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# 'APPRENTICESHIPS HAVE LOST THEIR WAY'

2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020

Total number of apprenticeship standards approved for delivery by the end of each year

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# OFSTED SNUBBED

Thousands of adult education courses funded from the new National Skills Fund will not be inspected, the DfE has admitted

**EXCLUSIVE**

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## FEWEEK

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# 'Further confusion' for BTEC and other vocational exams

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The government has been criticised for "making a divide" between students studying vocational qualifications, after ministers backtracked again on their plans for exams during lockdown.

In a letter to Ofqual published on Wednesday, education secretary Gavin Williamson said that written BTEC and other vocational exams should be cancelled from February.

But students taking competency-based assessment, including apprenticeships, can continue with "protective measures put in place".

The decision followed a chaotic start to the spring term which saw the closure of schools and colleges to most students, the government insisting that all January vocational and technical qualification (VTQ) exams should still go ahead before partially U-turning and placing the decision in the hands of college leaders.

Toby Perkins, Labour's shadow apprenticeships and lifelong learning minister, slammed the government's "indecision", warning that it has now "created a divide between those students who did January exams and others, creating further confusion for students and colleges".

Williamson's letter claimed that given the disruption of lockdown, it is "no longer viable" for written VTQ exams scheduled in February and March to go ahead.

However, where assessments enable a student to "demonstrate the proficiency required to enter directly into employment, are needed to complete an apprenticeship, or assessments are available 'on-demand', such as functional skills or English as a Second Language (ESOL)", they should "continue to proceed with protective measures put in place to ensure they are conducted in line with PHE measures".

"This is to ensure these students can continue to progress fairly with their studies or into employment, and employers are assured that students have reached the necessary level of occupational skill," the letter added.

Williamson attempted to justify the action during a hearing with MPs on the education



select committee on Wednesday. They questioned why the DfE allowed all VTQ exams to go ahead in January but not in February and March.

The education secretary did not give a clear answer regarding written exams, but said: "With a lot of technical and vocational qualifications there is almost a license to practice that many youngsters have to have. If they are not able to gain and demonstrate that competency level in the area they are working in it can often create a barrier for them to enter the place of work."

"We took the decision [for January exams] that it would be best to have a permissive approach where we were able to let colleges make those decisions that they know their students best."

He added that "about a third" of colleges chose to continue with VTQ exams in January.

The Department for Education's permanent secretary Susan Acland-Hood then stepped in to explain the reason for allowing written exams to go ahead in January but not over the next two months.

"The reason for that was because we got quite strong views, not all pointing in the same direction, from the sector themselves," she said. "Some were saying the children are ready to sit the exams and we want to enable them to do that, and others saying they should be cancelled."

"The permissive approach allowed those who

wanted to sit them to go ahead and others not to.

"I think it is different when you look forward to February and March where you have got the ability to plan and you do not have the same situation of children literally being on the point of taking a qualification as the decision was taken."

Ofqual's upcoming consultation on summer exam replacements is expected to put forward proposals for awarding grades to VTQ learners unable to sit their exams.

Association of Colleges chief executive David Hughes said: "The decision to cancel written exams in February and March is a good one, but so is the priority given to ensuring that assessments can go ahead when safe for students taking competency-based assessment including apprenticeships."

Perkins did welcome that the government "finally has bowed to the inevitable and cancelled February and March assessments", but said that "sadly, Gavin Williamson's U-turn has come too late for thousands of worried learners, alongside school and college staff who were placed in an incredibly difficult situation over whether to go ahead with January exams".

"The government's indecision has now created a divide between those students who did January exams and others, creating further confusion for students and colleges," he added.

"Gavin Williamson must urgently set out how these qualifications will be awarded and stop treating BTEC and vocational students as an afterthought."

# 'Plethora' of apprenticeship standards set to hit 600

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Exclusive

From front

The government has been accused of "losing their way" when it comes to England's apprenticeships, as the number of standards on offer nears the 600 mark.

Demands have been growing in recent years for the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education to "take stock" and focus on quality rather than quantity, but the pace of standard approvals has doubled since the quango launched its 'faster and better' programme of work in 2017.

The number on offer has risen from 300 at that point to 598 as of today. This is twice as many standards approved for delivery compared to Switzerland and Germany – two countries that are often referred to having world-class technical education systems.

A further 83 standards are also officially in development, while proposals for six further standards are also being worked up.

Tom Bewick, chief executive of the Federation of Awarding Bodies, said that from a policy point of view, "English apprenticeships have lost their way" compared to the "much clearer" ambition set out in the Richard Review of Apprenticeships back in 2012.

"The plethora of English apprenticeship standards are in contradiction to what the government says about the number of regulated qualifications allegedly causing confusion for employers," he added, referring to the current level 3 and below review which plans to cut thousands of applied general qualifications that overlap with A-levels and T Levels.

"The institute appears to have gone down the wrong track of allowing anything to be badged as an apprenticeship, provided a group of employers or universities come forward with an occupational role."

A report by an independent panel on technical education, led by Lord Sainsbury, was published in 2016 and called for a review of "all existing apprenticeship standards" at "the earliest opportunity".

The peer made clear he was concerned about standards that overlapped, were too job-specific,

or lacked enough technical content to justify 20 per cent off-the-job training.

The IfATE finally launched its first content review of apprenticeship standards in September 2018 – focussing on programmes in the digital "route". It concluded eight months later and resulted in 12 standards being reduced to nine.

Five other route reviews have since been launched but none of those has finished partly due to the reviews being suspended during the Covid-19 outbreak. They restarted again in September 2020.

Only 43 apprenticeship standards have been "withdrawn" by the institute since its launch, while a further 13 have been "retired".

Tom Richmond, a former adviser to education ministers and now director of think tank EDSK, published a report last year which claimed £1.2 billion was being wasted on "fake apprenticeships".

He wasn't the first person to flag these issues: Ofsted chief inspector Amanda Spielman warned in 2018 that existing graduate schemes were being "rebadged as apprenticeships", and the National Audit Office reported a year later that "some employers use apprenticeships as a substitute for training and development that they would offer without public funding".

After hearing that the number of approved standards is almost at 600, Richmond said Lord Sainsbury's request for low-quality standards and duplicated content to be revised or withdrawn is "plainly not happening on the scale required".

"Instead of patting themselves on the back for approving a seemingly endless number of standards, the institute should be spending its time sorting out the standards it has already waved through."

Bewick argued that in "world-class" systems

like Germany, the emphasis of standards development is at the industry level, as opposed to the occupational level as we find in England.

For example, English apprenticeships for the hospitality sector include 11 standards: senior culinary chef; production chef; maritime caterer; hospitality manager; baker; chef de partie; hospitality supervisor; senior production chef; commis chef; hospitality team member; and visitor experience and economy leader. There was also a standard for a head barista, which has now been withdrawn.

But in Germany there are five hospitality apprenticeships: specialist in the hospitality services industry; restaurant specialist; specialist in the hotel business; hotel clerk; and professional caterer.

Bewick said the IfATE "needs to go back to basics and decide who apprenticeships are for, what they are for and how industry is best galvanised and incentivised to deliver them".

Jennifer Coupland, chief executive of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, defended the number of standards, saying that the employer-led approach to developing new apprenticeships has "driven up quality and is delivering on England's skills needs".

She said: "We would like to thank the thousands of employers who have identified training requirements for hundreds of occupations right across the economy, following an all-age and cross-level approach that provides a huge variety of opportunities for people from all backgrounds."

"We are always open to ideas on how we can improve our work but firmly believe that this is the right approach."

Coupland added: "The cross-sector route review process is also supported by our system of revisions for individual apprenticeships,

where an urgent need for an update is identified. We've made an active decision with employers to slow the pace of route reviews because of the Covid-19 pandemic. While work is continuing, we are all too aware of the unprecedented challenges that employers involved are facing, so are carefully managing what we ask of them."

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





# Covid forces delay to T Level work placements

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Disruption during the pandemic has forced colleges to postpone industry placements required by 16- and 17-year-olds to complete their T Level, *FE Week* can reveal.

Early years educator qualifications, including the T Level specialism, require 750 hours or more on an industry placement, far higher than the 315 hours minimum for other T Levels.

A spokesperson for NCFE, who certificate the early years educator T Level, said they "understand the current restrictions bring with them increased challenges for providers in delivering the industry placement element".

In response, a 'flexibility' has been introduced by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education to reduce this to 415 hours for the current cohort, which the DfE has confirmed to *FE Week* will be applied to all level 3 early years educator qualifications.

Learning outcomes of the course must still be met and the flexibility will be reviewed for the next academic year.

One of the college's that has had to delay placements is Chichester College, located in skills minister Gillian Keegan's own constituency, where a spokesperson said all 74 of their education and childcare T Level students had been due to start placements at nurseries, early years providers and schools this week.

But due to Covid-19, "we have sadly taken the decision to pause some of our planned industry placements until after February half-term".

"This is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our students, as well as that of the employers' staff members and the children attending these settings," the spokesperson continued.

It is hoped Chichester students will instead attend online lessons towards their T Level qualification, with the placement hours being made up later in 2021, "hopefully"



after the February half-term, depending on government advice.

Chichester's spokesperson said: "Understandably our students will be disappointed, as they had been looking forward to their placements.

"However, the employers have signalled that they are still keen to welcome students once it is safe for everyone."

Winchester-based Peter Symonds College confirmed to *FE Week* it has also had to postpone placements. It has 16 students on the education and childcare course – the only T Level it delivers – but said: "Given it is a two-year course, we are not yet concerned that this will jeopardise our students' ability to complete their qualification."

The two-year T Levels are the government's flagship technical qualification, and launched in September 2020 with an initial offer of three pathways: digital, construction, and education and childcare.

The T Level industry placements are mandatory and need to be completed in full in order for the student to pass the qualification.

In recently updated guidance that explains how FE providers should operate during lockdown, the DfE said it was "closely monitoring" the impact of Covid-19 on T Level

industry placements.

A spokesperson added that the first cohort of T Levels is "relatively small and most placements will take place in 2021/22".

The HCUC college group in London told *FE Week* its placements had been "significantly impacted," by Covid-19, due to the "knock-on effect of the many pressures on employers".

A spokesperson for the group said it is facing a problem that Derby College Group has also raised with *FE Week*: the DfE's T Level guidance states "placements cannot be delivered virtually or remotely".

Derby College, which has 15 students on the education and childcare T Level, says students have only been able "sporadically" to go into nurseries and schools so far this year.

Instead, they have been meeting with employers virtually. However, this will not count towards their placement hours.

The DfE spokesperson said: "T Level placements cannot take place virtually and therefore can't count towards the required placement hours – that's because we want students to have a genuine experience of being in a physical workplace to give them a high-quality experience".

# Ofsted snubbed as DfE moves closer to skills bootcamps national rollout

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Exclusive

From front

Thousands of adult education courses across England and funded from the new National Skills Fund will not be inspected by Ofsted, the government has admitted.

*FE Week* can reveal that Department for Education sees no need for Ofsted inspections for skills bootcamps – a £38 million programme of courses targeting 25,000 unemployed and employed adults, being rolled out later this year.

Instead, a spokesperson said it would be up to providers bidding for the scheme to provide “evidence” that training will be high-quality, that it meets in-demand skill needs, and that they have their own “strong” quality assurance and continuous improvement processes in place – all of which “will be key to bids being successful”.

“Potential suppliers can provide that reassurance through qualifications which are already subject to external regulation by Ofqual, programmes of learning assessed using RARPA (Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement), SFIA (Skills Framework for the Information Age) or other recognised quality assurance process, or are based on industry and/or apprenticeship standards,” they added.

A day prior to the DfE’s response, Ofsted told *FE Week* its role in quality assuring skills bootcamps was “subject to ongoing discussions” with the Department for Education – so it appears the watchdog has now been snubbed.

The DfE claimed that it was not uncommon for new schemes to not be part of Ofsted oversight at the start but can “come on-stream further down the line”.

During previous trials of bootcamps, which are funded by the taxpayer, provision has been delivered by commercial firms that are not subject to any other Ofsted oversight, as well as publicly funded private providers and colleges.

Having colleges and independent training providers inspected for some provision, for instance, apprenticeships, while allowing them to evade it for the bootcamps, could lead to a situation similar to the one in which Ofsted was not allowed to inspect apprenticeships at levels 6 and 7.

Chief inspector Amanda Spielman explained this to *FE Week* in March 2019, saying that because inspectors were not allowed to inspect higher apprenticeships and the Office for Students could only review apprenticeships if they had a degree element, some providers were going “completely unscrutinised”.

It also meant that when inspectors were called at a large accountancy firm, which allegedly had “repackaged” a graduate training scheme as apprenticeships at level 4 and level 7, inspectors could “look at only one piece of this graduate traineeship programme”, the level 4 courses, “which made for an extraordinarily artificial conversation”.

After Phillip Augar’s landmark review of post-18 education recommended Ofsted be allowed to inspect all apprenticeships, the

government confirmed last September that the responsibility would be handed to the watchdog from this coming April.

The national bootcamps tender, launched last week, has been split into two lots, each worth £18 million and for delivery from the summer when the National Skills Fund is due to roll out.

The first lot is for digital skills bootcamps in the nine geographical regions of England to “meet the skills shortage vacancy needs of local areas”, starting this April.

The second will award “a number” of contracts for bootcamps in sectors such as electro-technical, nuclear or green energy, but also for digital skills, at a local or national level, based on “evidenced demand”.

Payments to supplier will be on a per-learner basis and drawn out across a number of milestones: when a learner starts the bootcamp; when the learner achieves a required standard; and whether the learner progresses into a new job in six months, a new role if they are employed already, or a new opportunity if they are self-employed.

Both will last for one year, with the possibility of a one-year extension for lot one and two one-year extensions for lot two.

The DfE is aiming for 25,000 people to take part in the bootcamps over the next year, which are open to people aged 19 and over seeking work, looking to change careers, or already in work looking to retrain. Each programme offers “sector-specific skills”, can last up to 16 weeks and include a guaranteed job interview for those seeking employment.

The department said it anticipates that at least 75 per cent of all trainees will “move into a new job or role within six months of completing training”.

Potential suppliers have until February 12 to submit tender bids.



# DfE backtracks: Free devices scheme opened to ITPs

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The government has extended its free digital devices scheme to independent training providers just days after the skills minister said they would not be included.

A Department for Education spokesperson confirmed on Wednesday that private providers would soon be able to benefit from "Get Help with Technology" for students aged 16 to 19 on study programmes, including traineeships, and in receipt of free meals.

Those aged 19 or over with education, health and care plans, who also receive free meals, will also be eligible.

The department is looking to invite "the majority" of eligible FE providers to order devices by before the end of January; but can only commit to inviting all eligible providers by the end of February.

Allocations will be based on the estimated number of free meals at a provider and estimates of the number of devices providers already own.

It marks an apparent reversal of policy: minister Gillian Keegan controversially told an

*FE Week* webcast on Monday independent providers would not be included in the scheme, partly owing to how many of their students are on part-time, rather than full-time, courses.

Apprentices will not be included in this expansion, it has been confirmed, after Keegan said:

"Their employers are responsible for their technology."

The Get Help with Technology programme includes a £400 million government investment in delivering laptops and tablets to disadvantaged young people who are learning remotely.

The DfE announced in December that 16-to-19 students at schools and colleges would soon be included in the distribution of devices.

Commenting on the expansion to ITPs, Association of Employment and Learning Providers managing director Jane Hickie



called it a "very welcome development after the minister's comments on Monday".

Hickie had criticised Keegan's remarks as "passing the buck to the employer", but she said today that inviting independent providers would be especially welcomed by those disadvantaged students.

"The government's response should be geared to meeting the needs of all disadvantaged young learners and definitely not according to the type of provider who is offering the learning or the type of learning," she added.

# MBA apprenticeship funding cut by over one-fifth

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The popular level 7 senior leader apprenticeship will have its funding slashed by 22 per cent when a revised version is made available in March and its controversial MBA component is axed.

In a blog post published this week, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education announced that the revision of the standard is now complete following a request for it to be reviewed by education secretary Gavin Williamson last February.

The funding band for the standard had previously sat at £18,000, but will now be

lowered to £14,000 when it is launched for new starts on March 29, 2021.

Funding has been cut owing to changes in the content of the apprenticeship. The blog confirmed the "removal of the Masters qualification as a mandated part of the apprenticeship".

However, it made clear that an employer "would still be free to use such a qualification to deliver the apprenticeship, so long as it aligns to the knowledge, skills and behaviours" that apprentices learn, as previously reported by *FE Week*.

"Apart from registration and certification costs, these would still be fundable under the levy up to the funding band limit," the IfATE said.

The institute added: "The knowledge, skills and behaviours apprentices must learn as part of the apprenticeship standard and end-point assessment have been brought right up to date and the apprenticeship continues to align to Institute of Leadership and Management and Chartered Management Institute professional recognition.

"We are confident that this impressive training programme will serve the employers, apprentices and the wider economy well for years to come."

The MBA component of the programme was set for the chop after Williamson said he was "unconvinced" it provides value for money.



# Exploring the Chief Inspector's Report

## Preparing for the resumption of inspections

FINAL AGENDA NOW LIVE!

### Great line-up for AELP's "A Day with Ofsted" event - online on 18 January

We have a terrific mix of Ofsted officials, training providers and employer providers lined up to contribute to our annual "A Day with Ofsted" event on Monday, 18 January, sponsored by The Skills Network. As usual, Ofsted's Paul Joyce will take delegates through key findings in the Chief Inspector's annual report 2019/20 and he will provide an update on the planned resumption of inspections and monitoring visits. Paul's colleagues, Richard Pemble HMI and Richard Beynon SHMI, will be running sessions before and after lunch on key issues.

A top group of providers will hold a roundtable discussion on the lessons learned from delivering learning during a pandemic and will look forward to what we can expect in 2021. In the afternoon, there will be further perspectives offered by training providers, employer providers and a long-standing university provider of higher level and degree apprenticeships. The full day's draft agenda is now available to view on the event website. So why not take a look at it today and take advantage of the fantastic value which "A Day with Ofsted" will offer online here.

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- "As usual, an excellent event with many areas covered by Ofsted staff to help and support providers pre, during and post-inspection."
- "Direct honest answers are very helpful. The employer panel was great and should be repeated."
- "An excellent day. All contributors provided real food for thought and excellent guidance."

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NICK  
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at a time of reform –  
what we now know

The nationally procured adult education budget contracts with the Education and Skills Funding Agency come to an end in July this year, so a new £80 million procurement round will take place, as reported by *FE Week* in October.

On December 16 the ESFA published an early engagement notice on the Contract Finder website, "to notify the market of a forthcoming procurement opportunity for delivery of education and training to learners resident in non-devolved areas, through ESFA-funded AEB contracts for services".

The notice includes an interesting line, suggesting the FE white paper could signal the end of the procured AEB as we know it: "Dependent on the outcome of the further education reform white paper, the ESFA may include a right to extend the contract for a limited period."

The notice also invited providers to join a webinar this week to find out more, so here are the highlights of what they were told (with some thoughts from me in italics):

- Confirmation that the contract is only guaranteed for one year, for starts from August



1, 2021 to July 31, 2022. *Remains to be seen how any carry-over funding would be paid off if the contracts might be extended. I suspect the plan is to roll the national AEB into the National Skills Fund, but so far the FE white paper and NSF consultation remain unpublished.*

**"I suspect the plan is to roll the national AEB into the National Skills Fund"**

- The AEB contract is from the ESFA, so it will only fund learners that are residents of a shrinking number of non-devolved areas. *Unfortunate*

*postcode lottery with this contract, and makes the ESFA attempt at coverage across England somewhat futile.*

- Traineeships are excluded from this procurement. Only providers with an AEB grant allocation (such as colleges) and those part of the currently delayed traineeship procurement exercise will have access to traineeship funding in 2021/22. However, the ESFA has not ruled out a market entry exercise for 16-to-18 traineeships in the future.
- The ESFA has listed their priority courses for this AEB tender in the first slide on the next page. *This list is as expected, as it is everything*

*AEB already funds; but on the webinar the ESFA said they were particularly keen to see tenders with bids to deliver eligible first full level 3 qualifications for those aged 24 and over (see Lifetime Skills Guarantee below) and SWAPs. You can find out more about SWAPs here. It is also interesting that they have included a bullet point in the slide below for basic digital skills, which is not a statutory entitlement but is something the ESFA now calls a 'digital entitlement' to fully-fund through the AEB, but just for the new Essential Digital Skills Qualifications (EDSQ).*

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

# Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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## What is included

In addition the procurement will fund the new level 3 adult offer to help adults without a full qualification at Level 3 gain in-demand skills and open up further job opportunities.

### Level 3 adult offer

- Announced as part of the Prime Minister's [skills speech](#) in September 2020
- Effectively extends the existing level 3 entitlement
- Open to any adult aged 24 and over who wants to achieve their first full level 3 qualification
- Learners will be able to access almost 400 fully funded courses
- Funding to deliver this provision is ringfenced

Providers will need to demonstrate in bids their ability to deliver training online

be fewer contracts, given the pot has shrunk (devolved areas excluded and no traineeships – see below). But it could be that they are signalling a move to use a fairly high minimum contract level as part of the tender.

- Subcontracting is allowed, based on

the rules at the time. Rules that may change. The ESFA has consulted on ways to limit and increase quality of subcontracting but as at today, not actually changed the rules. They have signalled in the AEB rules they want to see less of it even if the rules have not changed. It is expected the FE white paper will say the same thing about the need to limit and increase quality of subcontracting, so changes appear to have been kicked into the long grass again via a second consultation in the form of the unpublished FE white paper.

- The ESFA has not finalised how winning contract values will actually be calculated and have held some funding back in case they fail to achieve geographical coverage at the first attempt. Allocating from a small pot to lots of procurement winners applying for large sums has been a controversial area in previous tenders and the ESFA has tried different approaches.

**“Ringfencing this way is useful to try and make sure providers hit targets”**

- The procurement timeline has not been finalised in terms of exact dates, but the ESFA plans to publish the tender in “early February” and on the webinar they said it will be an extended application window of six weeks, owing to the pressures on bidders that Covid has added. (See ESFA slide below.)

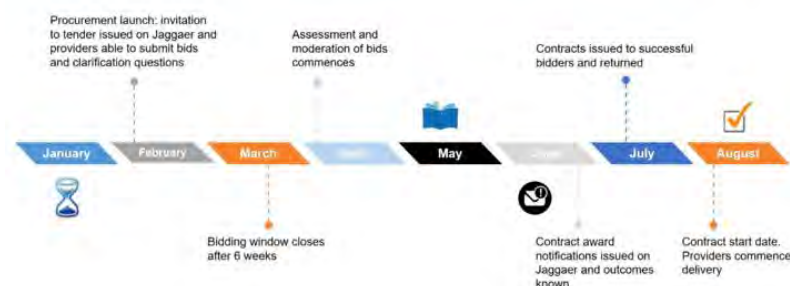
## CONTINUED

- The AEB tender would include funding from the National Skills Fund for the level 3 Lifetime Skills Guarantee, which would be ringfenced. This means if a provider had a contract for £1 million, then some of this (say £200k) could only be used for the level 3 Lifetime Skills Guarantee. If, for example, they delivered £1 million but only £50k was for the level 3 Lifetime Skills Guarantee, then they would only be paid £850k, despite delivering £1 million. Ringfencing this way is useful to try and make sure providers hit targets but can be controversial and complex as funding cannot be moved between the pots within the same contract. This unusual ringfence within an AEB contract has also probably come about owing to the Lifetime Skills Guarantee funding actually coming from the Treasury via a National Skills Funding allocation. Was interesting that the

ESFA, rightly, called it an extension to the existing AEB level 3 entitlement and do not actually refer to it as the “Lifetime Skills Guarantee” in their slide below.

- Providers will need to be demonstrate a track record and ability to deliver online. This is perhaps an obvious requirement, given the current circumstances, but has not been used in past tenders and may cause concern from some providers. It also signals that a large online-based provider could do well in this tender, delivering courses to residents in all the non-devolved areas of England.
- The ESFA says one of the “objectives” is to “reduce the number of direct contracts we fund”. It remains unclear why or how this will be done. All other things being equal we would expect there to

## Timeline



Education & Skills Funding Agency



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# Ofqual gives backing to replace exams with... mini exams

JOHN DICKENS

NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Plans for students to sit short, externally-set exams this summer to help teachers award grades appear to have won Ofqual's support, but the wait for full details continues.

Education secretary Gavin Williamson has asked the exams regulator to look at the "possibility of providing externally-set tasks or papers" to inform teacher assessments after GCSE and A-level exams were cancelled this year.

Ofqual chief regulator Simon Lebus seemed to support the proposal in a letter to Williamson. He said that the "more the evidence comes from students' performance in externally-set papers, the fairer and more consistent teachers' assessments are likely to be, because all students are given the chance to show what they can do in the same way".

Last week, Williamson assured schools and colleges that he and Ofqual had already drawn up contingency plans when announcing that exams would be cancelled. However, a consultation promised this week with the full details has yet to be published.

Andy Byers, headteacher at Framwellgate School in Durham, said it seemed "perverse" that exams were being replaced with "mini-exams".

He added: "The secretary of state has said that a form of teacher assessment will be used but, if all these tests do is inform (and not replace) teacher assessments, the government should have continued with the planned examinations.

"It is not clear how these mini-exams will be marked or moderated, when the content will be published, how multiple test dates can maintain the integrity of the process, or how the original problem (that not all students have covered the same content) can be mitigated."

Lebus said that appeal arrangements would



probably be "more straightforward" with papers set externally, but added that this approach "will mean teachers have less flexibility in terms of the evidence they could use".

He continued: "The consultation will carefully consider the issues related to this and, given the advantages of students taking consistent papers, whether teachers should be required to use them."

In a letter setting out some direction for Ofqual, Williamson said that teacher assessments should be informed by a "breadth of evidence", but that plans must "minimise additional burden". The consultation should propose students are assessed only on the content that they have learnt so far, he added.

Williamson also said that grades should be decided "as late as possible", to maximise teaching time, and that any changes to grades as a result of quality assurance should be "the exception" and based on human decisions, not an algorithm.

"The process will not involve second-guessing the judgment of teachers but confirming that the

process and evidence used to award a grade is reasonable," he added.

Lebus also warned that overall outcomes this year would "likely look different" from 2020 – when results soared because centre-assessed grades were used – and previous years.

Asked for a further explanation, an Ofqual spokesperson said: "The checks and balances, which normally make sure standards are maintained, will not be possible this year. We cannot say how overall results might be different – that will depend on how students perform and on how their teachers assess them."

Geoff Barton, general secretary at the Association of School and College Leaders, said one of the key issues will be "precisely how any system of externally set assessment would work and how this can be done in a way that ensures fairness for students who have been heavily disrupted by the pandemic".

He added that Williamson's letter sets out "broad and sensible parameters" for replacing GCSEs and A-levels, but "the devil will be in the detail".



# Vaccination: Williamson fighting 'tooth and nail' for education workers to get priority

**BILLY CAMDEN**

**[BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK](mailto:BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK)**

The education secretary has promised he is fighting “tooth and nail” for education staff to be given high Covid-19 vaccine priority, in a week that saw FE leaders make the case for being moved up the list.

Ministers have been under pressure to vaccinate teachers, with a petition being debated in parliament on Monday and Matt Hancock, the health secretary, saying they have a “very strong case” for priority jabs last week.

The government published its “vaccine delivery plan” this week, which explains how doses will be provided to those most at risk before deciding on how “phase 2” will be delivered.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation has asked the Department of Health and Social Care to consider occupational vaccination in the next phase of vaccine rollout, in collaboration with other government departments including the Department for Education.

Education secretary Gavin Williamson told the education select committee on Wednesday that it is “quite understandably right that the government has chosen to prioritise those that are most at risk of being hospitalised”.

“But...in that next wave where we have to prioritise others, I will make no apology for the fact that I see the top priority” as all those who work in education, he added, before declaring that he is fighting “tooth and nail” for this to happen.

Earlier in the week, FE Week spoke with multiple college and training provider leaders who said it was vital that their staff are given the vaccine as soon as possible so that they can reopen to all students safely.

Ali Hadawi, principal of Central Bedfordshire College, said: “We have had examples of where we have had to send a whole site home after three members of staff tested positive.

“If we can get over the issue of vaccination



where people feel confident that they could come in because they have had the vaccine, then we can facilitate a much closer to normal college operation than we are now.”

Yiannis Koursis, principal of Barnsley College, said getting students physically back in class is “hugely important” and treating staff as a priority group would “speed up the process”, while Mike Hopkins, principal of South and City College, added: “Vaccination will remove the serious difficulties that there are currently with contact, infection and requirements for self-isolation for colleges.”

Independent training providers with onsite staff are also calling for their workforce to be given vaccine priority.

Sue Pittock, chief executive of Remit Training, which operates two automotive academies for apprentices in Derby, told FE Week: “The tutors in our academies are key workers and need vaccine and testing priority so that we can reopen our academies safely.

“This should not just be about teachers in schools, but about protecting teaching colleagues and those they teach in any place of learning where teaching takes place face to face.”

Thirteen trade union and sector representative bodies have also combined forces to call on the government to prioritise education staff in the second phase of Covid-19 vaccinations.

The organisations, including the Association of Colleges, the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, Sixth Form Colleges Association, HOLEX and the University and College Union, co-signed a letter on Wednesday to Williamson, health secretary Hancock and vaccinations minister Nadhim Zahawi.

The letter outlines the case for prioritising education staff in the second phase of vaccinations, which will start once care home residents, frontline health and social care workers, extremely clinically vulnerable people and all those aged over 70 are vaccinated, by around the spring.

“Fully reopening education settings is a national priority, the moment it is safe to do so,” the letter highlights, adding that learning often takes place indoors, in close contact, with large numbers of students in multiple groups, which puts staff “at high risk of both catching and transmitting the virus”.

Prioritising them for vaccination, combined with mass testing, “would be a sure way to reduce transmissions, remove any further disruption to the education of our young people and to support the resumption of economic activity by reducing the burden of home schooling on working parents”.



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# MPs take fight to save local college to Downing Street

FRASER WHIELDON

FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Members of parliament fighting to save a land-based college have escalated the issue to prime minister Boris Johnson, after the FE Commissioner rejected multiple rescue bids.

Six Conservative MPs (including former Scottish secretary David Mundell) and former Liberal Democrat leader Tim Farron have called for the prime minister to support their efforts to save Newton Rigg College in Penrith, Cumbria.

The college has been edging towards closure after FE Commissioner Richard Atkins was asked to review its provision by Newton Rigg's parent college, Askham Bryan, which has run the site since 2011.

The review concluded in May 2020 the site was no longer financially viable, and it was announced Newton Rigg would shut this coming July, with the potential loss of 117 jobs.

This triggered action by the MPs, who have now written to Johnson. "We must secure a viable future for this educational institution," they said in a letter, seen by *FE Week*. "We would kindly ask you support us in ensuring Askham Bryan facilitate a smooth transition to a new provider and are not allowed to close the doors of Newton Rigg and leave Cumbria without an agricultural college."

According to the letter, Newton Rigg has operated from its current site for 124 years and runs a dairy farm and a hill farm. Students educated at Newton Rigg, the letter reads, "will be the farmers and land managers of the future".

"This pandemic has thrown into sharp relief the importance of food security and a college such as this will be pivotal in supporting that moving forward."

Following the commissioner's review, the government announced in June there would be a strategic review of proposals to take over the site, again led by the FE Commissioner.



However, Atkins found neither of the bids put forward – by an organisation called the Hadrian Group and a company formed by the college's supporters, Newton Rigg Ltd – were compliant with the criteria for the review. Askham Bryan was told to proceed with closing the site.

Newton Rigg Ltd said at the time the decision left them "deeply disappointed and frustrated [that] the review team have rejected our proposals for the future of the college".

Speaking after the letter to the prime minister was sent, co-author and MP for Penrith and the Border Neil Hudson said he too was "deeply saddened" by the outcome of the strategic review.

Yet the letter reveals bidders have been given a short window to make their bids compliant before resubmitting them. Hudson told *FE Week* this window will only last for a "matter of weeks", and the two bidders are looking at possibly collaborating.

Newton Rigg is certainly not short of support to continue its education provision: Kendal College has said it will give advice and guidance to the parties looking to keep Newton Rigg open. But Kendal will not play any further part in a formal rescue package, as it has had to focus on its core provision due to local circumstances, including the impact of Covid-19.

The letter to the prime minister has been signed by Hudson, Mundell, MP for Barrow and Furness Simon Fell, MP for Westmorland and Lonsdale Tim Farron, MP for Carlisle John Stevenson, MP for Workington Mark Jenkinson, and MP for Bishop Auckland Dehenna Davison.

They are part of a string of MPs who have criticised, and in some cases organised against, the closure of FE colleges in their constituencies.

After Cornwall College Group announced plans to close its Saltash campus, its local Conservative MP Sheryll Murray wrote to education secretary Gavin Williamson in January last year, calling for an investigation "to see if anything can be done to keep this facility available for further education provision".

The Conservative MP for Rother Valley, Alexander Stafford, met FE Commissioner Richard Atkins in February 2020 to discuss the "incredibly disappointing" decision by RNN Group to close its Dinnington campus. The college group later confirmed it would push ahead with the plans.

"Shocked" was how Conservative MP for West Worcestershire, Harriett Baldwin, described her reaction in November to the news Warwickshire College Group will shut Malvern Hills College by August of this year.

## Ofsted to inspect remotely until February half-term

**BILLY CAMDEN**

**BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK**

Ofsted's planned monitoring visits will take place remotely until after the February half-term, the watchdog has announced.

The inspectorate had been due to begin in-person "supportive" inspections of schools from next week, but had yet to say whether its plans for restarting FE provider monitoring visits would go ahead during the national lockdown.

However, Ofsted said on Tuesday that in "light of a change in emphasis from the government and clear advice to 'act as if you have the virus' over the next few weeks, we have decided that all planned inspection activity will be undertaken remotely until after the February half-term".

This applies to schools, early years and further education.

The decision came just a day after Ofsted

inspectors who are members of the FDA union "voted overwhelmingly" to call on the chief inspector to suspend on-site visits "as a matter of urgency".

"We have sought regular advice from Public Health England and we remain satisfied that our planned on-site activity would be safe and appropriate under current restrictions. However, the new government messages and the practical challenges of deploying inspectors across England have prompted this change," a statement from the watchdog said.

However, Ofsted will continue to undertake on-site inspections if it has "immediate concerns – for example, about safeguarding, the leadership, or a failure to provide education to children".

Remote inspections of schools and FE providers will begin from January 25.

As per an Ofsted announcement in December, this will involve the recommencement of monitoring visits,



including to those with grade three and four ratings and new apprenticeship providers.

Inspectors will also carry out "support and assurance" visits to providers, with a "particular focus on how well children and learners are being educated". These will result in a report, but no grade, similar to the interim visits that took place last term.

## FE providers reminded about deadline to publish their remote ed offer

**BILLY CAMDEN**

**BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK**

The education secretary Gavin Williamson has reminded FE providers that they must publish their "remote education offer" by Monday.

Just before the Christmas break the Department for Education informed providers that they would need to make information about their online delivery available on their website so that students "know what to expect" if they need to learn from home owing to self-isolation or lockdown.

Speaking during an education select committee hearing on Wednesday,

Williamson reiterated the FE providers must publish their remote offer by January 18.

He added that the country has seen a "seismic shift in terms of what is being delivered [online] and that is a real tribute to the teaching profession, who have really embraced this".

The information providers need to publish is as follows:

- what remote education will be made available for different learner cohorts (14 to 16, 16 to 19, apprentices, adult learners)
- delivery arrangements, such as timetabling, virtual learning environments and assessment arrangements
- expectations of students
- arrangements for students studying courses

that require specialist equipment or facilities

- support for students without devices, connectivity or a suitable environment for learning
- support for students with SEND

On Tuesday the DfE published a voluntary "remote education framework" to support colleges and training providers to identify "areas for improvement" in their online teaching, which can be accessed here <https://bit.ly/3oJqfu0>.

Recently updated DfE operational guidance asks FE providers to "use your best endeavours to deliver as much of students' planned hours as possible" during the national lockdown.



# The highlights from our webcast on post-Covid FE

FRASER WHIELDON

FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

It's tough for many of us out there at the moment, but some are starting to plan for life after Covid. Earlier this week, a group of sector representatives and political leaders expounded their views on the theme "The FE Sector Post-Covid: Supporting individuals to access learning and make progress in their lives", during an FE Week webcast, in partnership with Pearson.

Hosted by TV presenter Steph McGovern, the event featured apprenticeships and skills minister Gillian Keegan, Labour's shadow apprenticeships and lifelong learning minister Toby Perkins, Pearson's senior vice president for BTEC and apprenticeships Cindy Rampersaud and Learning and Work Institute chief executive Stephen Evans.

Giving a grassroots view were Barking and Dagenham College principal Yvonne Kelly, WorldSkills UK gold medallist and former BTEC learner Haydn Jakes and BTEC adult learner Feven Zeray.

Here is our run-through of what they had to say to the 1,400-strong online audience:

## Gillian Keegan

Keegan gave the audience an update on the much-anticipated FE white paper, admitting the legislation had been delayed but will be published "very soon". She explained that employers would be "key" to it and that the paper is: "Really going to be looking at all the reforms we need to make sure the system is organic and works very well."

This is after she has spent 30 years "pulling my hair out in many countries about the lack of the skills that you need for a modern workplace".

So what needed to be done was to ensure every education leaver has "the right skills to make sure they have a fabulous career, and the white paper focuses on that".

## Toby Perkins

Perkins restated his party's support for apprenticeships, saying, "From the perspective of the front benches, there's a lot of support in theory for apprenticeships and I think that many employers recognise the value of them".

But he said some policies had been delivered "with the best of intentions, but maybe haven't actually delivered



Gillian Keegan



Cindy Rampersaud

in policy terms", citing the apprenticeship levy, where Perkins says a lot has been spent on "managerial" training.

He used his speaking slot to push Labour's new apprentice subsidy policy, which would pay the full wages of 85,000 such learners for the first three months of a course, tapering down to 50 then 25 per cent for the remaining nine months of a year.

## Haydn Jakes and Feven Zeray

The BTEC learners told the audience how the qualifications had opened up the world to them.

Jakes, who won a gold medal for aircraft maintenance at the WorldSkills competition in Kazan in 2019, leading to an MBE, said he chose to do a level 3 BTEC in engineering as he knew it was the "best route for me" to get on to an apprenticeship.

Zeray said BTECs were mentioned to her when she came to the UK as she was looking to get into aerospace engineering. She researched her options and found BTEC "was the best option to do for me. And it has proven to be right for me, to be honest."

She has achieved up to BTEC level 3 in electrical engineering, but "didn't even think I would be having the variety of options of sectors. It wasn't just one engineering sector - I could get into construction and the automobile industry, and many types of engineering companies were willing to take me on."

## Cindy Rampersaud

Rampersaud felt this discussion was "still really relevant for thinking about and planning ahead for that post-Covid environment", despite the new lockdown and the sector's everyday routine still being dominated by the virus.

She flagged the importance to the discussion of topics such as participation in the "broad church" of FE, and the



Stephen Evans

importance of choice in the sector so learners could opt to take A-levels, applied generals such as BTECs, apprenticeships or technical qualifications like T Levels. "Maintaining that access and choice I think is going to be crucial going forward," Rampersaud said.

## Yvonne Kelly

"It's quite difficult here at the minute," admitted the college leader from London, where high Covid-19 cases triggered the mayor Sadiq Khan to declare a major incident last week.

But she said college staff were working "incredibly hard", having learned the lessons from previous lockdowns.

In a borough with "very significant deprivation, where money is very, very difficult", Kelly said, "there is an issue about immediacy, about the speed of response that's needed to ensure that the resources [such as digital devices or wifi] get where they are needed very quickly to ensure that we don't get that loss of learning".

## Stephen Evans

The chief executive of the Learning and Work Institute boldly threw his hat into the discussion of which courses and qualifications to prioritise with: "We need more people to go into higher education. But it needs to be through growing degree apprenticeships and higher technical qualifications."

Evans expanded his view to say that as "so many" young people and adults are looking to improve skills "we need loads of different options, because life's complicated".

His issue with the new Lifetime Skills Guarantee, including its offer to a first, full, level 3 course, was that the Department for Education is deciding centrally what courses to offer, which, Evans says, "gives less opportunity to tailor it to what's growing in Manchester, or in Newcastle or in Exeter". Instead, he said, "We need to match the skills we're providing with the job opportunities locally."

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**Michelle Montgomery**, Program Director,  
MathWorks Math Modeling Challenge

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M3 Challenge is an annual applied math modeling competition. A program of Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics (SIAM), funded by leading technical computing software developer MathWorks, M3 Challenge motivates students to study and pursue careers in applied mathematics, computational science and technical computing. It has been a virtual competition since its inception in 2006.

## An opportunity your math students won't miss out on this year

While many extracurricular activities are being cancelled due to the inability to hold them safely, M3 Challenge remains virtual, free, and is awarding £75,000+ in scholarships to talented math students in the UK and United States! Registration is open until February 19.

"SIAM is giving students the opportunity to see how math is more than just a series of formulas and rote memorization," says director of judging Dr. Karen Bliss, Virginia Military Institute. "M3 Challenge allows students to produce highly creative solutions to interesting problems, and to see that math can be a powerful tool for solving truly important problems."

## Challenge weekend is February 26 through March 1, 2021—students choose their 14-hour stretch

Working in small teams, students commit 14 consecutive hours during Challenge weekend to devise a solution to a real-world problem using mathematical modeling. Due to COVID, teams are encouraged to use online collaboration tools to remain distanced. Of the hundreds of participating teams, up to nine will be selected as finalists, and will share a large portion of the more than \$100,000 (~£79,000) in scholarship prizes available (there are 37 monetary prizes total). A

**PARTICIPATING IN M3 CHALLENGE** opened my eyes to fields in applied math that I didn't know about before. It has allowed me to consider new career possibilities and helped me to work well within a team and under pressure. It's unlike anything I've ever done before.

**ERIC CHAI, M3 CHALLENGE  
2019 CHAMPION TEAM MEMBER,  
HIGH TECHNOLOGY HIGH SCHOOL**

**M3 MathWorks Math  
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final event in New York City, to which finalist teams are invited all-expenses paid, is scheduled for April 26, 2021. The top ranking team in all of England and Wales will be invited to participate in the final event, regardless of overall ranking. (Disclaimer: Event is likely to become virtual due to COVID-19.)

## A contest with lasting impact

M3 Challenge has had a profound impact on many of its participants, including Dr. Chris Musco, a 2008 M3 Challenge finalist who now heads the competition's technical computing judging and develops problems. "Being involved in this program as a judge, and using my experience and perspective to help shape the problem the students will work on is really exciting," says Musco, assistant professor in the Tandon School of Engineering at New York University. "M3 Challenge changed the trajectory of my college major and career."

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Submissions are judged by an international panel of 150 primarily Ph.D.-level mathematicians, and most teams receives specific feedback from the judges who read their papers during rigorous assessments. Judges look forward to seeing creative approaches to predicting, quantifying, and providing insight into the Challenge problem, which is unknown until a team downloads it on Challenge weekend. "The questions

can be approached in a variety of ways depending on students' skills and experiences," says judge Dr. Katie Kavanagh, Clarkson University. "For example, participants may use simulation and programming, probability and statistics, or even algebra and basic math to model aspects of the open-ended problem. We are always eager to see how the students approach the issue."

Past competition topics have had students address issues such as substance abuse, food insecurity, plastic recycling, and car sharing.

## Learn more and register

Review how the contest works, rules, and prepare for success using free resources and sample problems at [M3Challenge.siam.org](http://M3Challenge.siam.org).

Since 2006, M3 Challenge has awarded more than \$1.5 million in scholarships.

Registration is open until February 19, 2021. The competition will take place February 26 to March 1, 2021. For more information and to register, visit <http://m3challenge.siam.org>.

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DETAILS AND TO APPLY.](#)



Closing Date: Wednesday 27 January 2021



## Curriculum Manager: Distance and Blended Learning

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You will have experience in teaching both large groups and individuals, a teaching qualification is essential, recent management experience would be advantageous with experience in the use of technology for delivering Teaching Learning and Assessment remotely.

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Closing Date: Monday 01 February 2021



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We only accept applications on our standard application form which must be emailed to [staffing@redbridge-iae.ac.uk](mailto:staffing@redbridge-iae.ac.uk) or posted to be received by 5.00pm Friday 15th January 2021.

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## Profile

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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Introducing...

# DIPA GANGULI

Principal, Sutton College of Learning for Adults



**'Many authorities are in trouble and look at adult education as easy funds'**

JL DUTAUT

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

**JL Dutaut meets a newly-honoured principal who could teach us all a thing or two about keeping calm and carrying on**

If college leaders feel aggrieved at being an afterthought to so many ministers' education announcements, then look no further than Dipa Ganguli for advice on how to stay calm

and carry on.

Take the New Year's Eve announcement on the delayed start of term and compulsory mass testing, for example. Initially, it lacked any mention of adult education at all. And that's just standard.

But the Sutton College of Learning for Adults (SCOLA) principal is as sanguine as it's possible to be. With smiling acceptance of the new lockdown, she simply offers the following: "It's OK. Most of our courses were online anyway. Except for, you know, the practical courses."

Context matters to understand quite how much resilience is on show from Ganguli here. On New Year's Day of 2020, with Covid only beginning to make distant headlines, the Learning and Work Institute (LWI) published its latest report, revealing that 4 million adult learners had been lost in a decade.

This new closure – the second since that report – is hitting SCOLA in its pocket. "The college run a mixture of fee-paying as well as funded courses. Whatever we could move online, we have. The rest – like pottery and floristry – we've



# Profile

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just had to cancel."

Such cancellations hit the college's revenue stream hard. "We still pay the tutors because it's no fault of theirs that we can't run the course," says Ganguli. "So we just take the hit."

Not that the college would have any other choice when it comes to closures. The average age of learners at SCOLA is 45, which puts many of them in high-risk categories. So even if it was treated as the business it fundamentally is – as opposed to a public sector body like a school – and allowed to stay open as an essential service, the simple fact is that many of its courses couldn't operate.

## "It's not tutors' fault we can't run courses, so we just take the hit"

A year ago, when LWI CEO Stephen Evans warned that "with our economy set to undergo transformational change in the coming years, lifelong learning has never been more important," he couldn't have imagined the depth of crisis Covid would represent.

In November, the organisation's head of research, Emily Jones, interpreted the results of their latest "Adult Participation in Learning" survey. In her article in these pages she voiced concern that while the pandemic and its varied

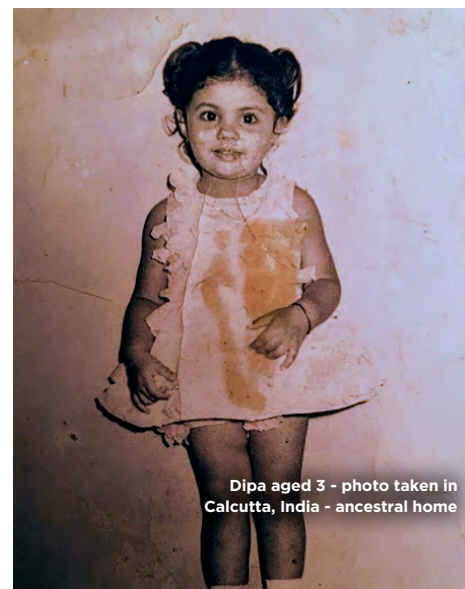
economic consequences correlated with an increase in interest, the survey revealed stark inequalities. People who were younger, better off, in work and already had qualifications were more likely to have engaged, regardless of furlough.

In other words, those SCOLA students who have seen their courses cancelled twice were already those on the fringe of engagement – on self- or community-funded courses. That doesn't bode well for future attendance, but Ganguli is an optimist and "hopeful we'll be able to offer those courses" when the lockdown ends.

Optimism isn't enough though. As Jones reminded our readers in November, "learning is addictive" and under Ganguli's leadership SCOLA has been versatile in its attempts to hook those potential learners.

The digital divide continues to make headlines in this new lockdown and the focus is entirely on the government's efforts to get laptops and internet into the homes of disadvantaged families. But what about making use of those laptops?

"They're talking about digital and how there's no access to computers," says Ganguli, "But there's no digital skills. We also found parents don't have the basic literacy and numeracy skills to be able to support their children with home schooling. So we've done quite a lot of work with local primary schools and through our family-learning provision, giving them the skills to support their children with their work."



Dipa aged 3 - photo taken in Calcutta, India - ancestral home

A policy win-win. Parents see their skills improve. Their children are better supported. And those parents get a taste of learning too – a direct sense of accomplishment and pride in the outcomes.

Sadly, as Ganguli says, "that doesn't get a mention".

It does get noticed though. Delhi-born Ganguli was listed in the New Year's honours list for her contributions to adult education and will receive her OBE when Covid restrictions allow. She says of the pending award that it's "a validation for all of the adult and community education sector that works with some of the most disadvantaged learners in our community, providing opportunities to upskill, reskill and succeed in their lives."

For all that enthusiasm though, Ganguli does have "slight" concerns for her beloved sector. She is stoic, but she concedes that "there are quite a few tensions we're working with".

Not least among them are ongoing qualification consultations. Typically, her worry is first and foremost for what's right for students rather than the college's purse. "There is definitely a need to have entry-level qualifications, levels one and two," she tells me, "Not everybody is ready to move straight on to the level three qualification."

And adult funding comes from multiple sources – all of them are concerning, not just because of the pandemic. "Now we're concentrating on what this lockdown means and financial sustainability for a lot of us. We've got the added tension of working with local authorities. I am lucky mine's very responsive, but there are some who are in trouble. They



Johannesburg, South Africa October 2017 - with other participants on the Leadership Exchange Programme

# Profile

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look at adult education as easy funds."

Born to a family of accountants, Ganguli knew early on that profession wasn't for her. Nevertheless, she has made college business her business and the story of how she came to do that is itself one of upskilling and reskilling.

Convent school-educated, she was funnelled by the Indian qualifications system towards

## "Laptops? Many parents lack the skills to support home schooling"

maths and business. While studying for her degree in economics and envisioning a career in commerce, she met her future husband, then an English tourist visiting the area, who happened to attend a party she was at.

They fell in love, married and Ganguli moved here with him, completing her degree with the University of Delhi at a distance before the conveniences of 'remote learning', let alone email. Her final exams were invigilated at the British High Commission offices.

She worked as she settled here too, and it was as a panel secretary for social services that she "first encountered racism". Demeaned in the pursuance of her role, she eventually

got a post teaching ESOL (English as a Second or Other Language) "and there, in that environment, when I saw the respect my colleagues gave these learners who were coming through with such struggles, it was completely different. It was truly inspirational."

But that was after the experience of working in social services had caused her to have a crisis of confidence, to doubt that she belonged here, and to return to her parents in India. Adult education has them to thank for her return, and her marriage has long outlived that early crisis too (27 years!).

As a mother of three young children, Ganguli had taken a step from ESOL into college business, making good on her economics education as MIS and business manager for Croydon Adult Learning and Training. But finding herself on the leadership team, she was frustrated that teachers ignored her feedback because of her lack of teaching experience.

So she showed them. She joined SCOLA as a sessional tutor in numeracy while she



On an Erasmus project visit to Potenza, Italy 2015

qualified part-time as a teacher – all the while taking a promotion as Croydon's service strategy manager. Her feedback is heeded now!

And she showed the racists too. Two more career steps to attain principalship of SCOLA via assistant principalship at the Westminster Adult Education service. Lengthy service as a HOLEX policy forum member. Board member of the Association of Adult Education and Training Organisations. Her continuing contribution will see her meet the Queen this year.

And when she does, Her Majesty will be in good company to remind us all of the virtue of keeping calm and carrying on.

"When students came back in September," Ganguli tells me, "they were saying how grateful they were just to be able to come into college and get a bit of human interaction. So [cancelling courses again] has been hard. But at least the funded provision is all online. So I'm grateful for what we can provide."

Perhaps the monarch can be persuaded to explain to ministers what Ganguli knows and government research has shown. Beyond the blunt measure of outcomes and preconceptions about pottery and floristry courses, investment in adult education is a net benefit – to health both physical and mental, to social and community cohesion including democratic participation.

And also to the economy.



Talesto TVET College in Mafikeng, South Africa October 2017 - carpentry workshop at the College



## FATMA SHAMI

Student, The  
Cheadle College



## The government made students like me feel we didn't matter

**BTEC students have been put on an emotional rollercoaster since the start of this term, writes Fatma Shami**

Just days after the national lockdown was announced, I was told my exams were set to go ahead on January 12 and 13. I was very fortunate at my college to have my exams cancelled in the end, but I never want to repeat the experience.

I am studying BTEC Level 3 Applied Science and the exams I was going to take this month were for unit 1.

On one side I was told by my teachers "you still need to revise, your exams most likely won't be cancelled", and then several days later I found out that the decision was being passed on to individual colleges and schools, and it was up to them.

To say it was one of the most uncomfortable situations that I have been in is an understatement. I genuinely thought that I was going to be forced to sit in an exam hall just because my college cared more about the results we needed rather than our safety.

My mental health has struggled severely during lockdown and remote learning in the first lockdown. This lack of a decision around the BTEC exams, completely disregarding them and just passing on the decision



to colleges, has affected me in ways that I didn't realise were possible.

I wasn't motivated to attend any of my lessons even though they are remote, or to leave my bedroom, and I gradually became less motivated to talk to my family and friends or even watch TV, just because I thought that the government cared more about A-levels and GCSEs.

It left me with a feeling that just because I do a BTEC that I don't matter, or that I am not enough, and that universities won't accept me solely on that reason.

And with how stressed I'd become, I couldn't sleep for a couple of days and was crying every so often, until I was told by my college "you will not be sitting your exams".

It was at that point I felt relieved because I knew that if I were to sit in that exam hall, my mind and focus would be on

"what if this invigilator stands too close to me and they might have Covid?".

When I first received the email, which was during my lesson, to say that my exam was cancelled, I had screamed and I was crying. Whether that was tears of happiness or anxiousness, I have no idea.

I remember calling one of my friends who was with me in my class and saying to them, "Is this real? Are you sure that it's not a joke?".

**"With how stressed I'd become, I couldn't sleep for days"**

My friends have also joined me as members of this emotional rollercoaster. We felt like we had been placed in a box and we were trapped - our voices were silenced and there was nothing

that we could do, until we had been told we weren't sitting the exams.

When we found out, we felt as though we had finally become important and ultimately that we mattered and we were equal to A-levels and GCSEs.

This one is for the colleges across the nation. As a student I'd like you to thank you for all the hard work and the immense support that you are giving your students and for prioritising the students' wellbeing and safety over the results that you receive every year.

You are the heroes in many students' eyes because of the lack of leadership in the government. The decision on BTECs was passed on like a parcel, but you decided that you weren't going to risk your students.

The government needs to listen to our voices as further education students. If they address A-level and GCSE students, they should also address BTEC students, because all students matter, whatever the qualification they take.

Every qualification and every educational institution is equal. So before you in the government decide to address any issues or questions in the House of Commons that concern education, make sure you have addressed ALL national exams, not just the "common" ones.



JANE  
HICKIE

Managing director  
of the Association  
of Employment and  
Learning Providers



## Ofqual must allow teacher assessment of apprentices on functional skills

**All the stops are being pulled out for GCSEs and A-levels, but yet again, efforts for apprentices look futile, writes Jane Hickie**

Lockdown three means that the focus must again be on protecting learners and apprentices from losing their livelihoods or not completing their programmes.

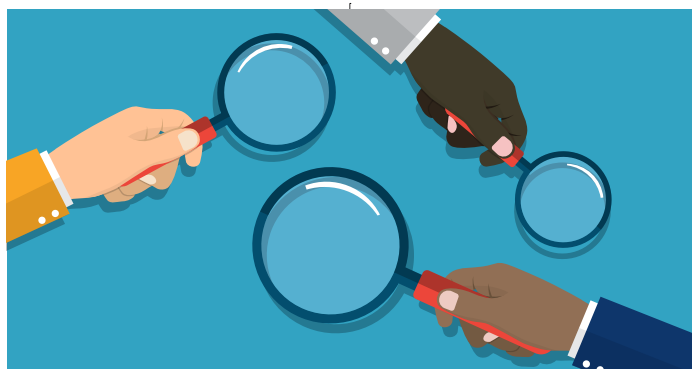
But the government's current measures around apprenticeship opportunities risk looking futile when it won't allow existing apprentices to achieve and progress in their jobs. Meanwhile, all the stops are being pulled out for GCSEs and A-levels. What happened to levelling up?

Allow me to explain. This lockdown is a monumental challenge for training providers. In normal times, most delivery of work-based learning takes place by definition in the workplace, often underpinned by very high-quality provision.

Most workplaces are closed and last week's government guidance decreed that all training and assessment must take place remotely wherever possible.

But face-to-face training and assessment have been allowed to continue in some employers' Covid-secure settings and end-point assessment and functional skills assessments for maths and English can continue on premises where it cannot be conducted remotely.

But these exceptions don't get to the heart of the problem. The problem is that most workplaces are closed.



The other major obstacle to apprenticeship programme completion is the task of conducting assessments and functional skills tests remotely. Despite the strenuous efforts of providers and awarding organisations, we are still some way off being able to do this in mass volumes.

**"The apprenticeship guarantee looks as realistic as a wall along the entire Mexican border"**

Remember that in a normal year, three quarters of a million apprentices are on a programme spread all over the country. Half of them work for small, now many struggling, businesses and many of them come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Therefore when I watch television reports of free or second-hand laptops being handed over to grateful parents of schoolchildren, naturally I am pleased, but my thoughts instantly jump to

disadvantaged apprentices who aren't receiving any support at all.

Without a laptop or high-speed internet, they cannot sit their functional skills qualification test remotely and if they cannot pass their test, they cannot go on and complete their apprenticeship.

In lockdown one, the government and Ofqual allowed apprentices to be teacher assessed for their functional skills. This was permitted until the end of July, and since then the continued tier restrictions and the subsequent lockdowns have resulted in a massive logjam of untaken tests.

AELP estimates that more than 40,000 apprentices are unable to progress on to their end-point assessments but the government won't tell us the actual figure - even though it should have the number from providers' submitted individual learning returns.

Instead, it informed shadow education secretary Kate Green this week, "We do not currently hold the data in the format requested."

Therefore when Gavin Williamson announced last week that GCSE and A-level exams were

being cancelled, we wondered for a moment whether the logjam for apprentices might finally be broken.

But no, the new Ofqual boss quickly quelled such hopes by saying the regulator would recommend different solutions for different types of qualifications. We fear that one rule applies for academic students and another for apprentices. Meanwhile as the Ofqual consultation takes place, the problem grows larger.

And despite being 32 pages, last Friday's DfE lockdown guidance for apprenticeships didn't bring any glad tidings to training providers. There was no suggestion of any renewed financial support for providers; just another signposting to the Treasury's loan schemes for businesses.

Every DfE and regulator missive refers to the maintenance of high-quality provision for apprentices - but guess what? That costs money.

Moreover, with programme starts at half their pre-Covid levels and provider income squeezed, the prime minister's promise of an apprenticeship guarantee looks as realistic as a wall along the entire Mexican border.

So, since the chief medical officer is stressing safety as the utmost priority, the government must urgently mandate teacher-assessed grades for functional skills where apprentices cannot travel to a test centre.

Otherwise, these young people among the 50 per cent who don't go to university will find that, once again, they have been forgotten.

## MARK DAWE

Chief executive,  
The Skills Network

## TIM BLACKMAN

Vice-chancellor,  
The Open University

## Here is a 7-point checklist to make sure the FE white paper doesn't fail

**If the long-anticipated white paper doesn't recognise the needs of 2021, then it will fail like so many initiatives before it, write Mark Dawe and Tim Blackman**

We have both spent our lives working in education and training – from primary schools to PhD researchers – and there is no doubt that the Covid crisis is the biggest shock to education we have ever seen.

Both our organisations are leading providers of high-quality courses that use technology to enable flexibility for learners and never has this flexibility been more important.

So with the FE white paper (still...) due any day, we have agreed a seven-point checklist to measure its suitability for the 21st century.

### 1. A joined-up tertiary education system

In an age of converging technologies, rapid change and increasingly hybrid job roles, everyone needs to keep learning, but this is often on a climbing frame rather than a ladder, mixing knowledge, skills and levels.

So we need a system of seamless tertiary education that supports lifelong learning, with common qualification frameworks, standards and funding.

### 2. Empower the learner

Now is the opportunity to put the system in the hands of the informed learner, whatever tertiary course they choose.

Many entry requirements are narrow, traditional and ignore the capability of students, especially when not demonstrated by formal qualifications.

A lifelong funding or credit entitlement would revolutionise the funding and support system, including incentives for policy priorities, such as digital literacy.

### 3. Unbundle qualifications

Full qualifications are important but the route and the flexibility of options should not be rigid and time-bound. That is not how society and the economy work any more.

## "It is time to rename soft skills as hard skills"

Learners should be able to build a collection of units over time, each recognised in their own right but contributing towards to an overarching "fully qualified" status with the norm being to top-up, receive formal recognition and then progress.

### 4. Progression and articulation

Along with unitisation, we need

clear progression pathways through levels of learning, allowing learners fluidly to mix levels and skills.

Occupational standards are helpful frameworks but cannot become straightjackets, and it must be possible to mix and match units relevant to what a learner or job needs.

### 5. Hard skills

We are in the human age, when human skills – whatever cannot be done by a machine – are more important than ever.

It is time to rename soft skills as hard skills: these are the ability to work in a diverse team, to communicate empathetically, to solve complex problems, and above all learnability, which is the ability to find out, evaluate, innovate and improve.

Time and again these skills are sacrificed in the pursuit of exhaustive definitions of industry-specific technical content packaged in a qualification that quickly dates.

This is the wrong way around. Human skills should be the core units of every programme at every level. They are what make people employable and mobile in a

dynamic labour market.

### 6. Diversity as a resource

Everyone is different and a team full of difference is a highly functioning team. Diversity prevents narrow framing of problems, creates more solutions and avoids groupthink.

Education can support diversity by enabling learners to study different topics that create opportunities for innovation and learn how to work with other specialisms towards a common goal.

### 7. Online and upwards

Mainstream education and training are no longer just about buildings, and any policy that favours these over digital technology risks making the publicly funded system a dinosaur in a digital world.

Of course, there are challenges, such as digital poverty, to overcome and we are not advocating every piece of learning going fully online.

But the Open University is already using augmented and virtual reality to make practical learning "real", including lab experiments operating equipment remotely.

So, if the white paper can demonstrate that it sets us on this path, we welcome it wholeheartedly. But if not, it will join the failed promise of so many other education and training policy papers.

This is not about being brave or taking risks. It is about waking up to smell the coffee.





## READER'S REPLY

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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### GCSE and A-level 2021 exams cancelled

Cambridge International Pre-U exams (equivalent to A-level) are still going ahead. Some students have one Pre-U while others take four Pre-U subjects. This puts those with more at a HUGE disadvantage. Nobody is speaking about this in the news - we would like our voices to be heard. These exams cannot go ahead, it is simply unjust.

Grace, website

I think going back to school and doing the exams is very dangerous, considering the increasing cases of Covid, therefore this method is actually good for students, especially for A-level students, as they have to apply for universities. They have been stressing for this quite a lot, because doing online lessons is not the same as learning in school while discussing. This is an important exam, therefore their minds should clear. I remember students asking what they might have to do in case of a panic attack/anxiety attack. Instead of putting them through so much pain, this is the best option.

Asmk, website

### Profile: Polly Lovell

I was so impressed by Polly's vision for the school but she just needed certainty to get on with it. Plymouth needs great schools and her contribution has been really important.

David Carter, Twitter

### Second national college set to 'dissolve'

This sorry story demonstrates the power that Ofsted has over all providers. One 'inadequate' rating removes the provider from RoATP and the dominoes start to topple... The college was set up to provide trained people for HS2. Like any new business it would have teething problems that would need

## REPLY OF THE WEEK

### Second national college set to 'dissolve'



Be good to hear the Department for Education admit the national college concept was misguided, implementation awful, research on student demand badly flawed, performance poor and a huge waste of money. Not to blame, but to ensure we learn and mistakes aren't repeated. Grown-up approach to failure.

Ian Pryce, Twitter

sorting out, but what happened? Ofsted sent in inspectors with no knowledge of how a rail industry operates, the tick boxes come out, and 'inadequate' is the result, rather than a pragmatic view, a firm action plan and a re-inspection at some point down the line (sorry). Well done, all concerned – another multi-million-pound bailout placed upon the UK taxpayer.

Philip, website



DfE backtracks: Schools and colleges left to decide whether BTECs go ahead Where is the leadership, direction, guidance, the parity and equity for students? It is morally irresponsible, weak and divisive to leave this burdensome decision to college leaders. This pandemic has shown who can lead and who can't.

Lee Lister, Facebook



My daughter has exam TODAY!!! Really stressed over lack of support and Covid situation!!! Why are some having to take these exams and others are cancelled??? How is this fair??? Haven't they been through enough this year without more stress???? They haven't had the level of education that they should have had and consequently feel very unsure and unprepared!!!

Debbie Abdoullahi, website



# Bulletin

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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**Pat Carvalho**

Principal, BMet

**Start date** June 2021

**Previous job**

Principal, Harrow College; Deputy Chief Executive, HCUC

**Interesting fact**

She enjoys thrillers, and grew up in Birmingham, so is returning to her home city to lead BMet



**Helen Smith**

Principal, The Bedford Sixth Form

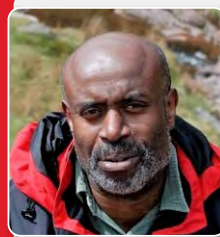
**Start date** January 2021

**Previous job**

Social science teacher, Melton Vale Sixth Form

**Interesting fact**

She chooses a new hobby every year, which this year was walking



**Jeff Greenidge**

Director for diversity, Education and Training Foundation and Association of Colleges

**Start date** January 2021

**Concurrent roles**

Chair of the board of directors, Groundwork Wales; Chairperson, Learning and Work Institute Wales

**Interesting fact**

He taught Latin to the Manic Street Preachers, whom he describes as "good lads" who made him guest of honour at their last concert in Cardiff



**Christina McAnea**

General secretary, UNISON

**Start date** January 2021

**Previous job**

Assistant general secretary, UNISON

**Interesting fact**

She is "fascinated" by genealogy and has spent time tracing her family back 250 years to the hamlet of Roag on the Isle of Skye

## Movers & Shakers

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

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)

Got a story?



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