

FE Week

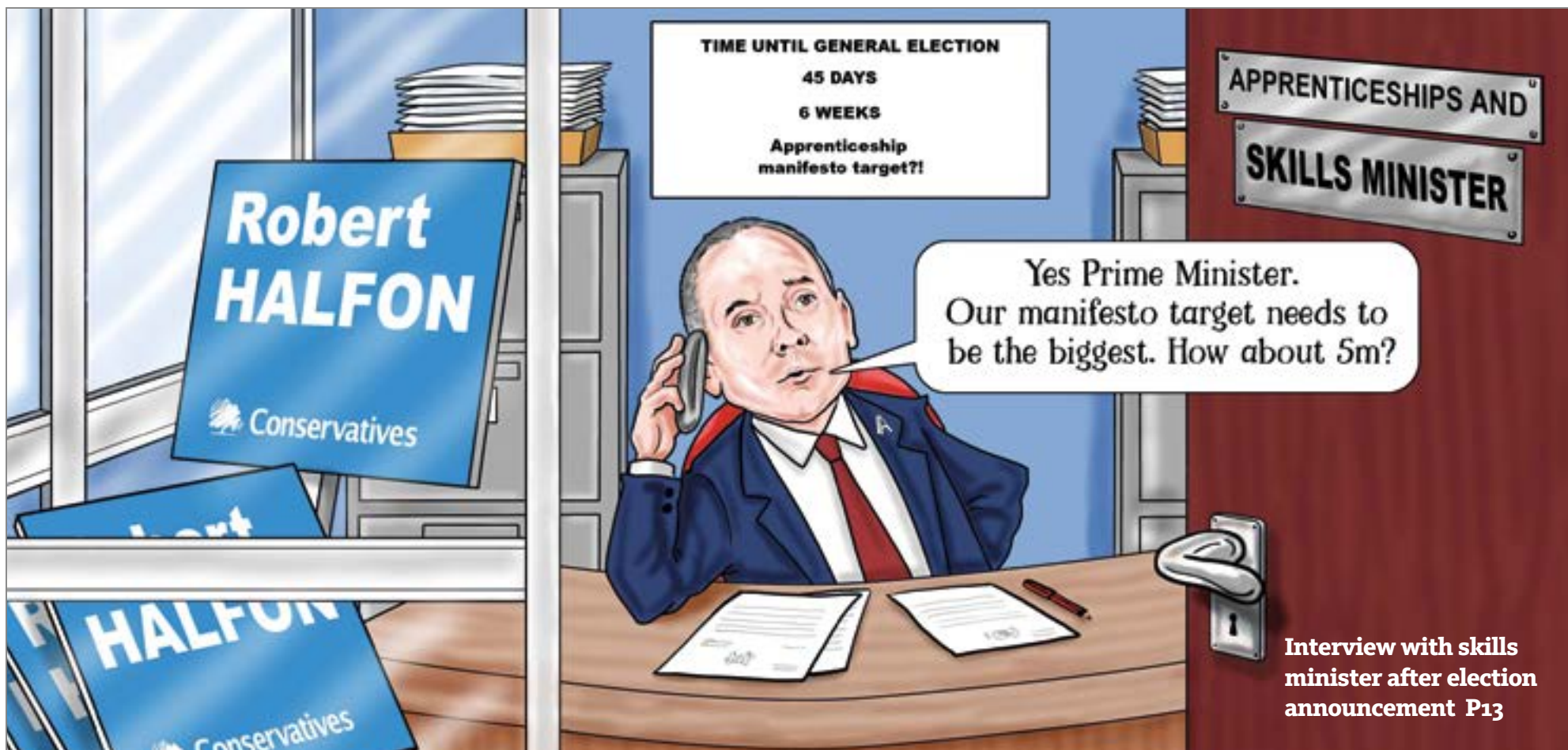
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GOVERNMENT SECRETLY GRADING FE PROVIDERS

- > More than half listed as concerning to the ESFA
- > Sector leaders demand answers but DfE tight-lipped

EXCLUSIVE **BILLY CAMDEN** @BILLYCAMDEN

ANALYSIS FROM FUNDING AGENCY 'PROFILE AND ASSESSMENT TOOL'

PAT category	Providers	Percent
1 - Formal intervention	73	
2 - Active engagement	299	55%
3 - Close watching brief	191	
4 - Standard monitoring	462	45%

Full investigation on page 4

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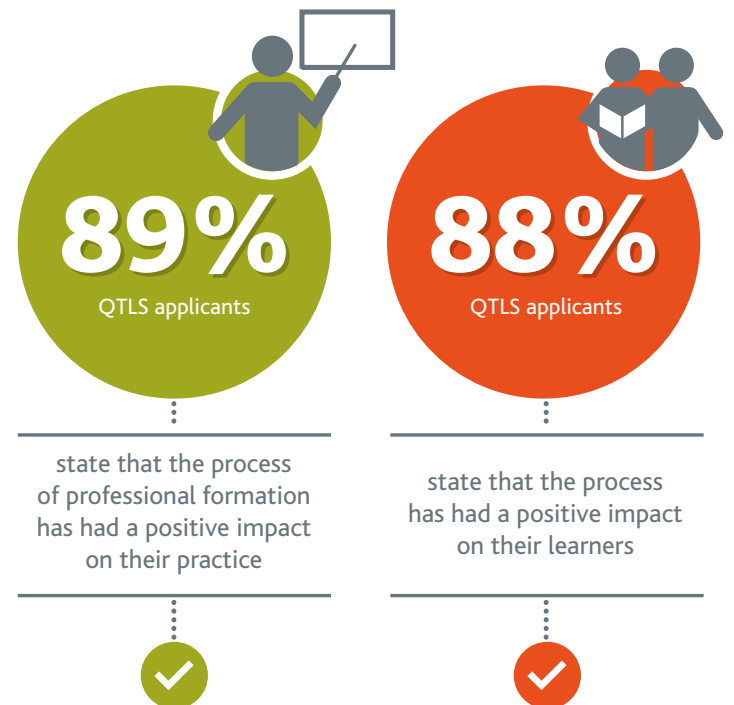
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NEWS

Secret government grading of FE providers posing risk

BILLY CAMDEN
@BILLYCAMDEN **EXCLUSIVE FROM FRONT**

More than half of providers have been secretly rated by the Education and Skills Funding Agency as posing a potential risk, FE Week can exclusively reveal.

They are surreptitiously marked using a four-grade system in the ESFA's 'profile and assessment' software tool, which FE Week has discovered listed 563 (55 per cent) of 1,025 private training providers, colleges and councils with agency contracts as either being watched closely by officials or receiving formal intervention, as of January 2017.

The Department for Education has refused to comment on the scheme, but sector leaders who were shown the list of providers and grades have lambasted the ESFA's secrecy and are now calling for urgent transparency.

The four categories included in the PAT are 'formal intervention' (red), the most severe, 'active engagement' (amber), 'close watching brief' (light orange), and 'standard monitoring' (green).

If a provider is placed in the first three categories, it means the government is

concerned about their performance and places them under scrutiny.

FE Week understands that a total of 73 providers were receiving formal interventions in January, with 299 in active engagement with the DfE, and 191 on the close-watching brief.

Just 462 were in the clear in category 4.

Mark Dawe, the chief executive of AELP, slammed the ESFA's secret grading system.

"As a public body there should not be any secretive processes and this should all be transparent to all providers that they fund," he told FE Week. "This is clearly something the AELP will need to raise with the ESFA on behalf of our members."

David Hughes, the boss of the Aoc, said it was "appropriate" for the ESFA to be assessing the financial and overall health of the providers it funds.

However, he added that it would be "good for the agency to be more transparent about what the triggers are using to move providers into and out of each category".

He also wants further information to help "understand more how the agency uses these

categories for funding decisions".

Providers rated in category 1 of the PAT are treated like those with a notice of concern or serious breach, and face having their funding contracts terminated if they do not meet the government's conditions for improvement.

The Department for Education would not provide FE Week with any further details about these categories, or the way they are determined and used.

"We do not comment on leaked documents," said a spokesperson.

You can view the full PAT list which states what category each of the 1,025 providers are in at www.feweek.co.uk.

UKPRN	Status	ProviderName	Intervention Status Category	2 Consecutive Ofsted Requires Improvement Grades	Inadequate or weak satisfactory FH	Declining FH	FH Status Category 2 - Active Engagement					
10000020	Active	5 E LTD.	Cat 4 - Standard Monitoring									
10000115	Active	A4E LTD	Cat 2 - Active Engagement									
10035281	Active	ABACUS TRAINING GROUP LIMITED	Cat 4 - Standard Monitoring		Inadequate/we		Inadequate/weak satisfactory FH and					
10000054	Active	ABILITY PROFESSIONAL TRAINING LIMITED	Cat 4 - Standard Monitoring									
10000055	Active	ABINGDON AND WITNEY COLLEGE	Cat 4 - Standard Monitoring									
10019646	Active	ABIS RESOURCES LIMITED	Cat 4 - Standard Monitoring									
10000060	Active	ACACIA TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT LTD	Cat 4 - Standard Monit									
10000061	Active	ACACIA TRAINING LIMITED	Cat 2 - Active Engagem									
10033736	Active	ACADEMIES ENTERPRISE TRUST	Cat 4 - Standard Monit									
10000191	Active	ACADEMY EDUCATION LIMITED	Cat 2 - Active Engagem									
10024597	Active	ACADEMY TRAINING GROUP LIMITED	Cat 2 - Active Engagem									
10039859	Active	ACADEMY TRANSFORMATION TRUST	Cat 3 - Close Watching									
10000080	Active	ACCESS TO MUSIC LIMITED	Cat 3 - Close Watching									
10010584	Active	ACCESS TRAINING (EAST MIDLANDS) LTD	Cat 4 - Standard Monit									
10009059	Active	ACCESS TRAINING LIMITED	Cat 4 - Standard Monit									
10000093	Active	ACCRINGTON AND ROSSENDALE COLLEGE	Cat 1 - Formal Intervent									
10019431	Active	ACHIEVE THROUGH LEARNING LIMITED	Cat 2 - Active Engagem									
10000099	Active	ACHIEVEMENT TRAINING LIMITED	Cat 3 - Close Watching I									
10023489	Active	ACORN TRAINING LTD	Cat 4 - Standard Monitor									
10007706	Active	ACTIV8 LEARNING	Cat 4 - Standard Monitor									
10004927	Active	ACTIVATE LEARNING	Cat 2 - Active Engagem									
10032745	Active	AGE UK TRADING LIMITED	Cat 4 - Standard Monitor									
10000201	Active	ALDER TRAINING LIMITED	Cat 2 - Active Engagem									
10027693	Active	ALL TRADES TRAINING LIMITED	Cat 2 - Active Engagem									
10000238	Active	ALLIANCE LEARNING	Cat 4 - Standard Monitor									
10022070	Active	ALPHA CARE AGENCY LIMITED	Cat 4 - Standard Monitor									
10001727	Active	ALT VALLEY COMMUNITY TRUST LIMITED	Cat 4 - Standard Monitor									

PAT category	Providers	Percent
1 - Formal intervention	73	
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4 - Standard monitoring	462	45%

DfE blasted for flip-flopping on GCSE maths and English resits

PAUL OFFORD
@PAULOFFORD

The government has been blasted for flip-flopping on its review into GCSE maths and English resits.

All 16 to 18-year-old students with a near-pass (previously grade D, now grade three) GCSE in the subjects have since August 2015 had to continue studying and resit them through the rule, alongside FE courses, rather than a level two functional skills qualification.

FE Week heard from multiple senior sources that the policy was going to be scrapped, with all such students being allowed to study functional skills instead, but 2017/18 funding guidance published on April 10 indicated that the government had decided to stick with GCSEs.

The situation has now been further confused, as when FE Week subsequently asked the Department for Education for more detail on its apparent decision, we were told that "nothing has changed" and it will "continue to examine" the policy "as stated in the Industrial Strategy Green Paper".

After learning of this, shadow skills minister Gordon Marsden told FE Week: "At a time when every report and research finding is detailing the damage to the life chances and morale that the resits policy is causing both apprentices and providers across the sector, it's hugely irresponsible of the government to

flounder on this issue.

"FE deserves a decision now, hopefully to replace automatic resits with alternatives relevant to functional skills and the real world in which apprentices need to operate and prosper."

The Industrial Strategy Green Paper published in January, which contains a consultation question on this issue, said the government was "reviewing the effectiveness of current policy to help as many young people as possible leave compulsory education

with a good standard of maths and English".

That review appeared to have been scrapped earlier this month, judging by the key section from the 2017/18 funding guidance which caused the confusion.

It stated: "Full-time students starting their study programme who have a grade three or D GCSE, or equivalent qualification in maths and/or English, must be enrolled on a GCSE, rather than an approved stepping stone qualification."

The 2016 annual Ofsted report had

previously said that while the resit policy's intention to improve literacy and numeracy levels was "well intentioned", the "implementation is not having the desired impact in practice".

It pointed out that many students – "just over a quarter" – were still not getting at least a grade C by the age of 19.

Further to that: "Inspection evidence shows that, for some students, having to retake their GCSE can be demotivating and that attendance at these lessons is lower."

Just 34,486 – or 26.9 per cent – of the 128,201 learners aged 17+ who took GCSE English in 2015/16, up to last August, got at least a C. And of the 173,628 learners aged 17 or above taking GCSE maths, only 51,220 – or 29.5 per cent – achieved a C or above.

In comparison, the previous year 35.1 per cent of the 97,163 learners aged 17+ achieved a C or above in English, while 35.8 per cent of the 130,979 GCSE maths learners aged 17+ got at least a C.

Education secretary Justine Greening previously strongly hinted, at November's AoC conference, that a change of heart over GCSE resits was imminent.

She told delegates that students must not be spending "time running upwards against a brick wall that they're not going to get over".

Apprenticeships and skills minister Robert Halfon also told delegates: "It is clear that we need a credible, high-quality option for students for whom GCSEs are not appropriate or achievable."



Justine Greening

INVESTIGATES

Expansion plans with Saudi Colleges of Excellence revealed

ALIX ROBERTSON
@ALIXROBERTSON4

EXCLUSIVE

An English college will extend its involvement with the Saudi Arabian Colleges of Excellence programme, squashing rumours that the controversial project was on the cusp of being wound down.

FE Week approached all the English FE providers involved with the scheme, after rumours circulated online that the entire project – to boost technical and vocational training in the middle Eastern country – was set to close this year.

A spokesperson for Lincoln College issued a steadfast denial and said the college “remains committed to operating in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for at least the next 20 years”.

He challenged the suggestion that CoE, which was launched in 2013 involving a number of English providers, could close this year. The programme was “in no sense in jeopardy”, he added, and was now focused on “the expansion of existing programmes and the opening of new colleges”.

He told FE Week that Lincoln College International had taken over a Technical Trainers College in Riyadh in 2016, increasing student numbers, and introducing a new senior management team. LCI is also in the middle of a tender process to operate this TTC for three more years, and this month it signed a new contract with CoE to deliver English language training in the health sector.

The rumours began in January, when EL Gazette, an international news and media company for the English Language Teaching

industry, featured a piece by an English teacher working in the Gulf who reported on “struggles” with the flagship programme.

“Unconfirmed reports on social media suggest this programme, worth £1 billion to the British economy alone, may be scrapped in 2017,” suggested the report.

In total, six FE colleges and an educational organisation in Oxford all confirmed to FE Week that they intend to continue working with CoE.

North Hertfordshire College and Hertfordshire Regional College, which operate together in Saudi as the Hertvec consortium, insisted they would continue supporting their three colleges in the region.

An NHC spokesperson said: “We are proud of the work we are doing to support our Saudi students, and are actively engaged with CoE as they think about the future of technical education in the kingdom for the medium and long-term.”

HRC continues to be Hertvec’s lead shareholder, despite suggestions in 2015 that it might abandon the venture altogether.

However, minutes from an NHC corporation board meeting on September 7, 2015, read: “We have agreed with HRC a 90-day option, to mid Sept, to replace them as a partner in Hertvec.” However, a spokesperson at HRC told FE Week that it is still “totally committed to the joint venture”.

The North East Surrey College of Technology established another Saudi

consortium, together with Burton and South Derbyshire College, Highbury College, Birmingham City University and the University of Hull.

The consortium secured a £75 million contract in 2013 to run Saudi Arabia’s first women-only vocational college in Jeddah, and a spokesperson told FE Week that this deal currently extends until July 2018. He said the consortium was “unaware of any specific threats to the future of the [CoE] initiative”.

A spokesperson for Burton and South Derbyshire College said the Nescot Consortium had “worked hard from the outset to understand the needs of students, parents and prospective employers on the ground in the kingdom”.

BCU was unable to comment by the time of going to press, while Highbury College and the University of Hull did not respond to our attempts to make contact.

The final UK consortium, the Oxford Partnership, is chaired by Sally Dicketts, chief executive of Oxford-based educational organisation Activate Learning.

It was created with GEMS Education and Moulton College, and runs four women-only colleges in the kingdom. Ms Dicketts said the colleges are “making a huge impact on the lives of hundreds of women”.

FE Week also attempted to contact CoE, and requested a comment from the Department for International Trade, but neither replied by the time of going to press.



Lincoln College Group chief executive, Gary Headland, with guests and higher education graduates at a graduation ceremony in Riyadh in March this year.



One of Lincoln College International's colleges in Saudi Arabia

Troubled history of English involvement

Colleges of Excellence was founded in 2013 to boost technical and vocational education and training in Saudi Arabia through partnerships with international providers.

But a number of providers dropped out of the programme early on as challenges with operating in the region became apparent.

Lincoln College was the only college in England to enter the CoE programme on its own, and was awarded a huge contract worth £250 million in 2014 to establish three colleges in the Kingdom.

But Lincoln announced in January 2016 that its two colleges in the Al-Aflaj region would be closed by the end of the month, as was subsequently reported in FE Week.

A statement on its website said: “Unfortunately, the number of students able to participate in this unique education in Al-Aflaj is not sufficient.”

Lincoln also faced some financial hardship in the process of getting its Saudi project off the ground.

In March last year a spokesperson told FE Week there had been “exceptional costs” related to the “initial mobilisation and recruitment for a male college, which was discontinued by CoE and replaced with the female college in Al-Qatif”.

However, when speaking to FE Week on April 19, the spokesperson said: “Lincoln College International will make surplus from 2017 onwards.”

The Hertvec consortium also faced initial challenges in Saudi Arabia after it rapidly lost a member.

The partnership, between Hertford Regional College and North Hertfordshire College, was

supposed to be supported by the University of Hertfordshire and the Samama Holdings Group, a Saudi Arabian company specialising in construction and facilities management.

But an enquiry from FE Week revealed the university had pulled out shortly after a bid for the contract was made.

HRC audit committee minutes from March 2015 also showed that a payment of £713,000 due from Saudi Arabia had been delayed for a period.

A Hertvec statement described the first year of the project as “a challenging one, from which we take many invaluable lessons”.

Nescot found itself under a cloud last year when its then-principal Sunaina Mann left her post, after FE Week reported she had paid her husband almost £200,000 in a contract for consultancy work in Saudi Arabia.

FE Week understands Ms Mann still heads the Nescot Consortium’s Jeddah Female College in Saudi, despite cutting ties with the college in the UK.

According to Moulton College corporation board meeting minutes from Jan 26, 2017, the Oxford Partnership recently underwent significant changes, after GEMS Education dropped out and was replaced by a new partner.

The minutes said: “TOP had received final confirmation from the CoE that approval had been given for the new partner Global Dimension for Education Training and GEMS had formally withdrawn from the partnership.”

Both Sally Dicketts, the chair of the partnership, and Moulton College declined to comment, while GEMS Education was unable to respond by the time of going to press.

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NEWS

In-Comm Training celebrates rare top mark from Ofsted

JUDE BURKE
@JUDEBURKE77

An engineering apprenticeships specialist in the West Midlands has earned a rare grade one across-the-board rating from Ofsted, in a glowing report published April 11.

The education watchdog praised In-Comm Training and Business Services Limited for the “outstanding” achievements of its apprentices and its “very ambitious” leadership team.

FE Week spoke to the company’s proud joint managing directors, Bekki Phillips and Gareth Jones, about the secret of their success and their thoughts on the ongoing apprenticeship reforms.

Ms Phillips said the Ofsted verdict was a “fantastic achievement for everyone connected with the business”.

She attributed their success to the tutors and trainers, who are all “industry professionals that have come in and they want to transfer their knowledge and skills onto the learners”.

“It’s their passion that has helped us to be where we are,” she explained, while the “continuous improvement plans” they have

in place ensure “what we’re delivering to our learners aligns with the employers”.

She said the provider is “embracing the changes” in the new apprenticeship system.

These changes include the introduction of a new system of funding for apprenticeships through the levy, due to kick in next month, a new register for apprenticeship training providers and the move from frameworks to standards.

Mr Jones concurred, adding that the firm had a “strong vision of where we want to take the business”, and insisting the changes were a “massive opportunity for growth”.

This includes working with levy-paying employers. In-Comm was successful in its application to the RoATP, which means it will be able to deliver apprenticeships to large companies from May 1.

Ms Phillips said they had been working with their large employers, who are now subject to the levy, to help them “understand how the model will work, and how we can support them in that”.

Mr Jones said that while “we’re happy with what we’ve got” in terms of levy-paying employers, “we’ve got a growth strategy as well” to boost their number.

However, the pair highlighted a number of concerns over the reform process, including a



Bekki Phillips and Gareth Jones

lack of information about the changes, which Mr Jones said meant they been “kept in the dark”.

He also echoed concerns raised by the former top skills civil servant Dr Sue Pember, who told FE Week in October that it was “diabolical” that learners could start on standards without knowing who would carry out the final exam.

Mr Jones said that In-Comm was “reluctant to start any Trailblazer because of the end-point assessment not being in place”.

“It’s not fair to set a learner off on a journey when you don’t know what the end position is going to be, so we didn’t want to do that as we didn’t want to disadvantage the learners,” added Ms Phillips.

By the end of January, just over half – 81 out of 159 – of standards approved for delivery had at least one assessment organisation in place.

Ms Phillips said the Education and Skills Funding Agency decision earlier this month to pause the procurement process for non-levy paying employers and extend existing contracts to December had “alleviated her fears” and had given them “more security”.

“We were getting to the point whereby from May we didn’t know what we could deliver, so we felt we were a little bit unsettled – that was the frightening part,” she said.

“I’m hoping that they’re going to make better decisions by taking longer over them,” added Mr Jones.

Ms Phillips dismissed concerns raised by others in the sector, including the chief executive of JTL Training in a column for FE Week, that changes in funding would lead to a drop in 16- to 18-year-old apprentices.

“I don’t think that will detract anyone from taking on any 16- to 18-year-olds – it hasn’t in any of our employers,” she said.

A first step to loans justice for learners in the lurch

PAUL OFFORD
@PAULOFFORD

EXCLUSIVE

Learners left with huge loan debts and no qualifications when their providers went bust have had their repayments deferred for a year in a partial victory for FE Week’s campaign for loan justice.

We have been demanding government action on the issue since January, when we discovered hundreds of learners were on the hook for thousands of pounds in FE loans

they couldn’t use after their provider John Frank Training suddenly went bust – and the government wouldn’t write off their debt.

We soon found many more learners affected by the collapse of Hampshire-based Edudo Ltd and Darlington’s Focus Training & Development Ltd, and immediately launched a campaign to force the government to let them off their debts – part of #SaveOurAdultEducation.

Now, after months of sustained pressure, the government has indicated for the first time that it could be softening its position.

FE Week has seen a letter sent to the thousands of students affected by provider collapses, telling them that the government will “defer your repayment status for one year”.

“Our priority is to help support affected learners and make sure they can transfer to a new provider as soon as possible and continue with their learning,” said a spokesperson for the Department for Education.

“To ensure affected learners are supported, we have written to the Student Loans Company asking it to take appropriate steps so that any loan repayments will be deferred during the April 2017 to March 2018 tax year.”

He added the department was “considering whether any further action is needed to avoid learners being unfairly disadvantaged”.

An SLC spokesperson also conceded that “in some cases, repayments had already started and SLC has notified the employers of those in this situation to stop any further payments being taken”.

He added: “SLC has written to all students affected to confirm that their repayments have been deferred for one year.

“If they do not meet the criteria for repayment in April 2018 we will not start to make any repayments until they are eligible to do so.”

Asim Shaheen, aged 49, was a former learner with John Frank Training who was left more than £8,000 in debt after it went bust

under murky circumstances in November.

He works nights as a chef and told FE Week that his bosses at a restaurant in Stoke had recently received a letter from the SLC asking them to start deducting loan repayments from his wages. Another was sent a week later, saying there had been a mistake and that deductions were not necessary, he claimed.

Mr Shaheen also received the letter sent to affected learners, which said: “We can confirm that we will defer your repayment status for one year.

“This means that if you meet currently meet the criteria for repayment of your advanced learner loan, or meet the requirement within the next tax year, we will not start to take any payments before April 2018.

“This is to allow you sufficient time to make alternative arrangements to complete your qualification.”

He told FE Week that he was pleased the government had recognised the learners’ plight and had held off on repayment demands.

However, he insisted that “they haven’t solved the problem”, and “are just putting it on hold for a year. It isn’t fair of them to carry on demanding repayments in the long term, and I hope the deferment gives them time to think and do the right thing: write-off our loans.”

FE Week will continue campaigning for the loans to be scrapped, so watch this space.



Mussarrat Bashir and fellow former JFT learner Asim Shaheen

NEWS

Staff kick cash-strapped college's carpark charge to the kerb

PAUL OFFORD
@PAULOFFORD

EXCLUSIVE

Staff and students at a Liverpool college facing “financial crisis” are fuming that they must now pay £600 per year to use a car park on campus that was previously free, after it was sold-off to a secret buyer.

City of Liverpool College has repeatedly refused to name the new owner of its Vauxhall Road campus' car park, understood to be a private party which swiftly introduced the charges.

The move is so unpopular that angry staff contacted FE Week to complain anonymously, while the University and College Union has also spoken out on their behalf.

“The college needs to explain to staff and students why it sold a facility that was previously free for staff and students to park at,” a UCU spokesperson told FE Week.

“We expect the college to publish the full details of the sale.”

FE Week was also shown a copy of a letter sent to staff, which provided a “final reminder for car parking permits” for the site.

It said: “As previously confirmed, the daily charge will be £3 a day.” It also explained permit parking rates, which have come into force this month – with the rate set at £54 per month, and £310 for six months.

The annual £600 permit charge, the letter said, can be paid-off “£50 monthly through salary over 12 months”.

However, only one registered car is allowed on site per permit holder at any given time.

FE Week also visited the car park, where we witnessed permanent signage confirming the prices and installed by Britannia Parking, a private firm which manages the site for the new landowner but which also refused to reveal its identity.

There was also a temporary sign attached to railings, apparently on behalf of the college.

The college, which declined to comment on the sale, posted a 2015/16 group deficit of over £15 million, and is understood to have sold the site to help pay off its debts.

It was recently revisited by the FE commissioner's team, and a report warning of “financial crisis” was published in March – along with a letter from apprenticeships and skills minister Robert Halfon.

“The college was rereferred for FE commissioner intervention because of failures of financial management,” he wrote.

“Last year, the college's budget outturn was £8 million worse than planned, and it required £2 million exceptional funding from the SFA to continue operations.”

He also raised “particular concern” about the college's oversight of its majority owned independent training provider – First4Skills.

This Liverpool-based company went bust in March, affecting around 200 staff and 6,500 learners, after the former Skills Funding Agency pulled its contract following a grade four Ofsted rating.

The college, which has five main campuses

– all located in the Liverpool City Council Local Authority area – had an initial FE commissioner intervention in December 2013 following an ‘inadequate’ Ofsted inspection and an SFA assessment of its 2012/13 financial health, which was also graded ‘inadequate’.

It was on surer ground by November 2014, following an improved Ofsted rating (‘requires improvement’) in April 2014, and improved financial performance (‘satisfactory’) in 2013/14.

However it was referred for another intervention last January, after it informed the SFA that it needed £2 million in exceptional financial support to cover working capital requirements, prompting a further notice of concern in February.

The latest FE commissioner report summary said: “During the November stocktake the team were concerned about some of the college board's responses to the 2015/16 financial crisis.”



The temporary sign



The car park

ESFA confirms subcontracting changes delayed until December

PAUL OFFORD @PAULOFFORD
ALIX ROBERTSON @ALIXROBERTSON4

Eagerly awaited extra guidance on non-levy funding for apprenticeships has been handed to providers – which confirms that planned subcontracting changes have been delayed to the end of the year.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency announced on April 12 that it had “paused” the decision over non-levy funding allocations to allow more time to be review the situation, and promised more guidance promised.

The information was finally sent to providers by the ESFA shortly before FE Week went to press on April 20.

Many will be relieved to see the ESFA “will continue to apply current subcontracting rules to the delivery of new starts to non-levy-paying employers through to December 2017”, in a move designed “to maintain stability through the transitional period”.

Mark Dawe, chief executive at the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, welcomed the development.

“AELP has pressed really hard and constantly for the existing subcontracting rules to remain in place until the end of December, because we need stability in the relationships between the main providers and

the subcontractors,” he told FE Week.

“The agency's decision to respond positively to our call is very sensible; otherwise we could have seen massive shifts in relationships unless agreed by both parties.

“However while this element of today's communication is very helpful, providers will only learn by April 25 what their allocations will be for the remainder of 2017.

“This is good news, but it only leaves six days until May 1. The notification is vital because providers really need to know what funding they will have available for starts and carry-over learners.”

After confirming the April 25 deadline,

the ESFA guidance told providers that their allocation will be “for the full eight months”, and that they “will have flexibility to use it over this period”.

It would continue to issue “separate allocations for 16-18 and adult apprenticeships”, and promised to continue its “simple approach” to calculating allocations, based on “your delivery track record”.

All existing apprenticeship contract holders will be informed of their allocation, it added, so that once they enter RoATP they are able to deliver.

“We will also confirm the value of apprenticeship grant for employers (AGE) available to you through to the end of July 2017,” it said. “These will be calculated using our previous allocation method.”

Before April 28, the guidance explained, the ESFA intends to “vary your existing contract to include funding for new starts from May 1”.

The rules on co-investment will apply, and funding is to be calculated using the new funding bands.

FE Week revealed last month that allocations worth up to £440 million, earmarked for delivering the apprenticeship training to non-levy employers, had been delayed by the government.

A key meeting that the former Skills Funding Agency had scheduled on March 8, in order to come to final decisions on which providers would be allocated a non-levy employer-funding allocation, was also cancelled.

We subsequently revealed on April 18 that the total value of the bids lodged through the now-paused process was around four times higher than the sum allocated, coming in at around £1.6 billion.

Opinion, see page 12

Action	Key Dates
All existing apprenticeship providers receive funding statement for new starts from 01 May 2017 to 31 December 2017	By 25 April 2017
Existing provider on RoATP receives contract variation to include funding for new starts from 01 May 2017	Before 28 April 2017. Other existing providers will receive variations once they enter RoATP
Existing provider receives contract variation to extend the contract duration into the 2017 to 2018 funding year	End of June 2017

The minimum wage has gone up – but are apprentices getting paid?

JUDE BURKE @JUDEBURKE77
PAUL OFFORD @PAULOFFORD

EXCLUSIVE

The minimum wage for apprentices changed on April 1 this year, soaring from a measly £3.40 per hour to a princely £3.50 per hour.

And though this extra cash – which represents an impressive 2.9% increase – is probably very welcome for young apprentices, we at FE Week started to wonder whether employers were paying attention, after the new rate came in without much fanfare.

So we set ourselves a challenge: could we find 15 job adverts on the government's own apprenticeships portal advertising the wrong rate in 15 minutes? If we could, we reckoned that might constitute a problem.

In the end, a 15-minute scan on April 12 uncovered 11 separate apprenticeship adverts featuring illegal wages – not total endemic, but not statistically insignificant either.

We reported these to the providers, including Vision West Nottinghamshire College, which was listed as provider for seven of the adverts.

The other three providers affected were the London Hairdressing Apprenticeship Academy Limited, Bexleyheath-based Skills for Growth, and Walsall-based Performance Through People.

To be fair to them all, when we alerted them, they did quickly acknowledge and correct the errors.

We decided to take our findings to the labour market tsar Sir David Metcalf, who was appointed by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy in January to help protect apprentices paid below the minimum wage.

We wanted to know what action he would be taking to crack down on employers who pay their apprentices illegal wages – and why these inaccurate adverts had been allowed on the site.

A spokesperson for Sir David at BEIS said he was still putting together a strategy for his priorities, and that it would be available in due course.

A spokesperson for the Department for Education said: “Employers are responsible for ensuring that their apprenticeship vacancies comply with the minimum wages,” we were told. “As soon as we become aware of any adverts which do not comply, we ensure these are taken down.”

Employers not paying apprentices the minimum wage would “face the legal consequences”, she added.

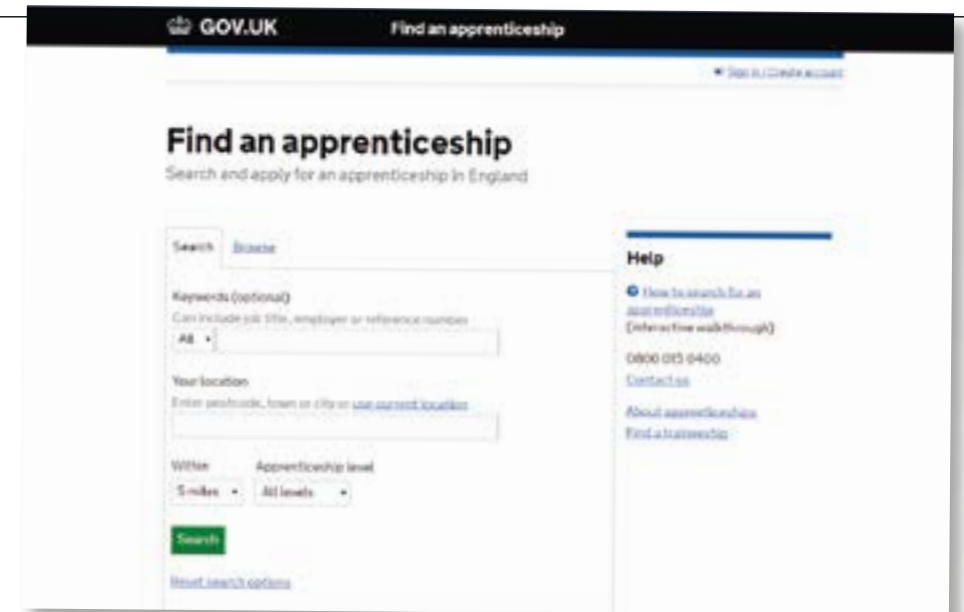
Our little experiment came almost a year after a major survey on apprentice wages and training kicked off, with results long overdue.

Even though FE Week has learned that the final draft of the 2016 Apprenticeship Pay Survey was given to the government way back in January by the researchers who carried it out, its results have still not seen the light of day.

The survey, announced in May by the former Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, aimed to help the government monitor whether employers were paying the national minimum wage.

Interim “high-level” results were released in October as part of a report for the Low Pay Commission – indicating that the proportion of apprentices earning below the NMW had gone up – but the full findings are still under lock and key.

Mark Winterbotham, the director of the firm which carried out the survey, told FE Week



that he didn't know why it hadn't yet been published.

He described the project as a “large scale survey of 9,422 apprentices, conducted by telephone from early June 2016 to the end of July 2016”.

He insisted that his organisation had handed the final drafts of the reports over to the government in January, but admitted he had “not had any communication since early March” with the research team at BEIS, which replaced BIS in July.

“They'd be the only ones able to say why it's not been published yet,” he said.

But the government, asked this week when the report could be expected and what had caused the hold-up, would only say it would be published “in due course”.

The survey was described by BIS as an “important research project providing information on training, hours and pay from current apprentices”.

The survey findings were to be “used by government to help set pay policy generally and make improvements in apprenticeship training” and would “enable us to look at wage levels nationally, measure changes with previous years and monitor whether employers are adhering to the rules on fair pay”.

According to the Low Pay Commission's report: “The 2016 survey shows that the vast majority (83 per cent) of apprentices, where an assessment can be made, are paid at or above the appropriate NMW rate” – suggesting that 17 per cent were not.

This is up from the 14 per cent found during the 2014 survey, which was based on telephone interviews with 9,367 apprentices.

In 2012, the Apprenticeship Pay Survey, which takes place every two years, found that 29 per cent of the 5,635 apprentices it interviewed were underpaid.

35 new notices of concern or serious breach issued

ALIX ROBERTSON @ALIXROBERTSON4

More than 30 private training providers, colleges and councils have been slapped with notices of concern or serious breach for falling below qualification achievement rate thresholds.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency published an updated list of providers given notices during the Easter break, which for the first time lists those providers now subject to formal intervention for failing 2015/16 achievement rate minimum standards.

Twenty private training providers were given a notice of serious breach and 15 colleges and councils a notice of concern.

FE Week called a number of them to ask why the government had taken action, and found several blamed either problems with subcontractors or data errors with achievement.

The Approach to Intervention document, first published in 2015, says for training providers: “We will identify the colleges



and other training organisations that have failed to meet minimum standards in apprenticeships or classroom and workplace provision.

“We will then decide whether to intervene formally.”

It adds: “If we issue a notice of serious breach, it will set out the conditions necessary to continue to receive public funds.

“Failure to meet the conditions in the notice will lead to contract termination.”

For colleges and local authorities that receive a notice of concern, it says: “We would not usually refer a college or institution to the FE commissioner for

review if the only trigger it fails is minimum standards, but we reserve the right to do so.”

The latest wave of notices of concern or serious breach come after the publication of the revised achievement rates for 2015/16.

As reported in FE Week back in February, the Department for Education has admitted to loopholes in the qualification achievement rate calculation.

This allowed around 10% of providers to “artificially” boost their, in some cases by more than 20 QAR percentage points.

The loopholes are now closed, and were related to the way the SFA compared learner records in several annual data returns from providers. Where learners disappear or do not have a completion status, they will in future be included in the calculation and counted as a fail.

New national achievement rate tables were due to have been published last month, including the rates for qualifications at providers.

Asked about the delay, the DfE would only say these figures would be published “in due course”.

FE Week attempted to verify claims by

providers we spoke to, including Tameside College and Essex County Council, that the DfE had accepted QAR rates they received notices for had been inaccurate.

However, no-one from the department would comment before we went to press.

In one case, the London-based training provider Jobwise Training received a notice of serious breach on March 17.

James Pearson, the firm's operations director, said the notice was “attributed to a small pilot programme of 13 classroom learners in 2015/16”.

“We received certificates for many of these learners after the hard close, which were not taken into account by the ESFA,” he said. “We ceased to run this programme in 2015/16 and have had no starts in this contract year.”

He added: “The ESFA have already confirmed that there is no corrective action for us to take and they are now looking into removing us from this list.”

He showed us an email on April 20 which appeared to confirm that the notice had been lifted, but the DfE was unable to corroborate this ahead of publication.



**A new suite of draft contracts.
Ready to be signed.
Helping our members to get
out there and grow.**

At AELP we strive to provide members with practical solutions to help them get out there and grow. This includes our newly released suite of draft contracts for members. These include:

- Revised levy paying employer contract with provider - mainly formatting so easier to manage but also encompassing some of the latest guidance - not significant change, but some differences
- Non-levy paying employer contract with provider - similar to the above but with slightly different obligations, in particular the employer contribution, but also recognizing the funding comes from a SFA contract with the provider
- Prime provider contract with sub contractor
- Provider contract with an EPA Organisation



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EDITORIAL

What secret grade did you get?



This week we expose the ESFA's top secret four-level grading system that gets applied to every one of just over 1,000 post-16 providers that they fund.

We learned that funding agency staff use what's called a 'profile and assessment tool' to assign every prime provider one of four 'intervention status categories'.

On the face of it this seems a well-structured and proportionate approach to intervention, given the ESFA's responsibilities.

But what's surprising – and concerning – is that over half (55%) of the providers that it contracts with are of concern, typically based on their finances.

This might be something the Education Select Committee, Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office will show an interest in.

And it's disappointing that the DfE has refused to explain the basis on which a provider is given a grade or any detail on what they are used for.

So we've published the full list, with providers and grades, on our website – and hope this will prompt some overdue transparency.

The AoC and AELP are united in their expectation the agency should come clean.

It is now a case of watching this space...

Nick Linford, Editor
news@feweek.co.uk

GENERAL ELECTION TWEETS:

Dr Fiona Summers @FionaYMCAawards

Also concerned about this. Ambitious timescales for T Levels and other changes in FE don't need anything else to contend with.

Andrew G-H @agladheight

How many apprenticeships standards & assessment plans will @halfon4harlowMP babe able to sign off before purdah?

ELATT @elatlondon

The link between unemployment and the skills gap needs to be acknowledged and the adult education sector is the solution #GeneralElection

Semta @SemtaSkills

There it is, then - a #GeneralElection is coming. Good thing all parties signed up to principles of @IFAteched and new #skills system!

Shane Chowen @LWShane

Now is the chance to drop the three million apprenticeship target!

HOLEX @suepemberholex

Election: Looking forward to telling every prospective MP about the importance and role of adult education in moving this country forward

RoATP provider now selling for tens of thousands

ALIX ROBERTSON
@ALIXROBERTSON4

A Company with no apparent track record or trading history is being put up for sale because it managed to win a place on the new register of approved training providers, FE Week has learned.

What's more, multiple companies that do change hands may even be allowed to remain on the register, according to a government spokesperson, who told FE Week that such decisions would be made on a case-by-case basis.

The register, which lists providers that will be eligible to deliver apprenticeships from May, was published in March – and at least 19 colleges with a combined current allocation of £44 million initially missed out, even though many other providers were accepted despite a complete lack of experience of running such training.

FE Week has now seen a post on the LinkedIn page of a consultancy group called The Leadership Team, which provides services to colleges, training providers and employers, offering one such RoATP newcomer for sale, along with another listed on the old register of training organisations.

"We have an RoATP and a ROTO company for sale currently," it said.

"Both have conducted no transactions and their owners have decided not to pursue funded training.

"If you would like to purchase please email your interest."

FE Week understands the usual rate for this type of sale is around £50,000.

We invited The Leadership Team to respond to criticism that the RoATP was being used as a selling point.

Tracy Myles, the firm's financial director, told FE Week that the practice was "normal".

"It is normal for owners of companies, whether they are on ROTO, RoATP or not, to buy or sell businesses with a view to making a profit," she said.

"With the amount of change in this sector we believe that there will be many more mergers and acquisitions, large and small, within the next 12 to 18 months."

But Anne-marie Morris, a team leader and assessor at Acacia Training, a provider which did not get a place on the RoATP despite its 'good' rating from Ofsted, disagreed, claiming the sale was "a typical example of how inadequate the whole process was for the RoATP".

"The Education and Skills Funding Agency have enabled companies to use their acceptance on to the register as a selling point to exacerbate asking prices," she added.

FE Week asked the Department for Education for clarification around rules for selling providers on the register.

A spokesperson said providers must notify the ESFA if there were a change their name

and/or ownership.

Under the Apprenticeship Agreement for Training Providers, the ESFA then has the right to terminate the agreement if they think the sale could affect the organisation's ability to deliver the contract.

The Leadership Team's LinkedIn page also shows that it apparently also works in a brokerage capacity to match employers with providers for apprenticeship delivery, and offers bid-writing services for applications to RoATP.

The firm has launched a "gold" members-only "community of RoATP providers", again promoted on LinkedIn, which it says providers can apply to join to gain access to "employers, funding and partnerships".

In February, the former Skills Funding Agency – which has now been merged into the new ESFA – banned the use of public funds to pay brokers' fees.

But Ms Myles insisted The Leadership Team's gold membership service was not in breach of this regulation.

"We are fully aware that prime providers cannot utilise the funds in their digital account to pay 'brokers' – we are not brokers and this is not our business model," she said.

"We have a very experienced team of people with significant sector experience including people who have worked previously at the SFA."



Birmingham finally has a college on register

JUDE BURKE
@JUDEBURKE77

Birmingham at last has a general FE college on the new register of apprenticeship training providers.

South and City College was one of three main providers added to the register when it was quietly revised by the Education and Skills Funding Agency on April 13.

Before this decision was taken, none of the four main colleges in Britain's second city had been listed on the RoATP, a decision which attracted widespread condemnation.

What's more, "critical" merger plans previously agreed by the ESFA and plunged into jeopardy by missing the register, can now go ahead.

"We are extremely relieved because this [being left off the register] would have meant either a delay or a cessation of merger arrangements which are absolutely critical for [merger partner] Bournville College," said Mike Hopkins, the college's principal.

The decision, means that Birmingham finally has a major general FE college able to deliver apprenticeships from May 1.

The update to the register, which followed considerable political pressure but only became apparent from a change in the file name, is understood to have been ordered after the ESFA established a process to revisit applications in exceptional circumstances.

In the case of South and City, the college had secured funding from the ESFA's transaction unit for its planned merger, which was agreed on the basis that the college needed to deliver apprenticeships to be viable.

"It now means that the merger should be secured and we should be able to get that resolved very shortly, because we had arrangements in place with the transaction unit," said Mr Hopkins.

As previously reported by FE Week, none of Birmingham's four main FE colleges – Birmingham Metropolitan College, Solihull College, South and City, and Bournville – initially made it onto the RoATP when it was first published in March, prompting an outcry both from the colleges and local MPs.

A South and City spokesperson told FE Week at the time that "we were very shocked to discover that our application had been unsuccessful, given our grade two Ofsted report and excellent track record".

Several local Labour MPs had also expressed outrage, along with the shadow skills minister Gordon Marsden and Sion Simon, the Labour mayoral candidate for the West Midlands.

Gisela Stuart MP and Jack Dromey MP raised questions in parliament, with Ms Stuart, the MP for

Birmingham Edgbaston, claiming the colleges' absence from the register was "destroying technical education for 16-year-olds in the West Midlands".

The other two main providers added to the list last week are Norfolk Training Services Limited and The IT Skills Management Company Limited.

FE Week understands that the decision to add Norfolk Training Services Ltd related to the way the RoATP Ofsted grade rules were being interpreted for an inspection which has yet to be published.

We asked the Department for Education to confirm why these three providers had been added to the list, but it would not comment on individual applications.

A spokesperson confirmed that all providers on the register that meet its Ofsted entry requirements – which state that providers must be rated grade three or higher for apprenticeship provision.

But Apple Training Academy, which FE Week reported had gone out of business in March, still hasn't been taken off the register.

A second application window opened within days of the first register being published in March, and closed on April 7.

The revised list is expected to be published in May.



Mike Hopkins

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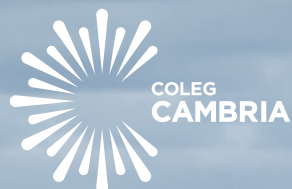
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Our ideal candidate will have an outstanding record of performance as a leader with outstanding communication and organisational skills and be strongly committed to working as a lead ambassador for the College's values and mission. They must also demonstrate a passion for education, and relentless drive to create an outstanding experience for our students.

A member of the Executive Leadership Team they will report to the Chief Executive and Principal and be involved in shaping and influencing strategic decision making to ensure that an outstanding level of innovative learning is delivered across the curriculum and an outstanding learner experience is achieved.

A college with excellence at the heart of its mission statement of **Empowerment through learning**, the ambitious team seeks to continually drive for excellence and in 2015 won the 'Best company to work for' Silver Award at the North East 2015 Cheshire Business Awards. In 2016, the College was a finalist in the Educators Investment Awards and was placed number one in Cheshire for student and

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All appointments will be subject to an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check and satisfactory references.

The College is committed to equality of opportunity. We welcome applications from all sections of the community, particularly from members of ethnic minority groups

The position will close at midnight on the closing date. Interviews will be held on 15 & 16 May 2017 at the College.

To apply for this post, please download the application forms by clicking on the Application Forms link shown below. Please email the completed forms to recruitment@macclesfield.ac.uk

Closing date for applications: 1 May 2017 (midnight)

Contact Details: For further details contact Human Resources: 01625 410007

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In the first instance please send your CV to us at hrservices@oldham.ac.uk. To find more details about this post (and apply on-line if you'd prefer) please visit www.oldham.ac.uk/aboutus/ourjobs/

Please note we do not accept CV's from recruitment agencies. Any speculative CVs sent to the College will NOT be considered.

Closing Date: 7th May 2017

Interviews will be held week commencing 15th May 2017

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- Teacher of Business (0.6 fte) and Law (0.4 fte)
- Teacher of Business
- Teacher of Chemistry
- Teacher of English
- Teacher of Geography and Travel and Tourism (0.7 fte)
- Teacher of Health and Social Care
- Teacher of Religious Studies (0.8 fte – Full time)
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Closing date for applications: 12 noon Friday 28 April 2017

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Closing date: 7th May 2017 • Interview date: 25th May 2017

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Teacher of English

Full Time Permanent | Start Date: 1 September 2017

Salary: £25,445 - £40,875 per annum, inclusive of Outer London Weighting

This is an opportunity for an excellent, committed and ambitious English teacher, who is ready to work in an exciting time at Sir George Monoux Sixth Form College and to help shape the future of the subject! We are looking for teachers of A-level English Literature, A-level English Language, A-level English Language and Literature, A-level Communications and Culture and also at GCSE level.

To succeed you will be a well-qualified, and driven practitioner with a first class track record in teaching either or both A Level and Foundation English, with the ability to challenge learners whilst supporting them to achieve outstanding results. Above all, you must have real enthusiasm for working with young people and aspire to them becoming confident and capable citizens, with real self-belief.

We are seeking only the best candidates who wish to make their mark and support the distinctive ethos of Sir George Monoux Sixth Form College.

For this role you will need excellent subject knowledge and a strong track record of successfully delivering student outcomes. As a person, you need the commitment to put the student at the centre of your practice coupled with the determination and energy to bring about continuous improvement. We welcome applications from NQTs and experienced teachers from Sixth Form Colleges, Schools and FE Colleges.

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If you are seeking a highly rewarding position, enriching the lives of the students who attend our College and being part of an institution which is on a journey to excellence, please visit our website: www.sgmc.ac.uk

Closing date for applications: 12 noon Friday 28 April 2017



Teacher in English A Level and GCSE

Location: Ashton-under-Lyne, Greater Manchester

Salary: £22,356 - £33,980 per annum

Tameside College is a further education college that offers a wide range of courses including Full-Time, Part-Time, Apprenticeships and University Level.

We believe in excellence and we back that up with high standards, real working environments and great teaching. We also believe that attending college is about more than achieving a qualification, important though that is. That is why we aim to give every person the opportunity to develop their full potential in a supportive and friendly environment.

Joining us as a Teacher in English (A level) or GCSE, you will coordinate a programme or group of programmes with responsibility for the quality of the curriculum, curriculum development and planning, the preparation, tracking and monitoring of assessments and for the leadership of the course / subject and team.

We are looking to recruit an enthusiastic, innovative and highly motivated individual, with a relevant degree in a relevant subject (2:1 or above desirable) coupled with a thorough knowledge of the relevant curriculum. With a successful track record of teaching in a further education establishment and experience of targeting needs of learners and supporting their needs effectively, you will be able to plan curriculum flexibly and effectively with a focus of delivering outstanding teaching and learning and be a strong team player with excellent communication skills.

Closing date for A Level applications: noon, 3/05/2017

Closing date for GCSE applications: noon, 12/05/2017

Interview date to be confirmed



Tutor: Maths GCSE (Full-time)

ABOUT YOUR TEAM

You will be part of the school of english, maths and academic studies reporting to the curriculum manager. You may be based at any of the college's sites where maths is taught (Derby Road, Construction Centre, Engineering Innovation Centre).

ABOUT THE ROLE

This is a great opportunity for a dynamic, professional individual qualified in an appropriate discipline, to join a forward thinking college to develop and teach GCSEs to groups of learners from across the college.

It is essential you are qualified to minimum of Level 3 in maths and possess a teaching qualification. Candidates should have experience of successfully delivering GCSE maths within a college or school environment.

It is essential that you have the ability to build positive relationships, displaying excellent communication, organisational skills and administrative skills, and have a flexible and professional attitude.

You will be a highly self-motivated, energetic and driven individual, encompassing a strong sense of autonomy. You will possess excellent presentation and communication skills and be able to demonstrate achievement of targets.

This post has
836 delivery hours

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delivery scale **£25,128 - £36,979**

You will be entitled to **32 days leave** (plus bank holidays).

The role will require you to take on and work to the college's values; working with **professionalism**, taking **responsibility** for your actions, and giving **respect** to customers and colleagues alike.

For further information and to complete an online application form please visit www.wnc.ac.uk/vacancies



Teacher in Mathematics

Location: Ashton-under-Lyne, Greater Manchester

Salary: £22,356 - £33,980 per annum

Tameside College is a further education college that offers a wide range of courses including Full-Time, Part-Time, Apprenticeships and University Level.

We believe in excellence and we back that up with high standards, real working environments and great teaching. We also believe that attending college is about more than achieving a qualification, important though that is. That is why we aim to give every person the opportunity to develop their full potential in a supportive and friendly environment.

Joining us as a Teacher in Mathematics (A level), you will coordinate a programme or group of programmes with responsibility for the quality of the curriculum, curriculum development and planning, the preparation, tracking and monitoring of assessments and for the leadership of the course / subject and team.

We are looking to recruit an enthusiastic, innovative and highly motivated individual, with a relevant degree in a relevant subject (2:1 or above desirable) coupled with a thorough knowledge of the relevant curriculum. With a successful track record of teaching in a further education establishment and experience of targeting needs of learners and supporting their needs effectively, you will be able to plan curriculum flexibly and effectively with a focus of delivering outstanding teaching and learning and be a strong team player with excellent communication skills.

Interviews to take place w/c 15th and 22nd May 2017

Closing date for applications: noon, Monday 3rd May 2017



Lecturer in English

£24,149 - £28,815

Hugh Baird College is a large, dynamic Further Education College, in Merseyside, delivering 300 courses to more than 7000 students from entry level to full degrees. The College is a friendly, diverse and vibrant place to work where students and the local community are at the heart of everything we do.

We are seeking to recruit a dynamic and self-motivated individual to the role of GCSE English Lecturer. You will have the ability to motivate and engage a range of students with inspirational and innovative approaches to deliver learner success and achievement. You will be a trained and experienced English teacher able to deliver GCSE to 14-19 year olds and adults.

To apply for this role please visit www.hughbaird.ac.uk or call **0151 353 4449** or e-mail vacancies@hughbaird.ac.uk. The closing date for this position is **Sunday 30 April 2017**.



Lecturer in Maths

£24,149 - £28,815

Hugh Baird College is a friendly, diverse and vibrant place to work where students and the local community are at the heart of everything we do. We have a reputation for providing high quality education and support for all learners and are seeking to recruit a high quality maths tutor to teach GCSE maths to 14 - 19 year olds and adults.

You will have the ability to motivate and engage a range of students with inspirational and innovative approaches to mathematics and be able to deliver high quality teaching and learning using practical, real life scenarios. A level 3 maths qualification or equivalent level skills is essential together with GCSE maths specialist teaching experience.

To apply for this role please visit www.hughbaird.ac.uk or call **0151 353 4449** or e-mail vacancies@hughbaird.ac.uk. The closing date for this position is **Sunday 30 April 2017**.

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OPINION: FOR AND AGAINST

It was announced during the Easter break that the government's decision over funding allocations for apprenticeship provision for non-levy-paying employers had been paused, to allow time a careful review. We asked two readers: was this the right move



ANNE-MARIE MORRIS

Assessor,
Acacia Training

A brave move for a confused sector

The pause in the non-levy ITT will bring some much needed stability to a sector that is currently in a state of confusion.

While I support the reform in principle, in practice it has been rushed, in particular for non-levy-paying employers. The Education and Skills Funding Agency now has the time to review the process fully and make sure it is implemented properly.

The stance the ESFA has taken is a brave one, and I appreciate the difficulties it has caused for many. However the very fact it has taken this step demonstrates that it has listened to these concerns, and agrees that more consideration is required.

It should be remembered that even for those providers that made it onto the RoATP, there was never any guarantee of contracts for non-levy employers, meaning there was always going to be disappointment for the majority of providers.

The RoATP process has had its difficulties, and there is still doubt over whether it was needed at all, as its aims could have been achieved through the current ROTO system. The ESFA already holds a wealth of information on primes and subcontractors that it could have used to make informed decisions about providers – more time should have been spent on this.

Ofsted results should have been considered more during the RoATP process and not utilising their findings in a more considered way was a mistake.

Equally, for subcontractors, the prime provider's grade would have given the ESFA information on those who work with them, which would surely offer more reassurance of quality than three ambiguous questions.

This approach could have stopped the list filling up with insolvent providers, shell companies and those with grade fours or notices of concern.

I recognise the ESFA wanted to attract more providers to the market, and some existing subcontractors should certainly be prime providers, but not at the price of proven experience.

The government has set a challenging

target to hit three million apprenticeships, but surely taxpayers want them to be good? Over the years the ESFA has lost touch with its provider base, and the RoATP process clearly demonstrated its lack of knowledge on what is actually happening on the ground.

I believe the government has put pressure on the ESFA, and I would hope that this pause also demonstrates that it also sees the need to slow down and review what apprentices and employers need.

With Brexit, there has never been a more important time to ensure that we are developing an effective workforce for the long term, rather than as a three-year business plan between general elections.

“ **The RoATP process clearly demonstrated a lack of knowledge**

The ESFA needs more time to listen to the many issues and to work in partnership with sector experts to ensure the process is robust, and that providers' rigorous checks are meaningful.

Employers and apprentices should not have to worry that a provider they choose from the RoATP has no experience, is financially unstable, under notice of serious breach, or has a poor Ofsted grade.

The very purpose of the RoATP was to give employers confidence that providers would be able to deliver the quality needed for their apprenticeships; the pause will enable ESFA to ensure this now happens.

I admire the ESFA for taking this difficult but fundamentally sensible decision to pause the process – let's hope it continues to apply good sense, and allows us all to get back to the important business of supporting our employers and apprentices.



NOEL DUNNE

Director of Creative Alliance

The pause will destroy good specialist providers

As the director of an award-winning training provider in charge of four subcontracts with different primes, I had made meticulous plans, and invested time and resources to be ready to deliver a direct contract from May 1. Now the government has pulled the rug from under our feet.

As a specialist provider in creative, digital and marketing apprenticeships, Creative Alliance has been effective at enabling 16- to 18-year-olds to secure apprenticeships – no mean feat for a graduate-rich sector with no history of, and little initial interest in, vocational entry routes into work.

This naturally meant we were particularly hard hit by the reduction in fees for frameworks for 16- to 18-year-olds. Last summer I had to explain to our board that from May 2017 we'd earn 100k less delivering the same frameworks.

Despite this, we soldiered on, budgeting carefully, being reasonable about carry-ins and planning for new starts. We counterbalanced the reduction in funding we'd receive for the qualifications we deliver with the fact that from May 1 we'd be no longer paying 15 per cent in management fees. Currently we pay our prime contract holders around 15 per cent of everything we earn to 'manage' the contract with the ESFA.

“ **No one in their right mind would run a business under these conditions**

I prepared for a variety of scenarios to ensure we can meet the potential obligations with our employers. As a social enterprise, we have done everything that it is apparent the government and ESFA have not.

Last week we had no idea how much contract we were going to have to deliver but at least we knew where it was coming from.

This week we are not only clueless on how much contract value we will have, we also have no idea where it will come from.

And, of course, we already have new starts lined up, because you can't turn the employer engagement tap on and off when providing a client-facing business service.

The ESFA says existing contracts will be extended, but that doesn't mean subcontractors will get value under those existing contracts: we are being capped NOW.

Our company needs a minimum contract for 2017-18 of £600k. If we do manage to find contract from somewhere, at that volume, then that's £7,500 per month in management that I hadn't planned to pay. That's £60k that we will lose this year alone paying for learners in contract management fees. At an average of £3,000 per apprenticeship, that's 20 people unable to start apprenticeship qualifications with us.

The tragedy is that the £60k of public money will be paid for services we don't need because we're ready to go. We've invested time and resources into ensuring we're ready. Like many other subcontracting providers, Creative Alliance is ready to start delivery immediately and directly manage contracts from the ESFA; we don't need to pay a prime to manage contracts on our behalf.

So, here's a simple request to the minister, the IFA and the ESFA. Please amend this decision and immediately issue direct contracts to training providers who:

- Have a three-year track record of effective apprenticeship delivery under subcontracting arrangements.
- Have a Qualification Success Rate 5% above national average.
- Can assure their ESFA contract managers that they have all the Information management, monitoring and reporting systems for the ESFA in place.

If not then we, and many other specialist providers, will find ourselves in jeopardy.

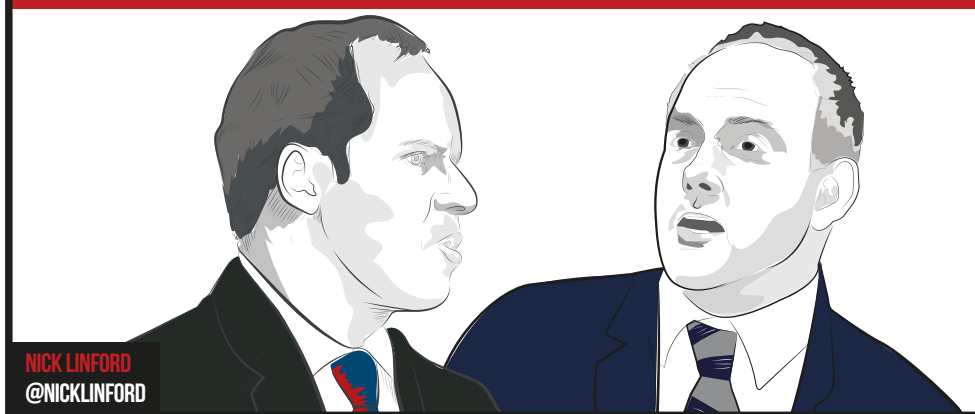
At a time when we should have been developing business opportunities, we have been focusing on how we going to manage this! No one in their right mind would attempt to run a business under these conditions.

As my last shreds of sanity slip away, it helps to remember that we did all tell the minister and civil servants that their process and timetable would not work.

The first rule of leadership is listening. The government didn't. Now I, the team, our clients and our learners will see what we can salvage from this fiasco of their making.

EDITOR ASKS

EDITOR ASKS...



NICK LINFORD
@NICKLINFORD

Halfon answers three key questions after snap election announcement

This week, Theresa May stunned the country by announcing a snap general election. Soon after, FE Week editor Nick Linford collared the skills minister Robert Halfon on the launch of the Institute for Apprenticeships, to ask three key questions on what it all means for FE.

1 The future of the three million apprenticeship starts target

The Conservative manifesto in 2015 committed to three million apprenticeship starts by 2020. So what happens to the target now we're

getting a new manifesto under a new leader?

The minister said he "wasn't going to comment on that" as he didn't know what was going to be in the manifesto, but he did say this: "I'm very proud that we've got 900,000 apprenticeships in our country at the moment. Highest on record."

I pressed him on whether he wanted an apprenticeship starts target to be in the new manifesto, even whether it should be increased to four million. He said it was "a very good question" but would only add that he "would love millions of quality apprenticeships – definitely" – making no commitment at all.

2 Lack of English and maths policy shift

Last November, both Mr Halfon and the education secretary Justine Greening indicated at the AoC's annual conference that they believed the policy to force resits in GCSE English and maths resits on D-grade students wasn't working. The following month, the Ofsted annual report was also critical of the policy, which had only been introduced earlier that year.

So, I asked why, as we have reported in FE Week, the 2017/18 rules on mandatory GCSE English and maths resits remain unchanged.

After a long pause, the minister would only say this: "If there wasn't an election announcement today, I would say there is a lot more work to do, and watch this space."

3 Impact of the pause to the non-levy procurement process

The Education and Skills Funding Agency had been due to share the results of the £440 million non-levy funding procurement process on March 14, but after a delay of nearly a month, it announced last Wednesday that it was "pausing" the process until the end of 2017.

Those already holding an SFA contract would have it extended during the pause. But there are estimated to be around 400 providers (typically subcontractors) that from May will not have direct access to funding from more than 98 percent of employers: those that will

not be paying the levy.

Many providers are hoping the agency will also pause changes to the subcontracting rules to allow existing arrangements to continue. Some, those with current allocations but which did not make it onto the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers, are also calling for a pause.

Despite the promise of further guidance and clarification, nothing has yet been published.

So I asked the minister about all these concerned, confused and worried providers and what happens now.

"Well, exactly what we said in the press release that went out. It's been paused until December," he said.

I pressed him on the hundreds of providers which had applied for an allocation but which now won't have direct funding to non-levy funding in May. Do they go bust?

"We paused it until December and we will set out again [after the] election," he insisted. "If there hadn't been an election announcement we would set out what was going to happen."

I pressed again, asking the question FE Week readers really want an answer to: does the minister accept that following the procurement pause there are now several hundred apprenticeship providers that don't know if they have a business from May?

"What I accept is that we've listened and we've extended this until December to make sure that we listened to the concerns that were set out and that's exactly what we've done" he said.

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CAMPUS ROUND-UP *with Samantha King*

Ten challenges, ten months, one principal



Principal Mark performs in a music video

The principal of Portland College is celebrating a decade at the helm by taking 10 different challenges over 10 months to raise money for a new activity centre.

Mark Dale has been principal of the specialist college in Nottinghamshire since October 2006, and wanted to mark his decade of service by doing something different.

He hopes to raise £1,000 to pay for a new woodland activity centre at the college with an accessible climbing wall, a zipline and walking paths, which will enable disabled students to access Sherwood Forest nearby.

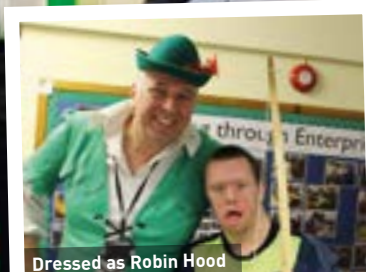
So far, Mr Dale has dressed up as Robin Hood, and recorded a music video while performing the song 'I'm Too Sexy' – a

challenge set by students. Other challenges in the pipeline include losing two stone by September, using a wheelchair for a day and letting learners throw pies at him.

Speaking of his fundraising campaign, dubbed 'Challenge Mark', he said: "When the learners challenged me to a series of 10 challenges over 10 months I had to take it up.

"Portland has a wonderful woodland campus in historic Sherwood Forest, linked with the legend of Robin Hood. I am really proud to draw attention to our exciting plans to open up our woodland to disabled people."

The principal has set up a Challenge Mark crowdfunding page, and has so far raised £150 of his £1,000 target.



Dressed as Robin Hood



Fred Sirieix, centre, with Novus and prison representatives

First Dates man gives young offenders a second chance

The presenter of Channel 4 series First Dates, is heading up a new programme to get young offenders filling hospitality skills gaps.

Presenter Fred Sirieix – who previously worked in Michelin star restaurants as a maitre d' – has established an initiative called 'The Right Course', which aims to get prison restaurants operating like high street establishments.

The initiative, which is funded by donations, will prepare young offenders for the world of work, and give them the skills they will need to get into the hospitality industry upon completion of their prison term.

The initiative will be run in partnership with offender learning and skills company

Novus, as well as the DM Thomas Foundation, and has already started at HM Prison Isis, an institution for male offenders.

"The whole aim is to reduce reoffending and teach prisoners about service and cooking within prisons so that they can join our industry upon release," said Sirieix.

"The work we do together with Novus and the DM Thomas Foundation gets young learners to practice delivering high standards that will ultimately make them great professionals.

"Prison environments should be about forgiveness and redemption. We should be educating these young people and instilling strong values within them to underpin it all."



Students strut their stuff

The catwalk for equality

Supported learners at East Kent College has taken part in a fashion show celebrating and supporting diversity in the industry.

The students, based at the college's Folkestone campus, created a collection of second-hand clothing which they debuted on the catwalk.

The collection, called Altered Images, was created from clothes sourced from charity shops, and promoted the idea of cost-effective fashion; hair and make-up students from the college's Dover campus were also on hand to provide styling for the event.

The show was organised by charity ARRC – which supports people with physical and sensory impairments.

Jackie Clancy, the college's programme director of supported learning, said: "It takes a lot of courage to stand up on the catwalk. It has done wonders for their confidence and they have all expressed creativity and enhanced their design skills."

ARRC's deputy CEO Trish Bishop said: "We are doing our best to get the message across that the fashion industry is prone to excluding people with disabilities and we would like that to change."

Things get hare-y

Two students from Gloucestershire College have hand-painted a 5ft hare statue that will become part of the annual Cotswold Hare Trail.

The challenge places more than 80 hare statues across 20 villages, towns and cities in the Cotswolds, with the students' creation positioned in the reception of the college's Cheltenham campus.

Each hare is sponsored by a local business, individual or community group, and hand-painted by local artists; this year the design brief was the culture, history and heritage of the Cotswolds.

Art foundation studies students Lauren Dutson and Ciara Hinchey painted their hare in the style of the designer William Morris, who lived in the Cotswolds for most of his life and is still celebrated for his floral textile and wallpaper prints.

Florence Beetlestone, founder of the Hare Trail said: "I'm so delighted that the students have got involved, as the Hare Trail is very much about working with art and young people and developing public art education".

The trail began on March 25 and will run until September. The hares will all go up for auction in October, with the proceeds going to National Star, a disability charity, and to local historical projects in Cotswold towns.



Lauren Dutson and Ciara Hinchey



Hare-raising: the Strawberry Thief

CAMPUS ROUND-UP *with Samantha King*

London's first autism college celebrates launch

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A national autism charity has celebrated the official launch of London's first-ever FE college for learners with complex autism. Samantha King reports.

Operating across two campuses in Tottenham and Isleworth, Ambitious College is the first specialist day college solely for young people with autism, catering for those between the ages of 16 to 25.

After operating out of temporary accommodation for more than two years, charity Ambitious About Autism raised enough money to take Ambitious College to a more permanent home, with two campuses colocated within mainstream colleges, the College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London (CONEL) and West Thames College.

The new college's Pears campus (colocated with CONEL) first opened its doors to a small number of learners in September 2016, and has already received an award for its impact on the local community.

Now the college has celebrated its official launch with an event on March 30, attended by the vulnerable children minister Edward Timpson MP, local MP David Lammy, Catherine West MP and the deputy mayor of London, Joanne McCartney.

Also in attendance was Trevor Pears from



Minister Edward Timpson MP, CEO of Ambitious about Autism Jolanta Lasota and David Lammy MP

Edward Timpson cutting the ribbon

Principal Vivienne Berkeley



the Pears Foundation, the lead partner of Ambitious College.

Ambitious About Autism hopes to raise a total of £4.4 million to fully establish the college and continue its work, and is £1 million away from its target. The appeal has already garnered support from broadcaster Jon Snow, John Bercow MP and author Nick Hornby, and has received donations from Sir Harvey McGrath and Baroness Dido Harding, the chief executive of TalkTalk.

"Through the model we have, we can support our colocated partners – West Thames

and CONEL – to become more autism confident. In doing that, it makes it easier for young people with autism to enrol on courses there so it's a win-win. That was important for us," said the college's principal Vivienne Berkeley.

"It's a real symbiotic relationship. The more autism-confident mainstream providers get, it opens the world of learning opens up much easier for young people with autism."

Across its two campuses, Ambitious College currently has around 44 learners, with plans

to expand its student numbers over the coming years.

"Complex autism means our learners have a diagnosis of autism and a further diagnosis of a learning disability," said Ms Berkeley.

"Having a day provision rather than a residential one means we can keep young people in their local communities and develop opportunities for them here."

The charity has released figures showing that only one in four young people with complex autism progress to further education.

The college day starts at half-past nine and finishes at four, with a total academic year of 48 weeks; the majority of learners come to the college five days a week.

Edward Timpson cut the ribbon to officially open the college.

"Ambitious about Autism should be congratulated for leading the way in providing this type of education provision for young people with autism in London," he said. "I hope that there are many more colleges like this in the coming years."



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MOVERS & SHAKERS

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

Clare Marchant has been named the new chief executive of the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, which operates the application process for all British universities and offering advice to college staff on how to help college leavers complete the application process.

Ms Marchant will take up the new role from her current position as chief executive of Worcestershire County Council. She first joined the council in 2010 and became its chief executive in 2014.

Before this, she worked for Deloitte, and lead delivery and deployment of IT services across the NHS for seven years.

Speaking of her appointment, Ms Marchant said she was "thrilled", adding "UCAS is a unique organisation which fulfils a critical national role connecting people with education opportunities.

"I look forward to working with customers, staff, and stakeholders to enable UCAS to realise its goal of delivering outstanding digital services to students, advisers and universities and colleges."

Ms Marchant will take up the role in July this year, succeeding Mary Curnock Cook who has been at the helm of UCAS for more than seven years.

Andrew Hargreaves, UCAS' director of customer experience and marketing, will act

as interim CEO following Cook's departure at the end of April.

Marc Doyle has started as principal of Humber University Technical College, which opened in September 2015, and specialises in engineering and renewable energy.

Mr Doyle has been teaching for 21 years, beginning his career as a maths teacher at Horbury School in Wakefield in 1995, before becoming head of maths at Thornhill School, which recently featured in the Channel 4 programme Educating Yorkshire.

Most recently, he was core team principal at the Delta Academies trust.

One of his key responsibilities will be working closely with local employers to

get them involved with the UTC, allowing students to actively interact with their potential future employers.

Mr Doyle said: "I firmly believe that wherever there are industry links in education, there is always greater success.

"As such, Humber UTC fits everything that I consider to be important in education. It has huge potential and is unique in its approach, turning students into the skilled professionals that local industry needs."

He began the role on April 1.

Katy Quinn has been appointed principal and CEO of Strode College in Somerset.

Ms Quinn is currently the deputy chief executive of Eastleigh College in Hampshire, and will take up her new role in June this year, replacing James Staniforth.

Prior to her position at Eastleigh, she held roles including vice principal of curriculum and quality at Canterbury College, vice principal of Sevic College as well as a variety of positions in South Essex College at the start of her career.

At Strode, Ms Quinn will oversee leadership and management, business development, quality improvement and broadening learning opportunities.

Speaking of her appointment, she said: "I'm looking forward to working with such a dedicated team of staff and governors. My key priorities will be to ensure that all students continue to receive an outstanding experience and that the college remains at the heart of the local community."



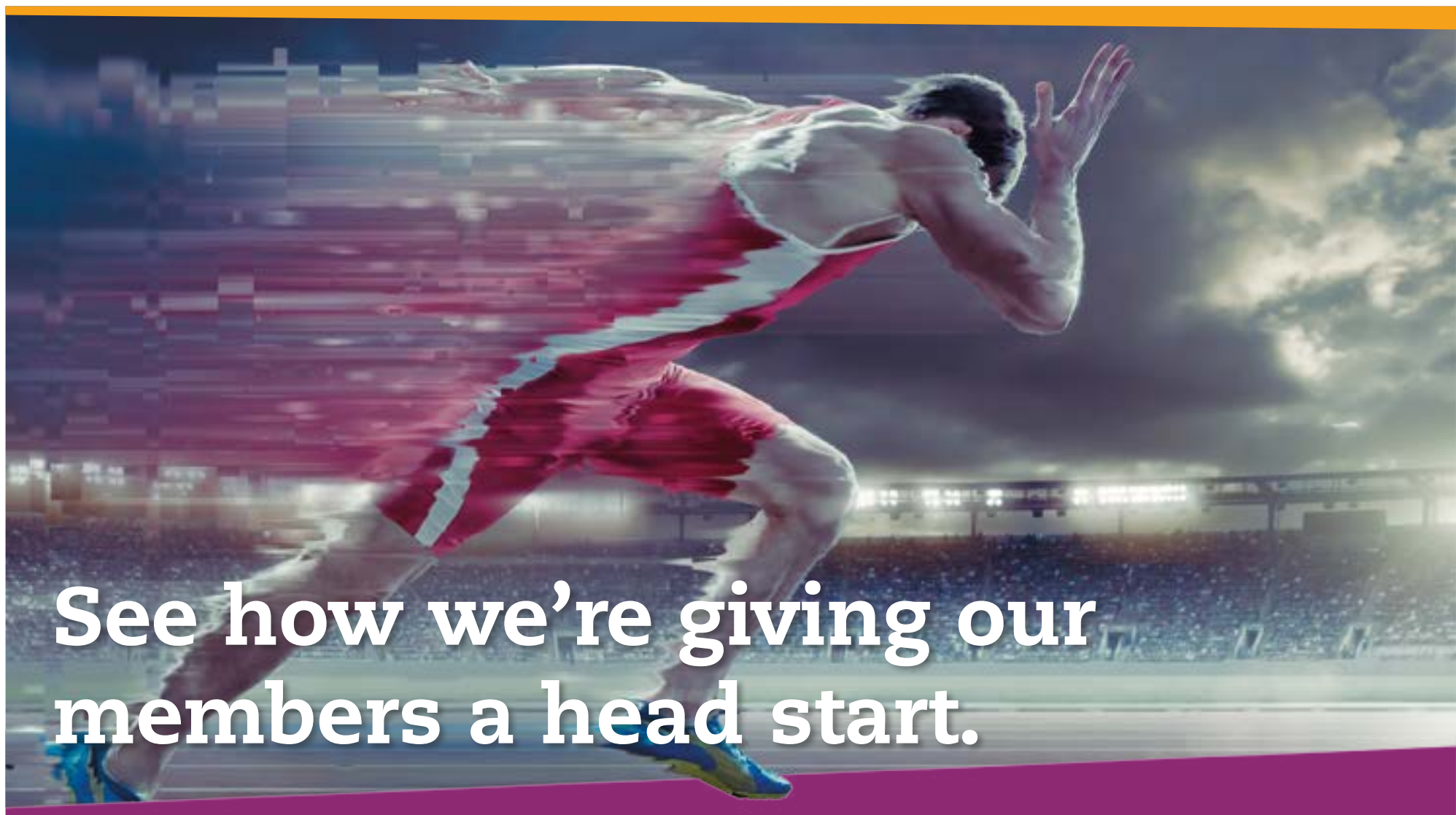
CLARE MARCHANT



MARC DOYLE



KATY QUINN



See how we're giving our members a head start.



See page 9 for more information

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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

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

Difficulty:
EASY

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

Difficulty:
MEDIUM

Solutions:
Next edition

Last Week's solutions

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

Difficulty:
EASY

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

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.
Last Edition's winner: Mo Dixon, New College Durham