

# FE WEEK

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

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FRIDAY, JANUARY 22, 2020 | EDITION 340

## WHITE PAPER SPECIAL

## FEWEEK

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Also in this week's white paper special edition...

## Focus: Animal care courses during Covid



Pages 23-25



Ofqual delays decision on solution for apprentices stuck in limbo

Page 13



Ofqual's criticism of the government's T Level plans gives me hope

Page 26



When I wear traditional Indian dress, people still react differently

Page 27

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FE WHITE PAPER **COVERAGE**

## 'Ambitious' reforms unveiled, but no 'revolution'

BILLY CAMDEN

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"New powers" for the education secretary to intervene in colleges, proposals for funding reform and local "skills plans" spearheaded by employers have been revealed in the much-anticipated FE white paper.

The 'Skills for Jobs White Paper' was published on Thursday and includes a raft of measures to "realign" the post-16 system around the needs of businesses.

While the Department for Education has claimed the plans are "revolutionary", sector leaders say that it "falls a bit short" of this ambition as it mostly builds on existing aspects of the sector (see pages 9 to 11).

FE Week understands the Treasury put a stop to transformational changes owing to its switch from a multi-year to a one-year spending review in 2020 – something that the skills minister Gillian Keegan contests (see page 7).

The white paper enshrines the prime minister's Lifetime Skills Guarantee, including the new level 3 entitlement and skills bootcamps, and reiterates the government's commitment to investing in college capital projects, new higher technical qualifications built with employer-led standards, T Levels, apprenticeships, Institutes of Technology and the National Skills Fund.

Brand new reforms (see pages 5 and 6) include a greater role for employer groups, such as Chambers of Commerce, as previously reported by FE Week, in developing local "skills plans" with groups of colleges and training providers in their area.

The plans will be piloted this year before a £65 million strategic development fund is launched in 2021/22 to roll them out further and to aid the creation of "college business centres".

The white paper also sets out plans to "overhaul" the funding and accountability rules for the post-16 sector, which will be consulted on later this year. The DfE was already planning to run a consultation for its new £2.5 billion National Skills Fund in the spring.

As part of the reforms the DfE says it will "introduce new powers to intervene when colleges are failing to deliver good outcomes for



the communities they serve".

The DfE has long-running concerns that there are colleges and areas across England with "persistent weaknesses" that they do not have the power to resolve until it is too late. This can result in costly intervention measures, such as hefty bailouts and even insolvency, as the sector saw with the Hadlow College Group, which involved tens of millions of pounds of taxpayer money.

The DfE told FE Week the new powers to be drawn up will enable preventative action to be taken, ahead of failure, or "where there is an area-based failure, rather than simply that of an individual college".

"This represents an improvement on existing statutory powers which only apply when the failure has already occurred, and cannot be used in a preventative capacity; or where the problem is a collective weakness, not just the failure of an individual institution," a spokesperson said.

Longer periods of "active support" post-intervention will also be implemented, as will more regular dialogue about emerging risks to help prevent failures.

The white paper also sets out plans for colleges and training providers to be "accountable for the outcomes they achieve with funding to ensure value for money for the taxpayer".

Keegan hinted that a move to an outcomes-based funding model was on the cards in September when she told an Association of Employment and Learning Providers conference that the FE sector should judge the quality of its

training programmes on the jobs that learners end up in.

The white paper sets out plans for the currently complex FE funding system to be simplified and streamlined, relaxing ringfences and reporting, strengthening governance and subcontracting, and will consider a move to a multi-year funding regime.

Tom Bewick, chief executive of the Federation of Awarding Bodies, "cautiously" welcomed the white paper, saying it is "perhaps not quite as comprehensive as it could have been in terms of covering the range of transformational reforms of post-compulsory tertiary education that the [Augar] review panel envisaged.

"Overall, what has been announced today is very much a restatement of what has already been agreed – a useful 'work in progress,'" he added.

"We look forward to the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review for the more 'revolutionary' aspects of what was promised previously."

David Hughes, chief executive of the Association of Colleges, said the white paper is an "ambitious package of measures which can deliver a significant shift in how we support the lifelong education".

He added that the reforms "build on what colleges already do well, so it's not about taking a wrecking ball to existing infrastructure or making colleges start from scratch, but investing in them to play a bigger part in supporting local businesses and local communities".

FE WHITE PAPER **COVERAGE**

# The key reforms

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The FE white paper included more than 30 proposals but the majority repeat or build on current reforms rather than announcing radically new ones. In this handy two-pager we explore the most significant and newest plans.

## 1 CREATE 'LOCAL SKILLS IMPROVEMENT PLANS' AND COLLEGE BUSINESS CENTRES

To ensure technical skills provision is "responsive to local labour market needs", the Department for Education will pilot "new Local Skills Improvement Plans" created by employers, colleges and training providers in trailblazer local areas in early 2021.

They will be led by accredited Chambers of Commerce and will see employers setting out a "credibly articulated and evidence-based assessment of skills needs to which providers will be empowered to respond". It is the DfE's "intention" to legislate to put the employer leadership of Local Skills Improvement Plans on a "statutory footing".

A £65 million Strategic Development Fund will be launched in 2021/22 to aid the plans and support providers to "reshape their provision to address local priorities that have been agreed with local employers".

Proposals will be invited through the Strategic Development Fund to establish "College Business Centres" within FE colleges, which will offer capital and revenue funding to help colleges "respond to locally agreed priorities".

## 2 NEW INTERVENTION 'POWERS'

The DfE says it will introduce new powers for the education secretary, so the government can "intervene quickly and decisively in cases where there are persistent problems that cannot otherwise be addressed, either with colleges not delivering effectively or where local providers are unable to deliver the skills priorities for that area".

Through legislation, this strengthened power would enable the education secretary to "intervene locally to close or set up college corporations, bring about changes to membership or composition of governing bodies or review leadership".

Use of these powers is "envisaged only as a last resort, where agreement has not been possible through other means and there are no alternative options for resolution".

## 3 STRENGTHENED GOVERNANCE

The DfE plans to set out clearer expectations, requirements and support for governors to "empower weaker colleges" to address problems earlier.

This will include refreshing existing guidance on appointments

to communicate a clear government position on what constitutes good leadership, and make it clear that an "independent person" should be included on college leader interview panels to ensure "objectivity and due diligence".

There will also be new requirements for annual board self-assessment and regular external governance reviews, as well as consideration of the possibilities for enabling board chairs to be paid in "specific circumstances" within the confines of charity law.

## 4 POTENTIAL SWITCH TO OUTCOMES-BASED FUNDING



The government plans to reform the funding and accountability systems to "better support" providers by simplifying funding streams and giving providers more autonomy, such as by relaxing ringfences and reporting.

But the DfE will move to hold providers to account for the "outcomes that colleges are delivering to improve progression and respond to employer demand".

The DfE will consult on how they can "best assess" the performance of providers, building on the "new progression performance metrics being introduced and considering effectiveness of employer engagement, quality of provision and the outcomes achieved, such as how well provision supports individuals to progress in their learning and secure good labour market outcomes".

By taking an outcome-focused approach, the department says providers will be "incentivised to review their provision to ensure it leads to meaningful employment for their learners, scaling back where there is an oversupply of provision and expanding other areas in line with agreed Local Skills Improvement Plans priorities".

## 5 MULTI-YEAR FUNDING TO BE CONSIDERED



The DfE says it wants to "give more certainty to providers" over their funding, including considering how they could "move to a multi-year funding regime which is more forward-looking".

The idea would be subject to the government's spending review cycle, the white paper says, and does not give a timeframe of when this could be introduced.

## FE WHITE PAPER **COVERAGE**

# The key reforms continued...

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## 6 IMPLEMENT THE FLEXIBLE LIFELONG LOAN ENTITLEMENT FROM 2025

As part of the previously announced lifetime skills guarantee, which is enshrined in the white paper, the government plans to launch a lifelong loan entitlement.

The DfE describes this as “new transformative funding provision”, enabling people to access four years’ worth of student loan funding across further and higher education providers throughout their lifetime.

Details of this new policy will be consulted on in 2021, but it will not be rolled out until at least after the next general election.



## 7 CENTRAL ROLE FOR EMPLOYERS TO DESIGN TECHNICAL COURSES

The white paper pledges to give employers a “central role” in designing “almost all” technical courses by 2030, to “ensure that the education and training people receive is directly linked to the skills needed for real jobs”.

This will include aligning the “substantial majority” of post-16 level 4 and 5 qualifications to employer-led standards set by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, as is the

case for apprenticeships.

## 8 NEW NATIONAL TEACHER RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN

“Significant new investment” to improve the FE workforce will be provided in 2021/22.

This will include a “nationwide recruitment campaign to get more talented individuals to teach in further education and investing in high-quality professional development including a new Workforce Industry Exchange Programme”.

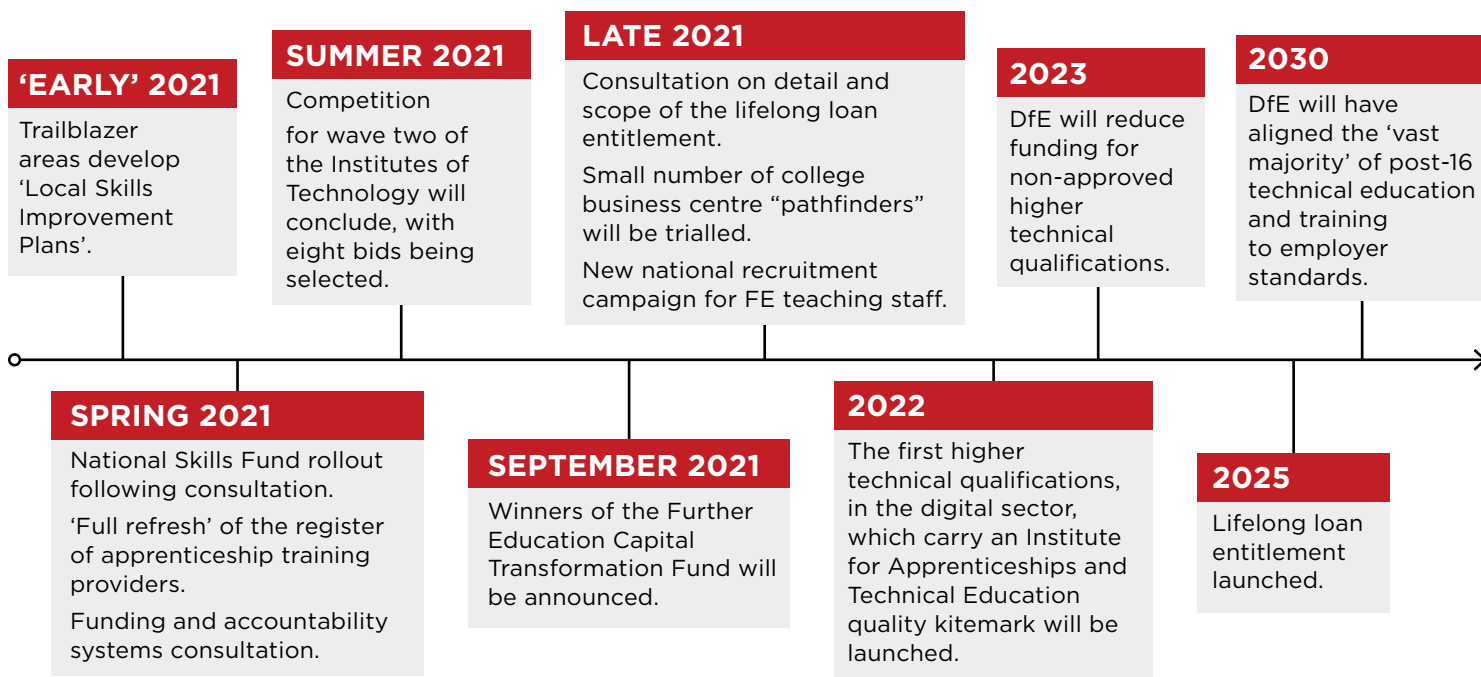
The campaign, expected to be launched this year, would “reach millions of prospective teaching staff, targeting those with experience and skills in industry, who can train the next generation of technical experts”.

The campaign would direct potential teachers to a new ‘Teach in Further Education’ platform, which, alongside a dedicated telephone helpline, will give potential applicants “all they need to take the next step into teaching, with information on how to access relevant training, for example the Taking Teaching Further programme, and financial incentives such as training bursaries”.

It will also signpost current vacancies and help existing teachers and lecturers find professional development opportunities.



## PLANS FOLLOWING THE WHITE PAPER – A TIMELINE





FE WHITE PAPER **COVERAGE**

## Skills minister Q&amp;A: 'We have got an awful lot to do and an awful lot to prove'

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

The lack of a long-term funding settlement for FE did not hamper the Department for Education's white paper in terms of its boldness or scale of investment, the skills minister has said.

Speaking to *FE Week* following the launch of the white paper on Thursday, Gillian Keegan insisted there is an "awful lot to do" with the reforms put forward and an "awful lot to prove" and she wouldn't "necessarily" want anything more to deliver.

In the Q&A she tackled questions about whether the Treasury's switch from a multi-year to a one-year spending review had put a stop to "revolutionary" reforms and greater funding, as sector leaders have suggested. And she gave her opinion on why this attempt at embedding employers at the heart of FE will succeed where many past attempts had failed.

**Q: Did the lack of a three-year spending-review hamper the white paper in terms of speed of reform and/or boldness?**

**A:** "No, it didn't. We have also had this focus on a need to recover as a result of coronavirus. There is a big recognition that skills are a key part to drive that recovery.

"Obviously having a three-year settlement is great because it gives visibility, it gives that long-term money, but a lot of the things we wanted to do we have either



Gillian Keegan

**"I can't think of anything more ambitious, to be honest"**

already been working on, such as T Levels, Institutes of Technology, the capital investment etc, but I think even if you look at what we have implemented and what we're going to implement this year, such as the level 3 entitlement, the basic digital skills, the bootcamps, we have got the money to get going with all of those things.

"We have got a lot of things we need to do."

**Q: So even if there was a longer-term funding settlement for FE, the white paper wouldn't have seen any further new policies or investment?**

**A:** "The fact is, I don't know. But I do know that trying to deliver a flexible, more modular approach with the lifelong loan entitlement, a level 3 entitlement, bootcamps, Institutes of Technology and T Levels, that is a massive programme in itself.

"To set ourselves the objective of closing

**CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE**

FE WHITE PAPER **COVERAGE****CONTINUED**

the skills gap and deliver to business what they need, I can't think of anything more ambitious, to be honest. I don't know what else I would add to that.

"The reality is, we have got an awful lot to do and an awful lot to prove.

"The most important thing for me is to be able to deliver some of this stuff and prove we are capable of stepping up to this massive challenge.

"I feel there is a lot to deliver. Would I want more to deliver? Not necessarily. Sometimes there is a case of, well, if you argue for more stuff but you can't spend it because you can't actually deliver it, well, then that doesn't always end well.

"I feel we have got the right type of investment to invest in some of the priorities, and I don't see that holding us back at all."

## "Would I want more to deliver? Not necessarily"

**Q: In your opinion, what is the biggest new reform in the white paper that will affect the sector?**

**A:** "I think it's really embedding employers at the heart of the system. But it's more than that, it's turning those words into actions and I think what's different is the fact that we've already started to build our confidence in this area with the apprenticeship standards and the work we've done with about 3,000 employers across the country and the development of T Levels which we've done with 250 leading employers.

"That has given us confidence to really embed the employers into our qualifications and our standards. And when you do that, we make sure that what people are studying is what employers want, which is what's going to get them a job. It is that big a difference."

**Q: Why will this latest attempt to place employers at the centre of the FE system work where so many previous attempts have failed; and will a one-off £65 million strategic development fund make for lasting improvements?**

**A:** "That's a good question and it is the one we should always ask ourselves. The first thing I would say... I haven't worked in the sector for a long time but I haven't seen qualifications built with the DfE, the sector and with employers collaboratively before. I think certainly on the ones I've done, the employers were not at the heart of building those qualifications and making sure that they set out what were the knowledge, skills, behaviours and qualifications, and what they needed to do for the 21st-century work environment.

"We've got more in college estates, we've got more in strategic development, we've got business centres, we've got additional capital coming forward, and we've got the level 3 entitlement, obviously.

"I mean, some of it has been announced before. I don't know why people get so obsessed about it being announced before — it's all part of the same strategy, some of which we've been working on to be able to start to get people ready to deliver it. But it's all part of the same strategy, which is closing the skills gap, where we put employers at the centre of our qualifications and working with FE colleges and local skills improvement plans to basically make sure that we bring the system together to

deliver it.

"I think the other thing that's different now is timing. Timing is everything in being able to implement successfully. And what you've got now is employers need to grow, you know, they've got skills gaps, the skills gaps are global, with a lot of competition for talent. We've also had Covid and there's going to be a recovery. Skills are going to have to power that. We've got Brexit. We will come together at a time when we have proven to ourselves that we can successfully implement employers into qualifications and into apprenticeship standards. Having all those together is what makes it different this time."

## "It's really embedding employers at the heart of the system"

**Q: The white paper has been a year in the making and builds on various ongoing reform programmes. How would you rate the job that Keith Smith, your director of post-16 strategy who led on the white paper, has done?**

**A:** "Fantastic. He has been involved for less than one year and he was dealing with the apprenticeship reforms before.

"There is an awful lot of work that has been done. To be able to land something that has been so universally welcomed as good news is fantastic. It was a relatively small team who have been working very hard to get this to the point that it is at. I think they have done an absolutely brilliant job."



## Opinion

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## FE WHITE PAPER COVERAGE

## JONATHAN SIMONS

Director and head of education practice at Public First



## I fear the FE white paper is the worst of both worlds

**Neither political capital nor actual capital are backing up today's FE white paper, writes Jonathan Simons**

In 2009, while working in No 10, I worked with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills on a white paper called 'Skills for Growth'. The white paper committed to government working with local employers to develop "local strategies" to ensure that "skills provision fully reflects the needs of all areas in the region."

The following year, under the incoming Coalition government, I worked with BIS and DfE jointly on a white paper called 'Skills for Sustainable Growth'. In that, the government suggested a new system of finance and loans for individuals to access training later in life and to build up higher-level technical skills.

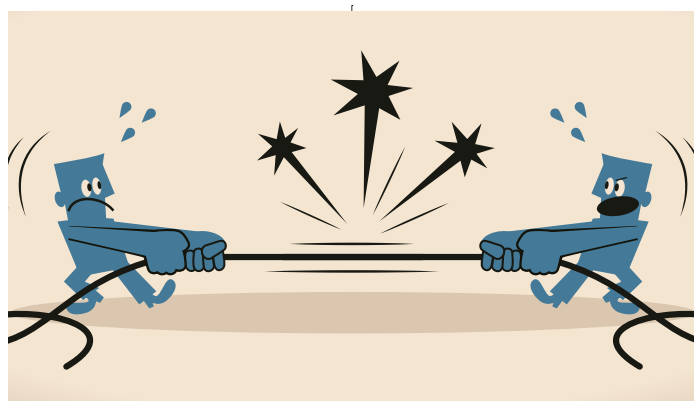
Stop me if this sounds familiar.

It's not that today's analysis is wrong. It's that none of it is new.

There are two broad options for policymaking in government, especially in complex areas like skills. The boring one is taking the existing policy architecture you have and evolving it.

I was perhaps a little unfair in my impression that none of this has changed from a decade ago. The difference between FE loans in 2010 and the shape of a finance system in this white paper are significant.

The latter is more flexible, and will build on ten years of



learning about who accesses credit, how it needs to work, how providers need to manage it and so on. Similarly, a decade ago, the dominant feeling was that it was all about higher skills, and the middle skills were disappearing.

Today's white paper is clear that intermediate skills have a vital role to play in the economy.

The second option is to make big, dramatic changes. This can happen when there has genuinely been a paradigm shift in the environment, or when there is a change of political approach towards a sector.

Such an approach is heralded by white papers and legislation, and the spending of political capital and actual capital.

We're arguably in such a moment now. The pandemic has revealed (or perhaps highlighted to those politicians not watching as closely as FE Week readers) the fissures in the skills system and labour market productivity.

Millions of people have sadly lost their jobs and thousands of businesses are shuttered. The

labour market of 2025 will be different to the labour market of 2020 on a scale that is very rarely seen within such a short window.

But the pandemic has also meant that the Treasury is extremely reluctant to make long-term financial commitments while the future shape of the economy is unclear.

So what I fear is that today has seen the worst of both worlds.

Because government has committed to publishing this white paper for over a year now, it has done so – despite the Spending Review in November cutting the ground away from under them.

**"The saving grace is government has left the political window open"**

We've got soaring rhetoric. We've got big statements about a paradigm shift. But we have neither political capital, nor actual capital, backing it up. We've

announced big things before we have big levers to make them work.

Chris Skidmore, the former higher education minister, wrote an excellent piece in Conservative Home in which he gently castigated his fellow politicians for rushing to make quick announcements in an effort to be seen to be doing something.

The saving grace is government has left the political window open.

He quotes psychologist and economist Daniel Kahneman about thinking fast, and thinking slow. All too often, Skidmore wrote, the temptation when we can't answer a difficult question slowly is to answer a different, easier question quickly.

The saving grace is government has left the political window open. In the next few months, with a fair wind and a successful vaccine rollout, we'll know more about the medium-term economic impact.

We'll know more about what is signal and what is noise in the labour market. We may also have a change in personnel at the top which could lend this agenda greater political capital.

So the mission for all of those who work in FE and skills policy is clear. We must see today not as the end, but the end of the beginning.

The task is to continue to press government in the run-up to this autumn's Comprehensive Spending Review. Only then will the reality of change and the investment of tomorrow meet the political rhetoric of today.

## Opinion

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## FE WHITE PAPER COVERAGE

## SALLY DICKETTS

President, Association of Colleges



## Never in 37 years have I seen colleges so much in the limelight as with this white paper

**This white paper is the first glimpse of where further education could be heading – for the better, writes Sally Dicketts**

Today's eagerly awaited "Skills for Jobs" white paper will be seen positively by the optimists in the sector and met with disappointment by others.

I sit in the first camp – I am full of optimism today. It goes without saying that there is no such thing as a perfect white paper, but we should all be delighted and recognise the significance of today's release. And it is worth remembering that the most realistic alternative was not a different white paper, but no white paper at all.

I am optimistic because never, in my 37 years in the FE sector, have I seen government put colleges centre stage and recognise the important role we undoubtedly play in achieving social mobility, greater equality and diversity and enabling economic growth and recovery.

We can individually quibble with parts of the paper and bewail issues of funding. Or we can decide to change our destiny and embrace the work with employers even more than we do at present.

And I am optimistic because today's white paper is one of the first tangible examples of what government means when it talks about "building back better" and

"levelling up".

Not only are colleges included (which just a few years ago we'd have been thrilled about), they are front and centre. This is one of the first major policy announcements on what a post-pandemic world could look like.

**"This is one of the first major policy announcements for a post-pandemic world"**

We will of course need to make sure that the bits we take issue with are ironed out, and any commitments are backed by funding, but that is what the consultation period will be for. Now, more than ever, working together collaboratively will be key.

The potential of further education colleges to work

more closely with employers is great, they already have strong partnerships, but today's reforms have the potential, if done in true collaboration, to engage thousands more.

Supporting people to retrain and upskill, and supporting employers with business change and labour market shifts, will be crucial in the coming years. We face a range of challenges and changes, including the climate emergency, regional inequalities, technological change and changes in the world of work. Putting colleges at the heart of key public policy will help to provide solutions to create cohesive communities and a stronger economy.

The aim will be to really impact locally on the quality and range of technical education provided to our communities.

Many of the measures, including the target of introducing a new Lifelong Loan Entitlement by 2025, will help those who have, so far,

been locked out of educational opportunities later in life. The job now is to ensure that these opportunities are truly accessible and properly funded.

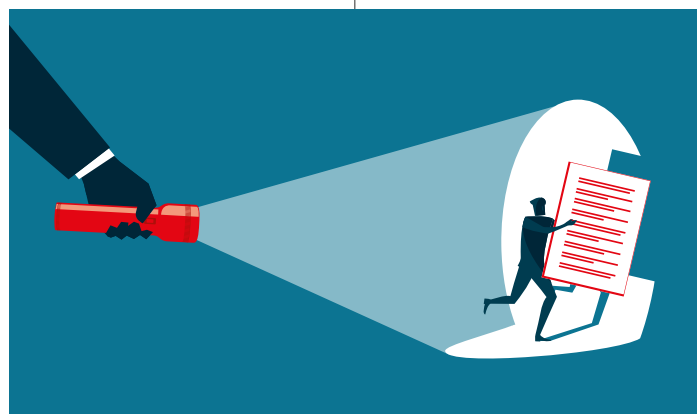
When I work with principals and chief executives from all over this sector I am always wowed by people's passion and thought for their learners and staff. This thought and concern for learners now needs honing into envisioning a future where we are at its centre.

We must work with and help to shape the implementation of this white paper to ensure our learners benefit and get the skills knowledge and attributes to improve their life choices and our economies.

I look forward to working with you on finessing and using this white paper to further catapult this sector not only into the limelight but into being the powerhouse for skills to drive the economy and our communities to success.

We are responsible for the lives of so many young people and adults — let's use our collective ingenuity and interest in learning and development to make this difference with agility, thought and innovative use of technology and our people.

I have real optimism for our future as long as we remember to stay open and curious to change, to work and support one another, and to trust and believe in our staff and students to work their magic.



FE WHITE PAPER **COVERAGE****STEPHEN EVANS**

Chief executive,  
Learning and  
Work Institute



## Here are four things the FE white paper has failed to address

**Verdict on the white paper? A fine start, but requires improvement, writes Stephen Evans**

“We must put employers’ needs for skills centre stage. We must make colleges and training providers more responsive to employers’ and learners’ needs, reaching out to more businesses and more people, and providing training in ways that suit them.

“Creating a truly demand-led approach means reforming qualifications, reforming the way we fund colleges, and reforming the way we deliver training.”

It’s difficult to argue with this quote from the white paper. Unfortunately, it’s from the 2003 Skills White Paper.

Will this latest publication be the moment we look back on as when we finally “cracked it”?

Short answer: only with investment, more radical change and sustained commitment.

### The good

Perhaps the white paper’s main contributions are to put further education centre stage, which matters after the last decade, and to provide helpful hooks for future change.

For example, I welcome plans to focus more on the outcomes of learning. We’ve long argued for that and worked with the Greater London Authority on it, though the details will be key.

The intention to look at multi-year funding is great too and,



while there’s a balance between simplicity and targeting support, it would be good to simplify the current complex funding and accountability arrangements.

The Lifetime Skills Guarantee, focus on apprenticeships and commitment to increase investment, while already announced, are also really welcome – there’s more to do, but it’s great to be talking about how to invest rather than what to cut.

A point, though, about language. When I worked in government, I was advised not to describe reforms as “radical”, as discussion of this white paper often has: people would notice if they were, otherwise you’d be overselling. No white paper can solve everything, so it’s important the government doesn’t over-claim its impact: better to argue there’s a big plan, moving in the right direction.

### Missing, or more needed

This white paper aims to align provision with local economic need and deliver better outcomes. But how will the new

Local Skills Improvement Plans, to be agreed by colleges, employers and others, fit with devolution in parts of England?

What traction will these plans have? Isn’t this what Skills Advisory Panels were meant to do?

Similarly, the white paper would have benefited from more recognition of the wider benefits of learning (health, citizenship, etc) and breadth of provision.

And while there’s lots of talk of employer leadership, I can’t see very much about how we raise their demand for, and investment, in skills.

### Now here are four areas where the white paper must go further:

#### 1. Investment

We need substantial and sustained investment after a decade of cuts that have left millions fewer adults taking part in learning. There’s little new money here, so let’s hope the government is working on a long-term funding settlement for the next spending review.

#### 2. Basic skills

Nine million adults have low literacy or numeracy, but participation in learning has plummeted. More than 20 years on from the Moser Report, which drove a significant focus on this challenge, it’s disappointing not to see greater ambition.

#### 3. Retraining

The Lifetime Skills Guarantee is great, but it’s focused on a first level 3, so we need more help for those needing a level 2 or to retrain at level 3, as well as with maintenance costs. With longer working lives and a changing economy, we need to be think bigger.

#### 4. Joining up

How will we align skills with employment support, like Kickstart and Restart? What about local government. There is little mentioned apart from Mayoral Combined Authorities, for instance.

### Verdict

It’s great the white paper puts further education centre stage – there’s lots of positives already in train to shout about, and some interesting new ideas.

But to avoid becoming another footnote in the history of skills policy, we’ll need long-term funding and commitment to more radical action.

Perhaps not a giant leap, but hopefully several steps in the right direction.



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# Ofqual delays decision on solution for apprentices stuck in limbo

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A decision on whether apprentices can receive teacher-assessed grades for their English and maths if they are unable to sit their assessments has been pushed back by Ofqual until at least late February.

As previously reported by *FE Week*, tens of thousands of work-based learners, mostly in the health and care sectors, have been stuck in limbo and unable to complete their functional skills programme due to Covid-19 restrictions since the start of the academic year.

Ofqual launched a consultation last week to set out its plans for replacing exams this year, including for vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs) if they cannot be sat safely.

The exams regulator's consultation says that if an apprentice can attend a training centre to sit their functional skills test or complete it remotely, then they should.

But it goes on to suggest that if these two methods are not possible, then "alternative arrangements" can be applied and can include teacher-assessed grades like GCSEs and A-levels.

*FE Week* pressed the regulator for clarity on when a final decision on this issue would be taken, and a spokesperson said it would be "determined through the consultation", the outcome of which will not be until "late February".

But even when the decision is published, a "technical" consultation will follow on the framework of rules that awarding organisations will have to abide by before putting in place the alternative arrangements.

By this point, it is expected that the majority of functional skills awarding bodies will have remote proctoring solutions in place for the assessments, thus cancelling out the need for a large number of teacher-assessed grades.

The Ofqual spokesperson made clear that through the consultation, awarding bodies will "need to determine the most appropriate approach to awarding based on their qualification design and delivery, including what the minimum assessment

## Awarding bodies' progress towards launching proctoring solutions

Awarding Organisation	Functional skills proctoring solution progress
Pearson Education Ltd	Partially launched. Full rollout in March
City and Guilds of London Institute	Partially launched. Full rollout in 'the coming months'
NCFE	Piloted. Full rollout in 'the coming weeks'
OCR	Not in development
AQA Education	Not in development
Skillsfirst Awards Ltd	Fully launched
NOCN	Fully launched
Highfield Qualifications	Fully launched
Open Awards	Fully launched

evidence should be for the valid and reliable award of each of their qualifications — including functional skills".

However, they added that this "does not follow that functional skills learners will automatically be issued with calculated results in the same way as in 2020".

Association of Employment and Learning Providers managing director Jane Hickie has urged officials to allow teacher-assessed grades now.

"When the government is saying that everyone should stay home unless absolutely necessary, it is ridiculous to still expect tens of thousands of apprentices who have been unable to take their maths and English tests for months to travel miles to do so at test centres," she said.

"Mass volume remote testing is still weeks away, and the logjam is now said to number 60,000 apprentices and still growing.

"Apprentices should have access to teacher assessments now."

Functional skills learners were able to receive calculated results last summer following the cancellation of exams, but Ofqual has refused to reintroduce them even for those that cannot access their training centre to sit their assessments since September.

Awarding bodies have meanwhile struggled to introduce remote solutions that allow apprentices to take the assessments either at home or in the workplace.

*FE Week* spoke to the awarding bodies that offer functional skills this week and found that five of them – NOCN, Open Awards, Skillsfirst Awards and Highfield Qualifications – do have

proctoring solutions available that allow the assessments to be sat at home and be remotely invigilated.

NCFE has meanwhile been piloting its own proctoring solution and will roll it out fully in the "coming weeks".

Pearson and City & Guilds, the awarding bodies that deliver the greatest number of functional skills assessments annually, have begun offering their own "test at home" solutions but only on a small scale. Full-scale solutions are planned to be rolled out in the coming months.

OCR and AQA both told *FE Week* they are not working on developing a remote proctoring solution, saying that the functional skills learners not being able to sit their normal assessments has not been a big issue for them.

Ofqual's consultation is running for two weeks and will close on January 29.

For wider VTQs, it proposes that where practical exams and assessments which are "required to demonstrate occupational competence for employment and apprenticeships" should "continue to take place throughout the academic year where they can be delivered in line with public health guidelines, including remotely".

Where these assessments cannot be delivered safely, they should be delayed.

For written VTQ exams, Ofqual is proposing to issue a revised version of its Extended Extraordinary Regulatory Framework, which gives awarding organisations the "flexibility to adapt their assessments and qualifications to mitigate against the disruption the pandemic has caused".

Where exams have not been able to take place, such as the January BTEC series, they are likely to be in scope of teacher-assessed grades.



Jane Hickie

# A new fiasco in the making? We grade the various exam replacement plans

SAMANTHA BOOTH

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## Exclusive

The government has finally published its consultation revealing the plan to replace GCSE and A-level exams this year. In some quarters it has done little to quell the fear that we're heading for another fiasco – but this time, with teachers left to cop the blame. FE Week investigates ...

## Move over mutant algorithm, we have a new scapegoat...

A key concern is that teachers are being primed to be the fall guy – in place of the so-called “mutant” algorithm which politicians blamed for last year's fiasco.

Teachers will be tasked with coming up with a grade for each student based on evidence that includes coursework, potentially mandatory mini-exams.

While teachers have been promised support and guidance from exam boards, there are big concerns about how any sort of consistency across grades can be ensured.

There is also anger that this plan B hadn't been enacted earlier in the year, rather than cobbled together this month.

Dr Mary Bousted, joint general secretary at the National Education Union, said collecting evidence across the country will prove “much harder now” than if schools and colleges had been supported to do it from the start of the academic year.

Ofqual's interim chief regulator, Simon Lebus, admitted teachers have a “heavier responsibility” under the plan.

He said the quality assurance arrangements – whereby exam boards sample the approaches and grades set by schools and colleges – alongside support from the boards would be “so important” to help teachers in “what is undoubtedly quite a burdensome task”.

But Dame Alison Peacock, chief executive of the Chartered College of Teaching, said the risk is that “hardworking teaching profession is fed to the lions”.

## 'Pandora's box' of appeals

Students can appeal to their school or college,

but grades would only be changed if the original judgment was “not legitimate”.

The appeal should be considered by a “competent” person not involved in the assessment, which could include someone from another school or college.

If a student is still not happy, they can appeal to exam boards – but only if the school or college has “not acted in line with the exam board's procedural requirements”, not to challenge the merits of the teacher assessment.

Mary Curnock Cook, former chief executive of university admissions service UCAS, said the “sheer volume of appeals might overwhelm the system.”

Tom Middlehurst, curriculum and inspection specialist at the Association of School and College Leaders, said it could put schools and colleges in an “extremely difficult situation” of having to organise an appeals system against “the grades they awarded, when common sense would suggest that this should be done by another body”.

Bousted said a “pandora's box of appeals” could cause “great anguish and workload for seemingly very little benefit”, but suggested exam boards could instead run the process.

Lebus himself, in an interview with FE Week's sister paper Schools Week, admitted there are concerns over the extra workload, adding an “adversarial appeals process” would put schools and colleges in an “invidious position because it can be corrosive of trust and good relations”.

Meanwhile professor Barnaby Lenon, dean of education at the University of Buckingham, who sits on Ofqual's standards advisory group, warned the timescales to achieve all this are too tight. Ofqual is proposing to bring results day forward, possibly to early July, so that appeals could be submitted immediately.

## 'Huge task for exams boards'

Under the proposals, exam boards would set papers for students, marked by teachers, to feed into the grading process. Ofqual is mulling over whether to make them compulsory, too.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of ASCL, said the papers would need to be “exceptionally well designed”, adding: “All of this adds up to a huge and complex task for the exam boards.”

The consultation suggested a combination of questions from past papers and new questions could be used.

Past papers have their advantages because exam boards already have the data on how children performed, to use as a comparison to how children perform this year. But they are complete papers and may not even cover all the topics students have

studied.

It is also understood that the Joint Council for Qualifications has set up a working group to find commonalities between the exam boards to help create guidance.

But Middlehurst highlighted a conflicting issue in the plans. “On one hand, having common assessments would ensure greater consistency in how grades are awarded,” he said. “But on the other hand, it may be more difficult to take into account the differing extents to which students have lost out on learning during the pandemic.”

Lebus reckons the more frequently mini-exams are taken the “easier, I think, the task becomes of ensuring fairness across the piece and that students are being held to a consistent standard whatever school or college they are studying in”.

## What about learning loss?

There has been little news on who will make up the DfE expert group, announced before Christmas, to help come up with plans on differential learning loss.

Sam Freedman, a former government advisor, said Ofqual has acknowledged a key reason exams had to be cancelled was the “huge and differential loss of learning suffered over the course of the past year”.

In last year's centre-assessed grades, teachers were asked to come up with a grade they thought a student would have achieved had they sat their exams.

This year, Ofqual wants the grade to be based on the teachers' assessment of how they are performing now.

But Freedman sums it up like this: “In other words, it's not possible to assess the course but the only way of providing a grade is to assess the course.”

Instead, Freedman says the government should – for A-level students – work with universities to ensure that offers are not conditional on precise grades, “but are much more flexible”.

Universities UK said universities will be actively considering any additional support needed for students to transition, with some universities already announcing they were going to lower A-level requirements.

On the issue of fairness, Lebus said exam boards would be key in providing quality assurance. He also signalled that the ambition is to keep outcomes broadly in line with 2020 and confirmed a final plan announced in the week of February 22.



Simon Lebus



# College's £240k rugby stadium naming deal investigated

NICK LINFORD  
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## Exclusive

The new interim chief executive at Hull College Group has launched an investigation after *FE Week* revealed the organisation had signed a £240,000 three-year rugby stadium naming sponsorship deal.

The cost of the deal signed in July 2019 with Hull Kingston Rovers came to light after the college fought and lost a year-long freedom of information request to keep it secret.

The rugby club stadium was renamed Hull College Craven Park at a widely publicised ceremony in August 2019.

Lowell Williams, who recently joined the college as the fourth interim chief executive, has told *FE Week* there "may have been a breach of the college's financial regulations when senior management at the time entered into the contract".

Quizzed on whether the sizable deal was signed without the college chair and other board members knowing, as well as whether any spending rules had been broken, Williams said: "My view is that a contract of £240,000 plus VAT did indeed require board approval. I have asked for a legal opinion on this matter.

"There is no record of management bringing to the attention of the board the full value of the contract."

Hull College Group is supposed to be carefully watched by the government as part of a formal FE Commissioner 'intervention' process following a well-reported £50 million bailout in 2018.

Government 'fresh start' budgets are meant to be carefully scrutinised and an observer from the Education and Skills Funding Agency attends board meetings. Several board meetings at Hull College have also been attended by the deputy FE Commissioner.

The college marketing budget has been a concern for the government since *FE Week* first revealed in October 2019 that thousands

was spent by the husband of the then-chief executive of the college to hire the 80-piece Hull Philharmonic Orchestra to play computer-game music at the Hull City Hall in June 2019.

The FE Commissioner undertook an "analysis of marketing expenditure" in November 2019 and found more than £1 million was spent in a single year.

The draft report leaked to *FE Week* stated: "2018/19 actual marketing expenditure was £1.077 million compared with a budget of £0.938 million."

The final report published nearly a year later in October 2020 omitted the expenditure figures and this week the government declined to comment on when they were made aware of the Hull Kingston Rovers contract or value.

Williams said: "The contract with Hull Kingston Rovers was listed in a paper on college's global marketing spend in a paper to the board on December 18, 2019 [four months after it was signed], but only at its in-year value without VAT, with no reference to the three years.

"The paper was then deferred at the meeting and was considered at the following meeting on January 29, 2020."

In addition, Williams admitted he was "concerned senior managers at the time did not make best use of legal advice they had obtained when negotiating the contract", adding that "the

college welcomes our educational partnership with HKR but I would not have recommended to the corporation entering into a contract of this value and nature in July 2019, if I had been in post."

Hull Kingston Rovers declined to comment on all questions put to them concerning the stadium naming and educational partnership with Hull College Group.

It is understood that the FE Commissioner and his team is due into the college today (January 22).

When asked what action the FE Commissioner would take, the DfE spokesperson said: "The ESFA and FE Commissioner's team continue to work with Hull College through the formal intervention process.

"As an independent body the college has responsibility to decide how its marketing budget is spent. The department is clear that college leaders must treat taxpayers' money in a way that benefits their students and represents value for money."

In an email to all staff on Tuesday afternoon, seen by *FE Week*, Williams said the vice principal for learner experience and business development, who had worked at the college for two years and is responsible for the marketing department, had resigned to take up a job at Hull Kingston Rovers.



# Coventry College sells off a campus to repay debts

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A college is selling one of its only two campuses to repay debt after being warned it could “face insolvency”.

Coventry College will lose its hospitality and catering provision and put 23 jobs at risk under plans to close its Henley campus by the end of August. All remaining courses and the “majority” of staff will transfer to its city campus two miles away.

Principal Carol Thomas said the sale was “in order to generate revenue” and create a “financially stable further education college which is fit for the future”.

Coventry College’s 2018-19 accounts show that it breached the conditions of a loan from Barclays Bank, meaning the full balance of the loan – £9.4 million – was due within one year.

The college scrambled to refinance that loan by August 2020, with an FE Commissioner report from a visit in March last year warning that if the college could not reach an agreement with the bank, it would have to meet its loan obligations. Without government or other third-party support, the report continued, that “will not be possible and will leave the college facing insolvency”.

The college told FE Week the loan has been extended from the August repayment date and “expects to be cash generative after loan repayments in this financial year”.

A spokesperson said there are therefore currently “no solvency issues”, but confirmed the sale of Henley was to help repay debt.

The college said it had looked at refurbishing the former Henley College site, which has been operational since 1964 and merged with City College Coventry to form Coventry College in 2017, but concluded that “is not possible as it would require significant financial investment”.

Coventry College received £1 million in capital investment from the government earlier this year. The board had explored further “funding options” with government education agencies, but this did not materialise.

The Henley campus was said to be “under-



utilised” and in “a poor state of repair, with ineffective and inconsistent quality of digital access”. Moving to one campus means all the college’s capital funding can go towards “the development of one modern further education campus”, Thomas said.

Local Labour MP Colleen Fletcher is protesting the Henley closure. She has written to education secretary Gavin Williamson to say she is “concerned this decision was in part predicated on government failing to offer an appropriate level of financial support”.

“This example in Coventry may well be being repeated up and down the country,” she added.

“While I of course understand why colleges may wish to amalgamate, I am concerned that this may well represent a loss of opportunities for many.”

This is the latest bump in the road for Coventry College. It was rated ‘inadequate’ by Ofsted in 2015 before achieving two consecutive ‘requires improvement’ grades in 2016 and 2019.

Thomas took over last August, following a string of short-term leaders over the previous five years, and told FE Week in September the latest grade three had meant staff had “lost heart, they’ve lost passion, and they’ve lost confidence in their own ability”.

Coventry College is planning to move most of Henley’s provision, including courses in sport and public services, to its city campus at

the end of the academic year, so no course is interrupted mid-term.

Aside from the fewer than 80 catering and hospitality learners, the decision will affect around 30 per cent of the college’s learners.

Alternative providers were being discussed for the hospitality and catering learners, the college added, but no names were provided to FE Week.

Of the 23 staff at risk of losing their jobs due to the move, six are full-time and the college says it is working with all of them to find new employment.

The college ran two staffing restructures last year, leading to 33 staff taking voluntary redundancy.

Fletcher is set to meet with the college about the closure, where she said she will raise concerns about losing provision from the Henley site.

Members of parliament protesting the ending of provision at their local campuses has become a common occurrence recently, as colleges seek to offload estates to balance their books.

Just last week FE Week reported on how a group of Cumbrian MPs, Conservative and Liberal Democrat, had written to Boris Johnson, asking for his support to save the county’s Newton Rigg College from closure.

Similar situations occurred when site sales were announced for Cornwall College Group, RNN Group, and Warwickshire College Group.



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Advertorial

# FIVE THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT DELIVERING T LEVELS



By Zac Aldridge

**T**Levels bring with them important new expectations of educators, says Zac Aldridge, NCFE's operations director for technical education

It hardly needs stating that beginning to teach the first T Levels in this, of all academic years, poses challenges for providers. If the position of T Levels in the senior leadership team's league table of priorities had dropped during the last 6–12 months, we'd understand why. However, at NCFE, we've seen no decrease in appetite from providers to get T Levels right. We're delighted with this; T Levels are important.

The first few thousand students who enrolled on a T Level at the start of this term expect providers to get T Levels right first time. The many hundreds of employers that awarding organisations like NCFE engaged with to write, review and validate T Levels expect to recruit students with enhanced technical skills and knowledge. There's therefore a lot riding on the quality of T Level teaching. From our development work with industry representatives, we'd encourage colleagues with responsibility for teaching and learning to think about the following things:

## The first T Level students are pioneers

When something new comes along, it's often easy to rein yourself in for fear of getting it wrong. Over the next few years, as teaching staff get more familiar with the methods of assessment for T Levels, they'll take more risks with their delivery. They'll try something different that might just stretch students enough to get them the distinction grade they're on the cusp of achieving; they'll trust themselves more to be able to pull it back if those risks don't quite pay off. Current students deserve those chances, too. Therefore, make taking a risk less risky; lower the stakes. On your T Level provision, use peer observation rather than a formal approach; allow T Level teachers to observe and coach each other; allocate them time to develop a project-based improvement activity aligned to the T Level assessment strategy. Pioneering students learn best from trusted, pioneering teachers.

## Industry Placements: not just for students

A great CPD programme allows time for teachers to go back into industry and update their skills and

knowledge every year. T Levels were written by employers and providers need to keep up. The ETF's [Industry Insights](#) programme will fund this for you, but even without discrete funding, industry placements for teachers are essential to high quality T Level teaching. If your T Level students are all on placement at the same time, why not get teachers to join them? The contemporaneous assessment opportunities this will provide doubles the benefits.

## Contextualise maths and English

We know the entry requirements for T Levels will be high – the content is new and challenging, and good GCSE passes are tempting minimum thresholds. Remember, though, that GCSE passes are not an exit requirement for T Level achievement. In this context, your T Level [Transition Programmes](#) become key drivers for imparting maths, English and digital skills in ways that prepare students not only to pass GCSEs, but to support their T Level occupational specialism. Talk to employers about industry-relevant content, speak to your AO about the support they can offer, and don't forget that Functional Skills may allow you more scope to directly target T Level preparedness than GCSEs.

## Introduce mentors

HE institutions and employers will expect T Level students to assimilate as well as any other student or employee. The Industry Placement and rigour with which assessment is applied to T Levels will certainly support the transition. Many HE institutions and employers offer the opportunity for students to be mentored – we think this will be invaluable for

early T Level cohorts and can help to link you with the right people. A mentor to support with the general experience of university or working life is useful. Even better is a mentor who can embed the connections between your T Level teaching and a future potential HE course or technical job.

## Formative assessment scaffolds the summative

Providers have no past cohorts of T Level students to learn from this year. Couple this with grappling to introduce the dramatic and necessary increase in blended learning, and measuring the progress of your T Level students against untested assessment criteria becomes a huge challenge. You should take as many opportunities as possible to formatively assess your students – and use employers to help. Ask them to set industry-relevant assessments that embed learning; ask them to interview your students – remotely – about their T Level content; set up employer panels to which your T Level students present termly progress. All of these activities will complement formal, summative assessment and enhance learning.

T Levels represent a considered, fundamental change to the post-16 education system, a chance for students who take an applied, vocational pathway to secure genuine parity of esteem with their academic peers. We'd be delighted to work with you on what we know is a shared determination to deliver outstanding T Levels.

Find out about NCFE's work on T Levels [ncte.org.uk/t-levels](https://ncte.org.uk/t-levels)





# PHE pauses daily Covid testing in colleges as new variant concerns grow

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The rollout of daily Covid contact testing in schools and colleges has been paused amid fears about higher rates of transmission from the new variant of the disease and following widespread concern over the accuracy of tests.

However, the weekly testing of staff will continue – with testing increased to twice weekly.

The key part of the mass-testing scheme was daily lateral flow tests for students and staff who had been in close contact with a positive Covid case. Those who tested negative could stay in the classroom rather than have to isolate.

However, Public Health England announced on Wednesday that “in light of this changing situation, we now recommend that the rollout of daily contact testing within schools and colleges is paused, other than for schools involved in further evaluation”.

PHE said as the new variant of Covid has “higher rates of transmission and hence generates a higher secondary attack rate...the balance between the risks (transmission of virus in schools and onward to households and the wider community) and benefits (education in a face-to-face and safe setting) for daily contact testing is unclear”.

Alongside NHS Test and Trace, PHE will now conduct “structured evaluation of daily contact testing as part of a wider evaluation of daily contact testing in a range of private and public settings”.

The Department for Education will support the evaluation so that

the findings can “contribute to further public health advice on daily contact testing in educational settings”.

A department spokesperson added: “Daily contact testing, used as an alternative to up to a whole class having to isolate if a positive case is detected, continues to have the potential to be a valuable tool to keep more young people and staff at school and college — the best place for students’ development and wellbeing.

“We will continue pilots to gather further data and to build the evidence base for the programme.”

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said the union was “relieved” by the decisions as “this use of these tests never really made sense”.

He added the government’s latest U-turn will have “thoroughly confused parents, pupils and the wider public” and called for clarity on the limitations of the test and for the government to review “the practical implications of mass testing in secondary schools and colleges”.

During a parliamentary education committee earlier this week Dr Dougal Hargreaves, the Department for

Education’s deputy scientific adviser, admitted there was “at least a hypothetical risk of increasing transmission”, and the use of tests in schools and colleges would be evaluated in the coming weeks.

Last week several local public health directors advised schools and colleges not to follow government guidance to conduct daily contact testing on close contact instead of sending individuals home to self-isolate.

While a study conducted by Oxford University and PHE found the Innova test used in schools and colleges was 76.8 per cent accurate when identifying positive cases, more recent studies suggested it to be less accurate.

For example, during a community mass-testing pilot in Liverpool, just 40 per cent of cases were detected.

Forest Gate Community School in Newham has conducted over 200 tests without receiving a single positive or invalid test result.

Simon Elliott, chief executive of the Community Schools Trust which runs the school, said a staff member “trying to ascertain if the test was somehow broken” received a positive result after swabbing their coffee.

Elliott added: “We’re really concerned that they may be a monumental waste of time and that it may create a false sense of security in people who have got a negative test.”

PHE has asked for schools or colleges who have found daily contact testing helpful and would like to take part in the evaluation to contact the NHS Test and Trace evaluation team at [dct-pilotpmo@dhsc.gov.uk](mailto:dct-pilotpmo@dhsc.gov.uk)



# REFLECTING ON THE CHANGES OF TEACHING IN 2020

By The Skills Network

The year of 2020 has changed the face of learning and development, with training providers all over the world forced to move classrooms online to teach, access and collaborate. However, as we move into 2021, and almost a year on from our first lockdown, why are we still faced with the same challenges?

## Limited progress through lockdown

The issue with lockdown 1.0 was how unprepared many learning providers were when they had to transform their offering to become fully digital. Hasty decisions were made to pivot quickly; and whilst there have been some successful transitions amongst many providers, many have also rushed into an unplanned solution, which offered no training nor a long-term solution to e-learning, merely just a quick fix.

Similar issues arose with lockdown 2.0 when once again learning was forced to go online. There were solutions and provisions made to the classroom environment meaning many providers didn't close their doors – another quick fix.

## Removing the barriers to online learning

During the midst of lockdown 3.0, many providers are looking for online and blended approaches to help deliver key areas of the curriculum. With the barrier to online learning being removed, more people are becoming accepting of e-learning systems as a longer-term solution. However, selecting the right partner to digitally transform education and training is paramount to the future success of virtual learning.

Whilst this may seem simple, the transition towards online teaching is something that has been overlooked by some. At The Skills Network, we support training providers by embedding high-quality online learning into curriculums, allowing educators to have a smooth transition



between classroom-based delivery to online learning.

With access to high quality learning support advisors and expert tutors who provide responsive learning support, training providers can benefit from an accessible, market leading 'Learning Management System' (LMS). This system allows individuals to engage in their learning at any time and in any environment, which is so important in today's setting.

## Developing online diagnostic tools to develop individualised plans

Up until recently, many training providers have been diagnosing learners by manually assessing them and using appropriately qualified staff to create an individualised curriculum plan, which can be time consuming for educators. However, at The Skills Network we have developed an innovative online diagnostic tool, which assesses a learner's strengths and capabilities to create a unique learning journey, tailored to their exact needs – helping them focus on learning, and not just passing a qualification. When you combine the diagnostic with our new resources to support all levels of functional skills and digital essentials, along with our online tutorial pack

(Essentials) it is possible to see how online learning will help during this crisis and beyond

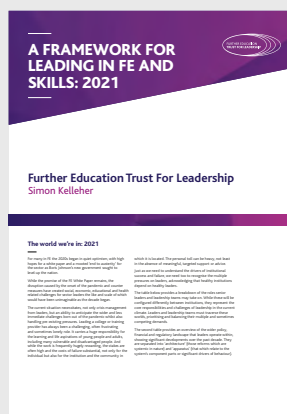
The e-learning solutions available at The Skills Network, which support teaching practitioners concentrate on adding value (rather than having to build the foundations of knowledge) and have been designed following a thorough analysis of the job market and the current skills gap. Whether it's through adult learning, CPD or apprenticeships, individuals are supported to develop the essential skills for current and future employment opportunities, and to apply their learning straight away.

## Finding the right online learning partner

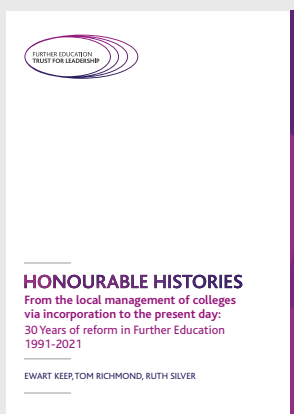
In 2021, organisations should be considering their online strategies in place to support their staff and facilitate processes. Partnering with companies who have been providing online learning for several years, with tried and tested systems, as well as tailored online content and assessment procedures is key.

There are valid and reliable assessment options now open to us through technology; it's just a question of finding your right online learning partner.

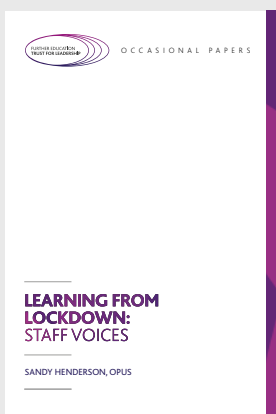
## Out Now



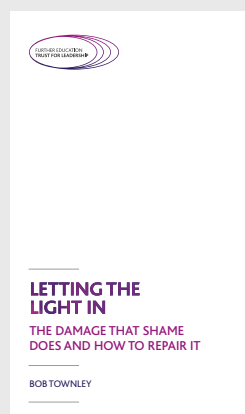
The World We're In:  
Leadership  
Framework



Honourable  
Histories: Calendar  
for FE Changes



Learning From  
Lockdown:  
Staff Voices

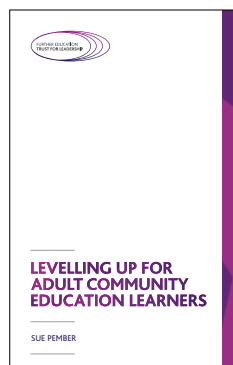


Letting The Light In



Leadership, Careers  
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## Out Soon



Levelling up for  
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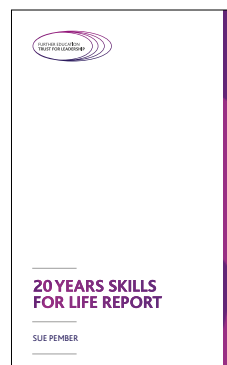
Ambitions for  
FE – Vision of The  
Future



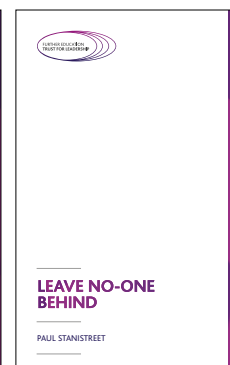
Wellbeing in  
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FE Research  
Community of  
Practice



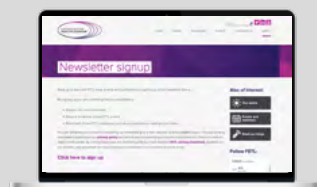
20 Years Skills  
for Life Report



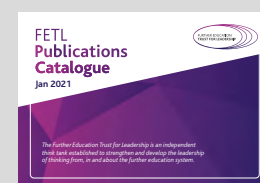
Leave No-one  
Behind

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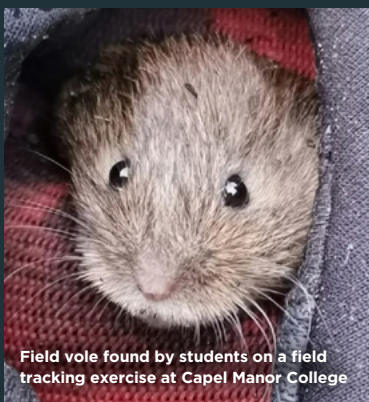
Checking on the rabbit at Capel Manor College



Checking on the  
hedgehog at Capel  
Manor College



One of the residents in the reptile  
unit at Herefordshire, Ludlow and  
North Shropshire College



Field vole found by students on a field  
tracking exercise at Capel Manor College



A student at Oaklands  
College in Hertfordshire  
handling a tarantula

## Focus: Animal care courses during Covid

JESS STAUFENBERG  
@STAUFENBERGJ

**Students and staff let the cat out of the bag on one of the most specialist courses in further education — animal care in land-based colleges**

"Animals don't care about lockdown, you know? They still need feeding, cleaning out, mucking out, looking after. That pressure hasn't changed. We're just glad the students can still come along to help us out." Helen Martin, land-based curriculum manager at Bishop Burton College in east Yorkshire, is one of the lucky ones. Her specialist site, to which learners travel miles and miles from across the north, is so remote it has space for 100 resident students. All bored of remote learning, they regularly emerge from their rooms in masks and protective equipment when emailed to help with livestock on site.

But for most colleges delivering "land-based courses" – a term used to describe a whole array of qualifications in animal care, animal management and agriculture – the challenges of the pandemic have been unique even for the further education sector. And most staff have had to fend for themselves.

Take Herefordshire, Ludlow and North Shropshire College. Animal care unit manager Rebecca Walker oversees no fewer than 400 animals, covering 74 species, each one with its own enclosure requirements, feeding timetables, clean-out regimes and "enrichment" activities (which, as far as I can tell, means fun). I ask for a quick list of the animals on site, and a David Attenborough programme wouldn't cover it: boa constrictors, corn snakes, iguanas, crested geckos, tortoises, tarantulas, millipedes, cockroaches, turtles, toads, frogs, owls, buzzards, falcons, alpacas, goats, sheep, cockatoos, canaries, rheas (like ostriches, apparently), hamsters, chinchillas and gerbils.

"And sadly our hedgehog passed away, so we'll be getting a new hedgehog soon," says Walker. "Oh, and monkeys."

It must be one of the most high-stakes logistics FE tasks around. "We were seeing animals in other places around us being rehomed or euthanised, because they weren't open to the public so no tickets were being sold," frowns Walker. Ferrets have had to be particularly well-protected, she tells me, because, just like the mink culled in their thousands at farms across Denmark, they are susceptible to coronavirus.

Death is not good for business; land-based colleges are often not just places of learning but tend to have commercial operations running on site as well. So it was all the more worrying that just as income was dropping off, food became very difficult to get hold of too. "We were trying to get our food and they were saying they couldn't get it in, which was

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



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## CONTINUED

not good. The specialist and exotic food was especially difficult." When the food finally came back on the market, the college bulk-bought just to make sure animals had enough to get through the winter.

Usually, Walker and course leaders like her would have tens of learners on hand to help her team out amid such challenges. But unless there are residential placements, all these students have had to return home. "We've gone from having 120 students in a week helping us look after the animals to literally a team of just four of us. It's been hard."

The staff worked through the entire summer without a break, she tells me. "When there's only a handful of you, to make sure the animals are safe, you just can't take the time off. I feel so grateful to the staff, their commitment has been unbelievable."

Charlotte Pugh, a former student now employed as an animal technician at the college, said when students were allowed back in between lockdowns they tackled the animal feed shortage by planting many fruit and vegetable seeds in the college's huge greenhouse on site. "I think the hardest thing has been not having the students. We didn't realise how much we relied on them and how much freedom they usually have on the unit to help out."

Land-based colleges are a deeply specialised part of the further education sector, with only about 15 scattered across



A fox on the wildlife camera traps at Capel Manor College



A student with a new lamb at Oaklands College

the country. Without them, learners wouldn't be leaving with level 1, 2 and 3 qualifications and extended diplomas (to move on to workplaces that include conservation centres, wildlife parks, equine training centres and zoos); as well as various higher education qualifications, such as zoology and marine biology.

The practical element of the course is particularly important, given that handling a large bull, pregnant ewe or – rather you than me – a tarantula inexpertly comes with no minor consequences. Some of the solutions dreamt up by lecturers are model lessons in not only fulfilling the practical experience assessment component, but also how to keep flagging students onboard.

At Brooksby Melton College in Leicestershire, which has about 290 animals, learners needed to demonstrate they could pick up an invertebrate (an insect) around the right part of the thorax (body) for internal teacher assessments that go towards their final grade. While some assessments can

be done on students' own pet if they have them, not many people have a giant spiny stick insect from Papua New Guinea. Lydia Bradwell, curriculum coordinator for animal management, explains that learners made life-like replicas from Blu Tac and cocktail sticks, and were then assessed on their correct handling via video link. Students have even, extraordinarily, been assessed on correct bandaging techniques using stuffed toys, as long as the proportions are similar to real life animals. "We need that evidence, and this is one way of getting around the problem," she hoots.

**"Looking at a picture of what could be wrong with your sheep is a very different thing"**

Doing things in miniature is also proving a popular learning route. Bradwell asked her students to set up a complete enclosure in a Tupperware box with all the correct elements, space, feed and proportions clearly labelled. A similar solution was proposed at Barnsley College near Leeds, where Charlotte Bantock, animal management course leader asked learners to design a zoo. "We looked at zoo maps and they had to answer questions such as, how has this zoo been designed and why?



Meerkats at Herefordshire, Ludlow and North Shropshire College



East Durham College in the north east shows the vast grounds and facilities of many animal care units

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

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## CONTINUED

Why is that animal near that one, because they have similar requirements, are they from the same continent, or for the visitor experience? Then they created their own zoos."

But it's not quite the same, and learners and staff are well aware of it. Back at Bishop Burton College, twins Charles and Will Smith, and friend Jack Fray, do lessons in livestock husbandry that features skills that are hard to pick up without hands-on learning. "If we were checking the sheep, for example, we would learn how to put them in the turnover crate, look at their teeth and feet and do a full check, make sure there's no damage or disease," says Fray. "It's a skill in itself using the turnover crate, and you're not learning that online, you're looking at a picture of what could be wrong with your sheep. It's a very different thing."

Will chips in with a business-like stoicism. "The only good thing about Covid is the price of meat and countryside game has gone up." So there are financial upsides to looking after livestock during Covid — but it's a poor return for young people who like the outdoors.

Helen Wiffen, curriculum leader in animal management at Capel Manor College in London, is realistic about what the pandemic means for students. "I think it's going to be really difficult for them to have the skills they normally would. We're just trying to

prioritise practicals as much as we can, whenever we can." Students under her care were tasked with creating individual projects such as setting wildlife camera traps. "They've seen a huge range of animals on there, foxes and all kinds of birds!"

Video links inside veterinary surgeries have allowed students to ask questions, which can both contribute to work experience units as well as help students demonstrate competence in behaviour observation, a core component of animal care.

## "We were seeing animals in other places around us being rehomed or euthanised"

Keeping an eye on the animals is reaching Big Brother levels at Oaklands College in Hertfordshire, where a live video feed is currently being installed in the lambing barn. Colin Elcombe, the livestock manager, acknowledges that getting students the required skills has been "obviously very difficult" but



Moving sheep at Oaklands College

that other technology, such as GoPros, should help students watch lecturers carry out tasks in real time. "With the lambs, students can log in any time, 24 hours a day, to check for signs of lambing," he explains. "Then, if they see anything, they can engage with me and I'll go rushing up there."

It's a bit like a high-intensity Spring Watch. Jay Jay Johnson, who is studying a level 3 technical diploma in animal management at Oaklands, puts a brave face on the situation. "What's been difficult for me is we got really used to working with the animals and being independent with them. Now we're not really doing practicals, and we can't act independently with them." He adds, a little sadly, "At the minute, we're not seeing the animals at all."

Purposeful work and animals have both been proven to be of great benefit to mental health — so to have both removed at once must be quite tough for learners. The level of passion for animal care is quite infectious, however, and I find myself becoming very excited as they send me pictures of tiny hedgehogs being weighed and foxes caught on camera at midnight. It seems there's little risk of most of these students not turning up back at college again.

But staff have worked flat out and could do with some recognition from those on high. Walker reflects as we end our Zoom. "You know, on the news there's even mention of vets and zookeepers, but we do get bypassed. For all of us, this has been one of the hardest years ever. I hope people find out what we do now."



Pigs staying relaxed at Barnsley College



Students weighing the animals at Barnsley College



NEIL  
PATTERSONPrincipal,  
Silverstone UTCOfqual's criticism of the  
government's T Level  
plans gives me hope

**The regulator agrees with many principals like me that the T Level reforms have serious flaws, writes Neil Patterson**

Reading Ofqual's response to the government's consultation over post-16 qualifications gives me hope. It echoes opinions that have been shared by many I know since the intended reforms were announced.

I was part of the original panel at the Department for Education for some of the engineering T Levels. In our first meeting I remember a DfE "suit" saying that he was there to "make sure the panel didn't subvert DfE policy direction".

Just over a year later I resigned from the panel because it was clear he meant it.

My concerns about work placements, the size of the qualification, the impact on the disadvantaged and the bifurcation into purely academic or purely vocational were clearly not as important as getting this flagship sailing before it had been leak-tested.

As an engineer, I know that engineering is not just an academic subject, but nor is it just vocational. To split it in two at age 16 is in my view too early.

It's a view that is backed up by the choices our students make in our sixth form, too. Just over half of last year's leavers had studied a blend of A-levels and vocational and technical qualifications.



Even for those going on to university, only eight per cent had come through a purely academic route, while 58 per cent did a blend of A-levels with vocational and technical qualifications. The remaining third followed a purely vocational route.

### "I resigned from the DfE's panel on T Levels"

Switching off these smaller qualifications and offering only T Levels is cutting off a route for a great number of talented young people.

My student whose creativity was ultimately unleashed on his product design A-level may not have been quite so attractive to the FI team that snapped him up.

The girl who studied maths alongside engineering avoided the need for a foundation year at university, which meant she could get earning sooner.

The young man who bagged a

degree apprenticeship with Aston Martin was more marketable because of his knowledge acquired on the physics and maths A-level courses, which illuminated his learning in the BTEC Diploma in Engineering.

They and many like them have gone on to great things because of the combination of qualifications available now.

To do away with them, and in their place put a large, inflexible, high-stakes T Level would be a mistake.

Furthermore, the T-Levels won't suit a lot of the students who would normally take a BTEC Extended Diploma, equivalent in size to three A-levels, and an option favoured disproportionately by those with protected characteristics and disadvantaged young people.

This picture is seen across the UTC network.

In a study by the Baker Dearing Educational Trust of last year's leavers, they found that the proposals in the post-16 qualifications review would meet

the learning and progression needs of just 60 per cent of UTC students.

Forcing more young people on to courses that aren't right for them will lead to lower completion rates and more NEETs, particularly among the disadvantaged, who face additional barriers to attending the extended work placements that are part of the T Levels.

When I talk to the employers in our region, particularly in the high-performance technology sector, they speak of the struggle to recruit young people with higher-level technical skills.

The Augar report into post-18 education concluded that "England needs a stronger technical and vocational education system at sub-degree levels".

Under the current proposals, I am concerned that it will lead to a divergence of final qualification levels, with even fewer attaining qualifications at levels 4 and 5 – take-up of which is already low here compared with other countries.

I welcome the process of removing the dead wood from the qualifications landscape.

But the binary proposals don't recognise the great synergy in pairing academic and vocational qualifications in engineering at level 3, and how that fits with the needs of businesses whose productivity and growth is slowed because of a shortage of skilled workers.



ANITA  
LALL

Vice principal  
of curriculum,  
Craven College



## When I wear traditional Indian dress, people still react differently

**In this third lockdown, we mustn't forget the conversation around racism and diversity, writes Anita Lall**

"Women don't do science". "Asian girls don't go to university".

These are just a handful of the phrases that I often heard growing up from my school and college teachers.

The comments continued whilst at university from members of my community and sadly some university tutors.

Despite such comments, my passion was science and fully supported by my parents, I pursued this as my first career. I always thought back to those comments and what I could do to stop this happening to other young women.

Now that we are into a third lockdown, the huge international conversations around racism and diversity from the summer risk being forgotten if we don't stay focused.

For me, teaching in further education has provided the ideal opportunity to challenge stereotypes and serve as a positive role model for young women in science.

These comments still persist in our society decades later, which is why we mustn't take our eye off the ball. Many of my BAME female vocational science students still report being told that science as a career is not for them.

Such stereotypes, however, are

not purely seen in science. Young men are often discouraged from pursuing childcare and nursing qualifications.

Times are starting to change with BAME students in FE increasing from 19 per cent to 23 per cent in the space of eight years. But Black and Asian representation in senior leadership has consistently decreased from 2012 to 2019.

**"Think about how you unconsciously perceive students who wear traditional dress to college and the assumptions you make"**

Fifteen per cent of FE staff identify as BAME, which drops to nine per cent for senior managers. This is something that we must actively address. Many colleges deliver learning in local communities and within faith institutions — but how many proactively recruit staff from that community?

It is not enough to just challenge the stereotypes — the barriers need to be broken down and senior leaders need to act.

Those working in all ranks of FE have a positive duty to break down the stereotypes and challenges that BAME students face and encourage them to seek opportunities in further education in the sectors from which they are traditionally put off.

Assumptions held by both staff and students need to be broken, and colleges should have high aspirations for all their students.

I can remember wearing traditional Indian dress to a college event a few years ago and colleagues walking past me didn't recognise me. In wider society, I am talked to differently if I wear Indian dress.

Think about how you unconsciously perceive students who wear traditional dress to college and the assumptions you make.

Imagery is a powerful tool. Colleges need to ensure their marketing is fully inclusive and

positively portrays men and women from ethnic minorities across a variety of courses.

At my college, this is something that we are continually working on. I am all too aware of the strong positive impression BAME teachers and senior leaders have on parents from ethnic minorities at open days and other events.

To see minority groups visibly represented within the workforce and especially at a senior level sends a powerful message to students.

As the visible BAME leader at my college, I am acutely conscious of this and the positive impact that I can have.

At the end of the day, we must continually affect less biased, more equitable and lasting behaviour change.

Our senior leadership team is small but diverse and this means that decisions are well tested and considered.

So what can you do to address some of these issues?

Invite people in your college to share how they have observed or experienced inequity and bias, and empower them to be part of the solution.

Enlist enthusiastic staff (and students) who want to actively participate in being part of a change, and equip them to do so.

Actively address the systems that inhibit equality, diversity and inclusivity in your college one at a time.

It's never too late to start.



## TOM BEWICK

Chief executive,  
Federation of  
Awarding Bodies



## The challenges facing 2021 exam grades are very different to 2020

**Ofqual and the Department for Education didn't want to make this decision around exam grades, and now face a daunting task, writes Tom Bewick**

Hardcore Star Trek fans will know that it wasn't Mr Spock that said to Captain Kirk, "It's life, Jim, but not as we know it." Instead, these famous lines first appeared in the 1987 song Star Trekkin', sung by the Firm.

So you may well find yourself, like me, interpreting lots of the joint consultation from Ofqual, written with the Department for Education, as something like: "It's exams, Jim, but not as we know it."

On Friday Ofqual signalled that practical exam assessments should go ahead as normal, subject to guidelines on Covid-secure settings. If these exams can't be delivered in situ or remotely then they can be delayed, said the regulator.

This means it is likely that the examination element of T Levels will now take place next year, which is fine – for licence-to-practice qualifications or non-exam assessments, there has never been a one-size-fits-all way to award vocational and technical qualifications.

Meanwhile, planned tweaks to the Extended Extraordinary Regulatory Framework (EERF) will allow awarding organisations to adapt vocational and technical qualifications to ensure that the vast majority of learners can still progress.

Indeed, the feedback from our



members about the operation of the EERF to date has been broadly positive. And no issues appear to have been raised by Ofqual about this temporary arrangement.

But you can tell the government and the regulator never really wanted to be in the position of cancelling the summer examinations a second time.

**"Unlike last year, these students have endured three national lockdowns"**

One of the painful conclusions from the 'fiasco' of August 2020 was that, for all the contentious debates surrounding the merits of assessment regimes, objective national tests moderated and performed under invigilated conditions are still the fairest way of finding out what a learner knows and understands.

Moreover, we know that ethnic minorities and bright working-class kids tend to lose out under teacher-

assessed grades. Human psychology traits such as racial discrimination and unconscious bias are big inhibitors to social progress.

Indeed many private schools, which offer international GCSEs, are planning to go ahead with physical exams this summer. They know the societal prestige attached to a set of reliable, externally validated results.

So one of the biggest dilemmas now facing Ofqual and exams is ensuring both consistency and fairness in awarding qualifications. This is a daunting task.

Last year, students had by and large completed the required scope of learning by the time lockdown restrictions happened in late March. But in the past 12 months, young people in England have endured three national lockdowns. They have experienced a massive overall loss in teaching and learning.

The north of England has also generally reported more college days lost due to coronavirus than the south.

At the same time, many year 11 and 13 pupils are already sitting

'mini-exams' which the government is saying can be used as valid 'mock exams'. This is potentially a bureaucratic nightmare.

Meanwhile, teachers have been told to hold back on assessing students until all these different forms of assessment, including valid mock exams, have been taken into account. After that, mock exam results could form the basis of any appeals.

What's tricky here is students this year will be assessed on what they know, not what they could have known if the pandemic had never occurred. This is a departure from last summer's arrangements, when teachers were asked to make judgments on what they thought students would have got if exams had gone ahead.

Appeals will be open to all students this year. This is potentially a bureaucratic nightmare.

The one saving grace is that the required 'evidence' for an appeal (like mock exam results and/or assessed coursework) will give awarding organisations something to work with.

No wonder, then, that Ofqual and the DfE have decided to work so closely together. It would appear that trapped on their Starship Enterprise, the regulator and Gavin Williamson are resigned to entwining their fates.

To quote the 1987 song again: don't be surprised if the whole enterprise continues "boldly going forward". But this won't be plain sailing.



## READER'S REPLY

### DfE opens free devices scheme to independent providers after backlash

So if a small SME allows their one apprentice to use their IT while at work for study or completing assignments (hair or beauty salon, kitchen, small retailer) and they are barely able to keep their head above the tide of lockdown, Gillian Keegan expects them to provide a laptop for use at home? Sorry, that shows a complete denial of what real life is all about. Does the term 'equality' mean anything? It is hard enough for young apprentices to keep motivated as they wait for the white charger of vaccination to come along to return some normality to the usual un-level playing field, with schools in the dry high ground and ITPs in the boggy water-sodden swamp to the very sides. Disgraceful thought process.

Phil Hatton website

This is great news and I'm glad to hear this.

Michele Budgen, Facebook

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

Really powerful piece. Stark example of the impact on learners like Fatma Shami, when the Department for Education and Gavin Williamson insist on learners taking exams in the current lockdown public health emergency. Let's trust in academic and vocational teachers for teacher-assessed alternatives.

Simon Ashworth, Twitter

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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## REPLY OF THE WEEK

### 'Plethora' of apprenticeship standards set to hit 600



The problem is that there has been a drift towards job-related, rather than occupational, standards. It would have been better to have started with a clear occupational map by each sector, agreed with IfATE, to give an overall framework of fundable apprenticeship occupations for priority standards development. Also, to consider cross-sector roles, such as maintenance work where there will be a high level of duplication.

I would suggest that any review should start by going back to these fundamentals, but let's not get too stressed about this. At least we have employers in the UK who are prepared to commit the time and resources to do this work properly. Tidiness and simplicity are not always the most important thing when meeting customer needs. Niches are important.

Simon Perryman, website



Great piece. Proper journalism exploring the human impact of government incompetence. We need more stories like this.

Bob Harrison, Twitter

### Ofqual must urgently allow teacher-assessed grades for apprentices



Heartfelt words from Jane that I completely agree with. Once again it seems like the deemed-to-be 'important' apprenticeships are being left high and dry. It is time to treat all learners fairly! Urgent action is needed, and soon.

Christine Edwards, Twitter



## Bulletin

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## Toni Rhodes

Principal,  
Sunderland College  
and Hartlepool  
Sixth Form

**Start date** July 2021

### Previous job

Vice principal of quality and access to learning, Barnsley College

### Interesting fact

She has a background in social care



## Paul Kennedy

Chair, WELL  
Training

**Start date** November 2020

### Concurrent job

Co-founder, Mood

### Interesting fact

As group HR director for online travel company ebookers, he once visited five countries in a single day: the UK, Belgium, Netherlands, Switzerland and Austria

# 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)



## Jon Collins

Chief executive,  
Prisoners'  
Education Trust

**Start date** April 2021

### Previous job

Chief executive, Magistrates Association

### Interesting fact

He lived in San Francisco for six months after university, where he volunteered for Project Open Hand, a food bank providing support to people with HIV/AIDS



## Nigel Duncan OBE

Deputy FE  
Commissioner,  
Department  
for Education

**Start date** January 2021

### Previous job

Further Education Adviser, Further Education Commissioner's Office

### Interesting fact

He has traced his family back to 1472 at the time of Edward IV and the Wars of the Roses

Got a story?



Get in touch.

FEWEEK