

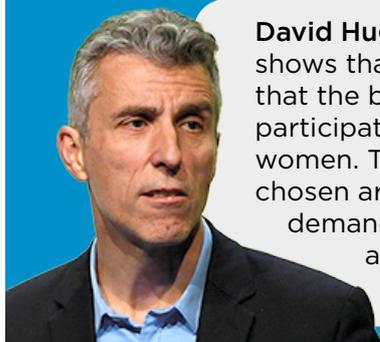


# FEWEEK

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

## BOOTCAMPS FOR THE BOYS

- Flagship £50m skills programme prioritises courses dominated by men
- DfE sets 50% female policy target which they say providers can ignore
- Our investigation finds 83 women (2%) out of over 5,098 on one course



**David Hughes:** "This analysis shows that it is very unlikely that the bootcamps will achieve participation of at least 50% women. The sectors and skills chosen are clearly in high demand in the labour market and yet we know they are male-dominated."

**Susan Pember:** "I would hope that any successful bidder will have to detail in their bid the proactive measures they are going to take to encourage more women on to these programmes."



See investigation on page 8

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# FEWEEK

## MEET THE TEAM



**Nick Linford**  
**EDITOR**

@NICKLINFORD  
NICK@LSECT.COM



**Shane Mann**  
**MANAGING DIRECTOR**

@SHANERMANN  
SHANE@LSECT.COM



**Billy Camden**  
**DEPUTY EDITOR**

@BILLYCAMDEN  
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK



**JL Dutaut**  
**COMMISSIONING EDITOR**

@DUTAUT  
JL.DUTAUT@FEWEEK.CO.UK



**Jess Staufenberg**  
**COMMISSIONING EDITOR**

@STAUFENBERGJ  
JESS.STAUFBENBERG@FEWEEK.CO.UK



**Fraser Whieldon**  
**REPORTER**

@FRASERWHIELDON  
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK



**Simon Kay**  
**DESIGNER**

SIMON@FEWEEK.CO.UK

### THE TEAM

HEAD DESIGNER  
DESIGNER  
SALES MANAGER  
ADMINISTRATION  
EA TO MANAGING  
DIRECTOR AND FINANCIALS

Nicky Phillips  
Simon Kay  
Bridget Stockdale  
Frances Ogefere Dell  
Victoria Boyle



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Learning & Skills Events, Consultancy and Training Ltd  
163-165 Greenwich High Road  
London SE10 8JA  
T: 020 8123 4778  
E: [news@feweek.co.uk](mailto:news@feweek.co.uk)

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# Colleges included in plans to reopen fully from 8 March

FRASER WHIELDON  
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Colleges and FE providers will begin reopening to more students from 8 March if the government's Covid-19 vaccination targets are met, the Department for Education has confirmed.

Prime minister Boris Johnson announced on Wednesday that this would be the earliest that schools could reopen, but failed to mention whether this would also apply to the further education sector. The DfE later confirmed that FE providers are part of the same plan.

**“[The goal] must be to buy the extra weeks we need to immunise the most vulnerable”**

If everyone in the four most vulnerable groups has been vaccinated by 15 March, the government is hoping to reopen education settings fully three weeks later, by 8 March. This is when those groups should have developed immunity to Covid-19.

Since 5 January, only vulnerable young people and the children of critical workers have been given face-to-face tuition at schools and FE providers. The DfE confirmed that this will continue to be the case until a wider reopening can begin.

Johnson said the goal “must be to buy the extra weeks we need to immunise the most vulnerable and get this virus under control, so that together we can defeat this most wretched disease, reclaim our lives, once and for all”.

The DfE has also announced an extra £300 million to help early years providers, schools and colleges provide catch-up tutoring and a



Boris Johnson

collaboration with the education sector to develop plans for summer schools.

In light of the “huge impact” that extending school and college closures will have on students' learning, the DfE said it would work with providers, parents and teachers to develop a “long-term plan” to make up for lost teaching over the course of this parliament.

Education secretary Gavin Williamson said it was the country's “priority” to get students back to face-to-face education, but it was “crucial we do this at the right time”. He added: “I want to assure parents, teachers, children and young people that schools, colleges and universities will be the first to fully return as soon as the public health picture allows it.”

The restrictions on face-to-face education will be reviewed again in the middle of next month and the government has said it is committed to publishing a plan for leaving lockdown by the end of February.

Responding to the prime minister's statement, the University and College Union called for all but essential teaching in colleges to be kept online until at

least April.

Jo Grady said staff “need to be able to plan their work over the coming months in the knowledge they will not be forced to do unnecessary and unsafe in-person activities,” including working in offices on campus, libraries, laboratories and classrooms.

**“College staff are burnt out from the chaotic and unsustainable demands”**

She added: “College staff are burnt out from the chaotic and unsustainable demands which the sector has placed on them this year. We need certainty and stability if staff are to continue delivering the best possible remote learning for students.”

She said it was “scandalous” that the prime minister had “not even bothered to mention further or higher education as part of his statement on plans to fully reopen school sites”.

# MP calls for inquiry over fears £2bn Kickstart scheme has become 'chancer's charter'

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

Exclusive

The chair of an influential committee of MPs has called for an investigation into the government's Kickstart scheme after *FE Week* revealed how firms based outside the UK or with no trading history were selected as "gateway" providers.

Meg Hillier, who heads the parliamentary Public Accounts Committee, was "shocked" to hear how firms were set up overnight to benefit from the taxpayer-funded scheme. She is now referring the case to the National Audit Office to scrutinise the spending.

The Labour MP for Hackney South and Shoreditch is concerned that the situation has "opened up another chancer's charter".

Hillier told *FE Week*: "This should be investigated. If the DWP is not already doing so, I would be shocked. I will also write to the department to find out what is going on here."

Since the launch of the new £2 billion wage-subsidised employment programme in September, small employers have had to use "gateway" companies – which include colleges, chambers of commerce and hundreds of private companies – where they have fewer than 30 vacancies, according to Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) policy.

Gateway providers "must" have "experience of managing partnership agreements with third parties" and "robust financial and governance processes to manage the application", the policy adds.

The DWP has issued more than 600 approved firms a per-job placement fee of £300, plus up to £1,500 for every 16 to 24-year-old on Universal Credit who they put through the scheme if they continue to help with job support and training.

But the DWP is understood to be so concerned about the quality of gateway providers that it has now stopped taking

applications and scrapped the requirement for small employers to use them from 3 February.

Examples of gateway firms found by *FE Week* include Kickstart Jobs Ltd which, according to Companies House, was incorporated just three months ago.

Another, KA001 Limited, lists a Gmail contact email address on the gov.uk Kickstart website. Its first set of accounts filed in November 2020 shows "total assets less liabilities" of £100.

*FE Week* also found the example of Casual Speakers Ltd, a DWP-authorized Kickstart gateway firm which Companies House lists as being based in Tel-Aviv, Israel, and therefore has not filed accounts in the UK.

After hearing of our findings, Hillier said there was "a real issue here".

She added: "Over the whole of the Covid pandemic we have seen the government letting out contracts fast, but for this one they seem to have contracted to companies that only set up in order to get the money. If that is not a chancer's charter, I'm not sure what is."

To become a gateway provider, the DWP said firms first go through automated due diligence checks via a "Cabinet Office spotlight tool" which only takes "seconds" to complete. They can then also be subject to human checks.

*FE Week* also found many companies advertising themselves as being a Kickstart gateway with no history of job matching.

Firms advertising their Kickstart gateway services include Banana Scoops Ltd, an ice cream supplier to Ocado which claimed on Twitter to have 70 placements already approved with the DWP. Another encouraging application from small employers is Rollerworld Ltd, a company with an ice rink in Essex.

Asked whether the DWP had launched its own investigation into the matter, a DWP spokesperson said: "Kickstart gateways have been subject to stringent checks to ensure we are careful with taxpayers' money. All companies who applied to become a gateway were required to be registered with Companies House."

Labour's shadow work and pensions secretary, Jonny Reynolds, said: "Billions of pounds of public money is being poured into Kickstart and we must ensure it is being spent well to create meaningful job opportunities for young people.

"Young people and businesses can't afford any more incompetence from this government."



Meg Hillier

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# Registrations for DfE's £1m 'toolkit' could be from all around the globe

BILLY CAMDEN  
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

## Exclusive

Registrations for courses on the government's "skills toolkit" that have been celebrated by ministers could be coming from anywhere in the world, the Department for Education has admitted.

More than £1 million of public money has been spent on developing and advertising the "platform", which directs visitors to free online content provided by the likes of Amazon, the Open University, Microsoft and LinkedIn.

Ministers across government have hailed the success of the toolkit since it launched in April 2020. Education secretary Gavin Williamson declared that it had had a "transformational" impact on the digital and numeracy skills for England's out-of-work people during the pandemic.

But little is known about who is accessing the content as most do not require registrations. And, as *FE Week* previously revealed, significant overcounting has already led to revised estimates of "course start" claims in official statistics which continue to include web hits.

*FE Week* has now discovered that the DfE is also unable to identify from which countries the registrations are coming. The department said the data is held and reported by the relevant providers who "do not provide country data, so DfE cannot confirm the country related to course registrations".

A number of providers with courses on the skills toolkit have confirmed that they do not filter for registrations that are England-based only.

Toby Perkins, Labour's shadow apprenticeships and lifelong learning minister, criticised the DfE for "failing to enact themselves the kind of data collection they would routinely insist on from other providers".

He added: "The government is very happy to make statistically questionable claims about the skills toolkit, yet it's clear that it has no



idea who is accessing the website and to what extent those people are utilising it.

"No one wants to make this small and potentially valuable initiative unduly bureaucratic, but it is important that they are aware of who is using it, who it is reaching and failing to reach, and that information should be both collected and published.

"We all want to celebrate successful initiatives but, without this data, I don't think it's possible to be sure how successful the skills toolkit is in improving the skills and opportunities of British workers and learners."

When asked if the DfE was concerned that it had no grasp on what countries course registrations were coming from, a spokesperson said: "We are committed to ensuring that the skills toolkit is accessible and of value to people across the country."

They added that the department was "able to identify England-based website visits in line with GDPR" through the toolkit.

This latest revelation comes as *FE Week* continues to challenge the DfE to release the names of firms that were given almost £800,000 to develop the platform. The department has kept the names a secret so far, refusing a freedom of information request.

Through the same FOI request the DfE did release a breakdown of the 118,980 course registrations by each provider on the skills toolkit as of 1 November 2020, which has

caused further concern at the official figures being reported.

A course provided by Corndel called "organisational financial management: an introduction", for example, is reported as having had 8,090 starts. However, the provider says that it does not track the usage of the materials and no "registration" data has been provided to the DfE.

The DfE has also come under fire for claiming the courses on the skills toolkit are of "high quality", considering they receive no quality assurance from the likes of Ofsted or Ofqual and many of the courses simply involve short video tutorials or PDF documents.

Sue Pember, a former director of FE funding in the DfE, previously said: "When the DfE puts out its own advertising for the toolkit, it always talks about good quality. But under whose judgment? It may be, but how do they know?"

She added that the DfE should be "cautious" as "website hits or even signatures on enrolment forms do not equate to learning taking place".

Latest official data published by the DfE claims that, as of 27 December 2020, there have been an estimated 138,000 course registrations. The department does accept that these are "experimental statistics" and says it is working to collect "more robust estimates of registrations".

# Male-dominated skills bootcamps criticised

NICK LINFORD  
NICK@FEWEEK.CO.UK

From front

Exclusive

The government's £50 million rollout of the skills bootcamps policy has come under fire for only funding sectors heavily dominated by men.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced the extension of the bootcamp pilot as part of a "refreshed Industrial Strategy" at the launch of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee, last September.

Paid for from the new National Skills Fund, this month the DfE launched two tenders for level 3-plus "bootcamp" courses.

The courses will run for up to 16 weeks and will be free to unemployed people, or where employed, their employer would pay a 30 per cent cash contribution.

An *FE Week* investigation into the tenders found the DfE is seeking a very narrow range of digital, engineering and construction related courses mostly studied by men.

When asked whether an equalities impact assessment for the bootcamps policy had been undertaken, the DfE appeared to not know, saying they would "respond through the Freedom of Information Act process".

The "digital skills bootcamps" tender, known as lot 1, is seeking bids for courses in IT subjects such as "Cloud Computing, Data Engineering and Software Development".

Analysis by *FE Week* of FE enrolment data for last year found less than 20 percent of level 3 IT courses were studied by women. In the case of the Award in Cloud Services qualification, for example, just 42 (8 per cent) out of 507 enrolments were female.

The "technical and cross-digital skills bootcamps" tender, known as lot 2, is seeking bids for courses in subjects such as "electrotechnical, welding, engineering, construction and electronics".

*FE Week* analysis found on one electrotechnical qualification last year women represented just 83 (1.6 percent) of 5,098 enrolments.

The DfE bootcamps "service requirement" tender document says there are "seven key performance indicators" in a spreadsheet which

"potential suppliers must complete" and "which will apply to each lot and will be included in contract terms."

The document then goes on to lists what appear to be 11 indicators, including: "Gender diversity must be encouraged, we will be aiming for a minimum of 50 per cent female learners."

David Hughes, chief executive of the Association of Colleges said: "*FE Week* analysis shows that it is very unlikely that the bootcamps will achieve participation of at least 50 per cent women.

"The sectors and skills chosen are clearly in high demand in the labour market and yet we know they are male dominated.

"We would encourage the DfE to recognise that and work with us in the sector to achieve greater equality of access and outcome on these bootcamps and in choosing future sectors and disciplines."

He added: "It's worrying that this flagship programme might not cater for the thousands of people losing their jobs in sectors like retail and hospitality because the distance to achieve in these disciplines might be far too big."

Susan Pember, former director at the DfE and leader of a membership body for adult education providers added her concern, saying: "I would hope that any successful bidder will have to detail in their bid the proactive measures they are going to take to encourage more women on to these programmes."

But *FE Week* found the DfE "tender response document" included no questions about how the applicant would attract more female learners to the courses they were hoping to run.

The 50 per cent female enrolment target now also appears to be watered down.

Following a question about how seriously the DfE was taking the 50

per cent target, they responded formally to all applicants on the tendering portal this week to say: "The policy aim is for 50/50 split, however we appreciate that will not always be possible. Suppliers will not be disadvantaged if they are unable to meet this target."

When challenged on the male dominated sectors, a DfE spokesperson said: "We are seeing a demand for digital and technical skills bootcamps across many sectors and industries, including healthcare, where there are high numbers of females and we already have bootcamps that are targeted at women and BAME participants."

*FE Week* is unaware of any government plans to fund bootcamps in the healthcare sector.

The DfE spokesperson continued: "We want everyone to benefit from this offer and share an ambition with employers to increase diversity. Our aim is for a 50/50 gender split and to encourage people from under-represented groups to take advantage of these fantastic opportunities.

"We expect this to be achievable by employers working with bootcamps providers to encourage a balanced take up. However, providers will not be disadvantaged if they are unable to meet this target, for example, where a bootcamp is aimed at a specific cohort where a 50/50 gender split would be unachievable."

## Evidence shows bootcamps focus on courses dominated by men

| DfE underlying FE enrolments data publish July 2020 | 19+ male | 19+ female | Total  |
|---|----------|------------|--------|
| Enrolments at level 3 in IT                         | 18,881   | 4,568      | 23,449 |

Percentage female enrolments in 2019/20 **19%**

| Example level 3 qual in IT sector for Bootcamps (lot 1) | 19+ male | 19+ female | Total |
|---|----------|------------|-------|
| Award in Cloud Services (aim 60302185)                  | 465      | 42         | 507   |

Percentage female enrolments in 2019/20 **8%**

| Example level 3 qual in engineering sector for Bootcamps (lot 2) | 19+ male | 19+ female | Total |
|--|----------|------------|-------|
| Electrotechnical qualification (aim 60173452)                    | 5,015    | 83         | 5,098 |

Percentage female enrolments in 2019/20 **2%**

# Mayors want more courses included under lifetime skills guarantee

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

## Exclusive

Regional mayors are preparing to plead for courses to be added to the government's lifetime skills guarantee offer after ministers controversially excluded critical economic sectors from the list. However, most remain tight-lipped about which industries they want to target.

Almost 400 level 3 qualifications covering sectors including engineering, construction, public services and IT will be fully funded for adults without a full qualification at level 3 – equivalent to two full A-levels – from April 2021 under the £95 million scheme.

But industries such as hospitality, tourism and the media have been left off the government list because they are deemed to be a low priority with low wages.

Mayoral combined authorities (MCAs) will be allocated a share of the funds to give to their area's providers to deliver courses through their devolved adult education budgets.

However they have been told that they can only submit requests for additional courses if they are "economically relevant to the local economy".

The Greater London Authority told *FE Week* that it was "looking at this issue in detail and expects to submit a request in due course". The Liverpool City Region is engaging in "detailed discussions" with its colleges and providers to decide which additions to ask for.

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority is "in the process of submitting a list of qualifications to the EFSA, which will focus on Local Industrial Strategy growth sectors", and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority is "working proactively with colleges, providers and local businesses

to identify any gaps in the course list, with a view to making a request to the DfE for additional courses if required".

The only mayoral authority that has so far submitted a formal request is in the West Midlands. A spokesperson said that it had asked for "one specific rail engineering qualification to be added to the list to date, as rail is a growing employment sector for us".

The Department for Education confirmed to *FE Week* that, if a course is added at the request of a mayoral authority, then it will be made available to everyone in the country through the offer.

Under the department's rules, there is a "strict condition that funding is used for its intended purpose" by MCAs. Otherwise they face having to hand the funding back to central government.

Funding allocations for each combined authority have not yet been communicated to the relevant mayors despite the approach of the April 2021 start date.

The DfE unveiled the list of level 3 courses under the lifetime skills guarantee offer in December. At the time the department said it

had chosen qualifications that were "valued by employers".

But Tom Bewick, chief executive of the Federation of Awarding Bodies, hit out at this "top-down driven list cooked up in Whitehall". He said it showed that the DfE had gone for a "convoluted way of trying to ration limited public funds from the get-go, while dressing the whole policy up as being an absolute free learning entitlement, like access to the NHS".

The new offer builds on a policy in place since 2013. It allows adults up to the age of 23 to be fully funded for their first full level 3 qualification from the adult education budget. Those aged 24 and over have since had to take out an advanced learner loan to pay for the course.

The current entitlement for those aged 23 and below covers nearly 1,200 qualifications, almost four times as many as those made available under the lifetime skills guarantee.

The DfE has said that any qualifications included in this new level 3 adult offer which are not included in the existing entitlement will be made available for 19 to 23-year-old learners.



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## PAC COLLEGE SUSTAINABILITY REPORT

## Too slow, too expensive, too feeble: MPs attack 'sticking plaster' attempts to oversee college finances

BILLY CAMDEN

BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The government's approach to college intervention takes too long, costs too much and is not effective in making them more sustainable, influential MPs have said.

In a damning verdict on how college finances are being managed while funding for courses has been cut, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) this week warned ministers that they "cannot keep putting sticking plasters over this gaping wound".

The committee's report comes a week after publication of the Department for Education's FE white paper outlining plans for new intervention powers, and days after a college chair attacked the "failure" of government oversight on the day he resigned.

Based on evidence it received, the PAC states that colleges' autonomy can "hamper" the DfE's ability to protect learners and safeguard taxpayers' money as, for example, colleges are free to borrow sums that they may struggle to repay, and to run with financial deficits year after year.

As *FE Week* reported in November, MPs heard from Matthew Atkinson, director of provider market oversight at the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), how a college can "bury its head in the sand" to keep officials away until the last minute. He said he would "definitely like more power", while colleges themselves described the existing intervention regime as "very negative".

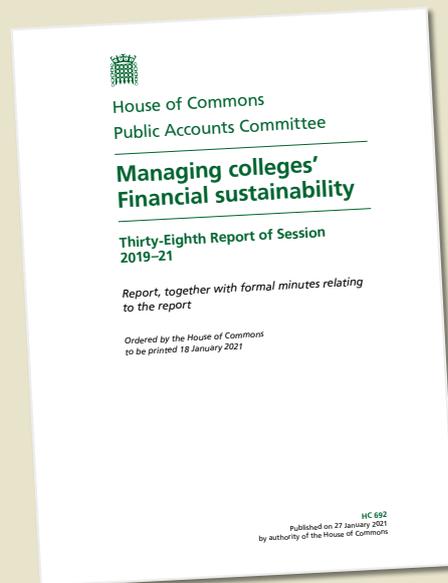
During February 2020, the government was intervening at nearly half of colleges for financial health reasons and the PAC discovered how seven of them have remained in formal intervention for five years or more. A total of 75 colleges have been in and out of early intervention more than once.

Between November 2014 and March 2019, the DfE spent £253 million of public money bailing out 36 colleges with cashflow problems. This emergency funding was intended to take the form of repayable loans, but much of the money

is now not expected to be repaid, the report says.

It goes on to explain how two colleges – Hadlow and West Kent and Ashford – have been in the new education insolvency regime since mid-2019 and the ESFA expects these cases will end up costing it more than £60 million.

Payments to the education administrators additionally amount to £6 million so far – a cost described as "gut-wrenching" by the DfE's permanent secretary Susan Acland-Hood at a PAC hearing in November – and could increase further.



The PAC has now called on the DfE to set out within three months what actions it plans to take to improve its intervention arrangements, and how it will assess their success.

The inquiry builds on Dame Mary Ney's 2019 report on college financial oversight arrangements, which recommended that the ESFA develop a more nurturing relationship with colleges.

It also follows a recent National Audit Office report which found £726 million in public funds has been spent on bailing out and restructuring colleges while core funding has tumbled by 20 per cent in real terms over the six years from 2013/14 to 2018/19.

Last week the DfE published its FE white paper which outlined plans to 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".

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

*FE Week* has reported extensively on the government's expensive intervention regime in recent years, most recently at Hull College Group. Its chair Daf Williams resigned as the FE commissioner's team visited last Friday and shortly after *FE Week* revealed that the new interim chief executive had launched an investigation into a £240,000 three-year naming sponsorship deal with a rugby stadium.

The college has been in intervention for a number of years and received a £50 million bailout in 2018.

Following his resignation, Williams said he had a "strong view that if the charge that we have failed as governors is to stick", then there was "also a failure on the part of our regulators".

He added: "Whilst we as governors are all enthusiastic amateurs volunteering our time to try to help, they are specialist professionals from the sector, paid to spot these matters, which sadly they have not."

Responding to the PAC report, skills minister Gillian Keegan said: "As set out in our Skills for Jobs white paper, we will overhaul the funding and accountability rules so funding is better targeted at supporting high-quality education and training that meets the needs of employers and individuals.

"We will also introduce new powers to intervene when colleges are failing to deliver good outcomes for the communities they serve."

# PAC COLLEGE SUSTAINABILITY REPORT

## MPs list DfE tasks to improve 'fragile' financial health

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

The Public Accounts Committee has set the Department for Education a list of tasks to address the “fragile” financial health of the further education sector. Here are the seven recommendations from this week’s report.

### 1 SET OUT FUNDING COMMITMENTS FOR FE WHITE PAPER REFORMS

The college sector has lacked a “proper, integrated vision for too long”, the report argues, saying the FE commissioner-led area reviews in 2016 and 2017 were “successful to a degree, but significant strategic challenges remain”.

Last week, the government published its “Skills for Jobs” white paper, which laid out plans up to 2030. However, many in the sector have voiced concerns that they have only received a one-year funding settlement, rather than a multi-year one like schools have.

The committee said the DfE “should make clear when it expects to set out funding commitments to support reforms proposed in the white paper”.

### 2 WHAT IS BEING DONE ABOUT PENSION COST PRESSURE ON COLLEGES?

While the government provided additional funding to colleges to meet the costs of teacher pension contributions in 2019-20 and 2020-21, and recently announced it would extend support to 2021-22, the MPs report that colleges “are worried about the affordability of contributions in future years”.

Colleges’ academic staff usually pay into the Teachers’ Pension Scheme, where employer contributions have risen from 14.1 per cent in 2015 to 23.68 per cent in 2019.

A deficit in the Local Government Pension Scheme, which is used by support staff, has grown to £3.5 billion, and colleges have had to make additional payments to cover it.

The DfE has been asked to



write to the committee within three months, explaining what assessment it has made of pension cost pressures on colleges, and how this has been taken into account for funding decisions.

### 3 ‘INIQUITOUS’ SIXTH-FORM COLLEGES PAY VAT WHILE POST-16 SCHOOLS DO NOT

There has been a long-standing issue where sixth-form colleges must pay VAT, while sixth-form academies and school sixth forms do not.

The Sixth Form Colleges Association told the committee the VAT requirement on colleges means it diverts around 4 per cent of funding away from frontline provision, which equates to around £20 million a year across sixth-form colleges.

The PAC calls the situation “clearly iniquitous”. The committee recommends the DfE presses the Treasury to assess the merits of making the rules on VAT consistent for schools and colleges.



### 4 REASSURANCE ON T LEVEL INDUSTRY PLACEMENTS

The committee “remains concerned about the practicability of implementing the T Level programme,” as colleges have said it has been “difficult” to secure the “crucial” industry placements students are required to complete for the course.

FE Week reported this month that colleges were having to suspend industry placements due to Covid-19 and the lockdown.

The MPs have requested another letter from the DfE, giving up-to-date assurance that there will be enough placements for T Levels and for them to allow virtual placements to count.

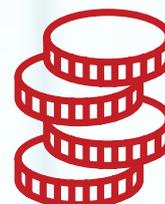
### 5 AN END TO THE LAGGED FUNDING MODEL

The DfE has been asked to consider changing the formula for funding colleges to take

account of real-time, or at least more recent, information about student numbers.

Currently, funding decisions are based on colleges’ student numbers from previous years, and the Association of Colleges reported in November 2020 that there were around 20,000 “unfunded” 16 to 18-year-old students in colleges this year.

The PAC reports that learner numbers are expected to increase over the next few years, so has asked the DfE to report back by the summer on how funding could be delivered that better reflects colleges’ real-time situations.



### 6 DfE NEEDS TO ‘IMPROVE’ ITS INTERVENTION ARRANGEMENTS

The government’s approach to intervention in colleges, led by the DfE, ESFA and FE commissioner, “takes too long, costs too much and is not effective in making colleges more sustainable”, the report argues (see page 11).

The PAC has given the department three months to outline how it will improve intervention, and how it will assess the success of its plans.

### 7 RESEARCH WHETHER COLLEGE SUPPORT SERVICES ARE MEETING STUDENT NEEDS

Students, the report says, are “losing out” on mental health and other support services that have been cut by colleges due to financial pressures.

The DfE has accepted that it needs to monitor this area, and the MPs have recommended a “firm commitment” to research the extent to which college support services are meeting student needs. This should include input from students.



# Decline in apprenticeship starts shows signs of easing

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

Apprenticeship starts appear to be recovering after new data showed a less dramatic percentage drop despite the effects of the pandemic.

Figures published on Thursday by the Department for Education showed there were 91,100 starts recorded from August to October 2020, compared with 125,800 reported for the same period pre-Covid in 2019/20 – a 28 per cent fall.

It is an improved picture on the previous quarter of the pandemic, when 43,600 starts were achieved between May and July 2020, compared with 75,500 starts for the same period in 2019 – a 42 per cent fall.

The DfE said the 2020/21 data “covers a period affected by varying Covid-19 restrictions, which will have impacted on apprenticeship and traineeship learning and also provider reporting behaviour via the Individualised Learner Record”. It said that “extra care should be taken in comparing and interpreting data”.

For the data recorded in the first quarter of 2020/21, those aged under 19 accounted for the biggest fall. Starts for this age group dropped by 42 per cent from 40,700 last year to 23,800.

Starts for level 2 apprenticeships similarly dropped by 43 per cent – from 41,000 to 23,300 – while the only increase in starts in the first quarter of 2020/21 was among higher apprenticeships, which rose by 1 per cent from 29,800 to 30,100.

The statistics provide an update for take-up of the chancellor’s apprenticeship incentive scheme, which gives employers a “bonus” of up to £2,000 to take on a new apprentice between 1 August 2020 and 31 March 2021.

A total of 18,670 starts were planned under the scheme as at 8 January 2021. The Treasury has budgeted for up to 100,000 incentive payments for new hires.

Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief executive Jane Hickie said her organisation had warned that the incentives for apprenticeships “were not enough to make a significant difference”. This week’s data appears to support her concerns.

“The chancellor recognises that young people are being hurt most by this recession, as the figures show, but his March statement has to do a lot more to reverse these falls,” Hickie added.

Responding to the figures, skills minister Gillian Keegan said: “Apprenticeships form a vital part of our new “Skills for Jobs” white paper which will transform post-16 education and training, helping to deliver the skills individuals, businesses and the economy need to build back better from the pandemic.

“As of 8 January



2021, almost 19,000 applications had been submitted from employers for our offer of a cash boost of up to £2,000 to hire new apprentices, showing the value they know apprenticeships can bring to their business. This offer is available until March 2021, so businesses can create even more opportunities and give more people the life-changing chance to kickstart or upskill their career.”

## “Apprenticeships form a vital part of our new “Skills for Jobs” white paper”

Keegan added: “I know the pandemic is continuing to impact businesses across the country and some apprentices have lost their job, or are facing redundancy. Our redundancy support service continues to offer free advice to apprentices and help them to find alternative options.”



Gillian Keegan

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# WorldSkills Diversity and Inclusion Heroes award winners 2021

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

An apprentice who hosted STEM career events at schools, and a provider giving back to the LGBTQ+ community have been recognised at the WorldSkills UK Diversity and Inclusion Heroes awards.

This is the second year of the awards, following the inaugural event at WorldSkills UK LIVE in 2019, run in partnership with Coca-Cola European Partners.

Seven awards were up for grabs this year and the winners were celebrated at a virtual event on Thursday. One of them, Rolls-Royce management accountancy apprentice Haider Ali, said it was a "complete shock" when he found out he had won the rising star award.

Having joined the manufacturing giant as a higher apprentice, WorldSkills UK said Ali was "determined" to make a difference by getting involved with initiatives to support an inclusive workforce. He has hosted events on STEM career opportunities for pupils at local schools.

WorldSkills said he, along with Derby City Council, had "worked hard to raise the aspirations of primary school children in some of Derby's most deprived areas".

Ali said: "From my own personal experiences, I think it is really important that young people

have access to role models, so they know – whatever space they want to enter – there is room for them.

"I want to help make a difference by sharing my own experiences and inspire more young people from all backgrounds to take up an apprenticeship."

Gareth Fallows, managing director of Stoke-based Acorn Training, won the UK's role model of the year award. WorldSkills UK said he found "safety and security" within his LGBTQ+ community and further education when he was a teenager.

After graduating from Manchester Metropolitan University as a teacher, Fallows founded Acorn because he was "determined to give back to the LGBTQ+ community", WorldSkills said.

Acorn has created a "safe and inclusive space for all communities" and, in the past year, has supported 1,350 unemployed people, with 68 per cent achieving sustained employment.

That work also earned Acorn another award – the network of the year prize for small-to-medium employers.

Fallows said he was really proud to accept the awards as they recognised the hard work his staff put in "to ensure everyone we work with gets the best life chances".

The panel of judges included: Ben Blackledge, WorldSkills UK deputy chief executive; Sharon



Haider Ali

Blyfield, Coca-Cola European Partners' senior manager for people and culture (GB), early careers and apprenticeships; and Dawn Baker, awarding body NCFE's director of innovation and investments.

WorldSkills UK chief executive Neil Bentley-Gockmann said they had been "completely blown away by the number and quality of the inspiring entries". He added: "These awards give us the opportunity to celebrate success with our partners, who are making progress and achieving real impact, and to showcase best practice so we can all learn from each other."



Gareth Fallows

## The full list of winners:

| Award  | Winners  |
|--|--|
| Programme or campaign of the year (small to medium employer) | Kids Planet Day Nurseries  |
| Programme or campaign of the year (large employer)           | Siemens  |
| Network of the year (small to medium employer)               | Acorn Training Ltd   |
| Network of the year (large employer)                         | South Eastern Regional College   |
| Role model award   | Gareth Fallows, managing director, Acorn Training Ltd                              |
| Rising star award  | Haider Ali, management accountancy apprentice, Rolls Royce PLC                     |
| Competition diversity champion award                         | Richard Hutchins, skills competitions manager, The Institute of the Motor Industry |

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For further information on the role, please contact our HR Team at [staffrecruitment@petroc.ac.uk](mailto:staffrecruitment@petroc.ac.uk).



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**Traineeship Coach: £26,008 - £31,833**



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In the **Lead Traineeship Coach** role, you will play an important role in the management of Traineeship programmes designed around the needs of young people and employers. You will be leading teams to deliver Outstanding learning experiences for young people from diverse backgrounds and motivating and managing team members, with support, to ensure the delivery of high quality, creative and innovative programmes that engage learners, assure achievement of digital skills qualifications and attainment of skills matched to career aspirations and the needs of local employers. The role is available in the **North West, North East and Midlands**.

In the role of **Traineeship Coach**, you will be working within our employer responsive team, Business Plus, you will play an important role in the delivery of Traineeship programmes designed around the needs of young people and employers. You will have a passion for changing lives, supporting learners through focused coaching and mentoring, enabling young people from diverse backgrounds to achieve their potential. You will assure achievement of digital skills or warehousing qualifications, working alongside Functional Skills team to support achievement of Maths & English. Your commitment will assure the attainment of skills that match career aspirations and needs of local employers, supporting individuals to access Work Experience and employment opportunities. The roles are available nationally across **Fareham, London, Midlands, North East and North West**.

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For further details and an application form please email [katie.hinch@bacoll.ac.uk](mailto:katie.hinch@bacoll.ac.uk) or contact our 24 hour answering service on 01388 443038.

Closing date for receipt of application is: Friday 12 February 2021 at 12.00 noon



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Please quote reference number ED/WAES/ 975

The closing date for this post is 9.00am Monday 1 February 2021.

Interviews will be held on Friday 5 February 2021

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Closing Date: Tuesday 9th February 2021

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**Salary: up to GBP 56,640**  
**Closing Date: 21st February 2021**

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Please visit [www.wlc.ac.uk/jobs](http://www.wlc.ac.uk/jobs) for further information.



**Director of Student Services and Safeguarding**

**Tenure: Permanent**  
**Salary: £65,000 per annum**  
**Closing Date: 22nd February 2021**

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The successful candidate will work closely with the Executive Team and sit on the Senior Leadership team, leading on and implementing the College's strategy for provision of high quality learner facing services, ensuring they represent the college's diverse community. An experienced and inspirational leader of staff with significant experience at a senior leadership level, you will have experience of communicating at a high level and writing reports for the Executive team and governors.

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Introducing...

# IAN PRYCE

Chief executive, The Bedford College Group

'I have always wanted to understand how things work, and be in charge'

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

**JL Dutaut meets a longstanding college leader who thinks we could all benefit from taking the long view**

How does a leader navigate such times? A phrase keeps coming back to me that encapsulates our sector today: "The fierce urgency of now".

When Martin Luther King Jr coined it in 1967,

it was a call for action. Today, I can only imagine tired college leaders using it to imply their deep desire for everything to slow down.

At least until I met Ian Pryce. We sat down to talk as the past year's dizzying events were undergoing another burst of acceleration: a new and more transmissible form of the virus; queues of lorries stretching through Kent; in education, a U-turn on college closures at no notice, exam cancellations, uncertainty about Btec assessments and lateral flow testing.

Given the context, any college leader could

have been forgiven for taking King's next sentence in that fateful speech – "In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late" – and aiming it sardonically at the Department for Education. Every pressured decision and reversal and every new and pressing deadline has narrowed horizons.

Amid all this, what struck me immediately and kept surprising me throughout my interview with the Bedford College Group chief executive was his utter calm and leisurely

# Profile

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manner. I must have let that surprise show, because he stopped a train of thought about college leadership to interject the following: "It really is a great job, you know. That's why I want to try and get more people to want to do it."

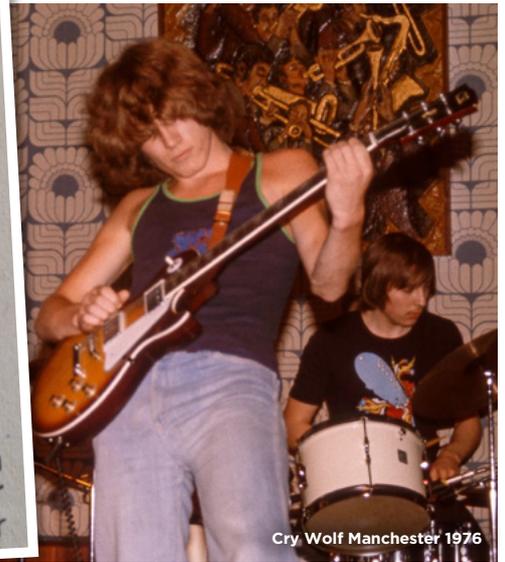
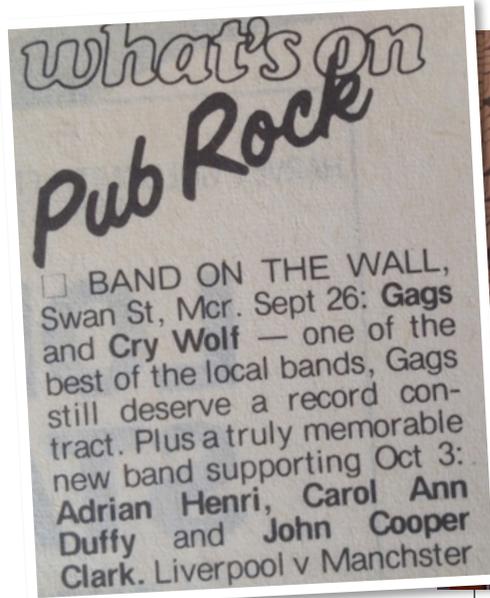
Just like that, he has made me question my premise. His calm demeanour is disarming. It is hardly surprising that this recipient of a CBE for services to education has long been touted by his peers as a possible future FE commissioner.

I can however reveal that he has not applied for the post, for which interviews have been held this week. He aims to retire in a few years, he tells me, and adds: "I don't think I would be a great fit. There are many principals who would be much better at it than me!"

Pryce's humility and composure stem from something as rare as it is simple: experience. Not just 22 years in leadership, but 22 years running the same college. Few can boast of such consistency and, much to his chagrin, few even aspire to it. "That's one of the sadnesses," he tells me. "A lot of people say, 'I can probably last 10 years as a VP, but it's harder to do that as a principal'"

Wryly, he adds that being a principal is harder, "but it is still better than being a vice-principal". Experience, it seems, also breeds a healthy sense of humour. More than that, it allows you to observe your surroundings with a long view. Look through it one way and distant things look larger. The other, and close ones shrink.

Born in London, Pryce's family moved to south Manchester, where he attended a "highly academic" Catholic school, achieving good results. As was then standard practice, he



Cry Wolf Manchester 1976

was not advised but "instructed" to study sciences at Cambridge. His heart was set on history and maths, but "they told me the only alternative that was acceptable to the school was to study medicine".

So off Pryce went to the University of Manchester but, after two years, he transferred from medicine to maths. "I'm quite squeamish," he explains. He does not dwell on two lost years, though. He had a great time gigging with Cry Wolf when the punk rock scene was at its zenith, and he met his future wife.

Maths degree in pocket, Pryce got a job in finance at Liverpool City Council just in the midst of its stand-off with Margaret Thatcher's government. "We had to do a lot of strange things with creative acc..." He stops short. "It was a really interesting intellectual exercise from a finance point of view."

When I draw him on similarities between that period and Andy Burnham's recent spat with Boris Johnson, he dismisses it at first. "With Burnham it's a reasonable conversation about centralisation and localisation." But he does add that "the last few years feel a bit like that period. I always think that, if you've got a good memory and you've been around, you've got that experience to help you with your decision making."

Pryce actually has 24, not 22 years of Bedford leadership to draw on. He started in 1996 as

finance director before becoming principal. After a few years in local government, then in the electricity industry and retail, he took redundancy rather than move to Yorkshire. A job came up at the fledgling Further Education Funding Council, an exciting opportunity just when colleges were being incorporated.

## "It's a great job. I want more people to want to do it"

Not a practical person by his own admission (ignoring his talent on the guitar), he had particularly admired the engineers during his time in the electrical sector. In contrast to the "conservative and prudent" professionals of finance, "they would bring out little pet projects they were doing that were nothing to do with what they had been tasked to do. I found that really exciting."

From there, the move to Bedford came because of something he shared with those engineers with their pet projects: "I have always wanted to understand how things work, and be in charge of it. So I thought I'd make the move to a college."

Two years in as finance director, the principal announced his departure and Pryce went for the top job. A letter from a majority of staff all but demanding his appointment sealed the deal in his favour



Pryce with Gordon Brown

# Profile

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– a testament to that calm and soothing demeanour.

But personality is no guarantee of longevity, and Pryce puts his survival down to a mantra he brought to the job from his time in finance: “The community drives the curriculum drives the people drives the money, and never the other way around.” He calls it “a recipe for not wasting any money. You can point to why you have spent every penny, because the community wants it.”

## “The thing that bedevils ministers is keeping things secret”

He adds that the mantra has helped Bedford through the Covid crisis. “What does the community want? How do we organise the curriculum if we go into lockdown in a way that still gives the community what it wants?”

To me, it sounds like the inverse of a finance-driven approach, but Pryce insists that is not so. In fact, he has little time for those who “do a job on the numbers” for a quick fix, dropping courses rather than investing in improving on the things communities want.

It took him 10 years to get Bedford to



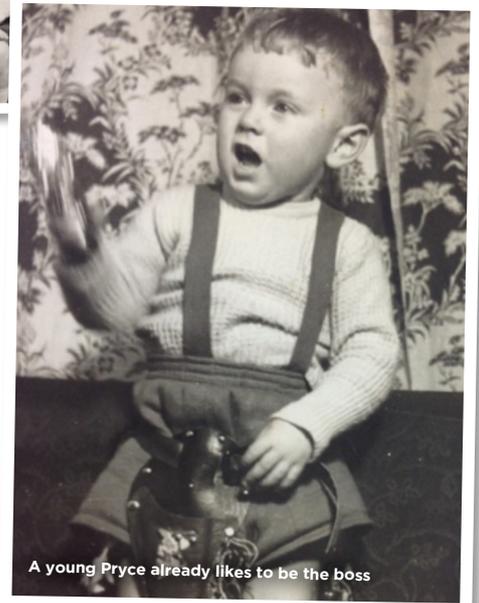
outstanding – longer than most people last (or even imagine they can) in the job. He points to the small number of colleges “who have never been below grade 2 over five or six inspections. The majority of colleges will get into that position at some point in the cycle and get out of it.”

So, as he surveys the choppy waters around us, Pryce’s assessment is that our major problem is interventionism. It is one of the reasons he could not imagine himself toeing the line as FE commissioner. Instead, we should “make sure they have got a plan, but just leave them alone to get on with things”. Raise the sails. Man the tiller. The storm will pass.

He is also rueful about another symptom of our costly, quick-fix attitude to leadership, what he sees as our tendency to confuse bad decisions with bad conduct. “It used to be that you could lose your job and, unless it was for conduct, you could make a comeback in another college. Now, a lot of very good people have lost their jobs and disappeared.”

So the long view of college leadership does bring some sadnesses, but it also brings a benefit that far outweighs them: it is hard to take yourself too seriously. Or anyone else for that matter.

Pryce achieved edu-celebrity status in 2017 by rewriting, performing – in a wig and a dress – a version of Dolly Parton’s Jolene. It was dedicated to then-education secretary Justine Greening. “We work so hard we hardly sleep / There’s nothing we can do to keep /



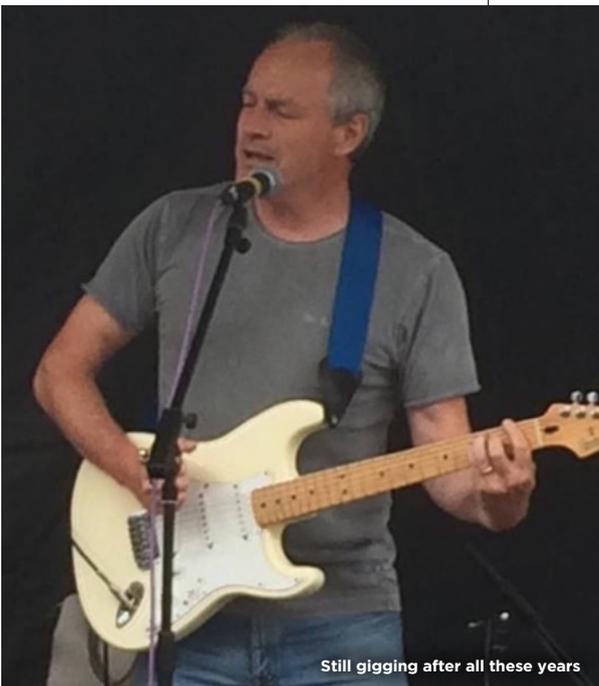
Our staff. They’re leaving every week, Justine.”

But parodying is one thing and hot-headed criticism another. Pryce is certain the song did more to draw the minister’s attention to key issues than a hundred angry letters would have done. In that, he is nothing if not consistent. Even in the face of everything happening around us, he models the forgiving attitude he preaches and, in lieu of criticism, he offers advice:

“The thing that bedevils ministers at the minute is keeping things secret. Discuss openly, get some advice on what you are going to say first, and share. People are too nervous about sharing things, and that’s true of ministers too.”

There is certainly something to be said about taking the long view. As we speak, every pressing matter of the day seems to recede to a distant horizon. Our destination and route seem a little clearer.

We could certainly all do with a bit of that, and there is no time like the present to set that course.



## ANDY NORMAN

Research analyst, Centre for Progressive Policy



## It's risky business to have an employer-dominated skills system

**The Department for Education must put more faith in local leaders if it wants the 'levelling up' agenda to work, writes Andy Norman**

Having just launched the long-awaited FE white paper, skills minister Gillian Keegan was asked to name its biggest reform.

Her answer – embedding employers at the heart of the system – was telling. The white paper is confirmation of what has long been clear, which is that the government is building an employer-led skills system.

Involving employers is sensible. Courses that do not cultivate relevant skills help neither learners nor businesses.

But an over-reliance on businesses will not build the system we need as we emerge from Covid-19 and look to level up the country. For that, we need empowered local leaders.

There is much to like in the skills policy agenda put forward by the white paper. Much of what the Centre for Progressive Policy has been calling for has been adopted by the government, including an extension in level 3 funding eligibility and a boost to online and blended learning.

And although there are things missing, the Lifetime Skills Guarantee is the kind of national level ambition the sector needs.

However, the white paper continues a worrying shift of power away from local leaders



and towards employers. Instead of skills advisory panels led by Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and Mayoral Combined Authorities, we have Local Skills Improvement Plans, with only a passing promise to “consult” MCAs.

**“We know that businesses tend to underinvest in training relative to the optimal level for society”**

Having devolved the Adult Education Budget to MCAs in 2019, Whitehall is stepping back from any further devolution, preferring instead to empower employers.

For example, the Department for Education has set which level 3 courses will be eligible for funding nationally under the National Skills Fund, with courses chosen according to prevailing business demand.

With many parts of the country

stuck in a low-skill, low-wage trap, businesses alone will not shift the dial.

We know that businesses tend to underinvest in training relative to the optimal level for society because the benefits that accrue to individual businesses are less than those that accrue to wider society.

There is evidence that this is a particular problem for UK businesses. According to the latest data, firms in the UK spend less than half as much on training as the average for countries in the EU-27. Danish firms, for example, outspend their UK equivalents by a ratio of five to one.

Depressingly, the Employer Skills Survey shows that, between 2015 and 2019, training expenditure by UK businesses fell by an average of £200 per employee.

Nor should we assume that the goals that society has for the skills system will match neatly the goals of individual businesses. Recent reforms that forced businesses to engage with the apprenticeship system saw rebranding of existing training and those from deprived

communities being squeezed out of higher-level courses.

So, if we build a system that is driven by the skills needs of businesses, where should the strategic direction come from?

A different approach is needed, one which encourages business involvement in course design but where local leaders can align FE with wider strategic economic objectives.

In this approach, mapped out in a Centre for Progressive Policy report from December, skills are an integral part of devolving industrial policy to MCAs.

With further devolution unlikely, what can be done under the current proposals? Firstly, the DfE should allow for local flexibility in level 3 funding, taking into account input from MCAs and LEPs.

Secondly, the move towards outcomes-based funding should target good work. While the white paper is entitled “Skills for Jobs”, what local areas really need is “skills for good jobs”.

The skills system must now aim to break local areas out of their low-skill traps and move people into better jobs, boosting economic resilience in the process.

We finally have a government that recognises the importance of further education to economic prosperity. But, for the skills system to level up the country and help struggling communities, Whitehall cannot rely too heavily on businesses. Instead, it must have a little more faith in local leaders.

Opinion

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NATHALIE RICHARDS

Chief executive, EduKit



Why was student wellbeing not in the white paper?

Student wellbeing is as important as financial management and the curriculum, says Nathalie Richards. She outlines seven support strategies

A key aim of last week's FE white paper is to help every young person gain the skills they need for life-long employment.

But there is no mention of student wellbeing and no new plans to support students' emotional development in the months and years ahead.

If there's one thing we have learned from the experience of the pandemic, it's that emotional wellbeing and resilience – often referred to as "soft" skills – are critical as young people make choices for their futures against the backdrop of the crisis.

Colleges have a key role in helping their students to develop the skills to cope with whatever life has in store, long after Covid-19.

Here are seven strategies for supporting the wellbeing of FE students:

1. Push wellbeing up the agenda

Wellbeing has to become as essential as financial management, recruitment and curriculum planning - and must be prioritised from the top.

Launch an initiative to upskill tutors and staff so they can spot the signs that a student could be struggling emotionally and step in to help.

A tutor who can identify when a



student is going through a difficult emotional period or is finding it hard to stay on track with their learning might prevent an issue from becoming a crisis.

2. Walk the talk

Take steps to create a culture of open conversation across your college when it comes to emotional wellbeing and mental health – including staff.

If they are happy to, encourage staff to talk openly with young people about the challenges they have faced and how they have overcome them.

This can break the stigma of mental health issues, strengthen relationships between students and tutors and inspire learners to find new ways to tackle their difficulties.

3. Reduce isolation

Live online sessions can be opened up early so young people have an opportunity to talk through issues they might be having learning from home.

Spending time with their peers,

in person or online, can ease pressure and help students find effective strategies for juggling college and home life.

“Create a culture of open conversation across your college”

4. Build students' resilience

Young people need resilience to be able to tackle the difficulties life throws at them, so make time in the curriculum for it.

Whether you run an online workshop to promote mindfulness, launch an exercise group or promote the benefits of writing a journal, you'll be helping young people to develop a valuable toolkit to manage the challenges they face, inside and outside their studies.

5. Get clarity on wellbeing issues

Run a short survey each week or month to get a clear understanding

of how students are feeling. Digital tools such as apps can help to make surveys easily manageable with fast results.

Knowing that issues such as anxiety and self-harm are on the rise in your college allows you to make informed decisions about what support to put in place and act quickly to get vulnerable students the help they need.

6. Keep support services in the spotlight

Not every student will have read the relevant area of the website or induction pack that outlines the specialist services on offer to support their pastoral and academic progress.

Kick off a new campaign to raise awareness of this support on social media and other channels, and keep wellbeing at the forefront of students' minds throughout the academic year.

7. Reach out to parents

While some students can make great progress learning remotely, others can find the experience isolating and can quickly disengage.

Parents and carers can still be an important source of support, even as students mature. So, strengthen home-college links with regular contact by phone or video conferencing and set up an online group where parents can support each other, share learning resources and keep young people motivated.

# PROFESSOR EWART KEEP

Professor of education,  
University of Oxford



## Now is FE's chance to deliver higher technical education

**The FE white paper gives colleges the chance to become high-level providers of technical education as in other countries, writes Ewart Keep**

Last week's long-awaited FE white paper sets the key strategic priority of higher-level technical skills and sub-degree provision.

This is an important focus. Research by Professor Paul Lewis at King's College London shows that in some areas of high-tech manufacturing, shortfalls in technician training create a significant bottleneck in the ability of many companies to adopt new technologies and to innovate.

International comparisons also show that England has a higher level skills provision gap at sub-degree level than it should.

As the Augar review underlined, most other developed countries have a stream of what is termed "short-cycle" tertiary provision (ie shorter than a full bachelor's-level degree). This is often delivered not in a university, but in a specialist institution.

We, by contrast, have spent the past 15 to 20 years trying to plug every skills gap above level 3 with university-delivered degrees.

But colleges are well placed to deliver growth in higher technical education. Now is their chance.

The white paper offers the sector opportunity to develop an agile, realistic and cost-effective approach.

In many instances this will mean that individual colleges will need to specialise their provision in subject areas where they have a comparative expertise.

They will need to cooperate with other colleges to deliver tailored skills plans that the government hopes will meet local skills needs.

**"It's an opportunity to develop an agile, realistic and cost-effective approach"**

It will also mean strengthening links between colleges and universities, so that progression through to degree-level and masters' courses can be created.

In Scotland, such "articulation" agreements between colleges and universities are common. In some instances, these links are becoming closer. For example in Aberdeen, NE College and the Robert Gordon University

have created a cooperative arrangement with a common prospectus and seamless integration of provision across the two institutions.

Many of the skills that employers say they need are acquired through intermediate or higher technical qualifications – but not enough young people pursue this path.

This means that careers' support and student finance will also be critical to the success of the white paper. It's not just about building progression pathways for young people, but also about opportunities for adults to gain the skills they need to progress in work at any stage of their lives.

Colleges can only ensure people can get the skills they need if it is made easier for them to do so, with many existing barriers broken down – from lack of flexibility to lack of funding.

Meanwhile, the white paper's focus on higher-level vocational skills also offers colleges a new starting point for expanded innovation support, particularly

with smaller companies.

Colleges already work closely with employers, but there are measures in the paper that could allow them to play a bigger role.

The UK has a long tail of poorly performing businesses, many of them lacking the managerial skills and capacity to organise even basic activities.

In the medium term there is much that colleges can do to help. For instance, they can help to support local employer groupings to enhance workplace learning by providing training-the-trainer services.

They can also offer more flexible short courses in basic aspects of management such as finance, human resources, ICT, and so on.

With the right investment and oversight there will be fertile ground for colleges to develop and grow this collaborative offering – especially through the proposed "college business centres".

By putting employers at the heart of the system, the government has recognised this pivotal business support role for colleges.

Meanwhile the independent commission on the College of the Future has made it clear that colleges must work together more.

We need an education and skills system that is truly joined up. I hope this white paper signals the start of moving in that direction.



## JOANNE MOSELEY

Employment lawyer,  
Irwin Mitchell



## Colleges need to know about changes to DBS checks

**If colleges fail to make necessary changes, it could result in a GDPR breach and potential claim for damages, writes Joanne Moseley**

If you are in the middle of recruiting new staff for your college, then you should know that you must not ask for a DBS certificate made before a date in late November. This is because of changes to DBS “filtering” rules.

Filtering describes the process that shows which criminal records are disclosed on a standard or enhanced DBS certificate. The rules have been in place since May 2013 and affect both what an employer can ask in relation to a person’s convictions and cautions and what is then disclosed.

The old filtering rules meant that single convictions for non-violent, non-sexual offences which did not lead to a custodial sentence would not be disclosed after 11 years - or five and a half years if the person was under 18 at the time of the offence.

But that exemption did not apply if the person had more than one conviction, however minor the offences. There have been a number of successful legal challenges to this.

As a result, the government has made changes. Under the new rules, standard and enhanced DBS certificates will no longer automatically disclose warnings, reprimands, youth convictions and all spent convictions, even where someone has more than one conviction.

That is provided the offence is eligible and did not lead to a suspended or actual prison sentence. All convictions resulting in a custodial sentence must be disclosed.

The changes to filtering rules affect the end of the DBS processing stages. If a certificate was created before 28 November 2020 then the previous rules will apply. If a certificate is created after this date, then the new rules will apply.

**“You should check whether you are legally obliged to ignore a criminal record in accordance with the new rules”**

So, if you are in the middle of a recruitment process for a new staff member, with applicants currently being considered for a role, you should not ask them to provide an old DBS certificate as it may disclose information you no longer need to know.

The three key areas for colleges to consider are:

### 1. Information management and GDPR

We recommend that your college reviews the records of existing staff with criminal records and amends or removes any information that is filtered under the new rules. This minimises the risk that you will take decisions based on out-of-date information!

Existing staff also have the right to have out-of-date information erased.

If you fail to make the necessary changes, this could result in a GDPR breach and/or a potential claim for damages.

### 2. Hiring practices

You may need to update your recruitment processes. Any job application forms for positions that are eligible for a standard or enhanced DBS check will need to correctly reflect the new rules.

The government has published further guidance to help employers ensure that their recruitment processes are up to date. It

suggests that you ask the following questions.

“Do you have any unspent conditional cautions or convictions under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974?”

“Do you have any adult cautions (simple or conditional) or spent convictions that are not protected as defined by the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 (Amendment) (England and Wales) Order 2020?”

The guidance also encourages employers to include these specific paragraphs in their standard application forms:

“The amendments to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 [...] provide that, when applying for certain jobs and activities, certain convictions and cautions are considered ‘protected’.

“This means that they do not need to be disclosed to employers and, if they are disclosed, employers cannot take them into account.

“Guidance about whether a conviction or caution should be disclosed can be found on the Ministry of Justice website.”

If a job applicant discloses a criminal record in conjunction with a current job application, you should check whether you are legally obliged to ignore it in accordance with the new rules.

### 3. Updates to policies and training

You may also need to update your policies and make sure relevant staff are made aware of and/or receive training on the rule changes.



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# READER'S REPLY

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

Let's not have the skills snobbery any more. For far too long vocational training/education has been woefully neglected. Please let this white paper be a corner turn in how politicians value the talented people who train on the job and in further education colleges etc.

Steph McGovern, Twitter

I have seen many an instance where colleges have been put in the limelight over the years, only for it to amount to nothing, or not much, once the rhetoric has died down. I would actually love to see training providers and employer providers placed in the limelight, just for a change. I shall keep my powder dry on any optimism but hope that Sally [Dicketts] is correct!

Richard Moore, website

### Hull College Group to close down Goole campus

"There is no need for the Goole College site"??? What an insulting comment for all of the staff and students at Goole College, not to mention the local community and businesses who will also suffer the impact of the college closing. A very short-sighted decision given that there is huge investment in Goole and the immediate area from Siemens and Beal Homes who will be looking to employ apprentices from the surrounding area.

A. Non, website

## REPLY OF THE WEEK

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



I agree with Jonathan Simons on much of this - the white paper is a platform for proper investment through spending review, but some old ideas are the right things if done well and properly funded.

David Hughes, Twitter

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



It is good to hear views on technical qualifications and I agree they are not the right qualification to offer an alternative vocational route to A-levels. The people who have designed these qualifications did not listen to the FE and skills sector despite their "consultations" and capacity to deliver funding. Feedback given to them regarding the size of work experience and their expectations of both the employers and the educators was absurd. Now, with a shrinking economy and a devastated retail sector, the success of these qualifications hangs in the balance.

MC, website

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



What a great article from Anita Lall on supporting BAME students, intersectional discrimination in FE and how to address it.

Alison Wonderland, Twitter



A personal and inspiring story from Anita Lall - thank you for sharing it.

Drew Richardson-Walsh, Twitter

# Movers & Shakers

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



**Louise  
Doswell**

Principal, Preston's  
College

**Start date** June 2021

**Previous job**

Deputy chief executive and deputy  
principal, York College

**Interesting fact**

She enjoys walking, playing golf and  
gardening



**Jane  
Hickie**

Chief executive,  
Association of  
Employment and  
Learning Providers

**Start date** January 2021

**Previous job**

Managing director, Association of  
Employment and Learning Providers

**Interesting fact**

She studied for a short time at the British  
Academy of Interior Design and says  
her husband believes she cannot enter a  
house without wanting to redesign the  
whole place



**Stephen  
Pugh**

Chair, Suffolk  
New College

**Start date** January 2021

**Previous job**

Finance director, Adnams

**Interesting fact**

He sings in two choirs (when restrictions  
permit) and also likes writing limericks

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