



FE WEEK

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

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COVID BLAMED AS TARGETS REVISED AT FLAGSHIP INSTITUTES OF TECHNOLOGY

- DfE spending £170m on shiny new buildings but already planning to agree to lower student number targets



Visual of Dudley College's £32m IoT building due to open next year. The 313 learner target is set to be lowered

Page 10-11

POPULAR APPRENTICESHIP SCRAPPED BY GOVERNMENT COULD BE REVIVED

- Employers revisit alternative to business administration at level 2
- Approval to be sought for 'operational support assistant' standard
- Meanwhile, DfE chooses level 2 customer service for admin role

EXCLUSIVE

Page 4

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**We have everything, plus a little extra
when it comes to end-point assessment**

FEWEEK

MEET THE TEAM



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Traineeships tender finally launched but with short deadline



Page 5



Colleges set to repeat foodbank partnership

Page 14



I hope more government departments follow our lead by employing apprentices

Page 23



Too little, too late, Johnson's speech takes FE back to 2013

Page 24

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FE WEEK IS PROUD TO BE A MEMBER OF



New level 2 business admin standard to be proposed

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From front

Exclusive

Plans are afoot to revive the level 2 business administration apprenticeship under a new name, *FE Week* can reveal.

A group, led by representatives in local councils and the health sector, last week held an online meeting with around 100 different employers, such as police forces and charities, to sound out support for the bid.

Working with the tentative title of "Organisational Support Assistant", the group is in the early stages of figuring out how to design the course content differently so that it doesn't fail where the level 2 business admin proposal did.

One option being explored is to design the new standard so that it is focused on the public sector.

The group is expected to appoint a chair by the end of this week before making plans to formally approach the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.

The proposal comes as the Department for Education defends its first ever job advert for an "administration" apprentice to undertake the level 2 customer service practitioner standard – a programme which the department controversially previously said was a viable replacement to the level 2 business admin. The DfE had favoured the level 2 business admin framework before it was binned.

The Association of Employment and Learning Providers welcomed the prospect of a level 2 business admin revival and believes the group has a "strong case for their proposal being treated favourably", managing director Jane Hickie said.

The popular level 2 business admin framework was officially switched off on July 31, this year. In February, the government outright refused to replace the programme as a new apprenticeship standard, despite lobbying by more than 100 employers, including the NHS.

At the time the IfATE claimed the proposal did not meet the required length or quality of an apprenticeship standard.



The institute's chief executive, Jennifer Coupland, told *FE Week's* Annual Apprenticeship Conference one week later that signing off on the standard would "undermine" efforts to create a "well-regarded" programme.

Efforts have since been made by the government to suggest alternative standards to the level 2 business administration framework, including the existing level 3 business admin standard.

A blog post published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency in March also lauded the level 2 customer service programme as a viable alternative if the learner is not yet up to a level 3, especially for NHS trusts. This is despite the customer service standard being for jobs in "sales, marketing and procurement", according to its specification on the IfATE's website.

Showing that they practise what they preach, a job advert for an "administrative officer" in the DfE's ministerial and public communications division is currently live and states the successful candidate will work towards a level 2 customer service practitioner apprenticeship.

When *FE Week* asked the DfE why it had chosen this apprenticeship for an administration role, a spokesperson said: "Having reviewed both the customer service level 2 and business admin level 3

apprenticeship standard, the department felt the customer service apprenticeship was more relevant with its emphasis on providing excellence of service to customers and stakeholders, and developing communication and interpersonal skills.

"We no longer offer business admin level 2 and would not have selected this apprenticeship for this vacancy, even if it had been available."

The spokesperson later confirmed this is the first time the DfE has ever recruited an apprentice on to the level 2 customer service programme, even though the standard has been approved for delivery since July 2016.

When asked if the IfATE had any issues with the DfE appearing to substitute the level 2 business admin framework with the customer service standard, a spokesperson for the institute said: "It is down to individual employers, including the Civil Service, to decide on which apprenticeships work best for them."

Hickie said the customer service standard as an alternative to business admin is an "interesting development, given that we were told that one reason for the government rejecting a business administration standard at level 2 is that the latter wasn't a profession or specific occupation.

"But surely the same applies to customer service, so why can't we have both?"

She added: "Both private and public sector employers have made it clear that they wanted a level 2 standard as part of an employer-driven skills system and yet the employer voice has been rebuffed despite them using business administration to offer young people the first step on to the ladder of opportunity."

Tom Bewick, chief executive of Federation of Awarding Bodies, said: "The reluctance by government to embrace an entry-level apprenticeship role like business administration is getting more Kafka-esque by the day.

"Ministers can't keep on banging on about how they want employers in the driving seat of a demand-led skills system; and then at the same time turn major employers down when they make a reasonable request for a level 2 business administration standard."

Traineeships tender finally launched but with short deadline

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A hotly anticipated application process to increase adult traineeships was finally launched this week, but training providers have been given less than three weeks to bid.

On Wednesday, the Education and Skills Funding Agency launched an "accelerated" bidding process worth an initial £65 million to fund 20,000 new 19-to-24 traineeships between February and July 2021.

The delayed tender was supposed to launch over the summer and follows chancellor Rishi Sunak's pledge to invest £111 million to triple the number of people taking part in the pre-employment programme as part of the country's economic recovery from Covid-19.

A short deadline of October 28 has now been set for applications. The ESFA intends to award contracts in January.

The £65 million of "guaranteed" funding in the procurement for use between February and July 2021 will be split across the nine regions in England. London is set to receive the highest amount at £20.8 million, with West Midlands following with £11.7 million. The south west will receive the least, at £2.6 million.

The total procurement has contracts worth £233.5 million up until July 31, 2023, and there could be options for extensions of up to £380.5 million in total.

The ESFA said this will be a "very competitive exercise" and so to mitigate significant oversubscription and "speculative" bidding, the agency has set tender caps that "take into account the experience and potential capacity of potential contractors".

Caps will be set at £1 million for brand new providers, £2 million for current subcontractors, and £3 million for existing providers.

In order for their bid to be successful, potential contractors will need to "demonstrate how they can quickly establish strong relationships with employers, Jobcentres, the National Careers Service, Local Enterprise Partnerships and other local partners to recruit learners, including through referrals from Jobcentres, and to tailor the

Initial funding period budgets for each of the nine regions in England

Tender Region	%	£
East Midlands	6%	£3.90m
East of England	5%	£3.25m
London	32%	£20.80m
North East	5%	£3.25m
North West	12%	£7.80m
South East	10%	£6.50m
South West	4%	£2.60m
West Midlands	18%	£11.70m
Yorkshire and The Humber	8%	£5.20m
Total	100%	£65m

traineeship programme to real-time needs of the learner and local labour market".

Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief policy officer Simon Ashworth said: "The delay and short procurement window are frustrating, but the ESFA has probably struck the right balance between the total initial awards and holding funding back for existing contractors and new entrants who perform well during the 30-month period.

"As the agency says, the tender is going to be very competitive and so it should definitely be looking at the track record of providers and colleges in delivering traineeships, apprenticeships and AEB before choosing the winning bids."

The Department for Education said it is using an "accelerated timetable" for this procurement to support Sunak's Plan for Jobs. The agency's previous adult education budget tender, launched in January 2017, had a deadline of a month.

Other AEB tenders, such as the devolved procurement run by the Greater London Authority in 2018, have had deadlines of at least two months.

A DfE spokesperson said: "In July 2020, the chancellor announced a significant expansion of traineeships as part of his Plan for Jobs to help more young people to get the skills and experience they need to get ahead.

"This is a light-touch procurement and as such is not subject to the full requirements of The Public Contracts Regulations 2015. The authority is using an accelerated timetable for this procurement which will allow the authority to award contracts to deliver a total of circa 20,000 traineeship starts by eligible learners between February 1, 2021 and July, 31 2021."

The tender is for 19-to-24 traineeships only. For 16-to-18 traineeships, the ESFA has published guidance for in-year growth for 2020/21, and they are planning to launch a "market entry exercise" for other 16-to-18 study programme providers to start delivering traineeships.

Included in Sunak's £111 million traineeships investment are £1,000 cash incentives for each trainee the employer takes on, with a cap of ten incentive payments per employer.

During an AELP webcast last week, officials from the ESFA said an overview of the incentive payment process will be published in a "Traineeships Framework for Delivery" in the "coming weeks for employers and providers", which will detail how the agency will be paying employers directly, once it has been agreed with the Treasury.

The ESFA expects employers to be able to apply for the incentive from "late autumn" but the employer can apply for the funding "once they have completed the work placement".

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Advertorial

F1 in Schools zoom to success with innovative 2020 UK National Finals event

For the first time in the 20-year history of F1 in Schools National Finals events, teams vying to become National Champions were unable to compete together at a live event. F1 in Schools however, were determined not to shatter the dreams of so many students and created an exciting livestreamed finals to meet the demands of the new environment we are all living in. With the 34 teams racing live and over 5000 students watching online Britannia Red from Robert May's School, Odiham, Hampshire, took the 2020 F1 in Schools National Champions crown in a thrilling climax to this year's competition.

In March 2020 this leading global STEM challenge, had completed its 12 UK Regional Finals and was set for an April UK F1 in Schools National Finals live event with 34 teams competing for the coveted UK Champions title and university scholarships. As with so many events, the finals had to be postponed, with lockdown, school closures and social distancing three major challenges to making it happen at all this year.

F1 in Schools were committed to ensuring that the students could see the fruition of their hard work, but had to take a different approach to replace their annual 2-day live event. An innovative hybrid event was created, combining live racing with video presentations, written submissions and distanced car scrutineering, all assessed remotely by a panel of expert judges.

The highly professional livestreamed event was hosted by Tom Deacon, from Formula 1's Esports series, with Georgina Edwards, an alumni of the competition as pundit, and Sophie Harker, an aerodynamics and performance engineer at BAE Systems and winner of the IET's Young Women Engineer of the Year Award 2018, providing expert car analysis.



The trio of presenters presided over the racing, ensuring all the teams could watch the performance of their cars on the F1 in Schools race track. The track action was accompanied by video conference team interviews and messages of support from F1 drivers. Lenovo UK provided the technical infrastructure to enable the event which culminated in a livestreamed awards presentation with the hosts announcing category winners and the top three podium winners.

Andrew Denford, Founder and Chairman, F1 in Schools, said of this F1 in Schools UK 2020 competition, "It's been a roller coaster of a year for all the teams. They wanted to complete their journey and compete nationally, with many having spent quite a few years participating and desperately wanting to win a place in the World Finals, so we wanted to make it happen. Today's event was a very accomplished 'plan B' and although the teams couldn't all be together, they were able to compete and share in the excitement of the competition.

"I congratulate all the teams for their perseverance and resilience. Today has proved that they can overcome the challenges that they are faced with and succeed. I'm sure all

the students have bright futures ahead of them, I know they will all have learnt so many skills from F1 in Schools that will benefit them in their careers ahead."

Britannia Red, celebrated their victory with confetti, albeit on their own at school and not on the top step of the podium with all the teams celebrating. They will receive the impressive National Champions trophy, a visit to a future FORMULA 1 BRITISH GRAND PRIX courtesy of Silverstone with an F1 team garage tour and exclusive behind the scenes paddock tour courtesy of Formula 1, as well as winning an F1 team factory tour and valuable UCL Mechanical Engineering bursaries.

The F1 in Schools National Finals 2020 took place with the support of Formula 1, Denford, the IET, Lenovo, Autodesk, the Project Management Institute Educational Foundation, UCL Engineering, FIA Women in Motorsport Schools Week and FE Week.

For further information
about F1 in Schools visit
www.F1inSchools.co.uk

The government department that failed to recruit a single apprentice in 2019-20

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Not a single apprentice started work at the Department for International Development in 2019-20.

That's according to the latest data on how the government is progressing towards the public sector target of employing at least 2.3 per cent of their total staff as new apprentices between 2018 and 2021.

The failure of the DfID to start any apprentices last year comes despite the department having employed around 3,600 staff.

A spokesperson for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) said DfID, which it absorbed in September 2020, had 11 apprentices in 2019-20, but they were based in Scotland so did not count towards the headcount percentage for England.

In the same year, the Department for Education managed 2.8 per cent of its headcount, with 188 starts, falling just shy of 2018-19's record of 2.9 per cent.

In 2017-18, the first year of the 2.3 per cent target, 2.5 per cent of the DfE's workforce were new apprentice starts.

Of the big three government departments, the Treasury had 2.4 per cent of starts as a total of headcount last year; the Foreign Office had 2 per cent; and the Home Office had 1.1 per cent.

HMRC came top of the table for 2019-20, employing 3,038 new apprentices (5.8 per cent of its workforce).

The Department for Exiting the European Union also did not recruit any apprentices in 2019-20, but this shouldn't come as a surprise as it closed in January 2020.

The Civil Service overall is still working towards the target: the data shows its percentage of apprenticeship starts as a proportion of headcount in 2019-20 was 2.1 per cent.

The public-sector apprenticeship target covers the period April 1 to March 31 each year.

It is run as an average target across the years 2017-18 to 2020-21 to "give flexibility to organisations to manage peaks and troughs in recruitment," the government has said.

Departments who missed the 2.3 per cent target this year have been given an adjusted target to ensure they meet the 2.3 per cent average by March 2021, the Cabinet Office said with this latest release.

Public bodies have until September 30 to submit their progress towards the target each year.



Labour Party calls out 'pitiful' underinvestment in college estates

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Labour has castigated the Conservatives for their "pitiful" investment in college estates, after a minister revealed that the average annual spend fell by £244 million between 2010 and 2016.

Skills minister Gillian Keegan this week released data showing that, while funding for capital improvements in FE colleges under the previous Labour government stood at £3.6 billion between 2001-02 and 2009-10, the Conservative-led coalition government spent £957 million between 2010-11 and 2015-16.

Analysis of the figures show the average annual spend under Labour was £404 million, more than double the £160 million average spent since being out of government.

Keegan's figures only go up to 2015-16 because, after that point, £980 million was devolved from the government through the Local Growth Fund to local enterprise partnerships to spend on objectives such as supporting college capital projects.

Shadow apprenticeships and lifelong learning minister Toby Perkins, who received the figures from Keegan in answer to a parliamentary question, said they "starkly reveal what principals across the land already know.

"That, for all the rhetoric, this government's capital investment in our FE estate is neither transformational nor record-breaking."

After prime minister Boris Johnson announced his Lifetime Skills Guarantee last month, education secretary Gavin Williamson told the House of Commons the government had a "proud" record on investing in colleges.

Speaking on the £1.5 billion of capital investment the government announced in March, the "largest capital investment in the sector in a generation", Williamson promised

Funding provided for capital improvements in FE colleges, since 2001

Year	£ million
2001-02	140
2002-03	233
2003-04	291
2004-05	360
2005-06	326
2006-07	367
2007-08	436
2008-09	582
2009-10	899
LAB TOTAL	3634
Av. per year	404

Year	£ million
2010-11	76
2011-12	121
2012-13	198
2013-14	379
2014-15	122
2015-16	61
CON TOTAL	957
Av. per year	160

the money would "transform" the estates of FE colleges over its five-year span.

"It will enable colleges everywhere in England to have buildings and facilities that can deliver world-class tuition.

However, Perkins called it a "pitiful insult to the FE sector" compared with the investment made under Labour.

He said £200 million, which had been brought forward to this September from the £1.5 billion, was less than Labour had spent in any year between 2005 and 2010.

Williamson's claims of "world-class tuition" and being the largest capital investment this generation, "shows how far detached from reality he

really is," Perkins added.

Labour has "been calling for a strategic approach to developing the skills our country needs throughout ten years of Tory chopping and changing," Perkins said, adding: "The need for investment and urgency is greater now than ever."

But the government "needs to come clean about the fact that it has neglected this sector, and that the money they are currently talking about is small change in historic terms".

The "insufficient" capital funding to maintain the college estate was also called out in Philip Augar's review of post-18 education, which also said declining revenue had discouraged colleges from investing in advanced equipment and facilities.

Keegan said the government was "committed" to upgrading FE colleges over the next five years "so they are great places to learn", through the £1.5 billion boost.

"That transformation," she added, "has begun with an allocation of £200 million this year to FE colleges and designated institutions to tackle immediate remedial condition improvement projects."

That is in addition to £290 million of capital funding to develop 20 employer-led Institutes of Technology.

Keegan said the DfE has so far invested £21.4 million in 2019-20, and £18.9 million in 2020-21.

£11.1 million has also been invested since last November in building facilities for T Levels, with an extra £5.4 million going towards specialist equipment.

The Association of Colleges deputy chief executive Julian Gravatt said the government's promised boost for capital funding "follows years of underinvestment".

Colleges have been able to access the Local Growth Fund and the IoT funding, but "there have been unrealistic expectations about the ability of institutions to supplement public grants".



Toby Perkins

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Student number targets revised at Institutes of Technology

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From front

Exclusive

Covid is being blamed for recruitment concerns at the government's new flagship Institutes of Technology (IoT), *FE Week* can reveal.

Despite demand for more traditional FE courses booming, the Department for Education is understood to be in negotiations with several IoTs over revising down contractual student number targets.

A crunch meeting was held in June with all of the first 12 IoTs and the DfE, in which "strong sentiment" was shared "across the group" that learner number targets were at risk due to the pandemic, according to newly published board minutes for Dudley College.

The college, which is spearheading the opening of the Black Country and Marches Institute of Technology set for autumn 2021, told *FE Week* that a follow-up meeting was held in September where the DfE confirmed that recruitment "re-profiling" would be "dealt with in the round by collecting data from all IoT's in the coming months".

At least four other colleges leading on the development of an IoT have said they are also struggling to meet recruitment numbers in the current climate.

Extensions to the contractual deadline for spending capital funding, originally set for March 31, 2021, have also been granted to a number of IoT projects owing to delays to their multi-million-pound builds.

While failure to meet learner number targets and other key performance indicators (KPIs) can put individual IoTs at risk of having their licence revoked, the DfE has said it will "work closely" with the institutes and introduce "mitigation measures" where necessary to ensure a successful rollout.



Conceptual image for the Black Country and Marches Institute of Technology

IoTs are not the only new, high-profile technical education schemes that appear to be struggling to attract students: an *FE Week* investigation last month found that colleges and schools had missed two-thirds of their T Level enrolment targets.

Meanwhile, a different investigation by *FE Week* in September found that recruitment for more traditional level 3 further education courses was flourishing, and even university technical colleges learner numbers were on the rise despite the pandemic.

Institutes of Technology are a major government project aimed at boosting high technical level skills across England. They are a collaboration between colleges, universities and employers, and specialise in delivering higher level technical training at level 4 and 5 in STEM subjects, including digital, advanced manufacturing and engineering.

The first wave of 12 IoTs was announced in April 2019 and are being created through a £170 million capital funding pot. A further eight are expected to open in the coming years through a new competition worth £120 million in total, which launched on Thursday.

Four of the first 12 opened last year, with the rest following in 2020/21 and then

2021/22.

Harrow College and Uxbridge College (HCUC) enjoyed a successful launch of the West London Institute of Technology in autumn 2019, recruiting 306 learners against a target of 272, according to board minutes for July 2020.

But the board noted "the challenge of meeting learner number targets for 2020/21" which led to a request to the DfE to "keep targets at 2019/20 levels taking account of Covid and a slow start to the national rollout".

The board also said the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic "might adversely impact on DfE funding for the IoT".

An HCUC spokesperson told *FE Week*: "Our first year as an IoT has gone well. However, Covid has been a concern with regard to our higher-level recruitment but this is not specific to our IoT and is a concern for many across the FE sector."

They added that the capital build for the IoT, developed with partners including Brunel University London, Fujitsu and Heathrow Airport, was completed on time

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

News

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CONTINUED

and on a budget set at almost £9 million.

Elsewhere, the Swindon and Wiltshire Institute of Technology is working towards a launch of autumn 2021 but raised concerns about recruitment.

A spokesperson said: "Targets remain unchanged. We will work towards achieving them but we know that apprenticeship recruitment in HE and FE recruitment has been impacted nationally currently and this is likely to result in a variance in numbers.

"However, with greater levels of unemployment and promised government initiatives to upskill adult learners particularly in these sector areas, it is difficult to forecast whether these targets for next year are currently achievable. It will be a challenge."

Dudley College said it was expecting its target of recruiting 313 learners in the first year of operation for the Black Country and Marches Institute of Technology to be revised by the DfE.

A spokesperson told *FE Week*: "At the last IoT network meeting [in September], the DfE confirmed that re-profiling will be dealt with in the round by collecting data from all IoTs in the coming months.

"The DfE acknowledges the likely impact of Covid on recruitment, particularly on



Paul Phillips

apprenticeship pathways as at the moment there is a predicted downturn of 20 per cent but as things begin to stabilise we are hopeful the negative impact will be mitigated."

Dudley has also been struggling to meet its capital build project deadline, after work stopped for seven weeks to enable it to be made "Covid-safe" earlier this year. The college is also still waiting to purchase the land of the site, although this is purely administrative and has not impacted the building schedule itself, which is continuing "under licence pending completion".

The college said the purchase of the land is "anticipated in the next two weeks" and the DfE has agreed to extend the deadline for spending its £17.36 million allocation from March 2021 to the end of July 2021, given the circumstances.

Barking and Dagenham College was unable to comment at the time of going to press but minutes from a board meeting in June 2020 warned there "could be a real challenge with the KPIs" for its IoT in the current climate.

Other IoTs that spoke to *FE Week* claimed that Covid had not had a big impact on their rollout.

Milton Keynes College is leading on the South Central IoT, which is inspired by England's famous wartime codebreaking centre, Bletchley Park, and plans on recruiting 213 learners in its first year of operation in 2021/22.

While there has been a delay to its building work, which resulted in the DfE extending the deadline by which it needs to spend its £27 million of capital funding, a

spokesperson said the consortium behind the project is "confident" of meeting its student targets.

Lee Probert, principal of York College, told *FE Week* the Yorkshire and Humber Institute of Technology launched last year and that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic "is currently under discussion with the DfE".

"Final actuals against KPIs for year one were very positive," he added. "We continue to recruit students and deliver against contracted targets in 2020/2021."

Paul Phillips, principal of Weston College Group, officially opened the aWest of England Institute of Technology building just this week but began delivering its curriculum in the last academic year.

In year one, the IoT was set a target of 200 learners which was achieved. The target has increased to 320 learners in 2020/21, which "we are on target to achieve", Phillips added.

Elsewhere, the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Institute of Technology opened to students in the autumn of 2019 and "met its learner number recruitment KPIs in its first year", a spokesperson told *FE Week*, and raised no issue about meeting this year's targets.

New College Durham principal Andrew Broadbent confirmed that North East Institute of Technology is on track to launch in autumn 2021 but did not say whether or not it was expecting a drop in learner number targets.

The three universities that are leading on the remaining IoTs – University of Exeter, University of Lincoln and Queen Mary University of London – could not provide comments at the time of going to press.



Lee Probert

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Young people hit hardest in full-year apprenticeship figures

BILLY CAMDEN

BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Apprenticeship starts for the whole of 2019/20 fell 18 per cent on the previous academic year, new figures show.

Provisional data published on Thursday by the Department for Education revealed there were a total of 319,200 starts last year compared to 389,000 in 2018/19.

A drop was to be expected owing to the impact that lockdown had on apprenticeship recruitment following the outbreak of Covid-19.

FE Week analysis shows that just one month (September) out of the 12 in 2019/20 saw starts increase on the year before.

Apprenticeships for young people aged 16 to 18 were the hardest hit, dropping by 22 per cent overall. Starts for 16-to-18s in July alone were down a huge 64 per cent.

Between March 23 – when lockdown hit – and July 31, 2020, there have been 58,160 apprenticeship starts, fewer than the 107,750 reported for this period at this point last year, which is a decrease of 46 per cent.

A DfE spokesperson said: "We recognise this is a difficult time for employers, apprentices and people thinking about their next steps, but we remain committed to making sure people across the country

Apprenticeship starts in 2018/19 (provisional)

Age	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18	Nov-18	Dec-18	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	2018/19
16-18	8,500	28,900	14,100	9,200	4,000	6,200	4,700	4,700	4,100	3,200	3,200	5,900	96,600
19-24	8,900	22,200	14,100	9,900	5,100	10,300	8,000	8,200	7,700	7,200	6,200	7,300	114,900
25+	12,900	21,800	18,400	15,400	8,500	16,800	15,100	15,500	14,300	13,900	12,700	12,500	177,700
All starts	30,200	72,800	46,600	34,400	17,600	33,300	27,800	28,400	26,000	24,300	22,100	25,700	389,200

Source: ESFA data published in October 2019

Apprenticeship starts in 2019/20 (provisional)

Age	Aug-19	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	2018/19
16-18	7,000	28,300	11,100	7,600	3,200	5,600	4,500	2,900	900	700	1,400	2,100	75,500
19-24	6,900	23,700	12,200	8,300	4,600	9,800	7,900	6,400	3,400	2,500	3,500	5,100	94,200
25+	9,500	26,000	18,200	13,300	7,400	16,800	13,500	12,700	6,300	6,900	8,100	10,700	149,300
All starts	23,400	78,000	41,500	29,200	15,300	32,200	25,800	22,000	10,600	10,100	13,000	17,900	319,000

Source: ESFA data published in October 2020

Variance between 2018/19 and 2019/20

Age	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	2018/19
16-18	-1,500	-600	-3,000	-1,600	-800	-600	-200	-1,800	-3,200	-2,500	-1,800	-3,800	-21,100
19-24	-2,000	1,500	-1,900	-1,600	-500	-500	-100	-1,800	-4,300	-4,700	-2,700	-2,200	-20,700
25+	-3,400	4,200	-200	-2,100	-1,100	0	-1,600	-2,800	-8,000	-7,000	-4,600	-1,800	-28,400
All starts	-6,800	5,200	-5,100	-5,200	-2,300	-1,100	-2,000	-6,400	-15,400	-14,200	-9,100	-7,800	-70,200

can access high-quality apprenticeship opportunities.

"It is encouraging to see that even during these challenging times, employers of all sizes still recognise the value apprenticeships can bring to their businesses."

Association of Employment and Learning Providers managing director Jane Hickie called on the government to replicate its Kickstart scheme by "subsidising the wages of new young apprentices" to help boost starts numbers and protect apprentices from redundancy.

EuroSkills 2020 postponed 'indefinitely'

FRASER WHIELDON

FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The EuroSkills 2020 competition, in which the UK was due to compete in January, has been postponed indefinitely due to the "worsening Covid-19 situation in Europe".

Having originally been scheduled to take place in the Austrian city of Graz last month, EuroSkills was pushed back to January 2021 while the Austrian authorities re-organised to battle the spread of the virus.

But WorldSkills UK chief executive Neil Bentley-Gockmann said that his organisation was this week informed by WorldSkills Europe

and the board of EuroSkills Graz 2020 that the decision has been taken to cancel the event again.

He added that WorldSkills UK was "saddened" by the "very difficult decision," but "fully" understands it.

"We had been working closely with our colleagues in Graz to develop a comprehensive Covid-19 prevention concept but without being able to guarantee the safety of all delegates it is not viable to hold an event at this time."

He thanked all of the 14 Team UK competitors, as well as training staff who have been working "tirelessly" to prepare for this competition, and confirmed that training will

continue for WorldSkills Shanghai, set to take place next September.

A statement posted on the competition's website said the worsening Covid-19 situation and the stepping up of restrictions has "created enormous challenges" for event licensor WorldSkills Europe and the organisers EuroSkills 2020 GmbH.

Supervisory board chairman of EuroSkills 2020 Josef Herk stressed that while they had "no choice" but to postpone, the event is "not abandoned... We definitely intend to make the European Skills Championships happen at a later date.

"We are currently in close discussion with the international decision-making bodies."

News

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Former Ofqual director planning new FE membership body

BILLY CAMDEN

BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Exclusive

A former technical qualifications director at the exams watchdog has signalled intention to establish another end-point assessment organisation (EPAO) membership body.

Phil Beach, who left Ofqual last month to become chief executive of the Energy and Utility Skills Group – which itself is an EPAO – is sounding out interest for a group “run by EPAOs for EPAOs”.

In an email sent to all apprenticeship assessment organisations on Wednesday, seen by *FE Week*, Beach says an EPAO-led forum where “we share areas of common interest, best practice or develop a common voice on the issues we face” is the “missing piece” of the EPAO “jigsaw”.

The body has a working title of the “Association of Apprenticeship Assessment Organisations (AAAO)”, and Beach adds that his “initial aim” would be to establish a no-cost organisation with membership open to all EPAOs. If the group achieves “critical mass” it could “provide us with the opportunity to

engage at senior levels across government agencies”.

On the face of it, the group would inevitably rival existing membership organisations that are currently the voice of the majority of EPAOs, such as the Federation of Awarding Bodies.

But speaking to *FE Week*, Beach said it is “absolutely not my intent” to cut across other bodies such as FAB. “What I want to establish, as part of my understanding and journey in this new role, is the degree to which there is any appetite for a relatively informal gathering of EPAOs as we all face our journey together,” he added.

“It is a really early scoping email to see what the appetite is.”

EPAOs have been established ever since apprenticeship standards were introduced in 2014, which replaced the old-style frameworks and now include an end-point assessment.

An independent organisation must be involved in the end-point assessment of each apprentice so that “all apprentices following the same standard are assessed consistently”, according to rules set by the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

There are currently 306 EPAOs, according to the ESFA’s register of EPAOs at the time of going to press.

Before joining the Energy and Utility Skills Group – a membership body for the utility workforce – Beach worked for four years as the executive director for vocational and technical qualifications at Ofqual.

The regulator will soon become the external quality assurance body for nearly all EPAOs, requiring all assessment organisations to gain Ofqual “recognition”.

In his capacity at Ofqual, Beach designed, developed and delivered Ofqual’s approach to external quality assurance.

His email to EPAOs said: “Having worked in Ofqual, and now operating as the chief executive of an EPAO, I think there is a piece of the jigsaw missing.”

“I think we lack an EPAO-led forum where we share areas of common interest, best practice or develop a common voice on the issues we face.”

“Of course, some membership organisations have apprenticeship working groups as part of their wider offer. And the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education and Ofqual will sometimes convene EPAO meetings. But that doesn’t feel the same as a group run by EPAOs for EPAOs.”

Beach has asked EPAOs for an “indication of whether your organisation would be willing to participate” and if he gathers enough interest, he will “pull together a meeting to discuss terms of reference and the like”.

“Ideally, I would like to make early inroads, recognising that Ofqual recognition is just around the corner for some,” he added.

Colleges set to repeat foodbank partnership

FRASER WHIELDON

FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

A college group is planning on providing festive relief to families in need this Christmas by bringing back its hugely successful foodbank project.

London South East Colleges (LSEC), in partnership with 30 other colleges, including Boston College, Central Bedfordshire College and Chichester College, raised £43,800 for their local foodbanks after launching #FEFoodBankFriday when the UK went into lockdown in spring.

The group is now looking to rekindle their partnership with those and other colleges for #FestiveFEFoodBankFriday, which aims to collect 30,000 items for local foodbanks.

“As the pandemic continues to impact so many people, it is imperative that we pull together to

support one another,” said LSEC chief executive Sam Parrett, adding: “Sadly, food poverty continues to affect too many people.”

Collection baskets for food and other donations will be placed at four of the group’s sites: Bromley, Bexley, Greenwich and Orpington.

Regular lists of the most-needed items will be published to help target donations.

Fourteen colleges are already signed up for this latest project and will be providing a basket in their reception areas for donations and will be updating LSEC with a collection total every Friday at midday.

On top of that, the group is launching a JustGiving page — <https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/FestiveFEFoodBankFriday> — to raise £12,000. These funds will be divided up between the involved colleges and then distributed to their local foodbanks.

“In the run-up to the festive period we will be running a number of virtual activities to raise as much money as possible – as well as collecting as many actual donations as we can,” Parrett said. These activities will include a fireworks display and a Santa dash.

She continued: “Christmas can be a difficult time for many people and our aim is to help make it a bit easier for families in our community.”

During the last drive, the group donated three trolley-loads of provisions from its own BR6 Restaurant as well as a chest freezer to a local foodbank. The student union of one of its colleges, London South East Colleges, collected almost £3,000 from students, after making the project their charity of the year.

Colleges looking to sign up for #FestiveFEFoodBankFriday should contact Andrew Cox on andrew.cox@lse.ac.uk



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We are looking for a talented and experienced FE practitioner to be our new Vice Principal for Curriculum and Quality. This individual would report to the Principal and the Board of Governors as a Senior Postholder.

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Introducing...

TINA GÖTSCHI

Principal, Ada National
College for Digital Skills

'I had a real
wakeup call about
elitist attitudes'

JL DUTAUT
JL.DUTAUT@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The principal of ADA, the national college for digital skills, reveals how growing up on various educational faultlines informed her attempts to close the digital skills chasm in the UK. By JL Dutaut

Culture wars rage on social media. Our political consensus is fraught. Elitism, aspiration and

social mobility define our public discourse while time and again glass ceilings affecting class, age, gender and ethnicity are smashed and, evidently, rebuilt. The global village brings us closer together, yet society has seldom been so riven with division.

Such are the throes of a world upended by the technological revolution and its profound economic consequences. The rule book is being re-written in real time in algorithmic form, recodified in lines of ones and zeroes few understand.

Among those few will be the students for

whom Tina Götschi is responsible. And the principal of ADA, the national college for digital skills, is under no illusion as to the responsibility this represents. She is one of ADA's founding teachers, and the college's mission statement – “to educate and empower the next generation of diverse digital talents” – is more than an organisational mantra for her; it is a heartfelt purpose.

When it opened in 2016, ADA was the first new FE college in England in 23 years. Next week, it is expanding its presence beyond London with the launch of its Manchester hub. As Götschi

Profile

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tells me, it aimed to be different from the start. “We have a sixth form, where all our students study computer science, and an apprenticeship programme, where we work with industry partners to deliver degree-level apprenticeships in the digital field.”

To say “that’s the whole offer” would be to seriously downplay the importance not only of its post-18 focus on higher apprenticeships but also the structure of ADA’s sixth-form curriculum. It is similar in some respects to a baccalaureate in that students who join ADA choose from three pathways – “pioneer”, “innovator” or “creator”.

A BTEC diploma in computing forms the core of all three pathways, and what demarcates each from the others is the complementary qualification that accompanies that BTEC. “Pioneers” study A-level maths and/or further maths; “Innovators” study A-level business studies or psychology; and “creators” study A-level graphic communication or downgrade the computing to a BTEC extended certificate, which they study alongside a BTEC diploma in creative digital media.

Students’ choice of pathway is guided from the start by possible career destinations. As evidenced by its curriculum, the college, according to Götschi, is in part a response to “a huge digital skills gap, a real driving need in this country that is getting bigger all the time”. As per the mission statement, diversity is also core to its mission – a challenge the IT sector as a whole (if there really is such a thing anymore) is struggling to address.

Amid reports of racist algorithms and



At the New Technologies in Education conference with a friend

concerns about intrusion, data misuse and political manipulation, digital’s claims to neutrality are under siege, and Götschi is no techno-evangelist: “It’s not just about getting on board with the Big Five and adding to that monster that’s eating us all. It’s about having a more nuanced understanding of technology, its good as well as its bad side.”

In practice, this means all students receive in-depth teaching about the ethical dimension of the careers they aspire to. “We expose our students to a lot of debate around disinformation and misinformation, and we do that with big players in technology who are not the big economic players. We do work with IBM and Deloitte and Google, but also with organisations like Mozilla, who are all about openness of access and web literacy for all.” As our interview is happening, Full Fact is on campus, talking to the students about disinformation.

Götschi joined ADA as it launched in September 2016 as its head of computer science. Three years later she became its vice principal, and only a year after that she took its top spot. She is clearly professionally at home here, negotiating the faultlines at the heart of the technological landscape. Her first principal’s blog ends with a link

to a Radio 4 interview with author Michael Morpurgo, in which he calls for a rethink of education’s “endless use of data-gathering and algorithms”.

For her new year 12s, these faultlines may yet be difficult to express but, starting their computing course mere weeks after an algorithm spectacularly let down their entire cohort, it is sure to be formative.

“We expose our students to a lot of debate around disinformation and misinformation”

As for Götschi, education was marked by other formative tensions. Born in Switzerland to an engineer father, her childhood was spent moving periodically around the globe following his successive career moves. Her mother had also had a career but remained at home to look after their eight children. At the age of two, the family moved to Montreal, and Götschi experienced education policy shaped by the kinds of tensions that arise when the old is threatened by the new. Worried, as



Götschi teaching

Profile

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Götschi explains, “that children would end up growing up and not speaking any French”, Quebecois separatists had convinced the Canadian government that any child resident in Montreal whose parents weren’t born in Canada should attend a French-speaking school.

“Students are starting their computing course weeks after an algorithm let them down”

Götschi did just that until grade 6, when the family moved to South Africa. The year was 1983, and apartheid was still in full force. That year, Wikipedia records 24 bombings and attempted bombings, eight limpet mine and two arson attacks, as well as two major offensives by the South African defence forces. That year too, a new constitution came into force, nominally giving a voice to the country’s “coloured” and Indian populations but continuing to exclude the black majority.

“I was 12. So I didn’t really get it. I finished off primary school, and that was a white school. Then when I went to high school, it was a private Catholic school. It wasn’t like

fancy private,” she notes, “but it was a mixed school, so I had a very different schooling experience, I think, to the majority of South Africans at the time.”

She is proud to note that she voted in the country’s “first democratic election” in 1994, when the apartheid regime was replaced for good, but she also hints at a lasting discomfort about her situation at the time. “We hadn’t been very political. My dad’s plant was shutting down, so he was looking for something else and they offered him South Africa. I think more politically active people would have said ‘absolutely no way ever’. But, for whatever reason, I’m not judging them, my parents didn’t.”

Evidently somewhat of a natural at maths and brought up around computers before the advent of operating systems she was also encouraged to develop her artistic tendencies by her mother.

When it came to university choices, this duality became an issue. She aspired to be a fashion designer, but says “the reason I didn’t go for fashion design is that you had to do it at what was called a technicon in South Africa [a polytechnic], and I was enough of an intellectual snob not to do that.”

Browsing through Johannesburg’s University of Witwatersrand prospectus, she settled on a course that had an A in maths as an entry requirement. “I thought ‘Oh. Nice. Elitist, I like it,’” she says with a laugh at her younger self. She studied computer science, worked



in industry for a few years, then qualified as a teacher. After four years teaching at Sandringham High School in South Africa, she moved to the UK to continue her career here but had to re-qualify. “I started off on the unqualified teachers’ scale. And I had only a small idea of what it’s like when you are crapping yourself because you’ve got five pounds and you need to make that last for another two weeks.”

The experience was a formative education in itself. “I was so incredibly privileged, and a lot of our students don’t have that. And this difference between FE and HE, A-level and BTEC, it’s that same sort of elitism. I’ve had a real wake-up call that that sort of attitude is fine for the few, but it’s not the reality for most. And yeah, it did take me until I was 40.”

Beside her successful career, she continues to pursue the passion she’s had for textiles since she was 15. She even went part-time to pursue internships with designers and teach coding to corporate clients. Only the role at ADA could lure her back to full-time teaching – which is perhaps the greatest compliment that can be paid to its unique offer.

Götschi has taught maths. And art. In schools. And in FE. She’s been privileged. And on the breadline. Politically naïve. And ethically engaged. She’s been an educational snob, and she is working to undermine that same snobbery.

One thing is certain, she is testament to the fact that faultlines can be crossed and divisions reconciled – and that is the kind of example every student, in London or Manchester, surely needs today.



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GILLIAN KEEGAN

Apprenticeships and skills minister



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The apprenticeships trial in my department will be closely evaluated so we can set an example across government, writes Gillian Keegan

There has never been a more critical time to invest in new talent and help create more job opportunities. As a former apprentice, I've experienced first-hand the amazing journey an apprenticeship can take you on and, as the lead department responsible for them, I believe it's time we practice what we preach.

Over the next few months, we intend to fill all entry-level vacancies at the Department for Education and ESFA with apprentices, wherever possible.

This is a trial, between September 1 and December 31, 2020, which will help support more people to do an apprenticeship and gain the skills they need to start a rewarding career.

We have advertised 28 apprenticeship vacancies in exciting roles in policy, business admin and project delivery and we are really pleased with the high level of interest from potential candidates.

We already have a broad apprenticeship offer, with 18 possible standards at level 3 and 4 that managers can choose from and which should be a good fit for the job roles on offer.

This action builds on our already successful apprenticeship programme, which has met its

public sector apprenticeship target of 2.3 per cent of the workforce for the past three years. The DfE is in the top three of government departments for recruiting apprentices.

We currently have nearly 400 apprentices at the DfE and ESFA, which is a brilliant start. I've heard from lots of managers about the positive impact apprentices have made on their teams.

Many have said to me how they value their apprentices'



enthusiasm, how hard-working and eager to learn they are, and how they bring new ideas and new skills to their work.

To help meet this pledge, the ESFA has also created a new apprenticeship programme, offering new opportunities for four level 4 software developer apprentices.

The successful candidates will be at the heart of developing or managing projects for our Apprenticeship Service, which supports the delivery of millions

of pounds of apprenticeship funding.

With such a high demand for software developer skills these apprenticeships will provide an excellent route into an exciting and rewarding career.

As the first government department to trial this approach, we will be carefully evaluating its success to make sure that it works for everyone and so it will set an example across government.

We will work closely and listen to vacancy managers and

apprenticeships can continue wherever possible, we have introduced a range of flexibilities.

"We are the first government department to trial this approach"

These include encouraging training providers to shift their training offer online so their students can continue their studies and so that providers are paid as normal, as well as making changes to end point assessments.

We have also offered additional financial support to providers through our Provider Relief Schemes so they can continue to deliver high-quality training.

To support employers to take on more apprentices, we are providing them with £2,000 for each new apprentice they hire under 25, and £1,500 for those taken on over the age of 25.

We are also reforming the apprenticeship funding system so that more unspent funds can be used to support apprenticeships in SMEs.

We want to support as many people as possible to start a new and exciting career, and I'm thrilled that our new pledge will build on the progress we have already made and help more people to get ahead.

I hope more departments will follow our lead.

apprentices' feedback and analyse the numbers of apprentices we take on during this period.

We recognise that Covid-19 has had a significant impact on apprentices, employers, training providers and assessment organisations, but we know how important apprenticeships will be in helping make sure more people can get the skills they need to get ahead and employers and our economy need to bounce back.

To help make sure

TOBY PERKINS

Shadow minister for apprenticeships and life-long learning



Too little, too late, Johnson's speech takes FE back to 2013

The prime minister's announcement lacks urgency and fails to bring enough money forward to this year, writes Toby Perkins

The prime minister's recent discovery of the merits of FE is superficially attractive but as we've learnt with this PM, things aren't always as they seem.

His announcement lacked both the pace to address the immediate jobs crisis nor the depth to tackle the systemic shortcomings caused by ten years of under-investment and political missteps by the Conservatives.

Since June, FE colleges have been making redundancies, apprentices are often either on an extended break in learning or being made redundant, and the 16- to 24-year-old generation is the worst hit by soaring unemployment.

Thousands of people who have been on furlough since March are at risk of unemployment in a matter of weeks or months, and they need support right now — not after more than a year since they were last working.

For those facing unemployment now, a plan for next April is the equivalent of placing an order for a new lifeboat while someone drowns in front of you.

Labour's call for more urgent action chimes with an array of voices from across industry.

Dame Carolyn Fairbairn,



director general of the Confederation of British Industry, said the "significant" unemployment that coronavirus is leaving in its wake "only accelerates the need for people to develop new skills and adapt to new ways of working".

Employers, unions and the Labour Party have known for months that this is an essential part of securing a real economic recovery for families and the country.

Meanwhile, this announcement brought only £200 million of the £1.2 billion promised for infrastructure forward to this year.

The speech not only lacked urgency; it lacked a serious and long-term strategy for skills. A decade of cuts inflicted by the Conservatives has left the sector in tatters.

Further education colleges have seen their funding slashed by one-third. The Association of Colleges estimates that the funding black hole has now reached £2 billion this year.

While the Lifetime Skills Guarantee is welcome in principle, we cannot forget that it only serves to reverse a decision already taken by a Conservative-led government.

In 2013 the coalition took away the right to training at level 3 to those aged over 24, and there is still no commitment to fully fund level 2 courses for these learners other than in English or maths.

"A plan for next April is like placing an order for a new lifeboat while someone drowns"

The current approach to apprenticeships has placed most of the skills funding in the hands of major employers, which has led to significant sums of public money going towards MBAs for highly qualified workers.

Meanwhile the number of level 2 and 3 qualifications that are

essential for entering the labour market has plummeted. This has also shut the door on apprenticeships in many SMEs, at a time when the Department for Education gave £330 million in unspent levy funds back to the Treasury.

Allowing large employers to pass levy funds to their supply chain, and the small new incentives for companies to take on apprentices, will do little to reverse declining starts.

These starts are down as much as 85 per cent in some sectors. Even pre-Covid, numbers were declining for young people and those studying at levels 2 and 3.

Labour has called for retraining to be a national priority and a core element of any replacement for the Job Retention Scheme, so as to support those who cannot work full time in getting the new skills they need for the challenges ahead.

Making retraining a core part of the new Job Support Scheme would have given additional support to those most at risk of unemployment now — not months ahead, when many people won't have worked for a year.

The government failed to act swiftly on retraining and now there are millions of people at risk of unemployment who may fail to get the support they need. There is still time to act quickly, but they must do so immediately. Not wait another six months.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

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ROBIN GHURBHURUN

Managing director
of FE and skills at ed
tech organisation Jisc



Why are only four in 10 staff in FE comfortable with mainstream technology?

The state of digital skills among the workforce isn't good enough and is letting learners down, writes Robin Ghurbhurun

There are too few colleges and providers in the UK whose staff have the technical expertise, support and vision to realise the potential of digital technology in teaching practice. This is potentially an urgent issue as Number 10 warns more local lockdowns might be headed our way.

Most colleges are not digitally transformed organisations, but rose to the pandemic challenge as best they could.

Staff made enormous efforts under challenging conditions to support learners during mass disruption, usually by switching lessons to video conferencing platforms.

But this is not an inclusive or sustainable model. It excludes disadvantaged learners, who don't have easy access to devices or wi-fi, and can result in lack of engagement over time.

To give today's learners the best chances in the workplace of tomorrow – and in any upcoming lockdowns – the sector must do better. To do that, teachers need support to upskill.

Over the summer, the Association of Colleges and Jisc conducted a joint research project comprising three webinars and two senior leader roundtables attended by more than 400 practitioners, learners, senior leaders and ed tech experts.

It offered us an insight into the impact of lockdown on teaching and learning online, with data on the digital divide, wellbeing, assessment and digital leadership all collated in the project's first report, *Shaping the Digital Future of FE and Skills*.

“To give learners the best chances, the sector must do better”

The report highlights a range of responses about the shift.

For instance, 66 per cent of respondents at the webinars thought the digital shift had a positive impact on their team and 55 per cent pointed to an increase in their levels of productivity.

But others struggled with digital capabilities and confidence.

Nearly half of staff (49 per cent) said they were concerned they would not be able to deliver the quality of teaching they expected of themselves.

Senior FE leaders taking part in the research also identified the need for digital professional development and coaching for staff struggling to cope with the transition.

Worrying findings also emerged from our learner digital experience insights 2020 report published last month, which collated responses from more than 19,000 further education learners.

When asked what one thing organisations could do to improve the quality of digital teaching and learning, among the top answers learners gave was “help teaching staff to develop digital skills”.

One participant in the survey even said: “We timed one of the lecturers on how long it took for them to access the learning materials they needed and it took 35 minutes of a two-hour lesson.”

Sadly, this isn't good enough.

But it's not surprising. Our equivalent staff survey (due to be published in November) finds that a significant proportion of staff lack confidence using technology. Just more than four in ten are comfortable using mainstream

technology.

Fortunately, the sector can learn from those few colleges that are ahead on the journey to digital.

During lockdown, Grimsby Institute gave staff an online “teaching and learning remotely” guide, including videos on how to create and organise lessons including running discussions, preparing online resources, integrating apps, virtual teaching, online assessment and recording attendance.

And at Harlow College, a digital innovation team have boosted development and training, recruited digital ambassadors and leaders and launched a strong CPD programme.

Drawing on these examples, our report with the AoC recommends the development by the Education and Training Foundation, the College Development Network (Scotland) and Jisc of a digital pedagogy CPD programme for staff.

A further recommendation advises that providers and colleges should give staff sufficient time to learn, practise with, and implement technology.

Learners need excellent digital skills to thrive in today's workplace, and providers and colleges are at the forefront of the government's drive to close the UK skills gap.

But meeting those goals is only possible if FE teachers are digitally and pedagogically confident.

Now we need to pull together to ensure that no member of staff – or learner – is left behind.



Opinion

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KIRSTIE DONNELLY

Chief executive officer,
City & Guilds Group

Dig beneath the surface of the government's skills announcement and it is not particularly ambitious

The government is deploying a solutions-as-you-go approach, instead of a proper national network for employment and training, writes Kirstie Donnelly

It certainly feels like the government is waking up to the potential of technical and skills-based education. But dig underneath the surface of these announcements and they feel slightly unambitious and limited in their scope and timing.

As the furlough scheme draws to a close, we've seen interventions from the chancellor announcing a new jobs support programme, swiftly followed by the prime minister setting out his skills vision - a Lifetime Skills Guarantee to give adults the chance to take free college courses "valued by employers".

Not forgetting the Job Entry Targeted Support programme announcement this week, which, although it may not be "new news", is still a welcome step in the right direction. Overall, jobs, FE and skills appear to be front of mind when it comes to current policy priorities — and rightly so!

But let's take a magnifying glass to the proposals. Our main questions are as follows:

Why are we only offering free training to those without a level 3 qualification when we know that people are being made redundant across many industries and at all levels?

And why is the emphasis still only focused on bricks and

mortar-based learning, when what is needed now is a hybrid model of flexible, digitally enabled training that can be accessed by as many people as possible?

We have always championed the need for educators and employers to work closer together to be better aligned to local and national labour market needs. Working with organisations such as the British Chambers of Commerce would help with this.

But trying to import another country's education system

and FutureLearn, we set out our vision for how the government can better deploy skills-funding in a detailed plan to reskill Britain in the face of an uncertain future.

We put forward a proposal for £60 million to be invested over three years for a national network of employment and training hubs.

These would provide a "shop window for skills" by making employment and re-employment pathways more visible and accessible, delivering skills bridges from one industry to another

permanent, regional-led solution and address unemployment, skills shortages and productivity issues.

"Why is the emphasis still only focused on bricks and mortar-based learning?"

We also put forward a more effective reallocation of the £1 billion investment from planned government funding, backed up by devolved adult education budget allocations. This would ensure all post-compulsory education adults have access to adult training allowance loans, to help meet employer and labour market demands.

With unemployment set to rise above four million by the end of year and a workforce already grappling with the opportunities and challenges of AI, automation and Brexit, we need a clear vision for lifelong learning that is focused on helping people to identify their skills and develop new, industry-relevant ones throughout their working lives.

April feels far too long to wait for action - this is our "act now" moment. We are urging the government to seize this unique opportunity to think differently and create radical yet long-lasting change that will allow the FE and skills sector to play the role it is capable of.



wholesale, such as Germany's in particular (because it has been developed to tackle different skills needs and operates in an entirely different ecosystem) is not the answer.

The government would do just as well to look to the Singapore system that has focused on short, sharp training interventions funded by a skills credit to remain employable.

In our submission to the government's comprehensive spending review, which we created in partnership with The Prince's Trust, City of London

and starting to convene a skills system that is less fragmented and importantly augments and quality-marks existing local provision.

And by bringing together job seekers, employers, colleges, training providers and local government in one space, the hubs will reflect regional needs – and support the government's flagship ambition to "level up" regions and develop the "skills valued by employers".

Unlike the current piecemeal solutions-as-you-go strategy, these hubs would provide a more



READER'S REPLY

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PM to announce major 'expansion' in FE funding for adults

I think this is a step in the right direction, Boris. This is aimed at getting adults retrained and offering opportunities to the olderpreneurs

Debs, website

The majority of FE providers who currently deliver qualifications that provide "skills valued by employers" do not have access to AEB funding via the current mechanisms in place, either through national or regional routes. The ESFA strategy to discourage and move away from sub-contracting further sustains this position. It is an obvious point it would seem, that a new approach ensuring funding is available to these FE providers, is a prerequisite to the success of this programme.

Just saying, website

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

You're right to point out the dangers of speeding, but the broad strategy feels right and is rooted in thinking over a longer period (Augar etc). More concerned about skill sets. ESFA's expertise more funding than curriculum. Would like to see Ofsted involved on valuable qualifications.

Ian Pryce, Twitter

It's hard to know what will go wrong. There are so many options. But the certainty is that someone else will take the blame. I feel for colleges but question why they are still offering

REPLY OF THE WEEK

PM to announce major 'expansion' in FE funding for adults



If this is simply added to AEB then it will be unfair. Register of training organisations requirement will also be vastly unfair as this register is out of date and has had no EQUAL OPPORTUNITY since 2015. This needs to be aimed at the heart of our communities, grassroots. With sub-contracting becoming a dirty phrase, this funding needs procuring fairly, not just an add-on to existing providers.

Alan Green, website

financially non-viable courses in so many cases. Will these new courses be viable?

Stefan Drew, Twitter

Apprentices stuck in limbo as Covid hits functional skills tests



Another issue for some of my year two apprentices is that they were still studying the legacy qualification. We already had limited time to get them through as they attend en bloc. Pearson announced just a few weeks ago that the final legacy exams will be October 31. Originally it was end of December - putting a complete spanner in the works!

Michelle Durr, Facebook



They need to allow us to put any apprentices who should complete before March 2021 through the teacher assessment like we had in summer, to ensure they all get the qualifications they need for EPA.

Clare Parker-Doyle, Twitter

Bulletin

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Movers & Shakers

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



Darren Crossley

Chair, Carlisle College

Start date September 2020

Concurrent job

Deputy chief executive, Carlisle City Council

Interesting fact

He really loves endurance events, particularly trail running ultras (which are longer than marathons)



Zee Walker

Assistant principal for planning, performance and quality, Furness College

Start date September 2020

Previous job

Director of performance and planning, Furness College

Interesting fact

In her spare time, she enjoys sailing, cycling, reading and walking her two Old English Sheepdogs



Martin Rosner

Chair, Newham Sixth Form College

Start date August 2020

Concurrent job

Consultant working mainly with colleges on HR, merger and quality issues

Interesting fact

In his spare time, he enjoys building Lego Star Wars models

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

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