

# FE Week

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FEELS LIKE BIAS**

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# SECTOR IN SHOCK

**Apprenticeship register winners and losers**

**Dozens of major colleges stunned after rejection  
One director successful with three untested firms  
Shadow minister brands process an ‘omnishambles’**

Exclusive

See investigation on pages 4 & 5



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# FE Week

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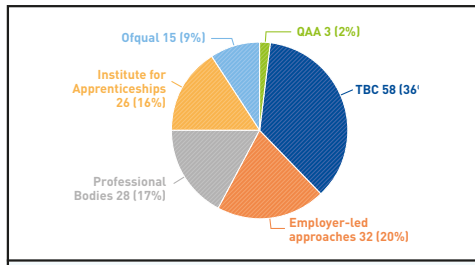


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Provider type	Grade 1 or 2
UTCs	45%
FE colleges	68%

**Under half inspected UTCs 'good' or 'outstanding'**  
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## Contributors



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## INVESTIGATES

## Sector in shock: Apprenticeship pr

## One director successful with three untested firms

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BILLY CAMDEN @BILLYCAMDEN

EXCLUSIVE  
FROM FRONT

The selection process for the new register of apprenticeship training providers has been branded an “omnishambles”, after providers with no delivery experience whatsoever have found their way onto it while numerous huge, established colleges have missed out.

The Skills Funding Agency this week published the full list of 1,708 providers which will be eligible to deliver apprenticeships from May, whittled down from 2,327 applications.

Many colleges with significant current apprenticeship allocations, including Bournemouth and Poole College, Hartlepool College, Birmingham Metropolitan College and Northbrook College (see page 10), have expressed dismay after they didn't make it onto the list.

To add insult to injury, FE Week analysis shows, for example, that one person operating from a rented office in Knutsford, Cheshire has succeeded in getting their three companies, Cranage Ltd, Obscurant Limited, and Tatton Solutions Ltd onto the approved ‘main route’ register – even though none of these companies has any experience of running government-funded apprenticeships.

The shadow skills minister Gordon Marsden told FE Week that the register was “looking like an omnishambles”.

He continued: “I fear that this reflects the concern I've been expressing for months that the SFA just doesn't have the resources to carry out due diligence on this scale.

“The SFA should now give a clear

indication of how thorough the checking process has been.”

Cranage, Obscurant, and Tatton Solutions were all incorporated between August and December 2015, and their first sets of annual accounts are due within months.

Another private training provider, the Hertfordshire-based Apple Training Academy, is on the RoATP despite having ceased trading, while the Essex-based Firm Training only launched in February 2017 – from a residential address (see boxout).

A DfE spokesperson told FE Week that “all providers were given a clear set of criteria they had to meet, in order to ensure they can receive public funds for apprenticeship training: due diligence, financial health, capacity and quality”.

He continued: “We will provide personalised feedback to all providers who do not make it onto the register to help them understand what they need to do to be successful in the future.”

The process was geared towards “ensuring excellence for apprenticeship provision”, and it “cannot compromise on our commitment” to rigorous quality tests.

The director of Cranage, Obscurant, and Tatton Solutions is Peter Sherry, the former chief executive of the National Skills Academy Logistics which went into liquidation in 2013 after the Skills Funding Agency pulled its financial support.

Obscurant is also on the old register of training organisations (Roto) - but Cranage and Tatton are not.

Mr Sherry confirmed that just 16 people work across all three companies, but added that with Cranage, which still has no official website, “we are still effectively looking at where we will run”.

“We are looking at senior management



Peter Sherry

Company name	On Roto?	On RoATP main route?	Company number	Incorporated	1st accounts due	Registered office	Director on Companies House
CRANAGE LTD	No	Yes	09918856	16/12/2015	16/09/2017	6 Royal Court, WA16 6EN	Martin Peter Sherry
OBSCURANT LIMITED	Yes	Yes	09718973	05/08/2015	05/05/2017	6 Royal Court, WA16 6EN	Martin Peter Sherry
TATTON SOLUTIONS LTD	No	Yes	09718975	05/08/2015	05/05/2017	6 Royal Court, WA16 6EN	Martin Peter Sherry

qualifications,” he added. “But in doing those we want to see whether we can work with a third party, maybe even a college or another prime.”

The SFA declined to comment on whether connected companies were supposed to apply for the register, though Mr Sherry said: “We are finding employers, now in control of apprenticeships funding, are often now looking to work with a number of different specialist smaller companies. That is the model we plan to follow.”

He added: “Some employers see it as a massive advantage that you have not offered apprenticeships previously. They like it if

we come to them fresh and with a different approach.”

The inclusion of his firms on RoATP will surprise many in FE, who were led to believe that only providers with a firm track record in delivering apprenticeships would be allowed onto it, in order to maintain quality.

Peter Lauener, the head of the SFA and shadow chief executive of the Institute for Apprenticeships, told FE Week's Annual Apprenticeship Conference a year ago that the new register was being introduced “to make sure any provider available for an employer to use meets the right standards”.

## Firm stops trading days before register success

A private training provider is on RoATP despite having ceased trading.

Hertfordshire-based Apple Training Academy is listed as a main provider on the register, but is understood to have gone out of business this month.

FE Week has been unable to contact Apple Training Academy directly, as the provider's phone is no longer working and our emails have not been answered.

However, a spokesperson for the provider's accountants, Lawrence and Company, confirmed it had ceased trading and was currently going through insolvency.

Apple Training Academy is not listed on the SFA's current register of training

organisations, nor does it appear on the SFA's subcontractor list.

According to its website, which is still up and running, it had offered a range of qualifications in health and social care, child care, business and management, and training.

A news story posted on February 27 indicated that it would be offering apprenticeships from May.

“New apprenticeship funding is available from 1st May. Don't miss out!” it said.

The provider's Facebook page is full of comments from angry customers who have lost money, having paid for training but not received it.

## Small distance learning provider ‘delighted’

An Essex-based private provider has been accepted onto the RoATP despite only being incorporated in February last year, apparently from a residential property.

Firm Training says it delivers distance learning specialising in online access to higher education for courses including nursing and midwifery, according to its website.

However there is no evidence of the provider having any experience of running government-funded apprenticeships training.

It is not on the SFA's general register of training organisations and its website lists

no address.

Firm Training is however registered on the UK register of learning providers to a residential property in Essex.

FE Week asked Firm Training if it had ever delivered government-funded apprenticeships, and what types of apprenticeships it would offer now it's on the register.

A spokesperson would only say: “I would like to say that we are delighted to be added to the register and are now situated in an office [waiting for the registered address to be amended].”

# Provider register winners and losers

## High profile National College fails to make the list

**ALIX ROBERTSON**  
@ALIXROBERTSON4

A high profile new government-backed national college has failed to make it onto the new Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers, due to what it claims is a “technicality” in its application.

The Skills Funding Agency announced the full list of providers that will be eligible to deliver apprenticeships from May this week, but the submission from the National College Creative Industries was unsuccessful.

The new college, based in Purfleet, Essex, opened to students in September. It began with 35 apprentices and, according to a spokesperson, has a commitment to subcontract a further 12.

A statement from the college, sent to FE Week today, said: “The National College Creative Industries will be re-applying to the Skills Funding Agency to be accepted on to the RoATP.

“The original application submitted in November did not meet the criteria, in section nine of the 14 main assessment areas, due to a technicality.”

It added the reapplication process will

open again at the end of March, when the college expects to “be successful” in its reapplication.

“This delay will not have any impact for apprenticeships currently being delivered by the National College Creative Industries.

“We are working closely with employers and we intend to deliver apprenticeships to non-levied employers, including small and medium enterprises as planned.”

The release said the college “remains committed to delivering high quality apprenticeships”, and intends to “pioneer apprenticeships with industry specialist assessors who are dedicated to working with our apprentices and employers”.

In being excluded from the register, the National College Creative Industries is in the company of a number of major apprenticeship delivering colleges, which told FE Week they were “stunned”, “disappointed” and “frustrated” at not making the list.

Those left out in the cold include Bournemouth and Poole College, Hartlepool College, Birmingham Metropolitan College and Northbrook College.

In May 2016, the government announced details of nearly £80 million in funding to



support the creation of five new National Colleges.

The sector skills council, Creative & Cultural Skills, and its employer partners provided the National College Creative Industries with a start-up grant which enabled it to be incorporated and employ industry practitioners.

Up to £5.5 million of matched funding has also been allocated to it by the government for a “capital project”, but this is still under tender and the college is currently operating out of The Backstage Centre, a theatre venue in High House Production Park.

So far only the National College for Digital Skills and National College for the Creative and Cultural Industries are up and running, since last September, but FE Week understands the National College for High Speed Rail and the National College for Nuclear are in development.

The National College for Onshore Oil and Gas was expected to open in 2016/17, but plans were understood to have stalled when Theresa May became prime minister, due to a need to assess what level of support her government intends to give to fracking in the future.

## Providers on register told of non-levy allocation delay

**ALIX ROBERTSON**  
@ALIXROBERTSON4

Allocations worth up to £440 million, for delivering apprenticeship training to non-levy employers, were postponed by the Skills Funding Agency this week, leaving those who applied for the funding in limbo.

The chief executive of the AELP denounced the delay, saying it will cause “more uncertainty”.

Applicants were informed that there would be a hold up by the government’s

e-tendering portal, Bravo, in a notification which has been seen by FE Week.

“It is disappointing that the statement on Bravo doesn’t offer any timetable on when providers can now expect to be notified and the ‘early March’ deadline looks like it has been missed,” said Mark Dawe.

“Providers really need to know their allocations so they can properly plan their provision and confirm with their existing employers whether or not their partnerships can continue, many of which have been in place for many years.

“More uncertainty is not in the interests of apprentices either, who want to be confident that they can complete their programmes without unnecessary disruption.”

The SFA’s message said: “We are notifying you that we have amended the timetable for communication of results to applicants that was published in the specification document for ITT 30190.

“As soon as we are able, we will advise you of the amended timetable through this e-tendering portal (Bravo). If you have any questions, please ask them through this message board. Thank you.”

The wait was met with frustration on social media – particularly as the apprenticeship levy is due to go live at the start of next month.

On Twitter, Adam Barnes wrote: “Given

the delay to #RoATP announcement and track record of SFA on these kind of announcements, this isn’t exactly a huge surprise.”

He added: “I’m taking the approach of ‘take the date, add a week, extend by a few days, reach actual date’. Gets closer to reality!”

“It’s getting a little silly isn’t it,” tweeted Charlotte Moreland, meanwhile.

Another comment on FE Week’s own website, from Lisa MacCormac, read: “Message on Bravo this evening re. ITT says that results are delayed and ‘a new timetable for results’ will be published shortly. Not great, given there are less than 8 weeks until May 1st.”

FE Week approached the Department for Education twice, asking for an explanation of the delay, but representatives refused to comment.

On March 8, FE Week reported that a key meeting that the SFA had been supposed to hold that day, in which it was to reach final decisions on which providers would be allocated a non-levy employer funding allocation, had been cancelled.

The meeting was intended to establish the amounts that providers would receive, but we understand that as yet no date has been set for when it will be rescheduled.

The DfE also refused to comment on why its meeting had not gone ahead.



### Sector concerns



**Adam Barnes**  
@adambarnes1983

Given the delay to #RoATP announcement and track record of SFA on these kind of announcements, this isn’t exactly a huge surprise.

6:31 PM - 14 Mar 2017



**Charlotte Moreland**  
@CharlotteMTforB

@adambarnes1983 it’s getting a little silly isn’t it

6:46 PM - 14 Mar 2017



**Adam Barnes**  
@adambarnes1983

@CharlotteMTforB I’m taking the approach of “take the date, add a week, extend by a few days, reach actual date” Gets closer to reality!

6:48 PM - 14 Mar 2017



Mark Dawe

## INVESTIGATES

# Apprenticeship reforms: Analysis exp

## 'Last resort' IfA most popular for external quality assurance

ALIX ROBERTSON  
@ALIXROBERTSON4

The Institute for Apprenticeships is the most popular choice for external quality assurance for apprenticeship standards – even though it was only set up as a “last resort” option for this sort of thing.

Of the 162 apprenticeship standards currently approved for delivery, 26 have chosen the IfA as their EQA route, compared with just 15 that have gone with the government’s official qualifications regulator Ofqual.

The Quality Assurance Agency, which generally deals with higher education qualifications, is also available, but has been named for quality assurance with just three standards.

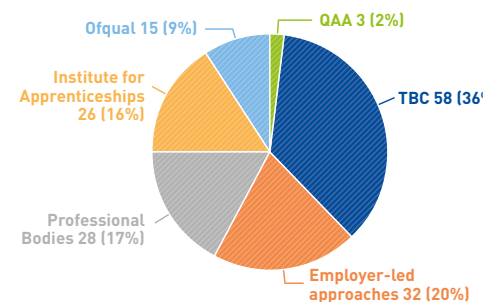
A further 58 still have no confirmed choice of EQA provider, while the remaining standards have selected professional bodies or employer-led approaches.

An Ofqual spokesperson said that in the new apprenticeship landscape it was “inevitable” for trailblazers to reach “different conclusions regarding their preferred EQA provider”.

He said: “The IfA has said that it considers itself to be ‘the EQA of last resort’. In this evolving landscape trailblazers may change their initial preferences.”

However, he defended Ofqual’s credentials, saying: “We start from a base of having

Breakdown of EQA route choices:



renowned assessment expertise, regulatory tools and a tried and tested framework.

“This means that we are in a great position to provide EQA and can draw upon our statutory powers to impose rules, set gateway criteria, undertake audits, investigate, impose sanctions and compel action.”

He added that Ofqual is also “exploring how we can work in partnership with employers and professional bodies as providers of the EQA role”.

Speaking during a webinar on January 6, Peter Lauener, the shadow chief executive of the IfA, told FE Week’s editor Nick Linford that the IfA did not have “the resource to do the quality assurance role directly”.

He also insisted it would be acceptable for the Institute to charge for EQA because “the principle of a regulator charging bodies in the industry for regulation is not uncommon at all”.

In contrast, an Ofqual spokesperson told FE Week: “We don’t charge and do not intend to introduce charges for our external quality

EQA providers:		
Academy for Healthcare Science	Institute and Faculty of Actuaries	Skills for Care
Association for Project Management (APM)	Institute for Apprenticeships	Solicitors Regulation Authority
Chartered Institute of Legal Executives (CILEX)	Institute of Groundsmanship	Tech Partnership
Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT)	National Education Network for Ambulance Services (NENAS)	The Institute of Meat
Employer Panel	Ofqual	The Institution of Mechanical Engineers
Energy Managers Association	People 1st	The International Council on Systems Engineering (INCOSE)
Engineering Council	QAA	Trailblazer Group
General Dental Council (GDC)	Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS)	

assurance role.”

Furthermore, while Ofqual, QAA and other professional or sector bodies which Trailblazer groups may set up to tackle EQA will be overseen by the IfA, the Institute itself will not have an organisation regulating its delivery of this role.

FE Week understands that the IfA has yet to tender for its EQA work, despite plans to start procurement in February.

And last month the Department for Education ran a consultation on the draft operational plan for the IfA, which invited feedback on quality assurance and other functions, and closed on February 27.

In its own response to the operational plan, Ofqual branded the “responsibilities and accountabilities” in the current apprenticeships system “blurred”, labelling it “crucial” to make the landscape “clear and easy to navigate”.

FE Week asked both the IfA and DfE to comment this week on whether they were now rethinking the IfA’s role in the process, and what would be happening with the EQA tender. They declined to comment.

Terry Fennell, chief executive and responsible officer at specialist awarding organisation FDQ, told FE Week that having four different EQA options is “extremely worrying for awarding organisations”.

He said: “We are used to one set of rules set out by Ofqual for qualifications and to this end all AOs are in the same game with the same expectations.

“When it comes to end-point assessments there are three new EQA bodies in the market and each is likely to have a different approach.

“Importantly it’s not clear who will police the EQA bodies so there is likely to be dispute and huge conflicts of interest.”

## No funded qualifications for over third of approved standards

ALIX ROBERTSON  
@ALIXROBERTSON4

More than a third of the apprenticeship standards that the government has deemed ready for delivery involve no funded qualifications other than a final assessment, exclusive FE Week research has revealed.

While the standards have end-point assessments in place, they will not provide apprentices with the chance to accumulate qualifications as they go along – as was the case with the previous apprenticeship frameworks.

This structure was designed to allow apprentices to build up their achievements, meaning that if they were unable to finish the full apprenticeship, they had still gained qualifications (or partial recognition in the form of units) from it.

It was also considered beneficial when a learner chose to change sectors, as it broke down the course, making transferable skills

clearer to employers.

But the apparent lack of qualifications within new apprenticeships standards has raised concerns in the FE sector over the transferability of current training, and how well its quality will be measured.

Mark Dawe, AELP’s chief executive, told FE Week that he believes every standard “should include or itself be a recognised qualification”.

“The omission of qualifications from standards will adversely affect the portability and transferability of apprenticeships, make it difficult to make comparisons between standards of level and breadth, and present difficulties in inspecting for quality,” he said.

“There is a serious question about whether we have the right assessment with a need for skills and competency to be measured throughout the apprenticeship, rather than placing so much reliance at the end point.”

AELP has already recommended that the government’s Technical and Further Education Bill, which is currently moving through the House of Lords, be amended

to take this into account. Mr Dawe said he was “encouraged to see both MPs and peers agreeing” with the proposal, even though “ministers still remain unpersuaded”.

Andy Walls, head of vocational policy at the Joint Council for Qualifications, agreed that embedded qualifications were valuable for apprentices.

“The evidence shows that learners benefit in their careers from obtaining a recognised qualification as part of their apprenticeship,” he said.

“Although it is right that employers decide the requirements of their sector’s apprenticeship standard, we want to see learners gaining the advantage that a recognised qualification brings.”

Teresa Frith, senior skills policy manager at the Association of Colleges, acknowledged that end-point assessment “does represent a change from the old system”, but said from her perspective the new approach could still be effective.

“In some industries, taking qualifications alongside an apprenticeship will still

be important but for others the EPA is sufficient and the apprenticeship itself is the qualification,” she said.

“Providers need to continually challenge the rigor of the EPA system, so that we can be confident that apprenticeships remain high-quality, nationally recognised qualifications.”

A Department for Education spokesperson said the government’s apprenticeship reforms remain focused on “quality”.

“The previous system was overly complex with a huge number of qualifications that tested incremental progress, but did not necessarily demonstrate that an apprentice was competent at the end of their apprenticeship,” she said.

“We have therefore introduced new apprenticeship standards which are developed by employers themselves and rigorously checked.

“We have also taken steps to protect the term ‘apprenticeship’ from misuse helping us to achieve our target of three million apprenticeship starts by 2020 and providing excellent value for money.”

# poses quality and assessment concerns

## More than half of standards still have no assessor

**ALIX ROBERTSON**  
@ALIXROBERTSON4

**T**oo many uncertainties in the new apprenticeship system is fuelling the acute lack of assessment organisations for new standards, according to the boss of their industry body.

FE Week research has revealed that more than half (87 out of 162) of the apprenticeship standards approved for delivery by the Skills Funding Agency still do not have an approved assessment organisation, despite ongoing concerns from sector figures.

Responding to these findings, Stephen Wright, chief executive of the Federation of Awarding Bodies, told FE Week that the current apprenticeship system contains “too many uncertainties”, and that awarding organisations are likely to be “cautious” about engaging in any



Stephen Wright

assessment that might “compromise their reputation”.

“With the high development cost and the memory of previous failed initiatives it isn’t surprising that many awarding organisations have taken a wait-and-see approach,” he said.

The lack of clarity around external quality assurance and external assessment could also discourage awarding organisations from coming forward, he claimed.

Earlier this month, the awarding giant OCR pulled out of delivering final apprenticeship exams altogether, potentially sending out a negative message to others in the sector.

“Implementing the reforms to apprenticeships will require a high level of development and investment, and OCR has recently decided that, unfortunately, we will not now be pursuing or developing any new apprenticeship standards that incorporate changes in assessment,” said a spokesperson for OCR at the time.

Terry Fennell, the chief executive and

responsible officer at the specialist awarding organisation FDQ, told FE Week that there was a range of issues contributing to “a worrying time for awarding organisations”.

He agreed that the environment is “uncertain”, and that assessors may not want to “pioneer” services and would “probably wait until the market is more stable”.

Mr Fennell pointed out that cost remains a grey area, as there is “still much uncertainty in relation to fees that we can charge”.

He also warned that the EPA at best lacked “sufficient detail” for some standards, but at worst was “virtually undeliverable from an assessment organisation’s perspective”.

Graham Hasting-Evans, managing director of awarding organisation NOCN, said: “There are risks as well as opportunities in the AAO market, and trying to link EPA charges to training costs does not help.

“Government needs to encourage the IfA’s employer groups to engage with potential AAOs as early as possible in the development, so that their knowledge and understanding is incorporated at the beginning.”

Commenting on FE Week’s findings, a Department for Education spokesperson

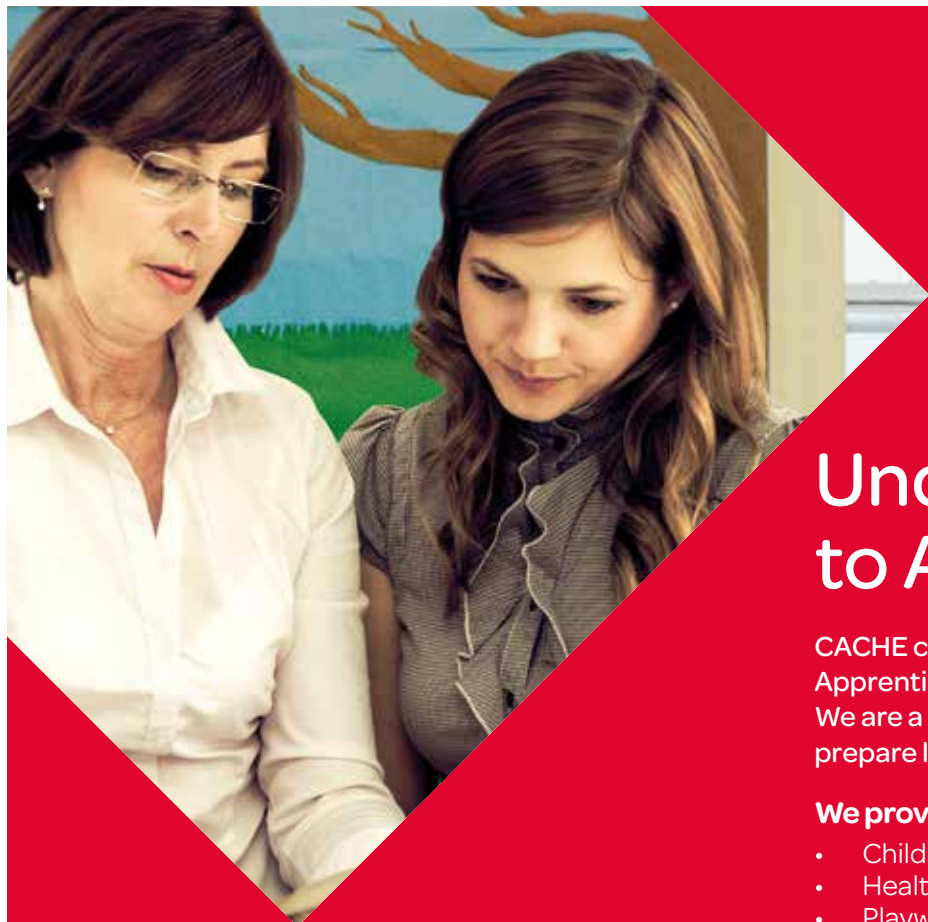
said: “We continue to make good progress in growing the number of AAOs on the register and are taking action to ensure there is always EPA provision by the time apprentices complete their apprenticeship.”

Back in October, FE Week reported that some AAOs applying to the register were being turned away because their plans for EPA were inadequate, after the interim chief executive of the IfA, Peter Lauener, told the parliamentary subcommittee on education, skills and the economy that the SFA had “knocked back quite a lot” of applications.

His comments followed FE Week research which revealed there were at the time no approved AAOs for over 40 per cent of learner starts on new standards.

This revelation provoked Dr Sue Pember, who stood down as the civil service’s head of FE and skills investment in February 2013, to label the situation “diabolical”.

But in November, Mr Lauener told a roomful of delegates at the AELP Autumn conference that the shortage of approved end-point assessors was not a serious problem. He accepted that the situation was “not ideal” but insisted it was “manageable”.



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## NEWS

# Finance director blamed for failings in FE Commissioner report

JUDE BURKE  
@JUDEBURKE77

A former finance director has been singled out as the “root cause” of a major London college’s financial failings, in one of three recent FE commissioner reports.

The former commissioner Sir David Collins and his team visited Lambeth College in September, following a “significant deterioration” in its cashflow.

Their report found that college finances were “no longer sustainable” unless it merged.

They cited and concurred with an investigation that had been carried out by the college itself, which found that “the root cause for both management and governors was the reliance on and trust placed in the vice-principal for finance and business planning who oversaw financial controls that were inadequate”.

Meanwhile, reports of the FE commissioners’ interventions into Tresham College and Epping Forest College – both published on Thursday – revealed that both had been placed in administered status.

Sir David’s team visited Tresham in September after it had been rated ‘inadequate’ by Ofsted, while his successor Richard Atkins visited Epping Forest in January, after it was given a grade four.

The report into Lambeth College found that both the 2015/16 budget setting process and financial reporting had been “poor”.

Its budget had been prepared by its former finance director, but it “was not based on a realistic and accurate curriculum plan”, while there had also been “a lack of rigour in ensuring the budgets were deliverable”.

The college’s principal at the time, Mark Silverman, and its then-finance director, Shaun Orrell, have left the college since its financial difficulties were uncovered.

Mr Orrell, who is currently finance director at independent training provider JTJ Workplace Solutions, said when he took up his post in March 2014 he had inherited a number of issues at the college that he had “worked hard to address”.

He added that there were “several ongoing and significant issues that affected the college’s finances”, including funding cuts, and industrial action at the college.

As previously reported by FE Week, Lambeth is pursuing plans to join forces with London South Bank University, though no date has yet been set for any link-up.

Monica Box, the college’s interim principal, said: “Lambeth College is currently working to address the recommendations within the commission report”.

She added that discussions with LSBU were “moving forward on models of governance”.

about financial systems earlier were being run by external auditors. (March 2016), the internal auditors.

The Report concluded that the decline in the financial position of the College was a result of systemic failure. Although this was primarily a failure of management, the governors were not able to exercise the oversight and challenge that might have enabled the true position to surface earlier. The root cause for both management and governors was the reliance on and trust placed in the VP Finance and Business Planning who oversaw financial controls that were inadequate.

The report into Tresham College said there had been a “high level of churn” in senior management, and that the board had failed to identify this as a “key risk”.

“Weak performance has been left unchallenged until it has reached a crisis point,” it said.

Financial forecasts were meanwhile found to be unrealistic, and it was “likely that the college will go back into deficit this year”.

Although it noted that changes were now being made, the report concluded that “the quality and finance improvement agendas are both now urgent”.

Ioan Morgan, who is the interim principal at Tresham, said he was pleased the report “acknowledges that we have taken appropriate action to address the college’s position”.

He added: “The college is now working towards a merger with Bedford College which will address both quality improvement and financial sustainability.”

The commissioner’s report into Epping Forest was damning about governance,

standards and finances at the college.

While the college’s financial health had been rated ‘good’ until recently, the report concluded that a “significant deterioration” in its finances meant that it would fall to ‘inadequate’.

There were found to be “serious issues” in governance, and both the board and the senior team had “been too slow to recognise the declining quality and financial performance”.

Saboohi Famili, Epping Forest College’s principal, said she agreed with the commissioner’s report and was already working to implement his recommendations.

“The college has already established a renewed leadership team and new members of the board of governors,” she said.

“Our practices have been revamped to ensure our learners are successful in their qualifications and gain university places or progress to higher-level courses or jobs. I have every confidence that the college is on the way up and I am personally grateful for the support we receive from government agencies on our journey.”

# Outrage at decision to widen admissions for small sixth form

BILLY CAMDEN  
@BILLYCAMDEN

The controversial decision to widen admissions at a struggling small-school sixth form has come in for fierce criticism, due to a rapid decline in the need for post-16 provision in the area.

Dyke House Community College, an academy in Hartlepool, opened a sixth form in 2014, offering A-level and BTEC courses.

This was on the condition that the school only took on students who had come up from its own year 11, after they finished their GCSEs, with maximum capacity set at 200.

But it has struggled to fill places since opening, with just 89 students studying at the sixth form in 2015/16, and only 65 on courses this academic year.

To increase numbers, the school applied to widen its admissions to allow students from other providers to join its sixth form from 2018/19, which was approved by the Department for Education in January.

However, other local providers, including the principals of Hartlepool’s FE and sixth form colleges, are in uproar about the decision along with council leaders, claiming that it represented a “wild west” approach to approval.

They complained to FE Week that the move will put unreasonable extra

pressure on other local post-16 providers, in the face of a fast-declining 16-to-18 population that was found by the Tees Valley area review.

Darren Hankey, principal of Hartlepool College, said he was “really at a loss” as to why the government green-lit the admissions change.

“There is clearly no need for extra post-16 provision across the Tees Valley or in Hartlepool,” he told FE Week.

“I don’t blame the school; it is doing all it can to secure its future. However, there should be more of a joined-up approach from the powers that be because. At the moment, it appears to be rationalisation on the one hand and a wild-west approach on the other.”

Maureen Bunter, principal of Hartlepool SFC, said Dyke House’s low student numbers cast doubt on how financially sustainable

it would be. The decision to expand its admissions, she claimed, “completely contradicts the purpose of the area reviews”.

A Hartlepool council spokesperson said the authority “does not support the revision of the admissions policy for the sixth form at Dyke House” and has contacted the Education Funding Agency to “try to understand their position on this matter”.

After FE Week put the concerns to him, Andrew Jordon, executive principal at Dyke House Community College, said the purpose of widening the sixth form’s admission policy was to offer “greater choice and opportunity for all children in Hartlepool who are contemplating their next step in FE”.

This is only the latest baffling decision involving small sixth forms, after the Association of Colleges took the DfE to court last November over its controversial decision

to approve a new small school sixth form at Abbs Cross Academy and Arts College in Essex, even though it would have broken the government’s own rules.

The move prevented plans for the sixth form from going ahead, and the government was supposed to launch a review into the guidance on how small-school sixth forms are approved.

The report on Tees Valley area review of post-16 education, published last November, warned that by 2019/20 there would be about 2,000 fewer 16- to 18-year-olds in the area than there are now.

A raft of mergers were recommended to ensure FE providers in the area would continue to be financially viable, including joining Hartlepool College and Hartlepool SFC.

Julian Gravatt, the AOC’s assistant chief executive, told FE Week that the government must consider the “demand and growth of student numbers, before giving permission for any new institutions to open or expand their offer”.

When asked if AoC had contributed yet to the government review on small sixth forms, he said the association had submitted a letter with proposals for amended guidance on the approval process to civil servants in November.

It is unclear whether the government had taken the matter any further; the DfE refused to respond to FE Week’s request for an update on the review’s progress.



Julian Gravatt



Dyke House Community College



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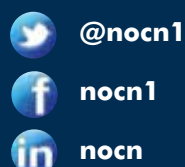
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# Under half inspected UTCs 'good' or 'outstanding'

**ALIX ROBERTSON**  
@ALIXROBERTSON4

Less than half of the university technical colleges visited by Ofsted have received 'good' or 'outstanding' grades, exclusive FE Week analysis has revealed, in another blow to the ailing project.

The education watchdog has now visited a total of 20 UTCs, but only nine of these, or 45 per cent, were judged to be good enough for higher grades.

In fact, just one – UTC Reading – was actually rated 'outstanding' during an inspection in May 2015.

This drags the Ofsted results of UTCs well below those of sixth form colleges, general FE colleges and independent training providers – even though the previous chief inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw warned UTCs last July that they needed to be doing "significantly better".

At the annual conference of the Baker Dearing Trust, the organisation founded by the former education secretary Lord Baker to facilitate the growth of UTCs, Sir Michael said: "If the UTC movement is to survive and prosper, then radical improvement is necessary.

"If this doesn't happen, politicians will come to the conclusion that the model is flawed."

The Ofsted annual report for 2015/16 was also unsympathetic.

"Inspection outcomes to date have not been strong and the potential of these institutions has not yet been realised," it found.

SFCs have fared best in Ofsted's books, with 77 out of 89 (87 per cent) rated 'good' or 'outstanding' according to data for all open and funded providers up to February 28, 2017.

286 out of 346 (83 per cent) ITPs achieved a grade one or two, while for FE colleges the figure is 140 out of 206 (68 per cent).

The most recent Ofsted report into a UTC, the engineering-focused UTC Swindon, produced an overall 'inadequate' rating last month. It received grade fours for effectiveness of leadership and management, quality of teaching, learning and assessment, outcomes for pupils, and 16-to-19 study programmes.

It will now join the FE-backed Activate Learning Education Trust, with backers including Banbury and Bicester College, City of Oxford College, and Reading College.

Energy Coast UTC, which is based in Cumbria and specialises in construction and engineering in the energy sector, was

also rated in February, receiving 'requires improvement' across the board.

And in September 2016, UTC Cambridge, which focuses on biomedical and environmental science and technology, was also branded 'inadequate' overall.

These new figures seem to suggest UTC performance is dipping; at the end of 2015/16, 15 UTCs had been inspected, of which eight, or 53 per cent, had received grades one or two.

During 2015/16, just one grade four overall rating was given, to UTC Plymouth, with grade threes going to Buckinghamshire UTC and UTC Lancashire.

And of the 48 UTCs currently open, 32 still have yet to receive a visit from Ofsted at all.

FE Week put its findings to the Baker Dearing Educational Trust.

Charles Parker, the trust's CEO, conceded: "The Ofsted inspection grade is a key performance indicator for a UTC as with every other school.

"So far, we have not done as well as we should have liked, but no one should underestimate the challenges for our principals and their staff of starting up much-needed technical schools for 14- to 19-year-olds in the current English education system.

"In all cases, where we have been judged

less than good, necessary changes have been made and rapid progress is evident."

There has been more bad news for UTCs however, with the announcement this week that plans for a new one in Guildford have been abandoned.

A post on the UTC's website from its trustees said: "It is with regret that we post this message to inform you of the cancellation.

"Unfortunately the Department for Education is no longer supportive of the project."

Burton and South Derbyshire UTC failed to open in September 2016, after government approval for the project was withdrawn "following low pupil recruitment numbers".

Two more UTCs are scheduled to close in August this year: Daventry UTC, following a financial notice to improve from the Education Funding Agency in April, and the Greater Manchester UTC, as a result of recruitment problems.

These closures follow four that have already shut: Black Country UTC, Hackney UTC, UTC Lancashire, UTC Central Bedfordshire.

Royal Greenwich UTC and Tottenham UTC are both converting to schools, starting in September.

UTC name	Opening date	Closed/problems	Last inspection date	Report published	Overall grade
UTC Swindon	Sept 2014		Jan 25, 2017	Mar 10, 2017	4
Energy Coast UTC	Sept 2014		Feb 1, 2017	Mar 9, 2017	3
Leigh UTC	Sept 2014		Feb 1, 2017	Mar 7, 2017	2
University Technical College Cambridge	Sept 2014		Sept 13, 2016	Nov 24, 2016	4
UTC Plymouth	Sept 2013		Apr 26, 2016	Jun 9, 2016	4
Liverpool Life Sciences UTC	Sept 2013		Jan 26, 2016	Mar 9, 2016	2
University Technical College Lancashire	Sept 2013	Aug 2016	Jan 26, 2016	Mar 4, 2016	3
UTC Sheffield City Centre	Sept 2013		Feb 2, 2016	Mar 1, 2016	2
Bucks University Technical College	Sept 2013	Still open, but served a financial notice to improve by the EFA in May 2017	Jan 12, 2016	Feb 15, 2016	3
Daventry UTC	Sept 2013	Served a financial notice to improve by the EFA in Apr, planned closure in Aug 2017	Apr 29, 2015	Jul 3, 2015	3
Elstree UTC	Sept 2013		May 12, 2015	Jun 29, 2015	3
Wigan UTC	Sept 2013	Still open, but abandoned by sponsor or costing too much	May 19, 2015	Jun 23, 2015	2
UTC Reading	Sept 2013		May 19, 2015	Jun 22, 2015	1
Silverstone UTC	Sept 2013		Apr 29, 2015	Jun 9, 2015	2
Bristol Technology and Engineering Academy	Sept 2013		Apr 21, 2015	Jun 9, 2015	2
Black Country UTC	Sept 2011	Aug 2015	Mar 10, 2015	May 22, 2015	4
Aston University Engineering Academy	Sept 2012		Jun 4, 2014	Jul 21, 2014	2
JCB Academy	Sept 2010		May 7, 2014	Jun 26, 2014	2
UTC Central Bedfordshire	Sept 2012	Aug 2016	Mar 18, 2014	Jun 4, 2014	4
Hackney UTC	Sept 2012	Jul 2014	Jan 15, 2014	Feb 6, 2014	3

Provider type	Grade 1 or 2
UTCs	45%
FE colleges	68%
ITPs	83%
SFCs	87%

Proportion inspected rated 'good' or 'outstanding'

## Latest grade four

UTC Swindon was the latest to receive a damning grade four Ofsted verdict, after inspectors visited in January this year.

Criticisms included the "inadequate achievement" and "weak progress" of pupils in years 10 and 11 in maths, science and engineering, partly due to poor feedback that did not explain how to improve work.

Leaders were said to be making "insufficient use of the wide range of engineering-based industrial partners", and failing to deal with "significant weaknesses in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in order to raise pupils' achievement".

The governors were said to be "supportive" of school leaders, but were not challenging them "robustly enough to improve the quality of teaching and raise pupils' achievement".

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# MARK DAWE

Chief executive, Association of  
Employment and Learning Providers

## There are two levels of unfairness in further education

Mark Dawe made his maiden speech as chief executive of AELP at last year's Annual Apprenticeship Conference. One year on, he tackles a familiar question: are FE institutions treated fairly?

My youngest of four children, the only girl, often retorts "What about me?" when I make the mistake of saying "come on, boys". Given my own experience in the further education sector, I really should empathise more.

I come from a background of educational privilege and I have seen what is possible. I have also run an exam board working with nearly every school in the country, while in various roles in FE I worked closely with schools and universities. I have witnessed the political priorities in what was the original all-encompassing DfES. Here is what I've learned.

### There is inequity in the education system

Despite positive noises about skills and extra money in last week's budget, I don't think anyone can deny that while all public services are suffering at the moment, further education gets a tougher deal compared with schools and universities.

And this disparity has a direct knock-on effect for learners. FE has some of the most challenging learners and is the engine for

social mobility and productivity.

While it's increasingly recognised, resources don't follow rhetoric – I am sure I don't need to go into the funding per learner in HE or schools compared to FE – and the sector has every right to shout and scream on behalf of the young people and adults it tries to support.

In many ways the Brexit vote represented a proportion of the population who didn't feel like they had a voice – something we have said in FE for decades. Maybe if ministers, secretaries of state and prime ministers paid a little more attention to the FE sector, they would have a better understanding of the mood – and challenges – of the nation.

### There is inequity within FE

Some people accuse me of being anti-college, but this couldn't be further from the truth. Working in colleges for over 12 years, I have represented them regionally and nationally. I was principal of the first college to join what was then ALP – they understood how to engage with employers and I wanted to learn how. Moreover, many of the issues were common to all providers and I thought we should be campaigning side by side.

I am a cheerleader for the FE sector as a whole. I hate 'Cinderella', 'second chance', 'safety net' and the many other labels the

sector has been given and still uses itself. With the apprenticeship policy and the technical and professional proposals, we can see a genuine light at the end of the reputation tunnel.

However, I also hate injustice, and as much as there is inequity of treatment between FE and HE and schools, inequity also exists within the sector. Namely, independent training providers and colleges are treated differently.

In some cases, this may be justified – especially when their functions and purposes are different – but there are also cases I shall outline below, where the inequity feels like nothing more than bias.

### Terminations

The government's approach to colleges and ITPs is very different. Take the recent demise of First4Skills, closed down almost overnight primarily because of a grade four from Ofsted, resulting in an abrupt end to their Skills Funding Agency contract.

While I hold to my conviction that 'inadequate' provision does not deserve new starts, the owner of First4Skills is a grade three (previously grade four) college that continued to get funding for new starts despite a damning letter from the minister over four months ago. If ever there were a situation to open a wound and then rub handfuls of salt into it, this has to be it.

### Bailouts

The government made clear in its apprenticeship register rules that a college with a grade four could continue to recruit apprentices if its apprenticeship provision was at a better grade, but gave no such leeway to the non-college sector.

Colleges didn't have to demonstrate financial security; non-colleges did, despite the message that colleges would be allowed to go bust.

### Capital funding

The ITP sector has never ever had capital funding or any kind of capital support yet colleges have. ITPs are not getting grants for consultancy to set up apprenticeship companies, joint ventures, etc – while colleges are. While this is not technically state aid (we checked), it is the closest yet.

### Subcontracting

The news is nearly always about subcontractors going bust, or lack of control over the subcontractor, but it is those doing the subcontracting that need to be challenged. The prime contractor is responsible for monitoring the quality and financial stability of those they work with.

Bad subcontracting is a consequence of a clunky funding system, where the money is not going to the providers that can do the job and there is no willingness to redistribute funds once allocated – in many cases allowing large management fees for no management, which is totally unacceptable.

Good subcontracting and proper partnerships are great for the sector. Dishing out money while retaining a margin is simply bad practice.

### Adult funding

Over 90 per cent of adult education is now grant-funded to colleges and local authority providers – with only £110 million put out to tender. To add insult to injury, colleges are able to compete with ITPs for their paltry



Mark Dawe speaking at last year's Annual Apprenticeship Conference

slice of funds.

This isn't going to remain static; we have the continued pressure of austerity and the looming implementation of devolution. Surely combined authorities will see that a greater proportion of the budget should be commissioned?

However, it seems this may be stymied in the name of financial stability for colleges; we are already hearing local authorities complain that the DfE readiness conditions include a requirement not to destabilise the college sector.

#### Let's be honest about the biases

In short, there is an underlying bias in favour of colleges. If this is what the government wants, let's at least be honest about it. Let's have colleges as public assets and provide them the support they need to survive in their current form.

However if they are independent, let the

many good colleges flourish, while those that fail can wither and die.

Fundamentally, some key decisions have to be made about what we want our colleges to be. My view is that large monolithic institutions delivering skills development away from the workplace doesn't work.

Just listen to the voice of apprentices and employers articulating the benefits of being embedded in the workplace and supported while in a job. Large educational establishments scare many of the learners we are trying to reach.

#### We need to speak for those who don't have a voice

When we argue for fair funding, it should be for FE and its students. Funding should follow the learner and be the same no matter who is delivering it.

I sometimes wonder (conspiracy theory warning) whether there is a deliberate plan

to cause friction within the sector, so we forget the problems caused by government for the learners we are all striving to serve.

We all need to fight the elitist viewpoint that level two is low quality and doesn't deserve to underpin an apprenticeship, fight the view that academic assessment is good therefore everything has to be externally examined, no matter what skills and competencies are being developed and tested.

The schools fairer funding campaign is getting lots of media attention, and HE fees almost brought down a government; but ripping out 16-18 apprenticeship funding and disadvantage funding, for example, was barely noticed outside the FE sector.

We have to speak up for those young people and adults with the quietest voices, and we need to purge the biases that lead to inefficiencies and poor delivery, and encourage everyone in the system to play to their strengths.

#### Colleges and ITPs have different strengths

Many colleges agree ITPs are far better at engaging with employers: colleges are not structured to respond in the flexible ways employers expect. They suffer from their own bureaucracy, which stifles their chances of proper employer engagement.

Colleges have incredible resources for full-time learning, but local niche organisations are often better at community work.

Some colleges are excellent at meeting the agenda, but generally the further the apprenticeship delivery unit is from the college systems, management, KPIs and processes and the more they are left alone, the more successful they are.

Each part of the FE sector has its own strengths – the sooner we recognise this, the sooner we will all be able to focus on those strengths and work collaboratively.



## Timeline of Mark Dawe's first year as chief executive of AELP

## EXPERTS- AAC CONFERENCE PREVIEW

**It can be a struggle to win media coverage, but there are ways to increase your chances of getting heard, says Ruth Sparkes**

Could it be that vocational qualifications just aren't sexy enough? Granted, they are getting recognition, but they're not up there with the likes of GCSEs and A-levels just yet.

I mean, I don't remember seeing female twin or triplet apprentices jumping up and down in strappy summer tops brandishing technical certificates on the front pages of national daily newspapers.

FE has suffered over recent times and the apprenticeship 'brand' has taken a bit of a beating. But (the levy and register aside) there is definitely a new positive buzz, and even awareness surrounding apprenticeships that I have certainly not experienced before.

### “ The apprenticeship 'brand' has taken a bit of a beating

Cybersecurity, law, marketing, veterinary nursing, journalism, software development and auctioneering are just some of the new and exciting industry areas for apprentices and we are seeing some fabulous marketing initiatives.

This buzz could quite feasibly be leveraged

**The changes to apprenticeships are great, but we must make work experience work too, says Rod Natkiel**

Of course there will be teething troubles as the levy kicks in, but current developments in the apprenticeships arena – the most significant overhaul of the system for more than 30 years – have to be warmly welcomed. Anything that significantly enhances employability, work readiness and job prospects must be good.

Many of today's senior industry leaders will say that they owe it all to what they learned as an apprentice. Apprenticeships are already in the DNA of industries like engineering, but one of the most positive outcomes of these new initiatives will be their becoming the norm in all industries, professions and sectors.

But – and there's always a but – there are dangers of which we must be aware.

Sir Dominic Cadbury's line, that “there is no such thing as a career path; there is only crazy paving and you have to lay it yourself”, so effectively encapsulates what has happened to the pattern of working life in recent decades. People are forced to navigate an extremely complex and confusing path which, almost invariably, has no clear signposts.

Work experience is important to successful navigation, whether it's paid or unpaid. Apprenticeships are a powerful and influential form of work experience, but they are not the only one.

My first concern is that, in all the frenzy



## RUTH SPARKES

Director of education marketing and PR agency, EMPRA

### How to get positive media coverage for FE

to give a boost to the FE sector as a whole in the public consciousness.

So, what is it about vocational qualifications that gives journalists (other than the fabulous staff at FE Week) that glazed look? Is it the way we're 'selling' that puts them off 'buying'?

Granted, not everything that happens in the world of FE is newsworthy, however with a hook, a good picture and careful timing you can very often leverage column inches.

I'm running a session at the Annual Apprenticeship Conference 2017 that will look at:

**The 'dull story' hall of fame:** What is and isn't news.

**Messages:** For parents and apprentices, your message might be 'employers are hungry for certain skills and this is the most cost effective route to a rewarding and well-paid career – debt free', but the message for employers might be something different.

**How to leverage current national stories:** Topics to piggyback upon, such as; skills shortages, mindfulness, women in STEM,

males in primary schools, aerospace and Brexit.

**Using a personal or unusual angle:** Looking for something unique. We've used ex-soldiers who've retrained in construction – Baghdad to Battersea – and a costume apprentice at the English National Opera.

**Timing is everything:** We'll look at some real-life examples of how timing has ensured an improved take-up of apprenticeship-related press releases.

**Have you got the tools for the job?** We'll look at some helpful (and not so helpful) online tools to help get your story in front of the right people.

If you're not able to attend the workshop at AAC 2017 – here are my top tips for getting press coverage.

**Timing**

Can you create a local story by piggybacking on a national event?

**Pictures**

VERY important these days – stories are getting shorter, and newspapers and websites

need images. A good picture is where you will gain the advantage.

**Topicality**

What's new is news.

**Write for the publication**

Newspapers generally have a house style. Look at who you are writing for and copy their house style. A pitch idea for a national paper will look quite different.

**Widen your net**

If you have a story about, for example, a carpentry apprentice, don't just think local – think niche, too. A search will reveal that there are 27 magazine contacts who are interested in writing about carpentry.

**Don't just think print**

Look at broadcast, blogs and online news, too.

**Key messages**

If a story can't include one of your key messages, ditch it.

**Quotes**

All PRs ought to have a quote. Often if you cannot see a way to include a key message, you can use a quote to ensure there is link back.

**Comment pieces**

Some national titles have comment sections on their online platforms. Examples include: The Independent, The Guardian, Huffington Post, TES and FE Week

**Relationships**

Build relationships with your local journalists, education journalists and citizen journalists/bloggers.

*Ruth Sparkes will be running a workshop entitled 'Top tips for positive media coverage' at AAC2017*



## ROD NATKIEL

CEO, Fair Train

### Apprenticeships aren't everything

currently surrounding apprenticeships, and the resources their implementation will demand, other types of work experience will get less attention than they merit.

Placements (from the traditional five days for year 10 students to the incoming three-month placements for 16- to 19-year-olds in technical education), traineeships, internships and volunteering that leads to employment are all immensely important.

Traineeships have an especially key role to play as a lead-in, pre-apprenticeship programme. One could consider placements, internships and volunteering as being primarily about “soft skills” and getting to understand the working environment – whereas traineeships can be considered more “sleeves-rolled-up” preparation for a job in a specific sector.

Unemployed young people who have little or no work experience and who have not

yet achieved a full level three qualification are going to find the job hunt especially hard. They're also unlikely to be ready to fully capitalise on an apprenticeship. Traineeships help to bridge that experience and skills gap, as well as adding capacity to

### “ Getting it right is a win-win-win

employers, and to send the learners on the path to employment or an apprenticeship.

Work experience that begins as early as possible (and I'd like to see it start with 11-year-olds) and continues throughout a young person's educational and personal development, taking some people right

through to a degree apprenticeship, is a hugely powerful navigational tool for those learners on careers' crazy paving.

For employers, it represents a genuine talent pipeline that has significant bottom-line benefits, alongside CSR merits. These range from cutting recruitment costs to providing invaluable management experience and raising both the morale and productivity of an existing workforce.

Getting it right is a win-win-win for learner, employer and learning provider – and ultimately for our economy and society.

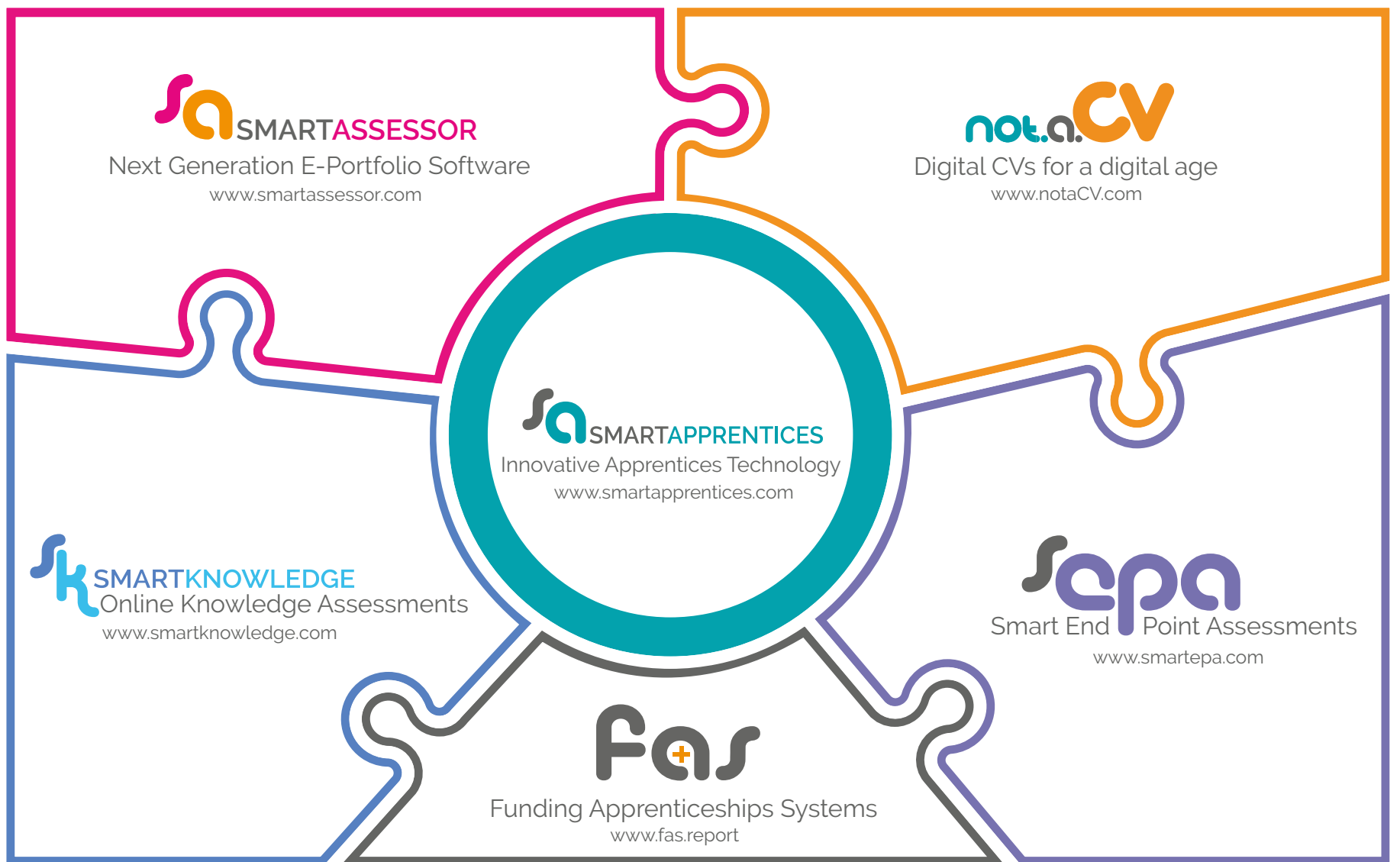
But it is pointless if the work experience, in whatever form, is not undertaken by all parties at the highest possible quality. And that's my other concern.

In focusing on meeting numerical targets and ensuring that levy contributions are fully used, there's a risk of corners being cut and apprenticeships not being carried out thoroughly enough. The new standards, if devised correctly, will be an invaluable guide to getting it right, but success will be absolutely dependent on everyone involved being committed to quality.

So, as the apprenticeships momentum gathers pace, let's not overlook other forms of work experience, which are vital elements, both in learners' pathways and employers' talent pipelines and, above all, let's not jeopardise quality as we strive for quantity.

*Rod Natkiel will be running a workshop called 'Creating a talent pipeline for the future' at AAC2017*

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## EDITORIAL

## I wouldn't 'trust' the new register



Many of the colleges and training providers that failed to get on the apprenticeship provider register are red-faced.

Not just angry but embarrassed, given some simply failed to comprehensively answer the questions in the tender document.

The SFA is sticking to its guns, but I suspect a quick reapplication will result in this being a temporary setback.

A much bigger concern should be whether this new register contains only what the DfE press release described as "top-quality training providers".

Robert Halfon, the apprenticeships minister, when unveiling the register, also said: "We are giving employers the confidence to do business with high-quality training providers."

And we've since received press releases from jubilant firms claiming they have been given what they call "government trusted training provider status".

But, to my surprise, it turns out companies with little or no trading history have successfully found their way onto the register.

These new firms probably wrote beautiful apprenticeship plans in their application, but in the real world employers get confidence from experience.

The SFA said they would set the entry bar high, but as exposed in the pages of FE Week, this has proven not to be the case.

So employers will still need to do their own due diligence when picking a provider, posing the question: why bother with a register at all?

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

## ROATP TWEETS:

**Carla Martinho** @CarlaMartinho1

Didn't pass this time? Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers reopens for applications 20th March #RoATP @tribalgrouop

**Ian Pryce** @ipryce

DfE looks hard at governance of colleges & MATs but doesn't give a monkeys about governance of private providers, most risky for taxpayer

**Calvin Turner** @calvin8turner

Very surprised by the absence of famous colleges that can't now deliver apprenticeships from 1 May. #roatp

**Susanna Lawson** @SusannaOneFile

About 75% of those that applied got onto #RoATP #apprenticeships

**Victoria Faulkner** @VikiFaulkner

Proud to be one of the 72 universities in this 'club' #RoATP #degreeapprenticeships @uniofbrighton

**K2Development** @\_k2development

Congratulations to all providers on the register! A huge 1708 providers now on the #RoATP. Keep up the hard work!



## No Birmingham colleges make apprenticeships register

**JUDE BURKE**  
@JUDEBURKE77

The nation's second largest city may not have an FE college delivering apprenticeships when the levy launches in April, as none of its colleges has made it onto the new register of apprenticeship training providers.

Birmingham Metropolitan College, Bournville College, South and City College and Solihull College were all missing from the list published by the Skills Funding Agency on Tuesday – despite the four currently delivering almost £12 million worth of apprenticeships between them.

Several other major apprenticeship-delivering colleges have also failed to make the list, including Bournemouth and Poole College and Hartlepool College, both rated 'good' by Ofsted, and which have apprenticeship allocations of £5.6 million and £2.9 million respectively.

In all, FE Week estimates that at least 21 colleges that were eligible to apply, with a combined allocation of £44 million, did not make it onto the register.

David Hughes, AoC's chief executive, said he was "concerned about the exclusion of some high-quality colleges from the register" and would be raising the issue with the SFA and the Department for Education "as a matter of urgency".

BMet's principal Andrew Cleaves told FE Week that "we are very surprised and disappointed by the outcome".

He said that his college, which has the largest 2016/17 SFA allocation of all four, at almost £4.7m, had "put forward a solid proposal to the SFA" and had "grown significantly this past year".

The college's most recent Ofsted report was published Thursday (March 16) and gave the college a grade three overall, with a grade two for apprenticeship provision.

"We are now working with the SFA to see how we can address things and are confident that this will reach a positive conclusion over the coming weeks, for BMet and our many satisfied employers and apprentices," he said.

Bournville College and South and City College, which are currently in federation ahead of a planned merger later this year, have a 2016/17 apprenticeships allocation of almost £5 million between them.

South and City College received a grade two overall, including its apprenticeship provision, when it was inspected by Ofsted in December 2015.

But Bournville received a grade four for its apprenticeship provision during its most recent Ofsted inspection in September – which meant it was ineligible to apply for the register, according to SFA rules.

A spokesperson for the two colleges confirmed that Bournville hadn't applied. "However, we were very shocked to

discover that the South and City College application had been unsuccessful, given our grade two Ofsted report and excellent track record," she said.

"We are keen to understand why this was the case and have already sought feedback. It is our intention to reapply at the next possible opportunity."

A spokesperson for Solihull College said it was "very surprised" not to be on the new register.

The college, which has an allocation of £2.3 million, was rated 'good' overall and for its apprenticeship provision at its most recent Ofsted inspection in November.

The college is "in discussion" with the SFA about "next steps and are awaiting a response".

All four colleges were part of the Birmingham and Solihull area review, along with three sixth form colleges – none of which are on the register.

One of the outcomes from the review, which finished in March last year, was to set up an apprenticeship company.

According to the review's final report, which was published in November, the company would "provide the first collaborative college-owned company delivering a dedicated service to employers to increase the range, volume and quality of apprenticeships in the Birmingham and Solihull area" and would be "driven by employer demand".

## COMMENTS

**Breaking: Full Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers finally published**

Very Happy for all those who made it through, but still unsure how you pass a quality assurance check with a Grade 4 ofsted report. I did a quick random check of 18 providers on the list 10 had a grade 2, 3 have no ofsted report, 1 was 10 years ago and 4 are inadequate all within the last 12 months. As an employer that wouldn't fill me with confidence!

Andrew H

What about the 25% who didn't make it? There are a number of excellent providers with decades of history, good Ofsted grades and well above average achievement rates who are not on the register (we are by the way). A simple mistake in the application / tender and the SFA computer says 'no!'. There should have been a sense check built in to avoid good providers being rejected. I suspect they realise this which is why they have brought forward the next round of tenders. I wouldn't be surprised if the turnaround is much quicker and the register is updated in May.

Malcolm Armstrong

**Studio school to stop recruiting from 14 and become sixth form**

What a mess these constant changes are messing with the lives of students and staff. Huge amounts of taxpayers money are sloshing around from one scheme to another. The only people benefitting are the fat cats at the top on their six figure salaries.

Susan kindred

**More loans misery as provider goes under**

I beseech the SFA to heed these portents of doom! How easily this could be an apprenticeship disaster story if the due diligence of RoATP and procurement allows financially weak organisations into the market. This is a tough business, especially in cash flow terms. You need money in the bank to ride the rough periods. I'd hate to see a headline of a provider going bust leaving apprentices and employers in the lurch.

Matt Garvey

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## EXPERTS



## THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

Graham Taylor is principal and chief executive at New College Swindon

# Level the playing field for colleges vs schools

**D**o colleges feel picked on? You bet. Funding cuts over the last 10 years and the difficulties in dealing with less money, annual redundancy rounds and adapting to a declining market have led to us being put under the cosh by government and Ofsted in a number of ways, some unfairly.

There isn't a level playing field. Colleges need to be treated in the same way as other providers, such as academies, school sixth forms and UTCs. Here's what needs to change: **VAT**

FE colleges pay it... others don't. If we demerged our 16-18 work and set up an academy, we'd save £350,000 a year in VAT.

Let's have one system, or let everyone use the other, to even things out, even though there's a good chance that Spreadsheet Phil might prefer that all institutions pay.

### New buildings

Colleges, or at least the financially viable ones, contribute to capital expenditure. In our case we have self-funded new build and the most we have ever received from the government is a 25 per cent contribution. The benefit of this approach is that it does make you think long and hard as to what you really need and why.

But school sixth forms and UTCs get 100 per cent capital funding. The taxpayer pays for the lot. No wonder there's excess capacity of bricks and mortar for 16-18 provision, the average class size in school sixth forms is around seven – according to DfE data – and UTCs are on average working at only 50 per cent capacity. This is not an efficient use of scarce educational resources.

### Area reviews

The heroic assumption with area reviews is that merging will cure all financial ills. We know that this doesn't always follow: colleges large and small have got into financial difficulties.

But if big is beautiful, then surely UTCs and school sixth forms should be subjected to the same scrutiny?

There are over 1,200 school sixth forms and UTCs in this country each with less than 100 learners – a concern in terms of value for money/efficiency, never mind quality and breadth of the learner experience.

### Quality

The DfE should publish 16-18 achievement rates for all providers, including drop-out rates as well as year-end successes – it's the only way of assessing overall quality. The performance tables do not show drop-outs from subjects or institutions, except indirectly in the progress measures for English and maths, because a score of -1 is assigned for a

drop-out or a no-show at an exam.

On a positive note, here's what looks like it might be changing:

### Access to schools

Colleges struggle to get access to schools so we have to rely on expensive, above-the-line advertising to get our message across. From a freedom-of-choice perspective this is unfair.

Lord Baker's amendment to the Technical and Further Education Bill (which has already become immortalised as the 'Baker clause') theoretically means schools will have to allow a "range of education and training providers" access to pupils aged between 13 and 18, to promote technical education qualifications or apprenticeships.

This should be for all provision, including 'academic' and hybrid (a mix of academic with vocational) routes. It's high time this change happened.

### T-levels

**“ This is not efficient use of scarce resources**

Funding for primary and secondary education has risen rapidly in the last 25 years, and universities can raise income by levying tuition fees. But there's been no such rise for FE.

So the budget announcement on T-levels – which seem to be a resurrection of Ed Balls' 14 routes to stardom (now 15) – provides a welcome boost in funding to vocational education.

The chancellor has promised an additional £500 million a year by 2022 – a 19 per cent increase. This goes some way to restoring the cuts to maximum annual funded hours, now down to 540 and 450 respectively for 17 and 18-year-olds.

I hope the extra funding will flow to broader educational needs including the generic skills of English, maths and IT. If so, this might just be the longer term solution to increased productivity that the chancellor wants.

These two developments suggest government seems (at last!) to understand that further education is vital to the future of the UK's economy.

Let's hope they follow up these positive announcements by addressing the remaining inequalities. FE has been the Cinderella sector far too long.



## SAM PARRETT

OBE, principal and CEO of London South East Colleges

# How we're preparing for the work experience revolution

**The government is right to identify work experience as vital to high-quality technical education, but the cost of managing all those placements shouldn't be underestimated, says Sam Parrett**

**T**he FE world – and indeed the wider education sector – welcomed last week's budget statement, which included a £500 million windfall for technical education reforms.

Rarely the recipients of such a gift, all of us in FE have been eagerly studying the proposals to find out what it may really mean for us and our students.

The introduction of T-levels with 15 career-focused pathways is central to the reforms, which will consolidate thousands of vocational qualifications. So far, so good. I am fully supportive of any initiative which aims to raise parity of esteem between academic and technical education, and I very much hope this will move things in the right direction.

But what will affect colleges, learning providers and businesses even more significantly are the proposals relating to work experience. Quite rightly, it is flagged as being crucial to all vocational education programmes, and it's a vital theme in the new technical education reforms.

All 16- to 19-year-olds working on a new T-level programme will see their study hours increased by 50 per cent to around 900 hours a year, and will be required to do a three-month work placement as part of their course.

This is a significant undertaking for employers and colleges, particularly at a time when many businesses are already taking on more young people in the form of apprentices and trainees.

FE is generally much better than schools at providing more industry-led learning experiences. Many colleges having excellent links with employers, realistic learning environments and facilities, and teaching staff who are experts in their vocational field.

Good careers advice can help young people identify where their passion lies, and is the best way to reach their career goal.

But ultimately, if the government is going to realise its ambitious vision for work experience, we need to see real collaboration between employers and schools/colleges.

Not only must we ensure placements are worthwhile for young people, we need to make sure that employers also benefit in the short term as well as the long term. Having

an extra pair of hands can be a hindrance if a student is uninterested and lacking in basic communication skills, but a keen, enthusiastic and motivated student can be a real asset to any business.

It also needs to be made easier for businesses to manage their placements and create strategies to ensure the young person gets a meaningful experience, for example: careful monitoring, mutually-agreed objectives and documented outcomes. Employers need to see that the time they are putting in will result in a skilled pipeline of talent further down the line.

At my college, we are already preparing for the work experience revolution by setting up an employment and skills board, with 11 subgroups covering each industry area. The aim of these groups is to ensure that employers have direct input into the curriculum development, which in turn provides them with reassurance that our students will be equipped with the necessary skills.

**“ Next year we'll have to triple our work experience coordinators**

Establishing a relationship with a diverse range of employers is not only helping us shape our study programmes effectively, but will also give these businesses an insight into the importance of providing young people with work-related experience.

The government is absolutely right to identify work experience as important. However, what shouldn't be underestimated is the cost of planning, organising, monitoring and managing placements for, in our case, around 4,500 students.

Last year we had to triple the numbers of our maths and English teachers, next year we'll have to do the same with our work experience coordinators! This is no easy task for an already squeezed FE sector – and I can't help feeling that the £500 million may be a drop in the ocean.

However, I do firmly believe that working collaboratively with employers will move things in the right direction – for both students and our economy.



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## CAMPUS ROUND-UP *with Samantha King*

### Virtual reality film, real fire risks



Hot stuff: Andy Gillespie from West Midlands Fire Service with Dean Webb

A Walsall College student has become the face of road safety after appearing in a promotional virtual reality film created by the West Midlands Fire Service.

The seven-minute video will be used to educate young people in colleges and universities across the west Midlands about driving safely.

Dean Webb, a 20-year-old level three performing arts student, spent two days working in various locations across the Black Country to film the video, which has been shot from the driver's perspective.

Following a group of friends on their journey to a party, the film – which can

even be watched through a virtual reality headset – provides a 360-degree immersive experience, and poses decisions for the viewer to make. The choices they make will determine which scenario they end up in.

Dean said: "I really enjoyed being involved in the filming as it's been a great experience.

"We do a lot of shows at college but this is the first time I've worked for a client with a real script.

"Filming the video gave me an insight into what it's like for real actors in the industry and has made me want to become an actor even more."



Media students with the Hawker Siddeley HS.121 Trident 1C aircraft

### Rare plane is backdrop for student horror film

A group of media students from East Durham College have used a rare passenger plane as the location for several of their horror film projects.

The 14 students, all studying their technical level three diploma in media, paid a visit to the last complete Hawker Siddeley Trident 1C passenger plane left in the world, and used it as the backdrop for their shoot.

The former BA aircraft was moved from Heathrow airport to Durham Tees Valley in 1983 when it left service, before it was brought to its current home at the North East

Land, Sea and Air Museum in 2011.

Amanda Gregory, the head of department said: "They are each making a horror film, and working on a green screen was distracting from what was happening later in the film. Having explored different effects, they decided to do it in a real environment.

"This is the only plane of its kind still in existence and the footage was incredible."

The final results will be seen when the films – covering every aspect of the genre from monster movies to zombies – are completed as part of the course.



A float from last year's Totton carnival

Saved by the cheque

### 103-year-old carnival saved by local college

A Hampshire college has saved a historic local carnival from cancellation by stepping in as the official sponsor.

After concerns the 103-year-old Totton and Eling carnival would be cancelled due to lack of funds, Totton College offered up financial support to keep it afloat following discussions with carnival organisers.

Not only will the college now fund the event, but students on the BTEC public services courses will act as stewards on the day.

Derek Headrige, the college's campus

principal, said: "The carnival is close to the hearts of many residents here in Totton which is why it is so important to us that it goes ahead. It is a longstanding tradition and is always well attended.

"It is a really upbeat and positive event that brings the whole community together and we are delighted to be providing our support this year to make it happen."

The theme of the carnival – which takes place on June 10 – is 'animals', and there are around 16 floats expected on the day.

### Women's car awards announce apprenticeship category

An annual event identifying and promoting women in the car industry will, for the first time, have a category for apprentices.

Every year, Autocar's annual Great British Women in the Car Industry looks for the most promising women working in UK automotive industry, and celebrates the top 100 at an annual awards ceremony.

This year, winners will also be picked in the new apprentices category, alongside those in the existing categories of vehicle development, manufacturing, purchasing, retail, marketing, communications, design, motorsport and executive.

Candidates must be nominated by friends, colleagues or their employers, with judges

taking into account the influence or potential future influence each individual has when making their decision.

Mike Hawes, chief executive of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, said: "We need to attract the most talented people to enter the workplace. We want to highlight successful women who've made a difference in UK automotive and to provide inspiration for many others considering their future careers."

To submit a nomination, please email Autocar's editorial director Jim Holder by April 3 at jim.holder@haymarket.com. There is no limit to the number of nominations that can be made.

The winners will be announced on June 21



In the driving seat: winners at the 2016 awards

CAMPUS ROUND-UP *with Samantha King*

## Food fight as budding chefs take over local hotel's kitchen

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A team of student chefs staged a kitchen takeover at a local hotel and went head to head in a culinary battle. Samantha King reports

Six student chefs from Sunderland College took over the kitchen of the Washington Holiday Inn for a day, to create their own three-course menus.

Splitting into teams of two, the culinary trainees went head to head under the watchful eye of the hotel's head chef Mariusz Urbanczyk, and battled it out to see who would be crowned takeover champions.

The winning team, who created the dish that was most popular with guests, was made up of Eleanor Wilson, Morgan Brickle and Connor Mills.

The students made quite an impression on the hotel's general manager Paul Mandeir, who said he was "delighted" with the way the day went.

He added: "It is clear from the delivery of service that the students will excel in the hospitality trade. All of the guests who attended enjoyed the food and left delighted with the event."

The event wasn't just to determine who



(Front) Eleanor Wilson and Keaton Carney.

(Back) Connor Mills, Morgan Brickle, Holiday Inn head chef Mariusz Urbanczyk, Leigh Turnbull and Katie Mulley



Gearing up for the big event back at the college kitchen

the best chefs were however, with £160 raised on the day going to the Holiday Inn's chosen charities, Grace House and Greenfingers.

Rob Stewart, Sunderland College's curriculum leader for hospitality, tourism and engagement, said:

"We were really pleased to help support local charities and give the learners an

opportunity to see inside a different type of kitchen to any they'd seen or worked in before.

"They all put in a lot of effort to prepare for the event and so hearing such positive feedback from the diners made it all worthwhile."

Last September, the college's catering students were moved into brand new facilities, which included a bakery, a training kitchen, two learning kitchens, plus a new commercial restaurant, City Bistro.

"With the facilities our students are used

to cooking in day in day out, they are gaining the knowledge and skills they need to become top chefs," added Mr Stewart.

"We encourage them to do as many work placements as they can in restaurants while they are studying with us and along with the experience they gain in City Bistro – which is fast becoming one of the most popular restaurants in the city – they are getting a great head start in the industry."

The takeover was arranged with the help of Reed NCFE, which joined forces with Sunderland College in 2014 to create a job zone offering work experience opportunities and careers guidance.

Katrina Blyth, employment broker for Reed NCFE, said: "The students have had the chance to create their own menus, cost their menu, prepare and, ultimately, take over the professional kitchen at the Holiday Inn, cooking for a restaurant of people."

"This has proved to be a real eye-opener for the students in terms of the hard work that goes in to running a real-life, working kitchen and they have all done a wonderful job."

## Do you want to be in Campus Round-up?

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# MOVERS & SHAKERS

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

There have been two new appointments at Askham Bryan College, which specialises in land-based courses.

**Sandra Burnhill** has been appointed executive director of the York college.

She joins Askham Bryan from her role as assistant principal at Kirklees College, which she has held since 2009.

Beginning her career as a police officer, she first started working in further education in 1989 as a sport and public services lecturer at Dewsbury College. She later became its head of department before moving on to the role of assistant principal.

In the new role at the college, Ms Burnhill says she is most "looking forward to returning to her North Yorkshire roots" and sees working in the land sector as going back to her "agricultural" beginnings, after growing up with the sheep her parents kept.

"For a while now I have wanted to work with students learning about the land-based sector," she said.

"I am looking forward to working with the college's curriculum team, particularly

with the challenges and opportunities which government reforms to apprenticeships offer."



SANDRA BURNHILL



JOSH BANKS



PAUL RILEY

She will begin in the role on March 20.

A former Askham Bryan student, **Josh Banks**, has been meanwhile appointed as the college's farm manager.

He will be responsible for running the three farms at the campus – totalling more than 600 hectares of land – as well as supporting student learning and assisting with public visits such as lambing Sunday, which often attracts 5,000 visitors.

He will oversee facilities such as the college's milking parlour, which has the capacity for more than 240 cows, as well as

crops currently being grown across the land.

Mr Banks, 30, graduated from the college four years ago, and has since gained experience across the industry, specialising in livestock. He said he was "delighted to be back at the college".

"During my three years there as a student I thoroughly enjoyed my learning experience.

"My degree gave me the ability to progress quickly through the industry, culminating in my recent appointment as the college's new farm manager."

**Paul Riley** has been appointed as the new principal at Worthing College.

The West Sussex college is spread across an 18 acre campus, and received a 'good' rating from Ofsted in its latest inspection.

Mr Riley takes up the new role from his prior position as interim principal at the college, which he has held since September last year following the retirement of Peter Corrigan.

In response to the appointment, he said he was "thrilled to be given the opportunity to be the guardian of the Worthing College community".

He hopes to lead the college to an 'outstanding' Ofsted rating within the next three years, adding: "I am relishing the prospect of leading the organisation and continuing with the innovative work we are already doing to create an exciting and dynamic college in the heart of our local community."

# Apprenticeships are changing.

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### FE Week Sudoku challenge

How to play: Fill in all blank squares making sure that each row, column and 3 by 3 box contains the numbers 1 to 9

	4			5	9	2		3
9								
	5	6			8		7	
6				9	7		5	
		9				8		
	1		8	2				7
	8		3			1	9	
								6
3		5	9	4			2	

Difficulty:  
**EASY**

		8		5				9
6		9		1				
	5		8			7	6	
7	9		2					1
		5				2		
8					4		7	5
	6	2			7		3	
				2		6		7
5				9		1		

Difficulty:  
**MEDIUM**

Solutions:  
Next edition

### Last Week's solutions

9	6	4	7	3	1	8	5	2
2	1	8	4	5	9	7	3	6
5	3	7	6	2	8	9	1	4
1	8	3	2	7	5	4	6	9
4	9	5	1	8	6	3	2	7
6	7	2	9	4	3	5	8	1
8	4	1	5	6	7	2	9	3
3	2	9	8	1	4	6	7	5
7	5	6	3	9	2	1	4	8

Difficulty:  
**EASY**

4	7	2	9	5	1	8	3	6
8	5	9	7	3	6	1	4	2
6	1	3	8	4	2	7	5	9
7	2	1	5	8	3	9	6	4
3	4	5	6	7	9	2	1	8
9	8	6	2	1	4	3	7	5
2	3	4	1	9	5	6	8	7
1	9	7	4	6	8	5	2	3
5	6	8	3	2	7	4	9	1

Difficulty:  
**MEDIUM**

### Spot the difference To WIN an FE Week mug



Spot five differences. First correct entry wins an FE Week mug.  
Email your name and picture of your completed spot the difference to: [news@feweek.co.uk](mailto:news@feweek.co.uk).  
Last Edition's winner: Catherine Storey, New College Durham