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FRIDAY, JULY 6, 2018
EDITION 251



BEST IN CLASS AT NATIONAL BTEC AWARDS

See page 4

SUBCONTRACTING FEES REVEALED

- One in four primes charged on average more than 20% topslice last year
- Learndirect kept £4.7m from £11.9m in a single deal, a whopping 40%
- DfE say they have 'no concerns', as overall 20% was kept by providers
- Former skills minister hits back, calling situation 'absolutely scandalous'

Exclusive

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CORRECTION

The opinion piece published last week and attributed to Anne Corrin of the Royal College of Nursing, contained some edits to her wording that unintentionally changed the meaning of the article, and could have left the reader thinking Corrin was arguing that hospital-based apprentice training is currently unsafe and inefficient. Corrin was actually referring to apprentice training in the 1980s.

We apologise and at the request of the author have removed the article from online.

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Great Debate on apprenticeships: time for stability, or major change?

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Single licensing is key to making
T-levels the gold standard
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If you're not careful, HE will muscle in
on college territory
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If apprenticeship co-investment is
removed, it should be done selectively
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'Incredible' that DfE unsure which of its apprentices were already civil servants

BILLY CAMDEN
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Exclusive

The Department for Education has drawn criticism for not knowing whether more than a third of its apprentices were new or existing civil servants.

As of May 10, the department had 186 employed apprentices.

Through a freedom of information response, the DfE revealed that 76 of these were existing civil servants and 36 were new entrants to the government.

However, for 74 of them the department admitted it did not know whether they were new civil service employees or not.

It said this was because the department gathers data on apprentices via a voluntary questionnaire and not all questionnaires are returned.

Lord Watson of Invergowrie, who has a keen interest in apprenticeships and often brings the topic to debate in parliament, expressed his shock.

He called the situation "ridiculous" and said it did not "inspire confidence" for employers dealing with the complexities of the apprenticeship levy.

"I find it incredible that any employer would not know how many apprentices are new appointments or existing members of staff," Lord Watson, Labour's education spokesperson in the House of Lords, told FE Week.

"That is particularly so when the employer in question is the department overseeing the whole expansion of apprenticeships and the apprenticeships levy."

He promised to table a parliamentary question to "probe this matter further".

"To have this left hand right hand situation does not exactly inspire confidence in other employers, many of whom are struggling with the levy system, as they find it bureaucratic and impenetrable," added Lord Watson



Lord Watson

"What this doesn't do is give the DfE any firm footing on which to question other employers that they are not satisfied with how they are proceeding with the levy.

"It is a question of getting their own house in order first. They don't just need to do that, but need to be seen to have done that, to inspire confidence."

NAO to check progress of apprenticeship reforms

A follow-up review of apprenticeships has been launched by the National Audit Office, which will focus on whether the reform programme is delivering value for money.

It is requesting submissions, with a key theme being whether the Department for Education is ensuring that the system is not being abused by stakeholders.

This follows its 2016 report, which warned that without more robust risk planning, the reform programme risked a repeat of the fraud that

plagued failed Individual Learning Accounts.

"Since then there have been a number of developments which make revisiting this topic timely, including a levy that has been introduced on the payroll of large employers to fund apprenticeships," said a spokesperson.

The review comes as AELP boss Mark Dawe had an "excellent meeting" with the NAO this week to discuss "the apprenticeship policy a year on".

Institute for Apprenticeships' T-level takeover delayed, again

A second delay to the date that the Institute for Apprenticeships will take responsibility for T-levels has been announced.

According to the institute's business plan for 2018-19, published this week, it expects to have agreed a "full implementation timetable" for taking on the new technical qualifications only by next March.

It was originally meant to take control of T-levels from the

Department for Education in March 2018. Then minutes of a board meeting from last November revealed the first postponement, which moved the takeover date to the end of 2018.

The IfA declined to comment on the latest delay, but a DfE spokesperson said it is "important that we make sure that the transfer of full responsibility is done at the time that is right".

IfA yet to review duplicate and low-skill standards after 2 years

JUDE BURKE
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Exclusive

The Institute for Apprenticeships has yet to carry out any formal review of duplicate, narrow or low-skill standards – two years after being urged to do so by influential peer Lord Sainsbury.

Demands are growing for the institute to "take stock" and focus on quality rather than numbers, with 300 standards now approved for delivery and a target of 400 set for next April.

But two years after Lord Sainsbury called for a review of "all existing apprenticeship standards" at "the earliest opportunity", the IfA remained tight-lipped when asked by FE Week what action it had taken.

It would confirm only that a limited review will begin this summer.

In his report of the independent panel on technical education, published in July 2016, the peer made clear he was concerned about standards that overlapped, were too job-specific, or lacked enough technical content to justify 20 per cent off-the-job training.

The government's strategic guidance to the IfA, published at the time of the institute's official launch in April 2017, also states that its core functions include "at regular intervals, reviewing published standards and assessment plans".

However, no such review has yet taken place, despite IfA's boss Sir Gerry Berragan saying in February he was aware that there had been "some price and quality compromises made early on to get some momentum into reforms".

An IfA spokesperson said it will "look to conduct a review of existing standards", and has recently advertised for a 'Standard Review Lead' post-holder.

"The first review will take place this summer on the digital standards," she said.

Both Sir Gerry and Ana Osbourne, the IfA's deputy director for approvals who will be leading this summer's review, declined FE Week's request for an interview.

Nor would the spokesperson confirm if the review would address Lord Sainsbury's recommendations. Instead, she said details would be announced "shortly".

"The IfA appears to think that we should all be impressed by the number of standards they are approving and how much faster they are approving them than before," said Tom Richmond, senior research fellow at think-tank Reform, and former senior adviser to two skills ministers.

"That is of little comfort to apprentices who are being put on narrow, often low-skill, training courses that do not offer

them genuine career progression."

Tom Bewick, chief executive of the Federation of Awarding Bodies, urged the government to take stock of the number of standards approved. He warned it would soon be well above "leading apprenticeship systems" like Germany.

"An apprentice being trained to carry out a 'job role' is not the same as one being trained to work in a whole industry," he said.

FE Week's own analysis of standards in development or approved for delivery found 26 for different manager roles from levels three to seven – even though a generic team leader/supervisor also exists.

Nine of these are at level four, including hospitality manager and facilities manager, both approved this year, and retail manager, approved in 2016.

Yet a number of overlapping level

three engineering and manufacturing standards were withdrawn in March 2017 before the IfA launched. They were replaced with a catch-all engineering technician standard, covering a number of different specialisms.

This approach appears to be at odds with the IfA's target of 400 published standards by April 2019 – part of its drive to be "faster and better".

According to the institute's 2018-19 business plan, it should have "due regard to appropriate coverage of the occupational maps and the priorities and diversity of the modern economy" in reaching this target.

The same business plan reveals that Ms Osbourne is tasked with "designing and implementing a long-term plan for standards review".

Sir Gerry has also compared the number of standards ready for delivery with those of "very mature apprenticeship systems".

"Switzerland has 249 standards and Germany has around 330," he said.

His predecessor, Peter Lauener, conceded last year that the institute would have to tackle the overlap between different standards.

He expected there would be "somewhere in the regions of 700 to 800" standards, reflecting "links to the number of occupations".

News

‘Inspiration and dedication’: BTEC stars in the spotlight

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From front

The 24 winners of the 2018 BTEC awards have been recognised at a glitzy ceremony in London.

Central Hall Westminster was the venue for this year's event, in which individual learners' outstanding achievements were recognised in subject areas ranging from construction to music and engineering to sport.

Hosted by TV presenter and well-known FE supporter Steph McGovern, the ceremony showcased the “fantastic contributions” made by students studying for BTECs.

An expert panel of 52 judges reviewed nominees for the eighth annual awards and chose the winners.

The July 5 event was attended by the winners, their families and teachers as well as stakeholders from the education and business worlds. Entrepreneurs, MPs and celebrities shared the 24 winners' stories and presented their awards.

The overall BTEC student of the year award went to Rachna Udasi, a level three subsidiary diploma in business student at St David's College in Llandudno.

As part of her studies, she launched a business that ships coffee beans from a community in Uganda to the UK, where they are packaged and sold to local coffee shops. The profits are then sent back to Africa.

“Rachna is a true example of putting her education into practice,” the judges said.

“She has achieved top grades and desires to become a successful entrepreneur and inspire others.

“Rachna exemplifies the spirit of inspiration and dedication.”

The BTEC sports student of the year was Megan Murphuy, from Bishop Thomas Grant School in London. Her award was presented by Max Whitlock, a double Olympic gold medallist and BTEC graduate.

He gave the audience a treat by showcasing his talent via an impromptu performance on the pommel horse.

Also performing were the five winners of Pearson's Showstopper Challenge drawn from colleges offering BTECs in the performing arts: Arts1, Pik'n'Mix, Hamilton Mix, Aurimas and Shemaiah.

Other BTEC award winners included adult learner of the year Feven Zeray, from Trafford College; tutor of the year Tommy Robinson, from the John Madejski Academy in Reading; and international student of the year Kuang Myat Htet, from UMG College Myanmar.

The award for college of the year went to Suffolk One Sixth Form College in Ipswich, while school of the year was claimed by the Westminster Academy in London.

Rod Bristow, president of Pearson in the UK, commended the recipients of the awards.

“I want to offer my congratulations to all of the winners and everyone



The winners of the 2018 BTEC Awards

BTEC award winners 2018

Award	School, College or MAT	Student Name
BTEC Art and Design Student of the Year	East Riding College	Elland Hill
BTEC Business and Enterprise Student of the Year	St. David's College	Rachna Udasi
BTEC Child and Social Care Student of the Year	Cardiff and Vale College	Whitney Phillips
BTEC Construction Student of the Year	Leeds College of Building	Sinead Burke
BTEC Creative Media Student of the Year	Westminster Academy	Nada El-Hammoud
BTEC Engineering Student of the Year	National Space Academy	James Brown
BTEC Hospitality, Travel and Tourism Student of the Year	Bury College	Alison Healey
BTEC IT and Computing Student of the Year	NSCG Stafford College	Matthew Risbey-Ward
BTEC Land-based Student of the Year	Bishop Burton College	Laura Wrisdale
BTEC Music Student of the Year	Holmer Green Senior School	Joseph Eales
BTEC Performing Arts Student of the Year	St Mary's Catholic College	Daniel Regan
BTEC Public Services Student of the Year	Southern Regional College	Matthew McCabe
BTEC Science Student of the Year	Blackpool & the Fylde College	Mica Mullender
BTEC Sport Student of the Year	Bishop Thomas Grant School	Megan Murphuy
BTEC Adult Learner of the Year	Trafford College	Feven Zeray
BTEC Apprentice 16-18 of the Year	Warrington & Vale Royal College	Ryan Kenny
BTEC Apprentice 19+ of the Year	Leeds College of Building	Thomas Coleman
BTEC Apprentice Provider of the Year	Leeds College of Building	Derek Whitehead
BTEC College of the Year	One Sixth Form College	Rob Bamford
BTEC Higher National Student of the Year	Leeds College of Building	Viren Lad
BTEC International Student of the Year	UMG College	Kuang Myat Htet
BTEC Teacher/Tutor of the Year	John Madejski Academy	Tommy Robinson
BTEC School or MAT of the Year	Westminster Academy	Patrick Farmbrough
BTEC Student of the Year 2018	St. David's College	Rachna Udasi

who was nominated for a BTEC award this year,” he said.

“This is a wonderful celebration, not just of the outstanding winners themselves but of the value of the BTEC qualification to employers and universities around the world.”

Pearson has run BTECs for over 30 years. The hands-on vocational qualifications facilitate training

of “work-ready candidates” with knowledge and practical skills sought by employers. Throughout their course, students work on assignments in real-life scenarios.

Mr Bristow said learners face a “rapidly changing landscape – as trends in labour patterns, technology and industry alter the way we work and live”.

“Now, more than ever, I believe the broad, career-focused education that BTEC offers reflects the reality that the global economy doesn't just value what people know; it values what they can do,” he added.

FE Week is media partner for the BTEC awards and will be publishing a special supplement on the awards ceremony next week.



Steph McGovern, Rachna Udasi and Maryam Taher

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News

Learndirect team head en masse to rejected buyer

FE WEEK REPORTER
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The entire executive team at Learndirect Apprenticeships Ltd, along with 18 other senior employees, have quit to work for PeoplePlus Group – the firm that had only recently had its purchase offer for LDA rejected.

The unexpected mass exodus of 22 key staff has been met with a furious response from the Learndirect Group, calling it “dirty tricks”, which PeoplePlus “absolutely deny”.

As reported exclusively by FE Week, Learndirect had been working for weeks on a sale to PeoplePlus Group, a division of Staffline Group, a listed company and one of the biggest recruitment firms in the UK.

PeoplePlus undertook several weeks of due diligence on a purchase of the entire Learndirect Group, but

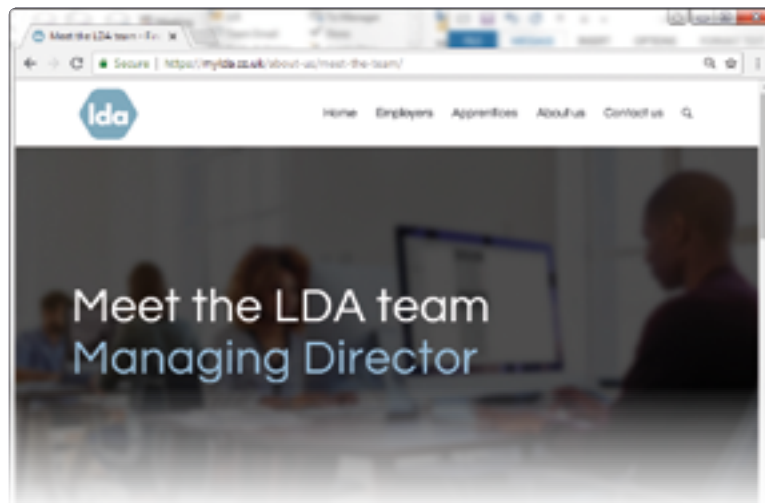
FE Week understands the talks ended after their offer to take ownership only of Learndirect Apprenticeships Ltd was rejected.

Two weeks ago Learndirect, owned by the private equity firm Lloyds Development Capital, then turned to entrepreneur Wayne Janse van Rensburg and a deal was done to take ownership of the whole Learndirect Group.

Mr Janse van Rensburg is managing director of the Stonebridge College Group, which supplies Learndirect with a virtual learning environment known as PEARL.

Stonebridge College Group includes Dimensions Training Solutions, a training provider that Mr Janse van Rensburg purchased in 2015, and the ESFA approved the change of ownership for LDA on the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers.

Mr Janse van Rensburg, who has only been owner of the Learndirect



Group for a week, told FE Week: “Colleagues that don’t share our vision and values, placing learners and employers at the heart of our provision, have no place in my business.”

But a senior employee at the Learndirect Group who did not wish to be named went further, saying: “This

is pretty dirty tricks from PeoplePlus, having spent several weeks in our data room [during the due diligence phase of the sale process].

“The 22 staff that resigned can expect a letter from our lawyer stating that they would be in breach of contract to leave without seeing out their notice period, which would allow

for an orderly handover.

“The letter will also remind them of the non-compete clause in their contract of employment at Learndirect Apprenticeship Ltd,” they added.

Simon Rouse, managing director at PeoplePlus Group, told FE Week that the 22 people who resigned from LDA would be joining PeoplePlus this week and any claim of “dirty tricks” was “conspiratorial nonsense”.

He went on to say: “We went into this to do a deal [to buy Learndirect] in good faith. We were not able to make that deal work after we made an offer and they decided not to proceed with that offer and went with an alternative buyer. The managers at LDA have decided that they don’t have confidence that the new business has a future for them and we are delighted that they have come to join us.

“This idea that there was some conspiracy or dirty tricks, we absolutely deny that.”

The 22 LDA staff who jumped ship to PeoplePlus include the managing director, sales and marketing director, quality director and performance director.

It is understood that Andy Palmer, the former chief executive of LDA, is not among those who have left, and he is currently interim chair at the Learndirect Group.

Careers and Enterprise Company agrees to publish board minutes

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Exclusive

The Careers and Enterprise Company has responded to savage criticism from MPs over secrecy by finally agreeing to publish its board minutes.

Its chair Christine Hodgson and chief executive Claudia Harris were grilled in May over the CEC’s lack of transparency, during a bruising appearance before the Commons education select committee, where CEC was called an “over-bloated quango”.

The company, launched in 2015, is leading efforts on behalf of the government to connect more young people with the world of work. But MPs raised grave concerns over a lack of evidence relating to the impact it has made so far, while committee chair Robert Halfon questioned why the CEC had never exposed itself to proper

scrutiny by publishing board minutes.

A message has now appeared on the CEC website saying: “From July 2018, we will be publishing minutes of our board meetings.”

A spokesperson for the company also confirmed to FE Week the intention to publish minutes of future meetings.

“We will be publishing on our website from our next board meeting at the end of July,” said a spokesperson. “We have always aimed to be a transparent organisation and have welcomed feedback on how best to achieve this.”

However, publication of previous board minutes is “still being considered”.

This stems from concerns that there may be a “generic issue around retrospective publication of minutes if board members were not made aware of that at the time of the meeting”.

The announcement was welcomed by Mr Halfon.

“We had serious concerns about a lack of transparency when we



questioned the CEC, so we are pleased they have taken our concerns on board and finally decided to publish board minutes,” he said.

“Any organisation that receives public funding must always be as open and transparent as possible. Sunlight is the best disinfectant and the public has a right to know how decisions are made.”

A freedom of information request lodged by our sister paper Schools Week has confirmed that the CEC has so far received £40.8 million of government funding since 2015, and is expected to be given at least £18.8 million in each of

the next two financial years.

Funding for the next two years has not yet been agreed, but it is understood it will be more than the £18.8 million handed to the organisation in 2017-18.

Future funding is expected to “reflect the expanded role that the company now has implementing the careers strategy”, a DfE spokesperson said.

After asking in the select committee hearing in May why the CEC’s board minutes were not yet published, Mr Halfon added: “Given that you get money from the government, shouldn’t you publish them?”

Ms Hodgson and Ms Harris agreed

to “take that away” as a point worth investigating.

FE Week has persistently pressed the company for details of the colleges that it works with, and how it is engaging them.

In December 2016 we revealed a postcode lottery for FE coverage, with 15 local enterprise partnerships not covered in the CEC’s “enterprise adviser network” – and no London FE and sixth-form colleges at all. Ms Harris insisted during the May hearing that the company is now working with 40 per cent of FE colleges, which works out at around 140.

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News

Great Debate on apprenticeships: t

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The motion: This house believes the fall in apprenticeship starts since last May and the unspent levy proves urgent policy changes are needed

The first in a series of FE Week and Pearson Great Debates was held in parliament this week, with nearly 300 sector leaders arguing over whether

further reforms are needed to the apprenticeships system.

It was chaired by Shane Mann, managing director of FE Week publisher LSECT. Leading the call for action was Sue Pittock, chief executive of Remit Training, while FE Week editor Nick Linford was against.

They were joined by skills minister Anne Milton, who listened in, and chair of the education select committee Robert Halfon, who delivered an impassioned speech.

The debate focused on the impact of the apprenticeship reforms one year in.

Hotly discussed were the reasons starts were down 52 per cent in March compared with the same period in 2017, and why employers have used just 10 per cent of their levy funds in the first 12 months since the levy was introduced.

The vast majority of the audience voted for change at the start of the debate, but Mr Linford managed to win over two individuals by the end. Here's our summary of what happened:

For the motion

"Enhancements not wholesale changes" in three main policies are urgently needed to address the fall in apprenticeship starts and the unspent levy, argued Sue Pittock.

The chief executive of Remit Training, a private provider that delivers apprenticeships in a range of industries from automotive to hospitality, called for "flexibility" on the 20 per cent off-the-job training requirement.

She also backed dropping the 10 per cent co-contribution, and wanted "some consistency" in end-point assessment.

She said these shifts are needed because small businesses are "dropping fast and disengaging" with apprenticeships, noting that two years ago her business had 90 per cent penetration among small and medium enterprises, but it has dropped to 40 per cent, with the rest being levy clients.

The 20 per cent off-the-job training requirement is one of the main causes of the drop, according to Ms Pittock, who called it a "huge commitment" not only for smaller employers, but for larger ones too.

"We need flexibility around how much is delivered in paid time and how much of a commitment the apprentice puts in," she told the audience.

"An employer puts their skin in the game by giving people the opportunity to do an apprenticeship and that chance of training."

She added that apprentices should also have some skin in the game by being allowed to have self-study time count towards the 20 per cent.

In terms of the 10 per cent fee that small businesses must pay when taking on apprentices, Ms Pittock wants it scrapped for level two apprenticeships for 16- to 24-year-olds.

"We are seeing level twos at 16- to 18 really suffer, so our social mobility is

really taking a hit," she said.

"We are seeing a 500 per cent increase in management programmes.

Do we want a society that ends up delivering management programmes as opposed to giving our young people coming out of the schools system a foot on the ladder to do a level two programme?"

And lastly, on end-point assessment, Ms Pittock called for consistency.

"I have one employer group that has a six-day EPA for a level two programme," she said.

"You could be 17, get in a car and pass your driving test in one afternoon; potentially if you were the wrong person and not competent, you could kill somebody. But we are going to take six days to assess somebody on a level two programme.

"There needs to be consistency, and the IFA needs to provide that framework so we don't end up with massive EPAs that disadvantages learners."

Also calling for change was Karen Bailey, head of competence development at Volvo Group UK.

She said she doesn't know many employers that can cope with the complexity of FE-level funding rules and regulations on apprenticeships.

"It is exceptionally difficult, it is exceptionally time-consuming, and I would argue that a lot of employers do not see it as good value and would rather not bother with apprenticeships," she claimed.

"We currently have over 400 apprentices and five different ways they can be funded. The complexity is absolutely ridiculous."

Ms Bailey also thinks that having a levy pot is encouraging employers to behave "exceptionally badly".

"I've heard a lot about employers who have removed their training budgets

and have instead put in an apprentice levy pot manager whose only job is to spend that levy," she said.

"To me that is not the idea. People are seeing it as their pot; it's not their pot. It's not your money, it is a tax and we need to treat it as a tax and look at it for the good of our economy."

Final speaker for the motion on the panel was Cindy Rampersaud, senior vice-president for BTEC and apprenticeship at Pearson.

She agreed with Ms Pittock that although no "wholesale change" is needed, some refinement is, particularly where the levy is concerned.

"I spent 20 years working in industry, and I look at the levy and think if I was back in one of my older roles in the media, how easy would this be as an employer to implement?" she said.

"There is a level of bureaucracy that colleges and private providers are used to working with, but large employers aren't."



Sue Pittock



Audience takes notes on the debate



Robert Halfon

Halfon in t

Admitting he "sounds like a politician", Robert Halfon struck a note of compromise in his speech.

The former skills minister agreed there isn't enough evidence for major apprenticeship changes, but significant problems cannot be ignored.

"I think it is right to talk about the number of starts and right that perhaps after 11 months we don't have the whole picture about what is going on," the chair of the education select committee said.

"It is also right that we shouldn't change the levy into just a general skills pot because I think there would be huge gaming of the system."

However, Mr Halfon conceded

that the "package does need some change", particularly where the levy is concerned.

From next month large employers will be able to transfer up to 10 per cent of their unspent apprenticeship levy funds to multiple businesses. Mr Halfon wants this proportion drastically increased.

"I am sympathetic to the idea that you increase that to 50 per cent because I think it would benefit a lot of non-levy payers," he said.

Under current rules, levy payers must spend their levy pot within 24 months. Mr Halfon wants the government to also look at extending this "to possibly 36 or 48 months".

Time for stability, or major change?

Against the motion



Anne Milton

the middle

But overall he believes the levy was never going to transform apprenticeships in England alone, as there are many other “deep rooted” issues that need fixing alongside it.

“I think the apprentice levy should have been accompanied by much wider reforms in general,” he told the audience.

“The problem is the levy is seen as the answer to everything when actually there are deep rooted problems in terms of having more disadvantaged apprentices, and there are deep rooted problems around careers advice in our country – it is not skills focused.”

He also touched on issues with the government’s three million starts target.

“In terms of the three million target, I always thought it was a good thing because I thought it concentrated the mind of the Treasury,” he said.

“My one fear having thought about it a lot is that what it means is that it is a substitute for quantity over quality. I want to see a lot more quality and progression.”

In conclusion, Mr Halfon said, the “apprentice ladder of opportunity only works if the levy is included in a whole load of things and not just seen as the answer to everything.

“I hope we make some changes to the levy but not to the foundations. If you imagine it was a house, I’d like to make changes to some of the rooms.”

Nick Linford called for a much-needed period of stability.

Wearing his “author of an apprenticeships book hat”, he urged Ms Milton to stand firm on the reforms already introduced, mainly because there is not yet enough evidence on the causes of the drop in starts.

“Many of you in the room continue to complain about change and you want the S word; you want stability,” he said.

“It is interesting to hear Sue [see page 8] suggest that nobody wants wholesale change. I’m not sure that is true.

“We just heard from Karen saying she wants a complete rethink from an employer’s perspective of this tax in terms of the levy pot.

“We have a long list from organisations such as the AELP that want to scrap co-investment for 16- to 24-year-olds at level two and three, or to increase framework rates at level two where there is no alternative standard.

“They want a ring-fenced budget for non-levy, they want to increase functional skills funding to be double where it is now, plus sector-by-sector

20 per cent off-the-job changes.”

However, there are many other organisations saying they want opposite changes, Mr Linford continued.

“The AoC for example says scrap the three million target.

“Then we have employer body groups such as the CBI pushing for much of the apprenticeship levy funding to be spent on things that aren’t apprenticeships, which sounds like wholesale change to me.

“Then the Federation of Small Businesses want a more generous employer incentive, and then the metro mayors are saying ‘unspent levy – give that to us; we’ll spend that on other things’.

“Talking about more wholesale change, the Lords economic affairs committee have come out and said, scrap the Institute for Apprenticeships.”

On top of this, the Department for Education is demanding that the Institute for Apprenticeships review and change 30 of the most popular standards because funding for those standards is said to be too high.

“My argument boils down to this: there is a huge amount of pressure on the minister at the moment from all corners, but I think more time is needed,” he said.

“Possibly the most important message is that if you change things you lose the confidence of the employers. You lose the confidence of the training providers.”

He added that there is only 11 months’ worth of evidence since reforms were introduced last May, and in that time there has been 309,000 starts, an average of nearly 30,000 a month.

“I would argue relative to 10 years ago, this is an incredibly buoyant programme,” Mr Linford said.

“For me stability and investment is what is needed.”

Sean Williams, chief executive of Corndel, backed Mr Linford’s argument.

“We need to look back at why the changes were made in the first place,” he said.

“It was first and foremost to make apprenticeships employer-led.

“The market has changed. I hear a lot in this room about providers who haven’t noticed that the market has changed.

“I think we need stability in order for the market to move to those high quality employer-led apprenticeships which really deliver. I plead for stability because it is only stability that will give us time to move forward.”

Fiona Aldridge, assistant director for research and development at the Learning and Work Institute, also agreed with the need for stability.

“I am conscious that if we continue to change the system, we will have young people, parents and teacher who don’t know what it is and therefore won’t engage,” she said.

“A Sutton Trust report said two thirds of young people are actually thinking about apprenticeships now, but only a third of teachers are promoting that opportunity. Lots of them say that is because they don’t have the right information and don’t know what the benefits are.

“My concern is that while we absolutely have to get the system right, constantly making big churning changes means people will not think this is worth speculating on for their children.”



Nick Linford

News

3aaa inspection 'incomplete' as whistleblowing sparks review

PAUL OFFORD
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Exclusive

An investigation is being carried out by government officials into apprenticeship giant Aspire Achieve Advance, after claims made by a whistleblower.

FE Week revealed last week that Ofsted's latest inspection of 3aaa – which holds the largest ESFA apprenticeship allocation – had been declared "incomplete" following intervention from the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

We can now reveal that 3aaa had been expecting a grade 1 outcome and the inspection has been classed as incomplete owing to an ongoing investigation led by the ESFA.

FE Week also understands that the provider is facing an employment tribunal claim from a former employee who does not wish to be named.

The employee raised concerns that now form part of the ESFA investigation

after they were set out in a letter to 3aaa bosses, seen by FE Week, dated February 28, 2018.

A response from Di McEvoy-Robinson, co-founder and director of 3aaa, also seen by FE Week, stated that this had sparked an "internal review", and that the allegations had been referred to the ESFA.

Neither 3aaa nor the ESFA would confirm to FE Week whether the allegations were shared.

Ofsted originally confirmed on June 20 that it had inspected the provider in May and nothing was amiss.

"The report is currently going through our normal processes and will be published in due course," a spokesperson said at the time.

And FE Week can reveal that 3aaa held a staff conference at Derbyshire County Cricket Club where it is believed they celebrated the expected outstanding grade (see picture).

And co-founder and chief executive Peter Marples took to social media to describe an "amazing week – challenging but back to back 1 it could be".

But there was a change of position shortly before the report was published and the inspectorate released a second statement to FE Week mentioning "new information".

"Given new information that has come to light, we have decided to declare our inspection of Aspire Achieve Advance Limited incomplete," a spokesperson said.

"In due course, pending further information from the EFSA, we will decide whether we need to return to the provider to gather further evidence."

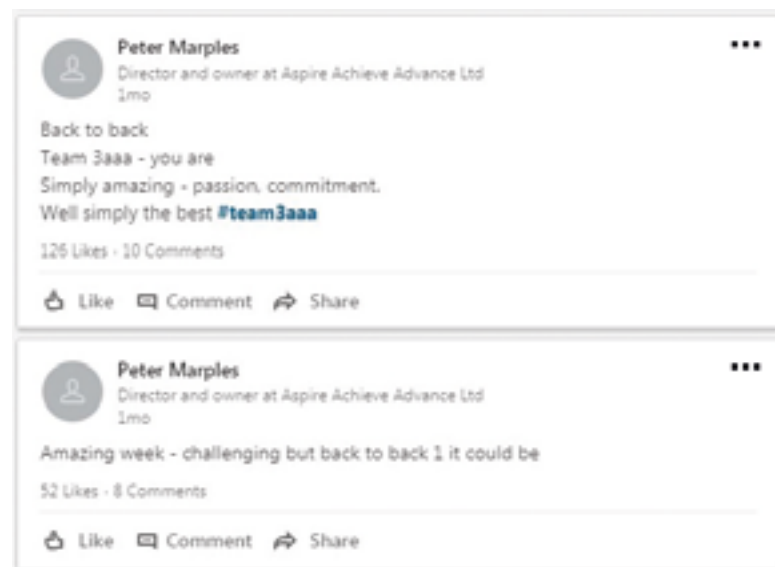
The provider has seen significant growth under the leadership of Marples and McEvoy-Robinson, its chief executive and director respectively. In 2014 the provider was awarded an "outstanding" grade by Ofsted.

Its allocation for non-levy apprenticeships now stands at nearly £22 million, which is up from £5.5 million at the start of the academic year.

Direct ESFA funding increased from just £390,000 in 2012-13 to £3.6 million the following year. It rose again to £12.5



Facebook post from the 3aaa staff conference and party in June 2018



Peter Marples' LinkedIn posts following their Ofsted inspection

million in 2014-15 and to £21.7 million a year later.

Its apprenticeships include IT, software, digital marketing, accountancy, financial services, business administration, customer service and management.

3aaa, at the time of going to press, has not provided a comment on Ofsted's decision, the ESFA investigation, or accusations made by the whistleblower.

The ESFA would say only that it never comments on whether investigations are taking place.

AEB devolution gets step closer as first pre-tender launched

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The Greater Manchester Combined Authority has become the first devolved area to launch a pre-procurement exercise for its adult education budget.

Ahead of its takeover of the AEB for its region in 2019-20, the authority is asking local training providers to take part in market research to help it draft and formulate a tender specification.

"The GMCA would like to explore current and emerging good practice in their AEB services to facilitate continuous improvement," said a prior information notice (PIN) launched this week.

"This would include looking at delivery models which would maximise opportunities for the GMCA to deliver value for money."

The Department for Education has issued an indicative budget for 2019-20 of £92.2 million for Greater Manchester.

The authority's PIN said it will look to put around £25 million of this out to tender.

As with the last national AEB tender,

FE colleges, local authorities and third sector providers will be let off the hook as the rest of the budget will be grant funded to them.

"In Greater Manchester this includes around 20 providers which deliver around 75-80 per cent of AEB-funded provision within GM," said a report on devolution published by the authority in April.

"The ESFA currently funds these providers via a block grant on the basis that they are not-for-profit organisations in receipt of a grant to support their work (as opposed to a contract for specified activities).

"We would look to replicate that approach in 2019-20, subject to confirmation that grant allocations are compliant with relevant law/regulations."

Like the Greater London Authority, which will also take control of AEB funding for its region next year, the GMCA is considering how funding models that incorporate outcome payments "can be used to drive better impact for learners based on progress from the starting point of their individual journey".

"We are also considering pilot



activity around funding additional elements of provision where they are linked to job outcomes," the notice said.

It is seeking views on the advantages and disadvantages of a number of different payment models.

These include "the current model, in which an element of funding is attached to the achievement of a qualification with 20 per cent held back for achievement of it", as well as "full payment by results, with the majority of funding predicated on achieving the stated outcome".

Another funding model under consideration is "partial payment

by results, combining funding elements linked to service delivery, on-programme milestones, for achievement of the agreed outcome/progression and an additional payment linked to a positive destination".

It will also consider payments for work experience.

"The GMCA is also keen to understand the introduction/impact of licence to practice and payments for work experience as long as there is a clear link to a job outcome."

By having control of the AEB, GMCA expects to be able to focus on working with a "smaller range of high quality

providers and reduce duplication".

Once contracts are handed out following procurement, the authority's intention is that they will run initially for one year, with an option to extend for a further two years.

But the GMCA warned that it will keep a close eye on subcontracting.

"GMCA wants to ensure that as much funding as possible reaches learners but recognises that there are costs involved in properly managing and assuring supply chains," its PIN said.

"We will be considering relevant guidance and best practice in relation to all management fees and those generated by subcontracting arrangements."

Interestingly, any underspend of the AEB will be retained by the authority.

"The Department for Education has now confirmed that there will be no separate administration budget provided after devolution," its PIN said.

"They have indicated that GM funding, including the AEB itself, should be used to fund operational costs associated with AEB, and that any underspend (usually around 2-3 per cent per year) will be retained by GM rather than returned to DfE."

Subcontracting fees revealed

Ex-minister Halfon calls fees 'scandalous' but DfE has 'no concerns'

PAUL OFFORD

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Exclusive

From front

The government has for the first time concluded they have "no concerns" about subcontracting fees, despite more than 10 providers charging an average of over 30 per cent last year, FE Week can reveal.

This is completely at odds with the view of the last skills minister Robert Halfon, who now chairs the education select committee, and who called the latest figures "absolutely scandalous".

Last week the Education and Skills Funding Agency published, also for the first time, the result of a subcontracting data collection completed by all prime contractors in receipt of funding last year.

But it looks like a recently announced review of charges will not lead to any tightening of policy, as the Department for Education thinks there's nothing to worry about.

"We have no concerns on the level of subcontracting fees being paid by providers. Our recent data shows that approximately 80 per cent of funding goes straight to the front line, supporting learners, apprentices and employers to get the training and skills that they need," a DfE spokesperson said.

FE Week's analysis of the 2016-17 figures showed the total level of charges by 407 prime contractors on subcontractors was £110.6 million (see table). Just under a third of primes were charging above the 20 per cent best-practice threshold agreed by key sector bodies in March, with Learndirect and John Ruskin College among those taking the biggest cut.

"The level of these subcontracting fees is absolutely scandalous," said Mr Halfon. "Money should be going to deliver high-quality front-line training, not paying off middlemen.

"When government funding ends up the lining the pockets of companies taking a hefty cut and delivering little value, then both apprentices and the taxpayer are being let down."

His successor as skills minister, Anne Milton, agreed with education committee MPs in May that huge top-slices in subcontracting concerned her and that it amounted to "wasted money" in some cases.

The Association of Employment and Learning Providers took to Twitter to criticise "unacceptable fees" soon after the subcontracting charges were finally published on June 29.

FE Week analysis also showed that 12 providers charged an average topslice – the common term used for subcontracting fees – in excess of 30 per cent.

At 39 per cent, John Ruskin College – which disputed the accuracy of the figure – appeared to have the highest average topslice percentage.

The biggest single deal was a £4.7 million (40 per cent) Learndirect top-slice taken from the £11.9 million of the adult education budget that went to training delivered by Go Train Limited. The provider declined to comment.

Topslicing describes the amount that prime providers charge subcontractors in so-called management fees when they run training on prime providers' behalf.

Concern has mounted in recent years that certain lead providers were charging excessive rates as an easy way of supplementing their incomes.

The ESFA had revealed in April that subcontracting fees and charges would be reviewed to ensure government funding is being used for "recognised costs". This will include looking at "subcontracting fees and charges, so that we can be assured that our funding is being used for recognised costs".

Any subsequent changes to subcontracting rules are expected to come into force from August.

Individual lead providers used to have to publish their annual figures on their websites by the end of November every year.

This changed starting in 2016-17, when new rules dictated that providers had to inform the ESFA of their figures, which would henceforth be published centrally. But the agency came in for heavy criticism as November passed without any indication of when the full figures would be revealed for the past academic year.

The sector finally got its answer in April, after Gordon Marsden, the shadow skills minister, lodged a written parliamentary question asking when the government planned to publish the data.

The education minister Nadhim Zahawi confirmed that they would be available by the end of June.

Topslice %	Primes	Funding	Topslice	Primes %	Funding %
31%-39%	12	£67,077,427	£22,666,141	3%	12%
26%-30%	39	£41,142,275	£11,251,093	10%	7%
21%-25%	61	£128,229,420	£28,425,051	15%	23%
16%-20%	161	£184,116,674	£34,263,034	40%	32%
11%-15%	79	£88,185,704	£12,348,623	19%	15%
1%-10%	55	£60,538,376	£1,682,846	14%	11%
Total	407	£569,289,876	£110,636,788		

Providers with a topslice in excess of 30%	Funding	Topslice	Topslice %
JOHN RUSKIN COLLEGE	£1,372,507	£539,925	39%
HARTLEPOOL COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION	£54,732	£20,185	37%
SELBY COLLEGE	£632,249	£225,545	36%
HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL	£502,230	£177,545	35%
SUTTON LONDON BOROUGH COUNCIL	£313,555	£107,481	34%
LEARNDIRECT LIMITED	£56,111,355	£18,986,842	34%
NISSAN MOTOR MANUFACTURING (UK) LIMITED	£1,810,529	£594,411	33%
WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL	£778,338	£255,280	33%
SUNDERLAND CITY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL	£2,277,252	£741,977	33%
PRESTON COLLEGE	£509,839	£163,965	32%
CANTERBURY COLLEGE	£92,841	£29,666	32%
THE WKCIC GROUP	£2,622,000	£823,319	31%

Top 5 primes by subcontracting value	Subcontractors	Funding	Topslice	Average topslice
LEARNDIRECT LIMITED	89	£56,111,355	£18,986,842	34%
WEST NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COLLEGE	97	£19,621,197	£4,422,107	23%
EASTLEIGH COLLEGE	58	£18,103,182	£4,056,752	22%
BCTG LIMITED	79	£15,599,169	£2,966,794	19%
NOTTINGHAM COLLEGE	41	£12,582,652	£2,617,658	21%

Analysis by FE Week

Source: <https://bit.ly/2MQzEND>

'Comprehensive' new guidance coming soon

"Comprehensive" subcontracting guidance agreed between key government education agencies and FE bodies will be published within weeks, FE Week can reveal.

But the Association of Colleges has indicated it will not come with tougher limits on top-slicing fees.

A 20 per cent recommended limit was agreed in March by the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, Hoxex and the Collab provider group. This was conspicuously missing a sign-off from the AoC, which insisted at the time it was developing other guidance "properly" with the Education and Skills Funding Agency and the University Vocational Awards Council.

FE Week asked them how this was progressing, considering that latest figures have showed how many primes are still charging a level considered by many to be excessive.

A spokesperson said it is still developing a "comprehensive guidance document" with the ESFA and UVAC, as well as other organisations including Ofsted, the Institute for Apprenticeships and AELP that "considers subcontracting from all angles relevant to a provider". This should be out within "the next few weeks".

Teresa Frith, senior AOC policy manager, indicated they want primes to retain control of their own charges.

"We are not condoning overcharging in subcontracting, quite the opposite, but want providers to be free to determine how much it costs them to support subcontractors effectively within the new apprenticeship market and within the new rules."

"We advocate for complete transparency in the process of determining the fees imposed by a lead provider," she added.

"The relationship should be a partnership where both sides can see value. It is the quality of the offer in general that should be the focus of concern, not the price attached to that quality."

AELP boss Mark Dawe reiterated his defence of the 20 per cent recommended limit.

"In signing up to our joint guidance, the members of AELP and Hoxex and Collab's college members are by implication struggling to identify where fees in excess of 20 per cent might be justified whatever services are being offered," he said.

"We would argue that by denying so much money to frontline provision, it is very much the quality of provision received by the learner which is being endangered. The ESFA data suggests that there are too many institutions where the funding is actually being used to prop up the general accounts."

Profile

Introducing...

STEVE FRAMPTON

President-elect, Association of Colleges

CATH MURRAY
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Steve Frampton will be the next president of the Association of Colleges, taking over the reigns from Dr Alison Birkinshaw in August. We chatted to him about his career to date, and how he came to be so committed to including the student voice in decision-making.

As chair of his school's student council in the mid-70s, Steve Frampton persuaded his fellow pupils to wear socks of every shade of the rainbow. Weymouth Grammar School ended up dropping their ban on coloured socks. "They couldn't expel every one of us!" he laughs.

Frampton laughs a lot. The Portsmouth College principal, who is due to retire this summer, is overflowing with positive vibes that he's planning to channel into the AoC presidency next year.

After 12 years overseeing the growth of the seaside college - ostensibly a sixth-form college, but which also offers apprenticeships to respond to local need - on his 59th birthday, Frampton decided to retire, and gave his notice last September. In May, he was appointed uncontested to the AoC presidency - something that in its ten-year history has never happened before.

While he can't say why for certain, the Big Friendly Giant (as he's been referred to in *Too Fast to Think*, a book on creativity and leadership) does admit that he "went on the offensive a little bit," sending his manifesto to 100 college principals in April, along with a list of five "powerful hitters" who were supporting his campaign. "Now, what I don't know is whether or not that deterred some people from standing," he muses, "because on the final day where everyone declares their interest, there was nobody else this year."

Such a statement could come over as disingenuous, scheming even, but he manages to project an impression of humility mixed with pragmatism - which might offer a clue as to how he has garnered sufficient respect in the sector to pull off such a coup.

Frampton is a people-person through-and-through. He's involved in all kinds of community projects, such as chairing Portsmouth Football Club's community organisation, which delivers literacy and numeracy projects - basically "everything that's not about football". The sport was his early passion and before an injury took him out of the game, he played semi-professionally for Weymouth FC.

"I think the students are much more sophisticated than we give them credit for"

Frampton-the-teen was also an entrepreneur, who would leverage his position as chair of the school council to block-buy tickets for Wembley Stadium. He made sure always to make enough money on the first 52 seats to pay for his own. "It was tiny, tiny amounts of money and I made a bit out of it, but I learned how to run things." Having established his reputation, he started making block bookings to concerts in Bristol, Bournemouth - even London. "No technology, word of mouth. I would sell out the tickets within 24 hours, just like that."

His crowning moment was getting a coach-load of students from Leicester University (where he went on to study)

to ball-boy for an England-Northern Ireland match where George Best was playing. "The England ball boys hadn't turned up," he relates. "Their coach had broken down in Kent and we were the first coach there and we looked really smart, and officials from the FA came over - I thought they were joking - and basically said, 'Would you like to be ball boys tonight?'"

Only those students who fit into the 14- to 16-year-old kit were accepted, and Frampton's best friend, who was smaller than him, managed to pull it off. "I've never forgiven him, really," he jokes.

After graduating from Leicester with a first-class degree in combined sciences, Frampton got a PGCE from Keele University, before returning south to begin his career. He taught at Price's Sixth Form College in Fareham, Portsmouth, which then merged with the general FE college, for nine years. He then spent the next decade at "probably one of the most exclusive sixth-form colleges in the country" - Peter Simmons College in Winchester - before landing a role as vice principal of St Vincent College in Gosport - a stark contrast in terms of social deprivation.

When he moved to Portsmouth College as principal in 2005, he took some of the senior team with him, although he denies it counts as "poaching", explaining innocently: "They choose to follow, don't they? They wanted to come and work here and help us build something."

He talks a lot about building a good organisational culture, for which his approach is to "transfer a lot of the professionalism back to your staff. We know that they're working hard, and they're getting the outcomes, and actually, we're having fun".

But how does a college principal strike the right balance between fun and discipline? "You involve the staff and the students in the decision-making process, so we all own it all. It's

not dependent on one person and their vision and their ideas, it's a massive, collective responsibility so everybody feels a really big part of this place. So it's very old-fashioned, but there's a massive family culture here."

Which brings us back to the multi-coloured socks incident. His point in protesting the school rule wasn't so much to defend the pupils' right to express themselves, as to challenge the imposition of arbitrary rules: "I was just interested in the argument, 'so what's red socks got to do with teaching and learning and assessment?'"

He's quick to point out that it was a great school, and his example is more about the time and context. But it's also the story he uses to illustrate how he first became passionate about student voice. "I think [the students] are much more sophisticated than we give them credit for," is a phrase he uses often.

"Student voice" is one of those topics that turns people off, I say, like "participatory democracy" - it's all very noble, but it just doesn't grab people's attention. Frampton doesn't care. "I believe in the student voice, and I've learnt more from listening to young people - including eight or nine-year-olds - and it has affected my thinking massively, along with talking to staff."

In fact, that's a big part of his vision for the AoC presidency, which he hopes to work on with colleges, the NUS and Ofsted. "I don't think Paul [Joyce - Ofsted's Director of FE] is too nervous about really putting student voice right at the heart of the process along with data," he says, optimistically, "because I think he's always said it's more than data."

Student voice is intimately linked with mental health, Frampton believes - which is another of the "softer outcomes" he'd like to help bring to prominence.

"How are we actually going to measure the college's contribution to improving the resilience and mental health of their student population over

the time that they're here?" he asks. "That's quite a difficult one to get your head around really, but I think what's great is there's a willingness to do it."

To guide him in this endeavour, Frampton has a master-plan up his sleeve, which combines his two great passions: education and football.

Johan Cruyff, a legendary Dutch professional football player and coach, "wanted to make football the most beautiful game in the world," enthuses Frampton. "Beautiful for players,



for coaches, for communities, for spectators, for officials, for everybody." To this end, Cruyff wrote a 14-point action plan, which is revered in football-club boardrooms across Europe.

Frampton thinks the concept could be adapted to education. "Because it really should be really beautiful. It's so valuable. To a certain extent, we've lost a bit of that by measuring it to death and putting in certain processes. It should be beautiful for young people

in primary, secondary, FE, and HE for that matter. It should also be beautiful for employers, because they should be able to reap the benefits of it. It should be really beautiful for parents and communities and teachers and managers, and for all of us.

"And I think we've lost a little bit of that fun and humour and beauty, and what I would love is, is if the new Ofsted framework was a little bit more holistic and could help contribute to that agenda."

CV

2005 - present Principal Portsmouth College

1998-2005 Strategic Vice principal St Vincent College, Gosport

1989-1993 Head of geography, geology & tourism Peter Symonds College, Winchester

1993-1998 Head of humanities faculty Peter Symonds College, Winchester

1983-1989 Head of earth sciences Fareham Tertiary College

1982-1983 Teacher and student liaison officer Prices Sixth Form College, Fareham

1980-1982 Geography, geology and PE teacher Prices Sixth Form College, Fareham

It's a personal thing

What's your favourite film?

Catch 22. Also One flew over the cuckoo's nest – film and book. Oh, and Paddington 2, because I thought that was absolutely brilliant!

If you could escape anywhere for a month, where would you go?

Shanghai. It's just so cool. It's the world's most rapidly growing city: colonial history on one bank, then this new development Pudong with a five-million population over 20 years. All of the history of China is there: the Buddhist temples, the Taoist temples, Confucian temples, art, culture. It's so exciting, so dynamic. Yes, the most exciting city on the planet, without any doubt.

What slogan would you put on a billboard?

Education, education, education. And actually what I mean by that is primary

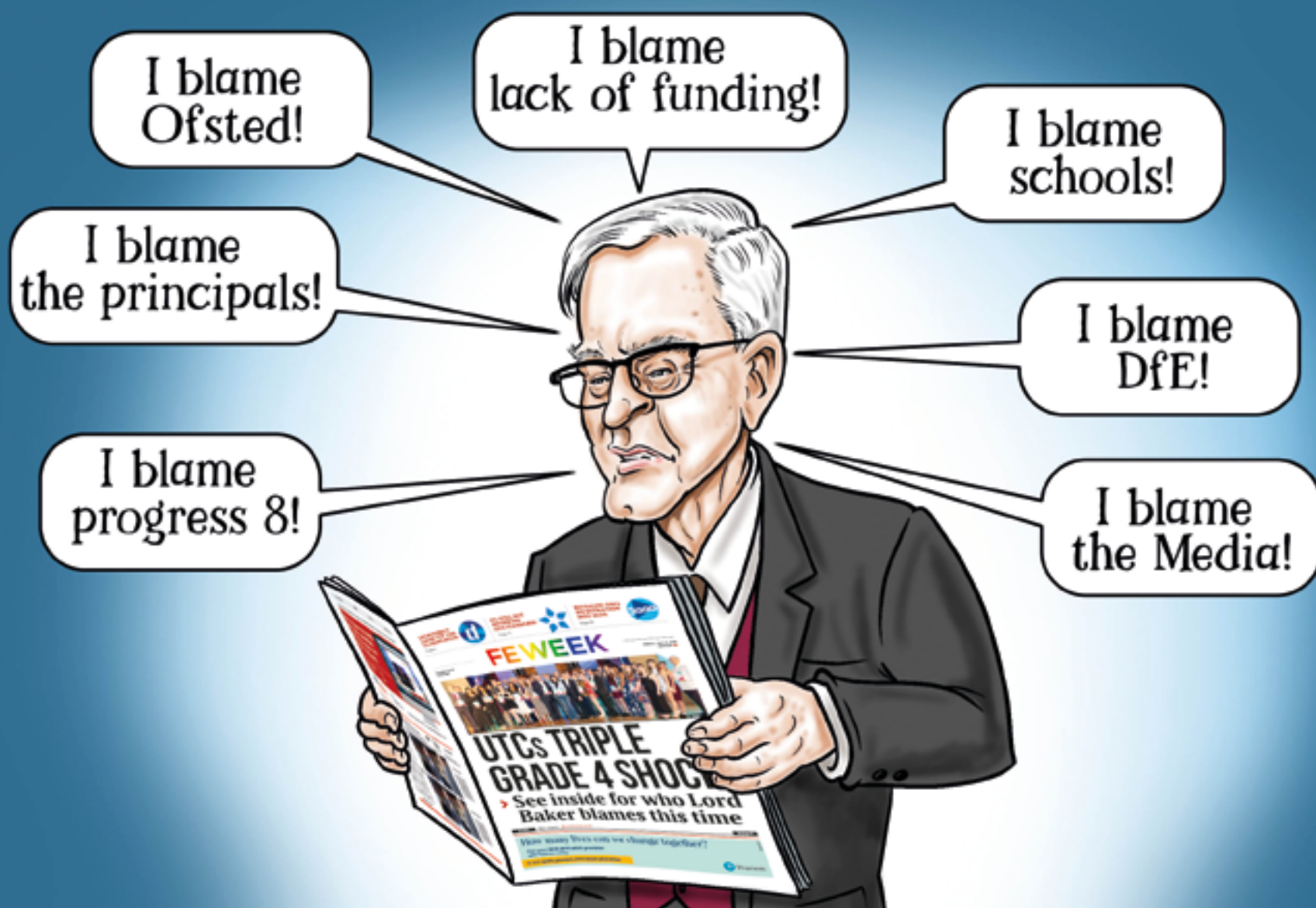
education, secondary education and the FE sector. Because it's all three.

Who's your greatest hero?

I've got two great heroes. I'm not a musician, but I love contemporary music, and so I do try and see a lot of live music. I was in London to see some on Sunday at the Meltdown festival, and I think on my leaving do next week a lot of students who are musicians now are coming back to play, because they've been extraordinary here. David Bowie is my great hero, and then Johan Cruyff is my favourite all-time footballer. It was hard, to lose them both in one year.

If you hadn't gone into education, what would you have done?

I would be Gareth Southgate in Russia now! After I stopped playing, I would have loved a career in sport. I love the psychology of sport.



Three 'inadequate' UTCs in a week as Lord Baker blames inspection regime

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Ofsted has dealt a series of devastating blows to university technical colleges this week, with three of the 14-to-19 technical and vocational institutions rated "inadequate" in a week.

Inspectors were damning in their criticism of UTC@Harbourside, Derby Manufacturing UTC and Health Futures UTC in grade 4 reports published between June 28 and July 4.

The latest verdicts mean that over a quarter of the UTCs inspected to date have been given the lowest possible overall grade.

This is sure to be an embarrassment to the Conservative party, which pledged to have a UTC "within reach of every city" in its 2015 manifesto.

Nonetheless, Charles Parker, boss of the Baker Dearing Trust, which backs UTCs, insisted it was "absolutely not" time to admit the experiment had failed.

"We are disappointed at our current

Ofsted records, which we are working hard to improve," he acknowledged.

"However, the excellent destinations of our students and the satisfaction of parents and employers mean it is much too early to say that standards are bad."

UTCs' destination data is "the best of all schools in the country", yet this is not taken into consideration by the education watchdog, he said.

Lord Baker, the trust's co-founder and architect of UTCs, previously told FE Week that he believed the current inspection regime was unfair for this reason.

"A UTC is not a school or a college, it is a hybrid animal," he said in an interview in May.

"Ofsted takes no account of employability in inspections and that is a big test for us."

However, a spokesperson for the watchdog rejected these claims.

"Inspectors take into account the destinations of UTC pupils, but as we set out in our handbook, no single measure determines the outcome of an inspection," he said.

Ofsted inspects UTCs as schools "because that is the legal status they have", and all schools are inspected against the same criteria.

"Clearly some UTCs manage to meet these requirements," he added.

In the same FE Week interview, Lord Baker hit out at schools that refused to comply with their legal requirement to open their doors to technical and vocational education providers, including UTCs – as set out in the Baker clause amendment to the Technical and FE Act.

And in an interview with The Times newspaper in 2017, he blamed "poor governance and mistakes made" where UTCs had failed.

Thus far, 10 of the 36 UTCs inspected by Ofsted, or 28 per cent, have received a grade 4 verdict.

A further 13 have been rated "requires improvement", meaning a massive 64 per cent are rated less than good.

And to date eight UTCs have closed after failing to attract enough pupils, owing in large part to the difficulty in

persuading them to change schools at 14.

David Russell, the chief executive of the Education and Training Foundation who formerly led on vocational education reform at the Department for Education, took to Twitter to vent his anger at the latest reports.

"This was the 100 per cent inevitable outcome of UTCs' policy, as many inside DfE said at the time," he tweeted.

"This hideous experiment in 'technical education' policy must stop."

The most critical of the three reports was for UTC@Harbourside, published on July 4 just two days after the school announced it would close in 2019 after failing to recruit enough pupils to make it financially viable.

According to 2018 school census figures, it has 130 pupils on register in 2017-18, down from 141 in 2016-17.

Bullying – some of it racial in nature – was found to be "frequent", which led to some pupils having a "miserable time" at the school.

"Adults do not act decisively enough to stop it and prevent repetition."

Pupils and learners at the school, which opened in 2015, are "hugely disappointed" with its "failure to live up to their expectations", the report said.

The school's governors said they "fully accept the findings of the inspectors and are committed to implementing the recommendations" for its remaining pupils.

The UTC@Harbourside report came just a day after Health Futures UTC in West Bromwich was branded "inadequate" across the board.

Leaders and governors at the school, which also opened in 2015, were deemed "ineffective", having missed "significant" teaching weaknesses, according to inspectors.

"Teaching has been weak and consequently, students have made very poor progress," the report said, adding that the top team had failed to recognise these failings until exam results were released in August 2017.

However, Ofsted acknowledged that the school's new interim principal, Ruth Umerah, was starting to turn things around.

Leaders and governors at Derby Manufacturing UTC drew criticism for their "over-generous" view of quality, which "prevented leaders and governors from taking appropriate action to secure the required improvements", according to the June 28 Ofsted report.



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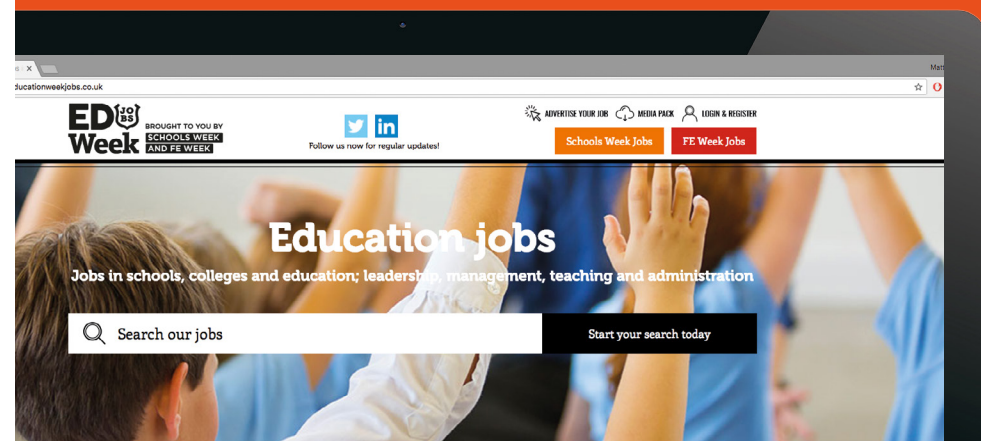
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EDITORIAL

DfE drops the ball, to even my surprise



the Mayoral
Combined
Authorities during

Just when you think the government is finally going to act to stop the practice of rip-off subcontracting fees, they provide a statement expressing “no concern”.

I'd be lost for words, if it wasn't for the fact this editorial demands I write them.

FE Week has been reporting on the huge topslices ever since we launched in 2011.

And we are regularly contacted by subcontractees, complaining of the impact on quality when funds are withheld, but fearful of going on the record to bite the hand that feeds them.

It did seem the

government recognised the poor value for money, introducing a series of measures over the years to limit subcontracting, and to make the management fees more transparent.

In April, the Education and Skills Funding Agency announced they were reviewing “subcontracting fees and charges; so that we can be assured that our funding is being used for recognised costs”.

At the time they also said they “believe it is important that government funds are not diverted away from training and assessment in the form of fees and other charges, and so the intent of the rules is to make sure that the main and

subcontracted providers both add value to the employer's apprenticeship programme”.

Skip forward a few months and the DfE tell FE Week they've looked at the latest figures and found that the total sector topslice was 20 per cent last year.

So, according to the DfE, everything is tickety-boo, nothing to see here, fine and dandy.

No problem with Learndirect keeping close to £19 million in fees (34 per cent), including a single deal with a £4.7 million (40 per cent) fee.

No problem with 28 per cent of prime providers charging more than 20

per cent, and 12 charging more than 30 per cent.

The DfE argument seems to be that if the average is 20 per cent, then the outliers don't matter.

What an appalling conclusion - that if the majority are acting responsibly, then there is no need to stop those that fail to.

It is clear that the education select committee, led by former skills minister Robert Halfon, will heavily criticise subcontracting fees in its forthcoming report.

The National Audit Office will also be taking a look as part of an apprenticeship reform review, as will

the transition to devolution of the Adult Education Budget.

And FE Week will challenge both Anne Milton and Damian Hinds on their “no concern” conclusion at the earliest opportunity.

My hunch, as well as hope, is that the DfE defending the indefensible won't hold forever.

But so far I've been proven wrong, so I won't be holding my breath.

Nick Linford, Editor
news@feweek.co.uk

Readers' reply



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Massive subcontracting topslices finally revealed

I totally disagree with this article, it does not depict what the lead provider is doing with their %.

It is entirely possible to have a 30/40% fee as long as it can be justified and all parties are happy.

Yet another article that does not uncover the actual basis of the %, this reminds me of the article back in 2012.

Is it really a 'management fee'? You have not investigated what is being done by the lead.

Pat Tucker

Ex-principal paid £80k for gardening leave amid staff redundancy push

Appalling, outrageous, disgusting. How do they justify this?

Anonymous



I see governance didn't make it on to their list of principal risks

Duncan Gotobed
@duncangotobed

Ofsted: Bigger colleges aren't always better

Bigger isn't always better? Any more revelations? The Pope's catholic? Anyone in the sector has known for years that bigger is neither more effective nor more efficient. The swine-like rush to amalgamate and create bigger institutions is simply a response to austerity, not a strategy for improvement.

I.ron pyrite



Does that mean we now get area reviews to downsize?
#keeppoliticsoutofeducation

Sam
@DigitalSCCB



The only hope for any FE college and most of the rest of what passes for an education system in England and Wales is the permanent retirement of Ofsted, the binning of targets/competition and the rest of the necrosis that has been inflicted upon education by brain dead govts.

Tom Oliphant
@Tomcraghead

An eighth UTC gets the bottom Ofsted grade

How much money has been squandered on UTCs? At the heart a brilliant idea, but as a society we have a long way to go before they would be fully accepted into the education system. Can't help but think the money could have been used to better effect supporting FE colleges.

Scott Cubitt

REPLY OF THE WEEK

Inadequate Ofsted report exposes racial bullying at doomed UTC



Reading this report made me sad. Then angry. And finally absolutely exasperated because this was the 100% inevitable outcome of UTCs policy, as many inside DfE said at the time. This hideous experiment in “technical education” policy must stop.

David Russell
@DavidRussellETF

Experts



MINISTERIAL MUSINGS

Anne Milton, Minister for skills and apprenticeships

Single licensing is key to making T-levels the gold standard

Choosing awarding organisations in open competition will not only give the new technical qualifications the greatest chance of success, but clarify the landscape for students, promises Anne Milton

I was recently interviewed by Nick at FE Week, who wanted to know why we are planning to use a single licensing approach for T-levels. I thought I'd put my thoughts down here to explain more fully why we have decided to do this.

T-levels are a once in a lifetime opportunity to change the way technical education works in this country, putting it on a par with the very best available in other countries. In the past, technical education courses were of variable quality and not always valued by employers. And that's exactly what we want to change. Single licensing has an important role to play in doing that.

The Sainsbury Report, which was published in 2016, recommended that for each occupation or cluster of

occupations, there should be one high-quality qualification for 16-19 year olds that meets employer-set standards. The report also recommended that a single body or consortium should deliver each qualification under an exclusive licence. This would be awarded for a fixed time period following an open competition.

So why did the report recommend this approach and why have we followed the advice? Well, the key reason is that we want to protect the standard of T-levels. T-levels must be high quality and those taking them must know that they represent the gold standard -- that's what introducing T-levels is all about. Making sure all T-levels are of the same exemplary standard also means that they will be valued and easily recognisable by employers.

Awarding organisations (AOs) play a vital role in our education system, and for me there are two key benefits that stand out when it comes to single licensing. By selecting one AO to work

on each T-level, it means they will have been successful against other competitors in demonstrating their vision to us, making it a shared vision to give our T-levels the greatest chance of success. Another reason is that we want to make the options as clear as possible for students wanting to do T-levels.

With thousands of qualifications at level 3 and below, the current landscape can be confusing for students. We have a chance to change this and a single-licence approach will make choices much easier.

“We are being completely open with the market about how we will run this procurement”

Of course, procurements are never easy – there are always losers and disappointments, and the process can be challenging. But they are often

necessary if we want to make sure we are getting the best. So we are being completely open and transparent with the market about how we intend to run this procurement. We held events in June to meet with awarding organisations to talk about our procurement plans, with further activities to come, and we are reflecting on the feedback we have heard from the Federation of Awarding Bodies, the Joint Council for Qualifications and others. We are working hard to think about how we can make the

procurement more attractive, create lively competition and make sure we get value for money for the public purse. This approach means we should retain

the best elements of the competitive market and still get the stability we need to make sure standards are properly understood and kept up.

We'll also be putting in place rigorous monitoring arrangements to minimise the risk of failure – and we will make sure there are effective exit arrangements at the end of each licence to enable smooth transfer from one awarding organisation to another.

The Sainsbury Report's recommendations are now in law – in the form of the Technical and Further Education Act 2017 – and we are proud to have followed them.

The single licensing model for T-levels means learners, employers and parents know exactly what they will be getting, and have a clear choice between excellent technical and academic routes. T-levels are a fantastic opportunity for everyone – providers, employers and young people – to get the technical education that they deserve, and the country needs.

SIMON MARTIN

Executive Consultant, Academy Transformation Trust Further Education



If co-investment is removed, it should be done selectively

There is no evidence that removing the 10 per cent contribution would incentivise more small businesses to take on apprentices, contends Simon Martin

The 10 per cent apprenticeship contribution rule for non-levied employers remains a lively issue. It is frequently cited by training providers as a barrier to engagement, and the calls for its removal by leading sector bodies such as the Association of Employment and Learning Providers and others remain strident.

An air of suppressed anticipation awaited Anne Milton's address to AELP's national conference last week, since it had been informally trailed that she might make just such an announcement. However, the apprenticeships and skills minister said that while the calls for removal had been “noted”, the policy would not change “any time soon”. Subsequent speakers with insider experience of the Department for Education wryly

suggested that “noted” is established civil service speak for sidelining an issue until it can be comfortably forgotten about.

A new approach is clearly needed. There are, in any event, some issues with the call for a complete removal of the 10 per cent contribution that have doubtless influenced the DfE's thinking.

The notion that some employers simply “can't pay” is far from universally credible, even in the case of small firms. A 10 per cent contribution to a £2,000 apprenticeship spread over 18 (or even just 12) months represents a monthly payment of only £11 (or £17). Of course many apprenticeships cost more. But even for a top-end £27,000 degree apprenticeship, where one might reasonably expect an employer to be a little bigger than purely “micro” or start-up level, the contribution is spread over three years and thus the monthly payment is only £75. This is obviously a more substantial outlay, but it is unlikely to be a bank-breaker if it really does represent an important

resource acquisition for the employer.

Furthermore, the quality of investment made by employers in something they are paying for – even at just 10 per cent – is likely to be higher than for something that is given for free. That particular aspect of human psychology is well documented.

A simple truth is that 10 per cent co-investment may be less of a barrier for employers than it is for training providers' engagement teams, who would obviously find it easier to sell apprenticeships if there were no charge at all. But that nature of provider-employer interaction does not always promote good quality. Furthermore, removing the 10 per cent would also significantly reduce, or remove entirely, the downward negotiating pressure from the employer on the fee. What's the point if it's free anyway? That change would clearly be for the benefit of providers.

Social mobility is often quoted as a reason to support calls for the removal of the 10 per cent contribution.

However, if paying 10 per cent really is a big financial problem for employers, and if removing it will boost their participation, then that will largely be for existing employees only. If an employer can't afford the (often) modest amounts associated with 10 per cent, then they are hardly going to meet the cost of a new employee, even at apprenticeship pay rates, never mind the cost of off-the-job training and everything else. So removing the 10 per cent will not really support social mobility in the way that proponents argue.

Levy-paying employers subjected to a compulsory payroll tax might also rightly question why they then have to pay the full (or maybe negotiated) list price when they see non-levied counterparts going from just 10 per cent to absolutely nothing. It is not cost-invisible for levy-payers just because they have had the money deducted up front.

There is obviously a powerful argument for championing social

mobility through apprenticeships, but given the minister's recent remarks, modifying the calls for a blanket removal of the 10 per cent co-investment may be more fruitful. For example, campaigning more selectively for the removal of co-investment for:

- all level 2 apprenticeships;
- all new apprenticeships – e.g. new positions/jobs;
- apprenticeships in defined disadvantaged postcode areas, whether relating to the employer, the apprentice, or both;
- employers below a certain redefined size for 19+ aged apprentices – “small” is not the same as “micro” (or the current sub-50 employee “no contribution” rule could be extended to 16-18 and 19-24 EHC apprentices).

Additionally, given Ms Milton's comments about the need to “demonstrate causality”, and if the 10 per cent contribution really is a disincentive, then robust research should be quickly commissioned and presented.

PROFESSOR EWART KEEP

Director of SKOPE,
Oxford University



If you're not careful, HE will muscle in on college territory

The FE sector is already beleaguered, but market forces will soon see universities trying to carve themselves out a bigger slice of the pie, writes Ewart Keep

A research project about to be published by the FE Trust for Leadership on the marketisation of further education points to the growing competition that colleges face from both schools and universities. There is a danger that the FE sector may be about to be caught in a pincer movement.

With the current demographic downturn in older pupils, English secondary education is currently suffering from local overcapacity, a situation exacerbated by the government's school choice agenda and its sponsorship of new market entrants such as UTCs, studio schools and free schools.

Moreover, between 2011/12 and 2014/15, about 260 school sixth-forms entered the 16-to-18 arena, and the number of approved apprenticeship

providers or with an AEB allocation registered as in scope for Ofsted inspections rose from 1,043 in 2011/12 to 2,543 in April 2018. The 14-to-18/19 marketplace that has been created as a result of these developments is a brutal one, with FE colleges, UTCs and other new forms of school, apprenticeship providers, sixth-form colleges and traditional school sixth-forms all fighting for "market share".

On the other side of the fence, HE has been seen by all mainstream parties as the chief means to deliver higher technical and vocational skill and promote social mobility. It has many political allies and has attracted increased resources through fees.

However, at present there is overcapacity in HE. This is partly driven by the current decline in the volume of 18-year-olds (which is set to last until 2020), and partly by increased competition for students between the Russell Group universities which are expanding their student numbers, and lower-tier institutions which have seen

applications fall.

Empty places are not an easy option to live with, because since fees went up, universities have spent £28 billion, much of it borrowed from banks, on new teaching infrastructure, halls of residence, cafes, social spaces and refurbishment programmes aimed at attracting students. A fall in cashflow from fees is dangerous as the financial performance in many institutions is weakening. Some universities are already searching for new markets and customers in order to sustain themselves.

"Some universities are already searching for new markets and customers in order to sustain themselves"

One route is to expand foundation years, and put tight limits on the validation of degrees in FE, particularly

where the university is seeking to build its own degree-apprenticeship provision. The other is to move directly into what have hitherto been seen as part of the FE marketplace, such as access courses and level three vocational qualifications, as some universities already have. This suggests that battles will loom over who fills the gap in technician level or sub-degree courses.

These are not new problems. Back in 2005, the Foster Review noted that "FE colleges are more and more drawn and squeezed into roles that are defined by

demography and policy changes and the emerging roles of HE and schools". The issues have simply been heightened

by a funding squeeze, increased marketisation of the different areas of FE provision, and the increased pace and scale of the marketisation of schools and, more latterly, HE.

What should FE's response be? One clear message is that colleges need to stake their claim, as publicly as possible, to a large slice of the new sub-degree technician action. The virtues of HE delivered through FE also need to be publicised (not least to local MPs) – colleges, not universities, are the main provider of lower-cost degree courses, and they are the ideal provider if policymakers want to try to revive part-time and adult participation.

Finally, as a medium-term goal, it is surely not beyond the wit and imagination of a powerful mayor and combined authority to seek to bring together local FE and HE providers in some kind of more integrated local tertiary partnership or alliance, particularly in areas where colleges have themselves learned to operate more cooperatively.

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Experts

LUCY HUNTE

National programme manager for apprenticeships, Health Education England



Setting the record straight on nursing apprenticeships

Apprenticeships may not be a magic bullet, but neither are they the poisoned chalice the Royal College of Nursing would have us believe, argues Lucy Hunte

I recognise there are challenges with the implementation and roll-out of the nursing degree apprenticeship, but they are not for the reasons the Royal College of Nursing stated in their article in last week's FE Week ("Nursing apprenticeships won't work how the government wants"). Here are some of the claims made, and why I believe they are wrong.

Myth – The nursing apprenticeship is a poor-quality programme that risks reducing the quality of care.

Fact – The nursing degree apprenticeship is subject to exactly the same regulations as the traditional programme and can only be delivered by Nursing and Midwifery Council-approved higher education institutions. The only difference is that it is now funded by the levy.

Myth – Degree-based training is safer.

Fact – The Nursing Apprenticeship is a degree programme.

Myth – The apprenticeship levy does not cover the full cost of training.

“The NAS says it has been one of the most enquired-about programmes since its launch”

Fact – The levy does cover the full cost of the degree, but not the backfill payments for the release time for when the apprentice nurse is away from the trust on placement or in learning.

Myth – Apprentice nurses will not have the same practice hours or placements.

Fact – They are subject to exactly the same NMC requirements as the traditional route, which includes supernumerary time.

Myth – The nurse apprenticeship is reducing access for mature students or those from diverse backgrounds.

Fact – The majority of the first wave of

apprentice nurses are mature students from very diverse backgrounds. The apprenticeship could in fact widen participation as the apprentices will be

employed and earning a salary. Many are existing healthcare assistants who, following the removal of the bursary, could not afford to give up work to study.

Myth – Apprenticeships are not the solution, with only 20 starts this year.

Fact – Approximately 400 nationally are due to start this year, with more to come in 2019. The removal of the bursary remains a concern and the apprenticeship is not the sole solution, but it is an alternative route to registration.

Backfill (the cost to cover staff when they are attending training) is an issue when many trusts are already under

financial constraints, but this is only the case if you look at the nursing apprenticeship in isolation. If you look at it as part of a trust-wide workforce and apprenticeship strategy, then it becomes more viable. For example, trusts in North Central London have agreed an apprentice pay policy whereby all band 1 – 4 roles should be considered as apprenticeship opportunities, with new recruits receiving 70 per cent of the pay band for that role. This still puts the salary at well above the national apprentice wage, but the savings made can therefore go into a pot to help cover backfill.

We know the 20 per cent off-the-job element is sometimes difficult, but in reality the time required for off-the-job training is closer to 60 per cent for apprentice nurses and this is the real challenge – not the quality of the programme or the apprentices.

There have also been considerable delays due to procurement and HEI readiness, but we are seeing movement now and the appetite from employers is increasing. The National Apprenticeship Service has said that the nursing

apprenticeship has been one of the most enquired-about programmes since its launch.

If you still have doubts, then I would recommend talking to the apprentice nurses! I have had the pleasure of hearing a number of them speak at events over the past few months and quite often there is not a dry eye in the house. They are delighted at being given this opportunity to fulfil their dreams without having to take out student loans. Nurses are nurses, whatever training route they take, and the sooner the apprenticeship is given the parity of esteem it deserves, the better for all involved.

Some may argue that as the apprentices are employed and part of the workforce – unlike a university student who simply comes in for a placement – they could even be better, as an apprentice gets far more hands-on clinical and patient experience. The apprentice (unlike a traditional student) also does not have to undertake part-time non-related work just to pay their bills.

PAUL JOYCE

Deputy director, FE and skills, Ofsted



Merged colleges don't get a three-year inspection hiatus

Merging with another college is certainly not a way to dodge a visit from Ofsted, explains Paul Joyce, in response to FE Week's criticism of the regulator's move to suspend routine inspections for at least three years following a merger

College mergers have become much more commonplace in recent years. With this in mind, and following last week's opinion piece by FE Week's esteemed editor ("Ofsted should renege on its merger deal"), I thought it might be helpful to clarify our policy on inspecting these newly merged colleges.

Our inspection handbook clearly sets out:

"A newly merged college will

normally be inspected as a new provider within three years of the merger... Any newly merged college or other provider deemed as a new provider may receive a monitoring visit to assess risk. Risk concerns arising from this or other sources may lead to an earlier full inspection."

So what does this mean in practice? Well, "within three years" does not mean that inspection will happen at the three-year point, or even within the third year. A full inspection can take place at any point during that period. In fact, we have just inspected NCG less than 12 months after its merger with Lewisham and Southwark College. And in May this year we inspected East Coast College less than a year after it was formed following a merger

between Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft Colleges. Inspections taking place relatively quickly after a merger are not unusual – but they are risk-based and proportionate.

“Rest assured we are monitoring colleges that merge very closely”

As well as carrying out full inspections, Ofsted uses its power to conduct monitoring visits to assess providers and flag any concerns. These visits are used to make sure a provider is on the right track, and where we find a provider is not making sufficient

progress, we can bring a full inspection forward. We continue to carry out monitoring visits to newly merged colleges, and before the change to our monitoring policy earlier this year

we completed support and challenge visits to a number of newly merged colleges where the merger included a college formerly graded as "requires improvement" or "inadequate". So rest assured we are monitoring colleges that merge very closely.

Our handbook sets out inspection time frames to help give colleges and other providers an idea of when they might get an inspection. It also serves to reassure students and parents about when their institution might be inspected. But these time frames are indicative and they are deliberately not specific; we monitor providers closely and use all available information to risk-assess when they are in need of inspection.

Ofsted regularly uses its powers to inspect "at any time". I can promise you now that where we have concerns about a college – newly merged or not – we will do what we always have done, which is to go in and inspect. Merging with another college is certainly not a route to avoiding inspection.

**Karen Redhead**

Principal and chief executive,
Ealing, Hammersmith and West
London College

Start date Autumn 2018

Previous job

Principal and chief executive, Derwentside College

Interesting fact

Karen is a keen horse rider, but now restricts herself to helping to judge at dressage competitions.

**James Scott**

Principal, Stockport College and
vice-principal, Trafford College
Group

Start date August 2018

Previous job

Vice-principal, Trafford College

Interesting fact

James is a lifelong Manchester City fan, and is now reaping the rewards of his devotion.

**Helen Wood**

Assistant principal, Trafford Col-
lege Group

Start date August 2018

Previous job

Director of learning, Trafford College

Interesting fact

Helen is training to be a yoga teacher, and can do a headstand for more than one minute.

**Julie Nerney**

Chair, Association of Colleges

Start date January 2019

Previous job

Chair, Greater Brighton Metropolitan College

Interesting fact

Julie attended 198 England football games, home and away, over a quarter of a century from the Italia '90 World Cup to Euro 2016. If England hadn't lost to Iceland, she might've made 200!

Movers & Shakers

...

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

**Graham Hasting-Evans**

President, British Association of
Construction Heads

Start date July 2018

Previous job

Managing director, NOCN Group (he remains in post)

Interesting fact

Graham was head of employment and skills for the construction of the London Olympics and Paralympics in 2012.

If you want to let us know of any new faces at the top of your college, training provider or awarding organisation please let us know by emailing news@feweek.co.uk

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

Difficulty:
Easy

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

Difficulty:
Medium

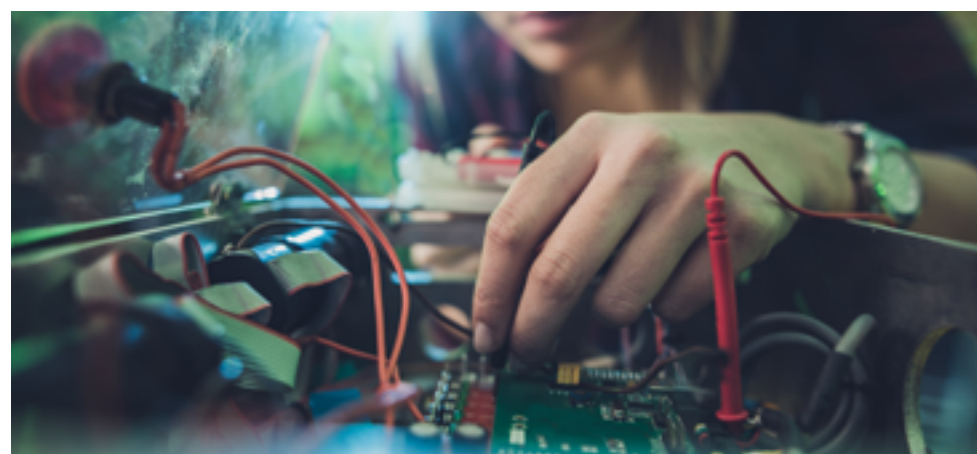
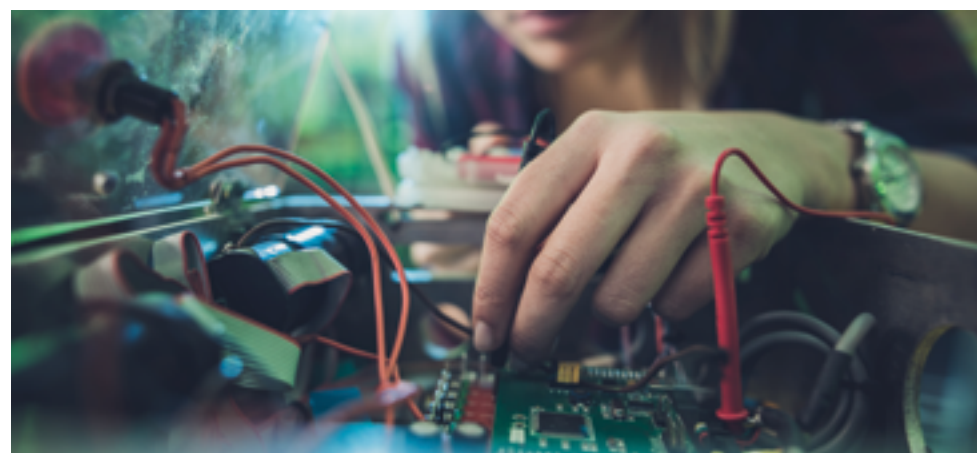
Solutions: See right

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: Ronnie Donkin

Solutions

Turn the paper around to check if your answers match- but no cheating!

Difficulty: Easy

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

Difficulty: Medium

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