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Management apprenticeships continue to soar as skills minister claims funding cannot be used for MBAs

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UCU warns against 'warm words' but poor pay offer

BILLY CAMDEN
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The University and College Union has written to Anne Milton before key pay talks to warn that it will not put up with another "shoddy" deal.

The union wrote to the skills minister ahead of sitting down with the Association of Colleges, when it will be looking to secure a pay offer better than the 1 per cent increase the AoC recommended last year.

In its letter, UCU claims that FE has reached "a crisis point on pay". After a "decade of real-terms pay cuts", senior lecturers are now earning around £9,000 a year less than they would if their pay had simply kept pace with inflation, it says.

Even in colleges that have honoured the AoC's pay recommendations, staff have "suffered a real terms pay cut of 25 per cent since 2009".

The UCU's letter states that "failure to properly reward staff means that teachers in further education are now earning around £7,000 per year less on average than teachers in schools".

It adds that the current review led by Philip Augar of post-18 education, including funding, will not report in time for next year's pay round.

"The truth is that UCU members simply cannot afford to hear once again that there is no money for a proper pay rise," said Sally Hunt (pictured).

The general secretary of the union also warned that FE staff will continue to strike, as they have done in droves throughout this year, if better pay is not secured.

"If the sector is to continue attracting experienced and dedicated staff to deliver for students, colleges need to make decent pay and conditions for staff a central priority," said Ms Hunt.

"After years of warm words, it is time for the government to step up to the mark on funding for further education and for the employers to bring a sensible offer to the table."

Trade unions wrote to the AoC last month to spell out exactly why they have resubmitted a claim for a pay rise of 5 per cent for the next academic year.

They want a guaranteed minimum increase of £1,500 for the lowest-paid staff, for whom a 5 per cent rise would be lower than £1,500.

They also want colleges to pay the living wage of £8.75 (£10.20 in London) and become accredited living wage employers.

Sally Hunt

Key role for colleges in 20 new careers hubs

More than 60 FE colleges will play key roles in new hubs that the education secretary said will transform careers education across England.

There will be 20 careers hubs, covering every region outside of London.

They will comprise colleges working with local schools and universities, training providers, employers and career professionals to pool their expertise on improving careers education.

The hubs will form a central part of the government's careers strategy and will "support young people with the right advice to help them make decisions about their future", according to education secretary Damian Hinds.

Question marks still remain over how viable it will be for colleges to implement the required changes, as the basic hub support fund amounts to just £1,000 per provider.

There is other financial support on offer, including funding of up to £3,500 for 15 colleges and schools in each hub to train a "careers leader".

Visit https://bit.ly/2mg3XC5 to see the list of colleges involved.

Preferred Social Mobility Commission chair criticises FE

The government's preferred candidate to chair the Social Mobility Commission has told MPs that the FE sector needs a "complete overhaul", and reviewing vocational education would be one of her key priorities.

Dame Martina Milburn appeared before the education select committee and made it clear that she is not impressed with the FE sector at present.

"The whole FE sector, I think, needs a complete overhaul," said Dame Martina, who is a governor for Capital City College Group.

"It's not just about money. It's about the leadership; it's about the courses they are doing; it's about the way they engage on a local level with local businesses."

One of her top priorities in post would be to have a "real look" at vocational education.

Her comments provoked former skills minister and committee chair Robert Halfon to jump to the sector's defence.

"People say it [FE] is the Cinderella sector, and I reply that she became part of the royal family. It's important to challenge the ugly sisters of snobbery and intolerance," he said.

Did failed Greater Manchester UTC get 'free pass' despite warnings?

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
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Exclusive

The viability of the failed Greater Manchester university technical college was questioned by government officials even before it opened, but ministers still allowed the project to proceed, new documents have revealed.

Correspondence seen by our sister paper Schools Week shows Department for Education bosses believed the state-of-the-art UTC, which cost £9 million to build, would only be viable if it recruited 173 pupils in its first year.

Yet records show it was allowed to open with fewer than 100, before it closed three years later.

Michael Dwan, a venture capitalist and founder of the controversial Bright Tribe academy chain, was granted permission to open the UTC in 2013 by education secretary Michael Gove. Documents show he was also handed a £300,000 grant to cover project development.

But the project was already unravelling by the following spring, months before the UTC opened on a purpose-built site in Oldham.

In a letter to Dwan dated May 8, 2014, an unnamed official from the Department for Education warned that only 65 pupils had been recruited to start that September, less than half of the "minimum viable number" of 173 agreed in the school's funding agreement.

The official warned that with such few pupils, Dwan could not "deliver the full educational offer that I know you aspire to".

Despite these warnings, the UTC opened as planned in September 2014. Its school census showed just 98 pupils on roll the following January. When the school closed in September last year, it still had fewer than the DfE-stipulated target of 173.

Lucy Powell, the MP for Manchester Central and a former shadow education secretary, accused the DfE of giving the school's sponsors a "free pass".

"It's clear now that even before this school opened, its future was bleak," she said. "Officials signed off plans for this school despite knowing that it was unsustainable from the outset, giving the sponsors a free pass even though they had fallen at the first hurdle.

"Unfortunately the DfE seems to time and again turn a blind eye when it comes to their 'preferred partners' or mates who run trusts."

Ms Powell demanded "much more robust challenge and support" when new institutions are being considered.

Other documents obtained by Schools Week show that further concerns were raised by officials in a 2015 report from DfE officials. Although the report itself has not been released, we did obtain Dwan's response, outlining a series of changes made at the under-fire school, and criticising officials.

In a letter on Greater Manchester UTC-headed paper, Dwan said he was "disappointed with the tone" of the civil service report, and demanded more support.

"I expected a more supportive approach to the challenging circumstances we have inherited and a greater recognition of the actions we have already undertaken, independent of your visit. I also expected a greater acknowledgement and acceptance of the reality and the data shared with you.

A spokesperson for Dwan's office said he had agreed to sponsor the UTC because it was "seen by stakeholders as a viable model for provision for Manchester".

"In the first year of operation of a UTC, it is normal for losses to be made as student numbers rise to a level that can make a college viable and Mr Dwan personally contributed £500,000 to the operation of the UTC," the spokesperson said.

"It is entirely appropriate that DfE officials query and challenge expectations around the student roll as they do with all new schools and colleges. Mr Dwan remains disappointed that the UTC failed in its objective."

The UTCs' model, of 14-to-19 institutions with a vocational focus, has faced substantial problems. Many have struggled financially after failing to attract the right number of pupils, and eight have closed so far.

The DfE did not respond to requests for comment on the Greater Manchester UTC case.

News

DfE orders an independent investigation into ESFA over 3aaa contract management

PAUL OFFORD
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Exclusive

An independent auditor has been called in to investigate the Education and Skills Funding Agency over their contract management of apprenticeships giant Aspire Achieve Advance (3aaa), *FE Week* can reveal.

Alyson Gerner is carrying out the independent investigation on behalf of the Department for Education.

She is finance director of DfE-owned LocatED, which is responsible for buying and developing sites for new free schools in England.

It comes after *FE Week* revealed that Ofsted's latest inspection of 3aaa – which holds the largest ESFA apprenticeship allocation – had been declared "incomplete" following intervention from the agency.

Ms Gerner is described on the LocatED website as a public financial accountant and a fellow of the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply.

Most of her career is said to have been "in commercial roles in the public sector".

She has served as director of NHS commercial development, head of procurement for the DfE, deputy director for risk analysis for the ESFA, and latterly director of financial accounting, operations and procurement for the Funding Agency Shared Services team, part of the ESFA.

The DfE would only say of her probe into the ESFA that it does "not comment on any investigations, ongoing or otherwise".

3aaa has seen significant growth under the leadership of Peter Marples and Di McEvoy-Robinson, its chief executive and director respectively.

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

Direct ESFA funding to 3aaa increased from just £390,000 in 2012-13 to £3.6 million the following year. It rose again to £12.5 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.

The provider had been expecting a grade one outcome following Ofsted's recent inspection, the same as its previous overall rating of "outstanding" in 2014.

This was put on ice owing to an investigation by the ESFA following claims made by a whistleblower.

Alyson Gerner

It is understood that the investigation led by Ms Gerner, which we can now reveal is being carried out for the DfE into its own agency, is running separately to this.

Ofsted originally confirmed on June 20 that it had inspected 3aaa in May, and it indicated at the time it found nothing amiss.

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

But there was a change of position shortly before the report was due to be 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."

Chair of college embroiled in bitter merger row resigns

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The embattled chair of a London college at the centre of a bitter row with staff and local residents over its merger plans has dramatically resigned.

Mary Curnock Cook, chair of Kensington and Chelsea College, was said to have walked out of a governors' meeting on Monday night after announcing she was stepping down with immediate effect.

The college is looking for a new partner after a previously planned merger was called off following direct intervention by the FE commissioner Richard Atkins, triggered by fallout from the fire tragedy at nearby Grenfell Tower.

Ms Curnock Cook's resignation with immediate effect was confirmed on Tuesday.

Following discussions about her "continued chairmanship with the FE commissioner, the principal and the deputy chair", she said she had "come to the conclusion that the end of the academic year is the right time to stand down and allow new leadership to take the college through the next phase of its development".

"I thank all members of the corporation and staff at KCC for their service while I have been chair and wish students and staff every success in the future," she said.

She later tweeted that she "had always said she would stand down if her chairmanship was more of a hindrance than a help".

Ian Valvona will step up as interim chair until a permanent replacement is appointed.

Ms Curnock Cook, the former boss of the University and Colleges Admissions Service, took over in May last year as chair at KCC.

This was around the same time that a huge scandal broke around the £25.3 million sale of its Wornington Road campus to the local council.

Mary Curnock Cook

There was public outcry as it emerged that the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea planned to build housing over most of the site, with a much-reduced space for learning.

That prompted the Save Wornington campaign, with local residents – some of whom were caught up in the Grenfell Tower fire which claimed 72 lives in June last year – fighting to save their local campus.

At a series of public meetings on the plans, Ms Curnock Cook became a focus for embittered comments from staff and residents.

She eventually reached an agreement with the borough to pause the redevelopment, but se repeatedly refused to cancel a proposed merger with Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College.

Campaigners opposed the merger owing to fears the resulting super-college would not retain the contentious Wornington campus in the long term.

The merger had been set to go through in January, but in December it was put on hold when the FE commissioner intervened.

It is understood this came at the request of skills minister Anne Milton, who met with members of the campaign group.

In late January Mr Atkins told campaigners the merger was off.

The following month, the college confirmed it would cooperate with a new commissioner-led structure and prospects appraisal seeking a different merger partner.

At the time Ms Curnock Cook vowed to stay on as chair, insisting that she had the full backing of the board.

"I have always seen my role to steer KCC to a secure and successful future," she said. "This continues to be my priority."

A college spokesperson paid tribute to Ms Curnock Cook, and said she had "worked tirelessly to help lead the college through an unprecedented period of change and challenge".

Her "commitment to public service at such a complex point in the college's history has been exemplary" and the college thanked her "for the key role she has played over the past year and wishes her well for the future"

KCC has yet to announce the name of its new merger partner.

In a statement last week, a spokesperson said it was "continuing to work closely with the FE commissioner's team on its structure and prospects appraisal to secure a new strategic partner".

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News

PAC chair warns Ofqual's 4-week window for feedback on T-levels is plain 'ridiculous'

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From front

The chair of an influential committee of MPs has hit out at the rushed pace of T-level implementation – after Ofqual gave the sector just four weeks to respond to its consultation.

Meg Hillier, head of the Public Accounts Committee, pronounced the timescale "ridiculous" when the exams regulator began asking for views on July 10 on how it should frame its rules when policing the new technical qualifications, with a deadline for submissions of August 6.

Four weeks is half the usual time period set aside for responding to an Ofqual consultation. The document isn't light either, as it includes 71 pages with 52 questions.

"It is a very short timetable and at the wrong time of year for educational institutions, which are just about to break up for the summer," Ms Hillier said.

"If you are going to introduce a new qualification, getting it right is really important. Rushing it through and risking getting it wrong could undermine it completely."

She added that Ofqual's short-turnaround consultation proves there is a "rush to deliver a government policy, regardless of whether it works, and that is not sensible".

Ofqual itself recognised this was a short deadline and is recommending respondents answer only particular areas, including setting and marking assessments, results and certification, and retakes.

It has offered just four weeks for responses because the Department for Education plans to launch an invitation to tender in September 2018 for awarding organisations wishing to bid to offer the first three T-levels, which will be introduced in 2020.

Ofqual will need to publish its assessment decisions by September in order for AOs to write their bids.

The regulator was unable to launch the consultation sooner because it needed to wait for the DfE to release its response to its Implementation of T-level Programmes consultation, published on May 27.

This set out the design parameters for the technical qualifications on which Ofqual needed to base its policy decisions.

"We have worked hard to develop our proposed approach to regulating these new qualifications since then," said Phil Beach, Ofqual's executive director for vocational and technical qualifications.

"It is important that as much detail as possible is confirmed in time for awarding organisations to respond to DfE's invitation to tender (which we anticipate being published in September)."

A DfE spokesperson defended the four-week consultation deadline.

"As stated in the Ofqual document, the consultation is one part of the engagement process to help them form their approach to regulating the new, high quality T-levels," she said.

She added that the regulator has undertaken pre-consultation activity during events held with awarding organisations. It is also holding three engagement events to support the consultation.

But delays to the AO tender process look likely.

The DfE's market engagement events held last month left AOs fuming over the commercial terms to which they will have to agree, prompting the Federation of Awarding Bodies to gear up for possible legal action.

This isn't the first piece of evidence that T-levels are being rushed through.

In May, the IfA initially gave the sector just five working days to respond to its consultation on the draft content for the first three T-levels – and it was during half term. Following outrage from FE leaders, it was forced to extend the feedback period twice.

This came just days after the education secretary Damian Hinds refused his own permanent secretary's request to delay the initial rollout of T-levels until 2021 – revealed via a rare ministerial direction.

Jonathan Slater was quizzed by the PAC on this point last month, where he admitted to having concerns about the lack of "contingency" built into the T-levels timetable.

A few days later his boss insisted to the

Meg Hillier

education select committee that the new qualifications were being introduced at a "good pace".

Ms Hillier admitted she was "surprised" by Mr Hinds' ministerial direction.

"Surely by now the DfE has learned lessons about what happens when you introduce change too quickly," she said.

"This unseemly rush could risk making it [the rollout of T-levels] go badly wrong."

After being shown Ms Hillier's comments, a DfE spokesperson said: "Since we announced T-levels we have worked closely education providers, employers and other delivery partners at every stage to ensure we are creating qualifications that will give young people the skills they need to secure a great job and provide employers with the skilled workforce they need."

August is key merger month amid 17 partnerships for 2018

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A partnership that was bitterly opposed by a local council, and the first university-college link-up in six years, are among four mergers set to go through on August 1.

They are among 17 partnerships due to be formalised this year, despite Ofsted's recent warning that bigger colleges are not always better.

Financially stricken Epping Forest College will become the fourth member of New City College at the beginning of August, as confirmed by both colleges this week.

The merger will "secure the future of Epping Forest College", according to its chair of governors, Martin Rosner.

In June, the chief executive of Epping Forest District Council spoke out against the plans, which he said risked losing the college's local focus and identity through the merger.

Epping Forest has been in administered status following intervention by the FE commissioner in March last year, and currently holds four notices of concern from the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

One of these ruled that the college must agree a plan to "achieve a merger by August 1".

Bolton College and the University of Bolton are also set to join forces on that date, in the first merger between a university and a college since 2012.

Their partnership will use an innovative merger model, described by the Department for Education as "exciting" and the "first of its kind".

The college will retain its own principal and governing board, giving it greater protection than would be offered by a traditional merger.

Another university-college link-up, between cash-strapped Lambeth College and London South Bank University, had been set to complete on August 1.

However, the college refused to confirm if it is going ahead as planned.

The on-off merger was initially announced in December 2016, but by January the college was back on the market for a new partner.

However, the college announced in March that it was reverting to the original plan.

Lambeth has been in financial difficulties since 2016, and is understood to have received £25 million from the government's restructuring facility ahead of the merger.

Lowestoft Sixth Form College and East Coast College are also due to merge on August 1.

Staff at the sixth-form college recently went on strike in protest at the merger, which is going ahead despite two thirds of the consultation feedback being against the plan.

The last merger scheduled for August 1 is between Stockton Riverside College and Redcar and Cleveland College.

A further five mergers are planned for later this year, which – in addition

to the seven that have completed so far – will bring the total number this year to 17.

That is 12 fewer than in 2017, in which a record number of mergers were completed.

This was largely a consequence of the area reviews of post-16 education and training, which ended in March last year with multiple merger recommendations.

Speaking exclusively to *FE Week* last month, FE commissioner Richard Atkins said the sector's appetite for merger "remains greater than I expected".

All 19 structure and prospects appraisals he was working on with colleges were expected to result in mergers, although "they won't all happen on the same day".

However, Ofsted warned in late June that "big is not always beautiful" when it comes to colleges.

Paul Joyce, the education watchdog's main man for FE, revealed it was considering whether to carry out a thematic review looking at the impact on quality of colleges formed through mega-mergers.

"We are concerned at the size of some providers, in relation to poor performance data, so big is not always beautiful," he said.

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News

Apprenticeship starts down 39 per cent in April

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Apprenticeship starts for April were down 39 per cent compared with the same period in 2016.

There were 24,100 starts recorded so far for April 2018, compared with about 39,400 in April 2016, according to the Department for Education's monthly apprenticeship statistics update published on July 12.

This is not an exact like-for-like comparison as the 2016 figures are final and the 2018 figures are provisional.

April 2016 is a better comparator than April 2017, when there was a significant spike in starts just before the introduction of the levy in May 2017.

Comparing first recorded starts for April 2018 to April 2017 would give a drop of 66 per cent, from some 71,000 in 2017 to 24,100 in 2018.

In its commentary published alongside the figures, the DfE warned that "care should be taken when comparing individual months with previous years as they are unlikely to provide a meaningful year-on-year trend" and that the "profile of apprenticeship starts changed significantly in the run-up to the introduction of the levy and beyond".

"This is especially the case when trying to compare starts in April 2018 to starts in April 2017, as there was an unusually large increase in starts in April 2017, and then an unusually large decrease in starts in May 2017 when compared to previous years."

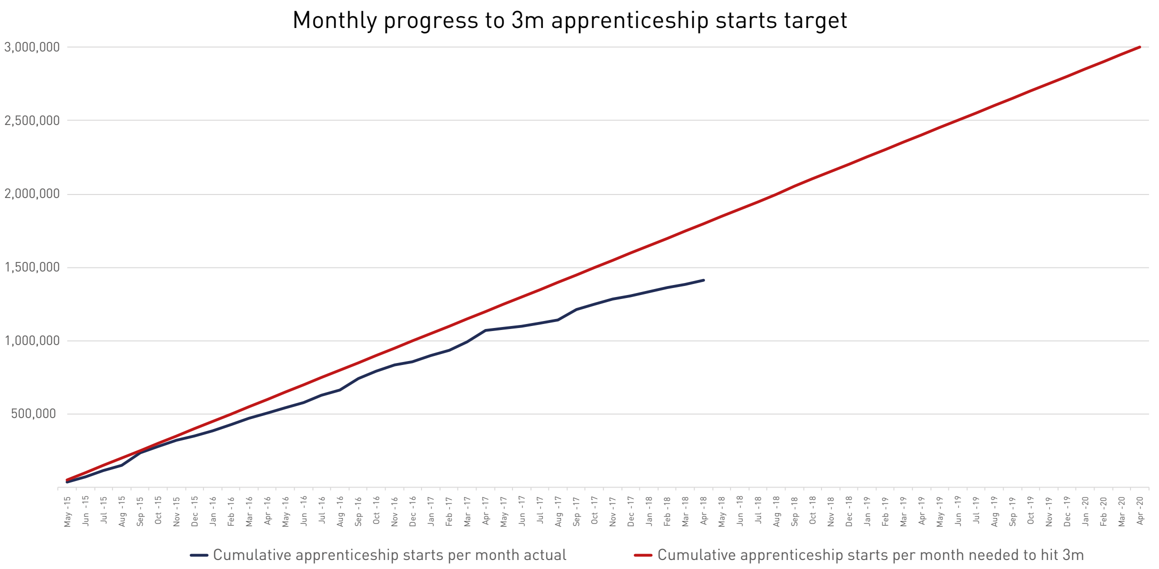
Last month's figures showed a 52 per cent year-on-year drop, from 50,000 in March 2017 to 23,900 in March 2018.

FE Week analysis of the latest statistics reveals that the government's target of three million apprenticeship starts by 2020 is slipping further out of reach.

Starts since the target was introduced in May 2015 now stand at 1,410,200, which is 389,800, or 22 per cent, short of where they need to be for the government to hit its target.

With 24 months left to go, an average of 66,241 starts are now needed per month – almost three times the provisional figure for April.

Mark Dawe, chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, said: "We can only repeat what we have said before. It's time for the government to act, and suspending the co-investment requirement for small to medium-sized enterprises and young people is the right place to start."



Stephen Evans, chief executive of the Learning and Work Institute, said he was particularly concerned "that there are 50,000 fewer apprenticeships for 16- to 24-year-olds in the year so far compared to last year" and urged the government to look at "funding for apprenticeships for younger people".

John Cope, head of education and skills at the Confederation of British Industry, said the drop was a "reminder that the apprenticeship levy is not working as intended".

"If we don't significantly reform the levy quickly, companies will find it harder to invest in the quality apprenticeships and skills training they value so highly," he said.

Skills minister Anne Milton said that while the overall number of people starting apprenticeships had decreased, "this is not unexpected".

"There is good news in these figures and I'm pleased to see the number of people starting on new, higher-quality apprenticeships has increased by almost 1,000 per cent this year. There are also tens of thousands more people starting on higher level apprenticeships," she said.

"Quality is more important than quantity," she added.

A 10 per cent contribution towards the cost of apprenticeship training by non-levy paying employers was one of the changes brought in under last year's reforms.

At last month's AELP conference, Ms Milton said it wasn't clear that the employer co-investment was behind the drop in starts since last May. She ruled out making any changes to the policy in the near future.

New figures suggest apprenticeships in pubic sector rising

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New figures published by the Department for Education suggest that public sector apprenticeships are on the rise after the government introduced a recruitment target of 2.3 per cent.

According to provisional monthly apprenticeship statistics published on July 12, some 43,400 out of a total of 338,400 starts between May 2017 and April 2018 – or 13 per cent – were in the public sector.

This is the first time the monthly figures have included a breakdown of apprenticeships into public and private sector employers.

A previous estimate of 12 per cent, or 28,000 out of 242,200 starts from May 2017 until January 2018, was based on analysis of figures provided earlier this year to the education select committee.

All public bodies with 250 or more employees have a target of at least 2.3 per cent apprenticeship starts per year relative to overall workforce numbers.

The target came into force in April 2017, with the first annual reports due in September.

Today's figures don't show how well – or badly – public sector bodies are progressing towards their apprenticeship target.

As previously reported by *FE Week*, some public bodies are making slow progress.

Just 12,611 people started an apprenticeship in the NHS in 2017-18, which equated to 1 per cent of the health service's 1,205,814-strong workforce.

The NHS was given a target of 100,000 apprenticeship starts by 2020 by former health secretary Jeremy Hunt gave the

But numbers have fallen each year since the target was introduced in 2016. There were 19,820 in 2015-16, and 15,532 in 2016-17.

An education select committee

hearing in June heard that urgent reform to the levy was needed if Public Health England's aim to get 2,400 people enrolled on a nursing apprenticeship was to be met.

There had been just 30 starts on the programme up to the end of January this year.

However, the situation may be set to improve. Under the auspices of Health Education England, 62 NHS trusts have now joined the Association of Employment and Learning Providers.

The 62 trusts currently employ between 50 and 350 apprentices, and these numbers will grow, a spokesperson said.

"There is no doubt that AELP's voice is strengthened when we are discussing the reforms with the government to have public and private sector employers united with providers on the big issues," said boss Mark Dawe.

Today's data, included in the monthly statistics for the first time, "does not allow us to officially monitor progress towards the public sector apprenticeship target", but is "indicative of the expected number of starts based on an internal mapping of public bodies".

The figures are based on an internal mapping of public sector bodies, such as NHS trusts, local authorities and police forces, but do not include the civil service, as these figures are not yet available.

Because the mapping is based on public sector bodies with accounts for the apprenticeship service, and is based "predominantly on account names", it "will not be possible to identify and map all public bodies", said the DfE.

Overall mapping is expected to "improve over time as we progress towards the target".

FE Week reported in June that the DfE had exceeded the target in 2017-18, with 178 apprenticeship starts out of a total workforce of 6,068 staff.

A freedom of information request earlier this month revealed that the department was not able to say whether more than a third of this cohort of apprentices were new or existing civil servants.

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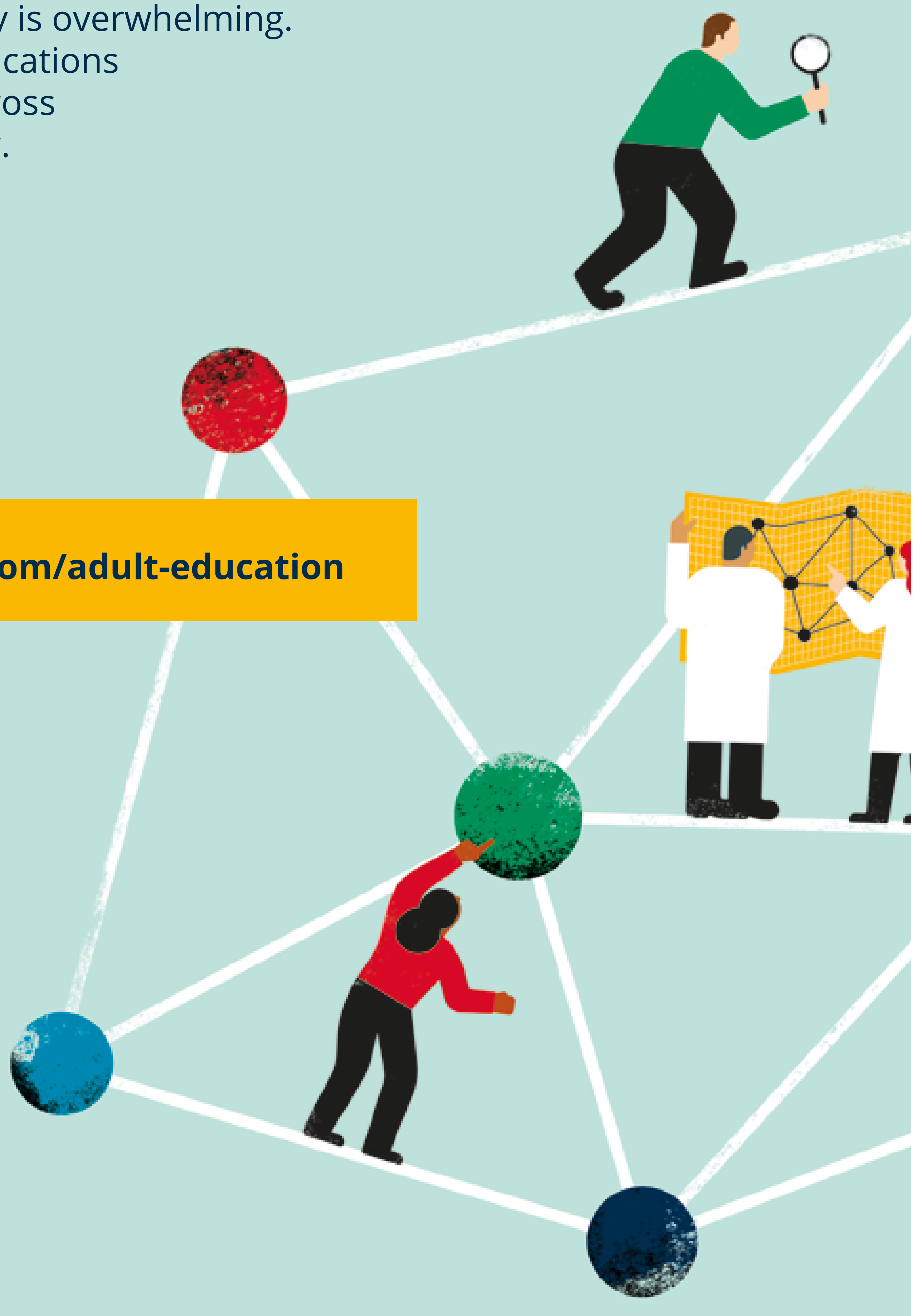

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News

Minimum 2-month notice period if funding rate reduced

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Apprenticeship funding bands currently under review by the Institute for Apprenticeships will be given a minimum two-month notice period if their funding rate is reduced.

But in the case of standards whose funding rate increases, the change will be immediate.

Lucy Rigler (pictured), the IfA's acting deputy director for funding policy, revealed the extra detail regarding the funding-band review of 31 of the most popular standards at a Westminster Employment Forum on apprenticeships this week.

The review was launched in May at the request of the Department for Education, but information since then has been scarce.

"We've been working with all the trailblazer groups involved so they all do have an expected timetable," Ms

Rigler said when questioned on the change by *FE Week*.

"We expect to make some of the recommendations coming out of the review to the department in August. Some of them will probably be in the cycle after that, so more in the early autumn.

"It is all a bit dependent on how quickly those trailblazer groups are able to mobilise things like getting some expected costs or real costs in from training providers."

She continued: "Where we have an agreed position, it is out there with the trailblazer groups.

"Where a recommendation is for a funding band to go up it will happen immediately, and where it is going down there will be a minimum period of two months' notice."

News of the funding band review rocked the sector after *FE Week* analysis showed that 21 of the 30 standards with the most starts this academic year are among those involved.

Universities were particularly outraged, as the chartered management degree apprenticeship is one of the 21. Its funding band is already at the maximum upper limit of £27,000. This means its rate has nowhere to go but down, and HE providers would receive less cash to deliver training.

It was predicted that many universities would stop offering degree-level standards if the rate were to drop, as delivering the apprenticeships would become unaffordable.

But both the IfA and DfE argue that a reduction in bands will be welcomed by employers who have felt unable to negotiate with providers on the price of standards, and will provide greater value for money.

As far as the review itself is concerned, early indications suggest that it is going well.

"The IfA has been proactive in briefing the apprenticeship trailblazer chairs on the process for the review of the funding bands," Petra Wilton, director of strategy for the Chartered Management Institute, told *FE Week* a few weeks after the review commenced.

"The IfA seems very keen to ensure that there is full input from employers and providers in terms of understanding the costs of delivery and to have real insights into the challenges.

"There is a welcome commitment from the IfA that the review should focus on quality, as well as taking into account affordability."

Another trailblazer member whose standard is under review said its meeting with the IfA went "well and was perfectly amicable".

The Association of Colleges is a fan of the review process, if it is carried out "carefully".

"It is right and proper that IfA should review what has happened within standard development since their standards introduction," Teresa Frith, the association's senior policy manager, previously told *FE Week*.

"But we would hope that they will listen carefully to provider concerns about the actual cost of delivery and take these concerns seriously. It is one thing costing apprenticeships to hit a volume target and quite possibly a different thing to fund them for cost-effective delivery."

Reforming non-levy employer fees would be 'massive mistake', university body warns minister

BILLY CAMDEN
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Exclusive

A membership body representing universities has written to the skills minister to say it would be a "massive mistake" to water down policy on employer fees for apprenticeships.

The University Vocational Awards Council issued the warning to Anne Milton this week.

The letter argued that the 10 per cent co-investment fee for non-levy payers is "not a barrier to employer engagement".

It complained that some of its 78 university members who are engaged in apprenticeship and who were unsuccessful in gaining funding in last year's non-levy tender are "turning employers away" and in desperate need of cash that is seemingly going unused.

UVAC suggests transferring unused non-levy funding from providers who say the 10 per cent fee is a barrier, to those who have demand.

"Up and down the country UVAC has identified degree apprenticeship cold spots, resulting from the ESFA procurement, where as a result of regional scale-backs, there is no ESFA funding to provide degree apprenticeships to non-levy paying employers," wrote Adrian Anderson, the council's chief executive.

"Universities are turning away employers who would happily pay a 10 per cent co-investment.

"Could we suggest resource is transferred from providers who bid for funding who were well aware of the co-investment requirement and now claim employers will not pay the 10 per cent co-investment, to providers who did not secure non-levy funding from the ESFA and are turning employers away?"

The apprenticeship levy is paid by employers with an annual payroll of £3 million or more, who can then spend their contributions on apprenticeship training.

Smaller employers can also access the funds generated through the levy, although they must pay 10 per cent towards the cost of the training, through the co-investment model.

There have been a number of calls in the sector, led by the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, to remove this requirement for non-levy payers if they are delivering level two and three apprenticeships to people under 25.

AELP claims the requirement was responsible for the sharp drop in apprenticeship seen since the introduction of the levy.

But at last month's AELP conference, Ms Milton said she was unwilling to make any concessions. Although the issues have been "noted", she said, there would be no rule change any time soon.

UVAC backs the minister's stance.

"The 10 per cent co-investment requirement is an essential component in ensuring the quality of the apprenticeship programme at all levels," its letter said.

"Put simply, if an employer isn't prepared to invest just 10 per cent of the cost of the apprenticeship, the apprenticeship is not exactly valued by the employer."

It adds that giving away "free" apprenticeship provision may increase starts, but would "totally undermine efforts to improve quality", and that a relaxation of the co-investment rule would "encourage some training providers to offer low level and low-quality programmes".

As part of a social mobility policy submission in September, the AELP said that to offset the costs of offering full funding for level two apprenticeships, the government should raise employer co-investment up to 50 per cent for higher levels via a sliding scale.

This would start "with 10 per cent at level three, 20 per cent at level four, 30 per cent at level five, 40 per cent at level six and 50 per cent at level seven apprenticeships for apprentices over the age of 19".

Mr Anderson believes this suggestion is "entirely inappropriate".

"I think that is totally wrong both from a productivity and a social mobility perspective," he told *FE Week*.

"If we want to develop a high-skilled

Adrian Anderson

economy that competes in a post-Brexit world, we don't want to focus on level two."

He pointed out that research by the Sutton Trust found that a "large proportion of individuals who have undertaken level two apprenticeships tread water educationally – so the social mobility argument is at best questionable".

"Why would we want to disincentivise employers, particularly SMEs, from investing in the high-level skills their businesses need?" Mr Anderson added.

"Are we really saying we want encourage employers to invest in business administration and customer service to develop their business, rather than say digital, engineering or management skills?"

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News

'Baptism of fire' for new Learndirect boss after takeover

BILLY CAMDEN
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From front

A little-known entrepreneur, Wayne Janse van Rensburg, has overnight become one of the most powerful figures in FE after taking the reins at Learndirect. He's watched from afar as, over the past 12 months, the nation's biggest FE provider lost a battle with Ofsted to suppress a ruinous grade four inspection report, with the fallout involving high-profile parliamentary investigations. Its government skills contracts will be fully wound down within two weeks, but that doesn't seem to have deterred the ambitious new owner. So why would he take on such a tough project? Senior reporter Billy Camden interviewed him to find out.

The takeover of the nation's largest FE provider has been "a baptism of fire", Wayne Janse van Rensburg admits, referencing last week's sudden departure of 22 key staff at sister company Learndirect Apprenticeships Ltd (LDA).

But the South African-born tycoon, who claims to have dreamed of running Learndirect since he was 13, is unfazed.

"Part of my vision, and people might question my sanity here, is to bring the brand back into the forefront of education," he says.

"I have big things I need to do in terms of reputation repair, but we owe something to the sector both in terms of a sorry, and repayment of what we have done in the past. I need this business to be an asset to the sector."

Mr Janse van Rensburg is determined to bring Learndirect back to its glory days.

The takeover from Lloyds Development Capital seemed like a rushed deal, concluded less than a week after an agreement with a company called PeoplePlus Group fell through at the eleventh hour.

So did they really have time to carry out due diligence? "We already had a fairly good understanding of the business, so to speak," responds the new owner, somewhat enigmatically.

"Our focus over the next two or three days following the call was to build a sustainable business plan for Learndirect and LDA going forward, and challenging some of that evidence that was there for the due diligence."

Prior to the acquisition, Mr Janse van Rensburg was a relatively small player in FE. He was the owner of Stonebridge Colleges, a distance-learning college with around 150 staff and a turnover of roughly £10 million, including a government-funded training provider called Dimensions Training Solutions.

The group has worked with Learndirect over the past two years by supplying it with a virtual learning environment through its technology company, PEARL.

This is where Mr Janse van Rensburg wants to rebuild Learndirect – through technology. And they might even offer it for free.

"I plan to keep the business and run Learndirect Ltd as a commercial training provider, as there is no opportunity for us to receive any more government funding," he says.

"It has great content, initial assessments and diagnostics, which a lot of money has been spent on over the years.

"My ambition is to bring that into the sector and allow other training providers to use our content to support their delivery.

"Whether we charge to do that or, as part of our 'sorry' statement to the sector, give it away for free, that is where we want to go with Learndirect Ltd."

"I need this business to be an asset to the sector"

Learndirect was formerly a giant of a training provider, with turnover reaching £200 million and nearly 2,000 staff. But this will all change in August once government contracts end and redundancies are complete.

Mr Janse van Rensburg expects to need only about 60 staff for the soon-to-be commercial provider,.

But it will be "business as usual" at Learndirect Apprenticeships Ltd, which currently has 350 employees. Mr Janse van Rensburg hopes it will become the "largest and most successful apprenticeships provider in the sector".

However, life at LDA has got off to a far from smooth start.

Wayne Janse van Rensburg

Four senior executives – including the managing director – and 18 other employees quit suddenly at the end of June and moved to the PeoplePlus Group, the firm that only recently had a purchase offer rejected.

"I do not know their reasons for leaving," Mr Janse van Rensburg confesses. "They obviously thought there was a better opportunity for them elsewhere." Legal action against the ex-employees is not an option he wants to pursue: "My focus has got to be about stabilising the business and the staff that remain."

On top of this, *FE Week* has recently learned that LDA is losing business from high-profile levy-paying employers including William Hill and Lloyds Banking (see page 13).

"I acknowledge that our employers were rattled by the news [of the sale]," says Mr Janse van Rensburg, who is "not entirely sure we were providing the service to the best of our abilities previously".

His job is now to "communicate to them what has happened and reassure them that the ship is steady".

Learndirect was previously run by Andy Palmer, who has taken the brunt of the blame for its downfall over the past 12 months, but who has stayed on in an "executive chair" role. Mr Janse van Rensburg says the former leader will have a job at Learndirect for as long as he "proves his value".

Asked who is officially the boss of Learndirect Ltd, he can barely disguise his excitement at fulfilling his teenage dream: "I am the chief executive of Learndirect, thank you very much."

Aside from the staff departures, Mr Janse van Rensburg says, two weeks into his takeover "everything seems to be going according to plan".

The focus now is to "drive revenue into the business so it can be sustainable, and bring Learndirect back to the sector".

News

Learndirect employers look to follow senior staff and leave

BILLY CAMDEN
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Exclusive

The recent sale of Learndirect Apprenticeships Ltd is causing some of its large levy-paying customers to take their business elsewhere, *FE Week* has learned.

William Hill, the world's biggest bookmaker, has signalled its intention to look for alternative providers to train their apprentices.

It is understood that the betting company may transfer its business to PeoplePlus Group, the firm that recently had a purchase offer for Learndirect rejected before poaching 22 of its staff.

Lloyds Banking, which owns Learndirect's former owners Lloyds Development Capital, may also be moving away from LDA after it put its business out to tender.

The news follows a whirlwind series of events in which Learndirect and LDA were sold to Dimensions Training Solutions – a training provider that is part of new owner Wayne Janse van Rensburg's other business, Stonebridge College Group – just days after a deal with PeoplePlus fell through in June.

"In light of the recent sale of LDA Ltd, we are currently reviewing our relationship with them as one of our apprenticeship training providers," said a William Hill spokesperson.

"Our commitment to apprenticeships continues and we are focused on ensuring the best possible learning experience for our colleagues."

Lloyds Banking currently has 1,100 learners on apprenticeship programmes with LDA. The group confirmed these apprentices will continue to be trained by the provider until their programme is complete.

But its contract comes to an end in December, and its future business has now been put out to tender.

However, LDA has been invited to tender along with four other unnamed training providers.

"As our existing contract with LDA comes to an end in December 2018 we have recently commenced the tendering exercise for the delivery of these apprenticeship programmes from 2019," a Lloyds Banking spokesperson said.

"The successful bidder will begin delivering apprenticeship programmes for new learners from January 2019."

It will be a kick in the teeth to LDA if it fails to win the contract, given that it was effectively owned by Lloyds Banking until just a few weeks ago.

Mr Janse van Rensburg accepts that some Learndirect employers may have been put off staying with the company and admitted that delivery hasn't been the "best" it could have been. However, he is urging them to stay put by reassuring them that the "ship is steady".

"I acknowledge that our employers were rattled by the news [of the sale]," he told *FE Week*.

"Part of what I have been doing is going to see our employers large and small to re-engage with them, communicating what has happened and reassuring them that the ship is steady."

"If I'm honest I'm not entirely sure we were providing the service to the best of our abilities previously anyway," he added.

"It is my job now to work tirelessly to convince these employers that under my stewardship they will receive a level of satisfactory service that both they and their apprentices require."

He also thinks decisions to take business away from LDA were "notwithstanding the changes that have happened" – referring to the news that following Mr Janse van Rensburg's acquisition, 22 Learndirect staff, including its managing director and three other senior executives, resigned to work for PeoplePlus.

Speaking specifically about the situation with Lloyds, the new owner said it was always known that their apprenticeships business would be put out to tender.

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News

Huge concern over surge in higher level management apprenticeships

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A surge in higher level management apprenticeship starts has raised grave concerns that employers are rebadging their training.

Gordon Marsden, the shadow skills minister, called on the government to "urgently look deeper" at what is behind the rapidly expanding overall numbers of apprenticeships at level four and above, after seeing *FE Week* analysis of the latest Department for Education data.

Of 35,620 apprenticeship starts thus far in 2017-18, 49.4 per cent (17,610) were on frameworks or standards with management in the title.

The rise of management apprenticeships has been closely followed by *FE Week* since we reported major sector worries about their "unstoppable" growth in 2016. The issue has become even more pressing since the apprenticeship levy for large employers launched last April.

Mr Marsden is now calling on the government to examine whether employers opting to upskill existing staff – rather than train new people – was an unwanted "market consequence" of forcing them to pay the charge.

Yet Anne Milton insisted that "high quality" management apprenticeships were creating "the leaders our businesses need to grow", when questioned by *FE Week*.

The skills minister was also asked by Newcastle MP Catherine McKinnell what estimate had been "made of the number of apprenticeship levy-paying employers in England that have used that funding to pay for master of business administration courses".

An MBA is a graduate-level management degree that covers a wide range of business fields, such as marketing, accounting and management.

Ms Milton's answer was anything but convincing.

"Apprenticeship funding can only be used to pay for apprenticeships and not courses, such as an MBA," she said.

"While apprenticeships may replicate some training delivered by traditional courses, an apprenticeship has to meet certain requirements to make sure it combines on and off-the-job training and delivers occupational competence."

Yet a quick Google search provided numerous examples of apprenticeship MBAs being advertised by universities.

Ms Milton added: "The department holds the overall number of starts on each apprenticeship standard, but does not currently have published data on the number of senior leader starts."

> "There clearly should be urgent concern among ministers"

Data isn't held on which apprenticeship standards "levy-paying employers spend their apprenticeship funding on".

Mr Marsden said the "government should urgently look deeper into these statistics and reflect on whether they are a market consequence of failings in the way they have sold the levy".

There should "clearly should be urgent concern among ministers and officials" about the high proportion of management apprenticeships.

"The key issue with apprenticeships is progression," he added. "Anything that smacks of rebadging, or simply validating normal training or professional development, is not going to get us the step change in numbers and quality that we desperately need."

Tom Richmond, a senior adviser to two skills ministers who is now a senior research fellow at the Reform think tank, said he was extremely worried by *FE Week*'s findings.

"Employers rebadging their management training courses as 'apprenticeships' in order to access the funds generated by the levy is very concerning," he said.

By allowing employers to re-label management courses as apprenticeships, he said, "precious funding" is being diverted away from helping young people get started in their career.

"It is bitterly disappointing to see MBA programmes for senior executives being prioritised over training up a new generation of skilled workers across different industry sectors," he added.

Association of Employment and Learning Providers boss Mark Dawe recognised the "importance of management training, in particular in helping to drive up productivity".

"Nevertheless AELP has consistently warned that the reforms need to ensure a balance across all levels," he added.

Ms Milton told *FE Week*: "Our reforms to the apprenticeship system are about increasing the number of quality apprenticeships in this country and creating long-term investment in skills training.

"There are now high-quality management apprenticeships available in lots of different sectors, creating the leaders our businesses need to grow."

A DfE spokesperson insisted that employers cannot simply convert their own training schemes into apprenticeships.

To be eligible for funding, training "must meet the rigours of an approved English apprenticeship – including 20 per cent off the job training and an End Point Assessment to test occupational competency".

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EDITORIAL

The IfA want a reputation for honesty. Well, here's mine

The Institute for Apprenticeships wants to develop "a reputation for providing honest, evidenced and high-quality leadership when developing opinion on apprenticeships and technical education".

It also says it wants to use its "unique perspective to develop its authority and reputation as an expert and trusted source for information", according to its five-year strategic plan published last week.

Talking with authority and honesty should be encouraged, but the lack of evidence for it so far is troubling.

The IfA has been quick to pat itself on the back for a "record breaking" June and hitting 300 standards approved for delivery, but falls silent when challenged over why it still hasn't reviewed whether the standards developed over three years ago were ever fit for purpose.

The IfA has been quick to pat itself on the back for the rise in apprenticeship starts on standards, but neglects to mention that popular frameworks in sectors such as retail and hospitality were scrapped many months ago.

The IfA has been quick to pat itself on the back for end-point assessment organisation and external quality assurance coverage, but becomes passive-aggressive when asked whether coverage equates to capability.

The IfA has been quick to pat itself on the back for the increased proportions of apprentices starting on higher level apprenticeships, but never mind that an explosion in management apprenticeships accounts for half of them so far this academic year.

And alongside all the patting on the back, it was also shocking to hear the chief executive of the IfA, Sir Gerry Berragan, say in his speech to the annual AELP conference that once one issue is resolved, "people will have to find other reasons as to why they think the reforms aren't working".

This may well be a glimpse of what he's really thinking, but it's not the sort of thing a high-quality leader would say.

If it wants to become a trusted source of information, the IfA should discount standards where equivalent frameworks are no longer available the next time the minister claims the "number of people starting on new, higher-quality apprenticeships has increased by almost 1,000% this year."

To develop a reputation as a source of expertise, the IfA should be publishing figures on changing markets, such as the explosion in higher level management apprentices, not leaving it to *FE Week*.

And high quality leadership in our sector is not combative. It requires a degree of self-awareness and reflection that people respect, even when they disagree with an opinion or decision.

If my perception of the IfA's leadership is right, they will likely have dismissed this editorial before they even reach this sentence.

But quangos come and go. So if the IfA wants to see out its five-year plan, it will need to live up to being "professional", the "P" in its four EPIC values.

Nick Linford, Editor
news@feweek.co.uk

Readers' reply

EMAIL TWITTER FACEBOOK WEBSITE

IfA yet to review duplicate and low-skill standards

It would be useful to know the total amount of money that has been spent (wasted) on the following:
The setup of the IfA and cost of running the IfA
The setup of UTCs, cost of running them, inspecting them and ultimately closing them
The cost of scoping and implementation of developing and roll out of the T qualifications. This cost to include the capacity to deliver funding made available to providers at cost of £250 per student. Plus the trial of the WEX.And finally the cost and running of the FE Commissioner office to tell us what we all know i.e., we do not have sufficient funding for FE and skills provision. Why? Because the money available is used to fund half-brained, egotistical whims of too many ministers who have no understanding of the sector whatsoever.

MCB

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

A great event and one which had a very good items from both sides and always good to see Robert Halfon in action. My only concern was that not all at the event were providers of apprenticeships. Several people were from software companies; yes they will want things to stay the same (which is slightly crazy as more users e.g. apprentices, more funds for them). Also a few university providers who deliver higher levels will be saying great less level two and level 3 means we have more funds for levels five, six and seven. Other than that, it is clear changes or items need to be changed. The longer it goes on the less chance of regaining employers, engaging new apprentices and keeping good staff in the industry.

Steve Lawrence

An interesting read, the big thing missing in this new world is conversation with those small businesses people keep on talking about but not inviting. I don't mean SME's of 100-250 employees but those with 10-15 who keep taking 1 or 2 apprentices per year & seem to be missed.

@andywells3

Ministerial musings: Why there will be only be one exam board for each T-level

So, how does this work in the apprenticeship context, given the multiplicity of EPAs then?

@tonyaas1

But it's ok for A-levels to have many awarding organisations cause those standards don't need protecting! A-level bias yet again.

@vic_taylor74

I get this approach but why not apply it to A-levels as well so that the playing field is even?

@rrobson66

REPLY OF THE WEEK

Names of over 60 colleges involved in new careers hubs revealed

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. The announcement to spend a total of £60,000 (£1k for 60 colleges) on Career Hubs is incredulous! This is 0.15% of £40m. Really puzzled as to how this will secure high quality careers advice for young people in England? Juxtapose this with the average salary of a college tutor circa £25k – £30k and/or the cost of purchasing services from a professionally trained carers adviser. Whilst there are other small-scale funds made available by CEC, this is piecemeal and uneven across the regions. In reality, a postcode lottery continues with those most in need of careers support being overlooked.

Deirdre Hughes

Experts

SKILLS ON PARADE

Sir Gerry Berragan , Chief executive, the Institute of Apprenticeships

A milestone month rounds off the IfA's first year

The publication of the 300th apprenticeship standard is a sign of real change with tangible outcomes, says Sir Gerry Berragan

June was a record-breaking month for the Institute for Apprenticeships, in which we published the 300th apprenticeship standard. We have now approved 90 new standards in just six months – twice the number approved in any previous six-month period since 2014, when the apprenticeship reforms began.

The 300th standard is significant because it exceeds the number of standards in place in a mature, respected apprenticeship system such as that of Switzerland, which has approximately 250 standards. It is close to the 330 standards in place in Germany, another established and respected apprenticeship system.

With the publication of the milestone standard, the number of approved standards has exceeded the number of standards under development for the first time since the reforms began. We're now on track to deliver 400 standards by the end of the financial year.

This is a fitting tribute to the efforts of the trailblazers, IfA staff and the route panel and board members who have worked so hard to make this happen. We've truly turned a corner in terms of productivity and efficiency, without compromising on quality.

To ensure that this progress continues, we have introduced simpler, more intuitive online templates for standards development, and they have been well received by trailblazer groups. We've also implemented a programme of intensive two-day workshops for trailblazers to assist with the rapid production of high quality, compliant occupational standards and end point assessment plans.

In addition, we've agreed individual timelines with trailblazer groups that will make it possible to complete an apprenticeship standard within 12 months of the group forming. So for the first time trailblazers have something concrete to work towards, and we know it can be done.

> "We've truly turned a corner in terms of productivity and efficiency"

The clinical trials specialist standard, developed and delivered in ten months, is a sign of things to come: real change with tangible outcomes.

Further testament to the progress that has been made is that for the first time, the number of apprentices starting on standards now exceeds the number of starts on frameworks. Just over a year ago, starts on standards represented only 3 per cent of all starts. Not only are there more starts on apprenticeship standards than frameworks, but those standards better reflect the diversity of the economy in terms of occupations and skill level, and apprentices on standards receive more training than apprentices on frameworks.

So more standards are now available, developed at a faster pace, and more employers are now choosing standards over frameworks for their apprentices. This represents tremendous progress, and it is in this context that last week we issued our new strategic plan for 2018-2023. The plan explains the three strategic principles developed by the IfA board in order to shape the future development of the institute over the next five years: efficient high-quality solutions, collaborative relationships, and building credibility and transforming the landscape.

These principles are described in detail in the strategy, and a vision of what the board expects the institute to have achieved by the end of the five-year period has been detailed. In our business plan, which was also launched last week, we have derived a range of aligned objectives for the 2018-19 financial year from these strategic principles and some high-level performance indicators against which the board will monitor our progress.

We will also be placing our annual report and accounts in the Commons before recess, giving the detail of what has been achieved in our first year.

NICHOLA HAY

Director, Outsource Training and Development

Why good governance is crucial for ITPs

The AELP's new code of governance is a chance for training providers big and small to think about how they comply with best practice, observes Nichola Hay

Governance is a hot topic right now. Only a week after I spoke on the subject at the Association of Employment and Learning Providers' national conference, Ofsted's chief inspector dedicated a whole speech to its application in multi-academy trusts. Obviously Amanda Spielman hadn't been taking her lead from the conference, but it has been rewarding to be part of an important initiative as AELP drives forward best practice in our part of the sector.

With support from the Further Education Trust for Leadership and the expert advice of sector luminaries Sue Pember and Karen Adriaanse, the AELP initiative takes the form of a new code of good governance for independent training providers (ITPs), which include limited companies, charities and not-for-profit organisations of all sizes. AELP has strongly recommended that the code be adopted by all its ITP members.

Good governance is not new to ITPs. My organisation is part of the Seetec Group and our governance approach follows the principles of the Corporate Governance Code. As a public service provider responsible for public funds, we are also guided by the Nolan standards in public life, and many other AELP members do the same. But the new code developed by AELP is a major step forward because it helps to formalise governance within the sector, and provides a clear framework for AELP members to map their governance against.

The code can be applied to organisations of all sizes, and ideally all ITPs should review their governance structure, document what it looks like and how it complies with the best practice. However, it is expected there will be differences in the way organisations implement the code, given their structures and sizes.

Larger ITPs will simply need to review their current structure and map over to the code, bridging whatever gaps they identify.

> "Focusing on how we deliver social value when using public money is vital"

Small and medium-sized organisations will need to think about what governance means to them, and consider how the senior management team will be challenged and questioned on decision-making. Their governance structure will need to be formalised.

My recommendation would be that if you are a small provider and feel that an aspect of the governance code doesn't apply, then you should be transparent about the reasons for not adopting it, and what you have in its place to ensure the principles are being followed.

Ofsted's scrutiny of the governance of all types of providers should be a reason in itself for adopting the code. But as a director, I am challenged and questioned daily on decisions made by stakeholders, including our employer clients. Following the code will bring additional comfort and security for me as well as being of benefit to stakeholders. I would recommend that those providers who have a board and haven't got a non-executive director should consider appointing at least one to offer external insight and hold the management team to account.

Other aspects I believe will be of particular value are the code's recommendations on transparency and openness. At least once a year, an ITP's board should publish on the organisation's website an account of its engagement with the main communities that it serves, the progress made towards meeting their needs for education and training, and how it aims to meet future needs. Again, the focus on how we deliver social value is vital when we are reporting on the use of public money, and this is why we should also encourage employers to put governance structures in place in respect of their levy funds. Via its annual report or self-assessment report, the ITP should also communicate that it has adopted the code and demonstrate how it complies with the principles.

The AELP code was published at the AELP conference as a "final draft" for consultation (see https://bit.ly/2zAifqM) and it will be finalised shortly. By embracing it, a provider is sending out a signal in a very competitive marketplace that it has good values and ethics.

Experts

MANDY CRAWFORD-LEE

Director of policy and operations
University Vocational Awards Council

Will the IfA's funding band approach derail apprenticeship reforms?

Are funding bands deliberately being set below cost to restrict the supply of some high-cost apprenticeship standards? Mandy Crawford-Lee weighs the evidence

The recent changes to the funding band structure and the review of funding bands for several apprenticeship standards, most notably the chartered manager degree apprenticeship, have drawn extensive media coverage. Although the Institute for Apprenticeship's chief executive Sir Gerry Berragan has recently explained how it arrives at the final recommended funding band, it is hard for me to say anything positive about the IfA approach. In particular I'm not convinced of the exact purpose of funding bands, the robustness of the allocation process, or its transparency.

Let's start with purpose. Does an apprenticeship funding band represent the actual cost of the external training and end-point assessment required by the apprenticeship? Or is it simply the maximum financial contribution that government is prepared to make to the cost?

Take the social worker degree apprenticeship: initially, the IfA allocated it a provisional funding band of £21,000. Few, if any, higher education institutions working with the trailblazer could deliver such a high-cost, highly regulated programme within such a band. The IfA is now recommending funding band 26 in the new structure that takes effect on 1 August. The upper limit of this band, £23,000, is still below the estimated cost of delivery submitted by the trailblazer to the IfA.

There is an important issue here: it appears that in some cases a funding band will not cover the actual cost of an apprenticeship delivery and employers must make additional payments if they want to use these apprenticeships. And yet, while the IfA states in its own advice that the funding band is not intended to be used as a funding rate, it also says it expects employers to negotiate with providers and agree a price below this band's maximum. The message is both confusing and contradictory.

Is this a conspiracy or a failure of process? At the very least it leaves me wondering whether the IfA methodology for establishing funding bands is flawed, or, rather more likely, that bands are being established to restrict the supply of some apprenticeship standards and limit employer spend on high-cost apprenticeships. To be honest, there is evidence on both counts.

Despite employers pushing apprenticeships upwards in terms of level of skill, the IfA still relies on historic Education and Skills Funding Agency data based on the costs of apprenticeships at levels two and three to inform its funding decisions. Few would doubt that the costs of delivering a higher-level skills programme are very different to those for an intermediate or advanced apprenticeship – so why use such data in decision-making? It's also worth noting that after 15 months of operation the IfA still hasn't recruited staff with an understanding or background in higher education costing.

> "Conspiracy or failure of process? There is evidence for both"

The evidence for conspiracy is equally compelling. In its guidance to trailblazers on funding bands, the IfA refers to "affordability within the wider apprenticeship programme". Affordability should have no role in establishing cost, although of course it has a crucial role in determining how much, if any, of a commodity or service an individual or organisation will purchase or fund. The government's manifesto commitment is three million starts this parliament. Based on the 600,000 starts a year needed to deliver this commitment (notwithstanding its current trajectory), the money expected to be raised annually through the apprenticeship levy equates to just £4,167 per apprenticeship.

Although apprenticeship numbers have fallen since the introduction of the levy, it doesn't take a lot of analysis to work out that if employers decide to spend their levy on high-cost and high-level apprenticeships, in the long term the levy will not stretch to fund delivery at the scale set out in the manifesto commitment. Moreover, it's impossible for the IfA to be "agnostic" about apprenticeship levels if it wants to ensure that the revenue raised through the levy can fund the delivery of anything like 600,000 apprenticeships per annum. So are funding bands being set deliberately below cost to restrict the supply of some high-cost apprenticeship standards? It would seem so.

LAIRA PEARSON

Head of health, care and integrated professions, Bridgwater & Taunton College

Let FE deliver nursing apprenticeships – for everyone's sake

FE has vast expertise in delivering healthcare apprenticeships, but those trying to solve the nursing shortage fail to see the larger role it could play, says Laira Pearson

Apprentice numbers in the NHS are falling and the number of nurse vacancies are increasing. The obvious question is: Why aren't NHS employers using their large apprentice levy pots to fund nurse apprenticeships?

To those of us in further education, the solution looks simple: let FE providers get involved. The sad reality is that this option is largely being ignored. Undergraduate nurse programmes are currently being delivered only by universities in their capacity as Approved Education Institutions (AEIs) designated by the Nursing and Midwifery Council. This approach worked well enough until the bursary for the undergraduate degrees was removed and the nursing degree apprenticeship standard was published; HEIs have been trying to get up to speed with apprenticeships ever since.

Given how much of a priority it is for the NHS to ensure there is a continuous supply of qualified nurses entering the system, why hasn't the NMC turned to FE to leverage their vast expertise in apprenticeships and appetite for pace? Surely it's a match made in heaven.

The NMC says it is considering awarding AEI status to FE colleges with degree-awarding powers – but there are so few FE colleges in this position that it feels somewhat tokenistic.

FE colleges such as Bridgwater & Taunton College are already successfully delivering degree-level apprenticeships in high-risk sectors such as engineering via sub-contract or franchise arrangements with HEIs. So why not nursing?

With the introduction of the level five nursing associate apprenticeship, the question has been pushed even further up the agenda by FE colleges and the Association of Colleges. Of the 35 pilot sites in England, only three FE colleges are involved: Bridgwater & Taunton College, Petroc and South Devon College.

> "This is bigger than individual institutions: this is about a sustainable NHS workforce"

When the pilot programme was launched as a foundation degree in January 2017, the Devon programme was developed and delivered by Petroc and South Devon College in partnership with the University of Plymouth. In Somerset, the University of the West of England (UWE) worked with us at Bridgwater & Taunton College to develop and deliver their nursing associate programme.

Fast forward to the publication of the nursing associate apprenticeship standard less than a year later, however, and all changed for our FE colleagues in Devon. Despite FE being the experts in apprenticeships, the NMC stated that AEIs needed to be the lead provider, and the University of Plymouth quickly withdrew from its FE partners to deliver the apprenticeship direct.

Thankfully, appeals from employers in Somerset resulted in UWE committing to maintain delivery of the programme locally via Bridgwater & Taunton College. We have an impressive track record when it comes to healthcare apprenticeships. Our employer partnerships are strong, and this year alone 52 of our higher apprentices in health will graduate... did I mention we are good at this?

With no university in the county, Somerset is particularly vulnerable when it comes to nursing resource. Individuals looking to pursue a career in nursing are required to leave the area to undertake their nursing degree; employers must then invest massively in recruitment campaigns to attract them to return as qualified nurses. A ridiculous set of circumstances, and one that the apprenticeship levy was intended to solve.

What we know is that nursing resource is in crisis and the apprenticeship levy is meant to help deliver the right skills in the right place at the right time. Failing to recognise FE as leaders in apprenticeship development and employer engagement poses a risk to apprenticeships in the health sector ever working at all.

I'm sure we all agree that this is bigger than individual colleges and universities: this is about the sustainability of the NHS workforce. The sooner the NMC invites FE into the discussion to get some pace behind nursing apprenticeships, the better.

Profile

Jon Yates: the most powerful (and leas

Introducing...

JON YATES

Secretary of State for Education's special adviser on policy

CATH MURRAY
CATH@FEWEEK.CO.UK

As the recently appointed policy adviser to the Secretary of State for Education, Jon Yates is now one of the most powerful figures in education. What makes him unique to the role is that he used to run an apprenticeship training provider. So what will he be whispering to Damian Hinds? *FE Week* spoke to people who have worked with him, and here's what we found

Somewhat unusually, when Damian Hinds was selecting his special adviser on policy he didn't pick a schools expert. Perhaps that's because he's married to a teacher. Or maybe it's because FE is undergoing a major overhaul, and he wanted someone with a handle on it.

Jon Yates fits that description. While not exactly an FE specialist, he has spent the past five years designing and delivering an apprenticeship programme, and has links with employers and education providers as well as schools.

According to former co-workers, Yates is a quick thinker who comes up with lots of ideas that he's prepared to drop quickly if they don't work. He's also been described to me as socially engaging, brave and good at cultivating networks.

Much of spads' work happens in the shadows, which explains why few people were willing to go on record with their comments on Yates. A sector leader, however, said: "It really helps to have dialogue with someone senior in government who has frontline delivery experience. It means our comments are not instantly dismissed as those of vested interests, yet Jon is also ready to challenge us if he believes an argument doesn't stack up. That's got to be healthy for all sides."

Both of the Education Secretary's spads are Oxford-educated, like Hinds himself. But while his adviser in charge of media relations, Meg Powell-Chandler, has worked for the Conservative party almost continuously since she graduated in 2009, Yates took a different route into government.

After two years working for management consultancy firm McKinsey, he plunged into the world of do-gooding – starting out at the Christian charity Tearfund before studying social entrepreneurship for a year and then founding his own social enterprise, The Challenge Network, in 2008.

Anyone wanting to know what makes Yates tick could do worse than watch his TEDx talk from 2016, where he describes all of us as living in "bubbles" of people just like us. Fundamentally he is powered by a desire to get people from different backgrounds mixing – or in fancier words, promoting social integration.

For five years, with The Challenge's co-founders Craig Morley and Doug Fraley, he pioneered a summer programme designed to get young people from different social backgrounds mixing. It provided the blueprint for the government-funded National Citizen Service, for which it is now the major provider.

In 2012, Yates left the running of the NCS to other team members, and in his role leading on strategy and public affairs began to explore new ways to fulfil the organisation's mission.

That's when they landed on apprenticeships. It seems a bizarre choice, as apprenticeships are about training and The Challenge was all about social integration. A Facebook post by Yates from 2016 reveals his ambitions: "We want to redesign apprenticeships. For too many young people, apprenticeships are seen as the option for those who have no option. We believe that's not good enough."

His underlying vision, says Emma Jenkins, head of HeadStart and

st-known) man in FE?

"He fundamentally cares about there being an impact on the ground"

development at The Challenge, was to do more than deliver apprenticeships, which is why their Step Forward scheme did a lot of additional work on team building, developing confidence and people skills; on going into schools and recruiting from non-traditional demographics; and on integration between apprentices on all its pathways.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, given all they were trying to achieve on apprenticeship funding, Step Forward turned out to be financially unsustainable, and the programme is winding down next year. The NCS has also had criticisms from the National Audit Office regarding its governance, slow growth and high spending.

So is Yates more of an idealist than a pragmatist?

"I'd almost say it's the opposite," says Jenkins. "Not that he doesn't have amazing ideas, because he absolutely does, but I think he's the first one to robustly attack it and say, 'is this practically possible?' and when it's not, 'let's iterate, and quickly make improvements'."

In 2017, The Challenge won the tender to design the T-level 45-day work placement pilot, and support colleges in its delivery.

Martin Doel, professor of leadership in FE and skills at the Institute of Education, UCL and a trustee of The Challenge, thinks it won the bid because the organisation "had credibility in terms of its links with employers and education providers of all kinds. It had a combination of a delivery record of working with schools and local employers and project management expertise."

Yates left The Challenge last summer to work on research and development for More in Common, the charity set up in memory of murdered MP Jo Cox, whose mission to make communities "more resilient to the increasing threats of polarisation and social division" seems a perfect fit for Yates. Less than six months later, he was recruited to the Hinds team.

There's no official application process to become a special advisor to a Tory minister. You just have to know people. Or rather, be known by people close to the minister. Then party officials will generally make lots of phone calls and whittle their list down to a shortlist, which is then vetted by the Conservative Campaign Headquarters, and the minister is given the final pick.

So how was Yates known to people in government?

His first forays into the world of Westminster came in the form of the Social Integration Commission, which was convened by The Challenge in 2014 and brought together representatives from business, the third sector and policy, with the aim of identifying good practice in social integration and making recommendations. Chaired by Matthew Taylor, the head of the RSA, it produced three reports, and led to the creation of an all-party parliamentary group on social integration chaired by Chuka Umunna MP and for which The Challenge now provides the secretariat, which means that they do all the admin and logistics.

Their design principles for an integrated society have also been adopted by the government in its integrated communities strategy and the Greater London Authority's All of Us social integration strategy.

"Jon brings a savviness and practical aspect to a policy world," says Rebecca Carter, director of organisational strategy, planning and communications at The Challenge. "He fundamentally cares about there being an impact on the ground, on someone's life. And if you want something to change in society, you've got to make sure it jolly well works."

Movers & Shakers

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

Peter Robinson

Vice-principal, Blackburn College

Start date August 2018

Previous job
Assistant principal, Heart of Worcestershire College

Interesting fact
Peter once walked non-stop for 24 hours to raise money for charity.

Mary Curnock Cook

Formerly chair, Kensington and Chelsea College

Resigned July 2018
(replaced by interim chair Ian Valvona)

Previous job
Chief executive of the University and Colleges Admissions Service

Interesting fact
Mary left school at 16, and didn't go to university until she was in her 40s.

Simon Barrable

Principal, Portsmouth College

Start date September 2018

Previous job
Deputy principal, Portsmouth College

Interesting fact
Steve started his career teaching history and politics at St Vincent College, Gosport, but before that spent time living and working in France and the Netherlands.

Zac Aldridge

Vice-principal, Derwentside College

Start date May 2018

Previous job
Assistant principal, Gateshead College

Interesting fact
Zac is allergic to cats, but because his wife insisted they have one, they bought a hairless cat and called him Colonel Sanders.

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

Difficulty: Easy

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

Difficulty: Medium

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

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: Catherine Storey

Solutions

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

Difficulty: Easy

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

Difficulty: Medium

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