



# OFSTED IGNORED 3AAA WARNINGS

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- Employee whistleblower raising safeguarding issues
- Quadrupling in a year to over 2,000 apprentices

## Another case of too big to fail?

- ESFA tells Ofsted nothing about 3aaa investigation in 2016 or 2018
- DfE supporting sale of provider to protect learners
- Chair of PAC: "Ofsted should have gone in sooner"



Exclusive

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See pages 10 & 11

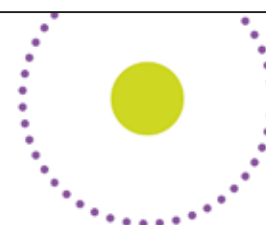
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# IfA loses funding rate review battle but uncertainty drags on

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Exclusive

An employer group that won an appeal over the Institute for Apprenticeships' handling of funding-rate recommendations is still waiting for a final decision, *FE Week* can reveal.

We reported in May that the education and training trailblazer group had rejected the IfA's recommendations for the three FE teaching standards it is developing.

The group lodged an appeal against the IfA's process, and was told in July that it had succeeded – leading to the original recommendations, which ranged from £5,000 to £9,000, being binned by the appeal panel.

This meant the three standards were sent back to the IfA's route panel to have new funding bands assigned to them, which should have happened at a meeting on September 13.

Instead, the panel deferred its decision, according to Jo North, chair of the trailblazer group.

She told *FE Week* that the group hasn't been told the reason for this delay, only that the panel needed to carry out "further work with training providers to inform the funding band recommendations".

According to a letter sent by the IfA to Ms North, dated July 5, the group appealed on four bases: failing to comply with agreed procedure; failing to take account of relevant information; making a decision based on a mistake of fact; and the institute exceeding its powers.

The appeal was turned down on three out of four of these points, but "the appeal panel considered it was, on balance, persuaded by some of your arguments" in relation to the first point.

These related to the "transition of the process from the Education and Skills Funding Agency to the institute" and the "request from the trailblazer group regarding their attendance at route panel".

Ms North told *FE Week* she had asked three times to attend the meeting and "each time it had declined, saying there was enough expertise on the panel".

Despite the ruling, she was also excluded from the September meeting

– even though she said she was asked to be on standby.

The level-five learning and skills teacher standard was first published in August 2015, while the level-four assessor/coach and level-three learning mentor standards were published in October the same year.

Ms North said the level-five standard had actually been approved for delivery in March 2016, subject to a number of small changes, but because of a lack of communication between the ESFA and the IfA this was never published.

That miscommunication had cost "at least 2,500 starts", Ms North said.

"We want some action. Everyone is wanting to deliver. My inbox is full every day of people wanting it," she said.

An IfA spokesperson said it was "working to establish appropriate funding bands to support high-quality delivery and provide value for money, and bring these standards through to delivery as quickly as possible.

"We are grateful to the education and training trailblazer group for all of their hard work so far. We are aware of their concerns, and are already in contact with them to get these resolved."

## All-new apprenticeship standards by August 2020

The government has committed to introducing all-new trailblazer apprenticeship standards by August 2020.

Three waves of frameworks have been switched off, but earlier this year the government said it would not close any more until 2020.

The Treasury has now said all old frameworks will be discontinued "by the start of the 2020/21 academic year".

So far, 86 frameworks have been withdrawn and two have withdrawal dates listed. Currently, 124 remain without a withdrawal date.

## Cash boost for struggling Stoke-on-Trent College

Stoke-on-Trent College has received a "major boost" to its finances after a successful bid to the Department for Education's restructuring facility.

The college, which was almost £16 million in the red in 2016-17, will use "most of the money" to tackle "historical debt", according to principal Denise Brown.

In February, *FE Week* reported the college had applied for £21.9 million in restructuring funds, but it is not clear how much of this has been received.

## IfA has signed off funding bands for 12 standards

The final funding bands for 12 of the 31 standards reviewed by the Institute for Apprenticeships have been signed off by the education secretary.

Seven have had their funding cut and two have seen their funding rate increase, while three have remained the same.

Three controversial management standards were missing from the confirmed list while their employer group appeals against planned cuts to the rates.

The IfA said it expects the process will be finalised in "late 2018".

# Why getting QLTS is on teachers' to do lists

When it comes to developing their careers, more teachers and trainers in Further Education are opting to gain QTLS status. Here three of them explain how it's enhanced their practice, as well as their prospects.

Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) status is the badge of professionalism for practitioners in the Further Education and Training sector, conferred by the Society for Education and Training. It offers participants an opportunity to develop their teaching practice, gain recognition for their skills, and widen their career prospects, and its parity with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) also allows those who achieve it the flexibility to teach in schools. But what do teachers who've gained the status believe it's done for them personally?

### Opening up career progression

Tom Hardy completed his PGCE in 2017. When he took a new role in a Pupil Referral Unit at Grimsby's Phoenix Park Academy, both he and the school had one eye on his professional development.

"Senior management said they saw additional opportunities for me, and that getting another qualification would help me progress," he says. "Some roles require you to have QTS or QTLS, so it was a necessity."

He chose to undertake QTLS – a six-month 'professional formation' that required him to build an online portfolio to benchmark his practice, create a professional development plan, record his CPD, and reflect critically on the development of his teaching.

It was QTLS' practical focus that appealed to Hardy: "I could have taken the QTS route, but QTLS suited me better. In my environment, I knew it would be beneficial to build a profile of the students, reflect on my own practice and think about how I could

improve.

"And now I've achieved it, the school is exploring additional opportunities and responsibilities for me."

### Gaining professional recognition

For Jeminiyi Ogunkoya, Qualifications and Development lead for disability and mental health organisation Certitude, QTLS offered a way to gain recognition of her professional status and commitment to developing her own and others' practice.

"I need to set an example in terms of how I measure the practice of the teachers, trainers, and assessors I work with," she explains. "My organisation needs someone who knows how to carry out teaching and learning training, and develop the staff.

"Through QTLS I was able to reflect on and align my own practices with the needs of my learners. Now I know that whatever I am doing is in line with the [professional] standards.

"I recently had an inspection rated Outstanding. When my tutors and trainers come and shadow me, they can pick up on good practice. Through standardisation, I can tell them, 'this is how we're going to share it.'

### Building confidence, benefiting learners

Liam James, Sports Lecturer and Course Co-ordinator at Weston College in Weston Super Mare, says that QTLS not only boosted his confidence and skills, but also had a positive impact on his learners.

"It made me reflect on how I teach," he says. "There were things I was doing just because I'd learned them in teacher training, but having that chance to step back and think helped me to adapt each session, because not everyone learns in the same way."

"Now I'm always discussing ideas, trying to be a bit more innovative and make things better suited to the learner."



Advertorial

James has also applied that approach to the coordination of the course as a whole. "I've raised my standards and the culture to a more professional level," he says. "Now more employers want to work with us, and the feedback we receive when our learners go into the industry is that they are ready for work."

All three professionals say that getting QTLS has improved their practice, benefitted their learners and had a positive impact on wider organisational culture.

"I'm giving a better service to the students now," says Hardy. "They're more comfortable in the learning environment, and making more progression."

Ogunkoya encourages anyone considering QTLS to take the plunge. "You'll develop your knowledge, and help the people you work with to develop theirs. You will not regret it."

For more on QTLS visit [set.etfoundation.co.uk/qtls](http://set.etfoundation.co.uk/qtls)  
Registration is open now.



# Dame Asha quits West Notts college amid financial crisis

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Exclusive

The principal of a high-profile college in financial crisis resigned with immediate effect this week – but will remain a “valued” board member at the Institute for Apprenticeships.

Dame Asha Khemka, who was one of the highest paid FE leaders in the country, stepped down from the top post at West Nottinghamshire College following a “special meeting of the board of governors” held “in light of the current challenges faced by the college”.

WNC received a £2.1 million bailout from the Education and Skills Funding Agency in July – which *FE Week* last month revealed was requested just 48 hours before it would have run out of cash.

The agency then hit it with a

financial health notice to improve, which triggers a formal review from the intervention team and the FE commissioner.

Despite the large cash injection, WNC admitted it “can’t rule out having to approach the ESFA for further funding”.

“The board thanks Dame Asha for her service and for the difference she has made to the college and the local community during her tenure,” said Nevil Croston, chair of governors at West Nottinghamshire College.

“We are now working with the ESFA and the FE commissioner’s office to appoint an interim principal until a national search for a permanent replacement can be implemented.”

He added: “Although we are not the only college to experience financial difficulty at this present time, the board and senior leadership team deeply regrets that the organisation has found itself in this position.

“We have every confidence in our ability to successfully implement our recovery plan and ensure our provision

for students and employers remains first-class.

“Although we can’t rule out having to approach the ESFA for further funding, we are committed to correcting the college’s finances in a way that minimises disruption to staff, students and the communities we serve while maintaining an excellent experience for our students.”

Dame Asha, who received a £262,000 remuneration package in 2016/17, was one of two college principals appointed to the IfA’s board in January 2017.

A spokesperson for the institute told *FE Week* that she “remains a valued member of the IfA board”, even though she is no longer a serving principal.

Dame Asha receives £15,000 a year for her role on the IfA board.

She is also a member of the Cabinet Office’s education honours committee, which is responsible for reviewing honours nominations for people involved in education.

This is a fixed-term position, and the Cabinet Office confirmed on Tuesday



Dame Asha Khemka

that she will remain in post until her contract expires.

WNC’s website lauds Dame Asha for receiving “many awards and accolades since being in post – including a damehood in 2014”.

She was also “named ‘Woman of the Year’ at the GG2 Leadership Awards” in 2014.

But the college has hit financial troubles in the past year.

It blamed changes in apprenticeship subcontracting rules, which reduced its income from management fees, for having to cut more than 100 jobs in March in an effort to make £2.7 million in savings.

Board minutes from April show the

college was running low on reserves, which were below the £9 million set in its banking covenants. The college has a £15 million loan outstanding with Lloyds Bank, which was negotiated in 2012 to pay for redevelopment and has another 20 years to run.

The minutes also revealed the college’s worryingly low cash days – the number of days an organisation can continue to pay its operating expenses given the amount of cash available.

For colleges these are benchmarked by the FE commissioner at 25 but they sat at just 11 for WNC, according to the minutes.

The college’s accounts for 2016/17 have yet to be published.

## Fears over ‘market instability’ in rush to roll out AEB devolution

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The rushed timeframe ahead of next year’s devolution of the adult education budget means providers will struggle to “hit the ground running” next August and may lead to “market instability”, an expert has warned.

The warning comes as the first combined authorities are gearing up to start their tender process this month, with contracts due to be in place in April – just four months before the authorities get control of the cash.

Dr Gareth Thomas, managing director of consultancy firm Skills and

Employment Support Limited and an expert on devolution, told *FE Week* that while the authorities “may be able to complete the procurement and contracting” it was less certain that providers would “be able to adapt their delivery models and put appropriate partnership arrangements in place” in time.

“A lot will depend on how different the delivery requirements look area by area, and how different they are to current requirements,” he said.

“Hitting the ground running from August 1 will be a big challenge.”

There was also a risk of “market instability”, Dr Thomas said, as providers that lose out would be left with little time to “put other arrangements in place”.

This could lead to a “knock-on impact” in other areas, such as

apprenticeships, as AEB cash has “previously provided much-needed stability for some providers”.

Mark Dawe, chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, said that providers were “facing dramatic changes across all their programmes of delivery”.

“It is the uncertainty as to what is changing when and therefore the ability to plan and vary resource that is and will cause the greatest destabilisation,” he said.

He urged the combined authorities to ensure the “initial transition” is “smooth and avoids

destabilisation, but then it should be followed quickly by a clear plan and commissioning of all AEB”.

This approach “appears to align with their thinking”, Mr Dawe said.

The Greater London Authority and six mayoral combined authorities are due to get control of their AEB funding from 2019/20.

*FE Week* reported on Monday that the GLA is set to go out to tender next week for £130 million of its estimated £311 million annual budget.

Private providers will be able to bid for their share of the cash in two lots, while grant-funded providers, including colleges, will receive similar allocations to their existing Education and Skills Funding Agency allocations.

Both Tees Valley and the Liverpool City Region combined authorities told *FE Week* they would be launching their procurement

processes by the end of this month.

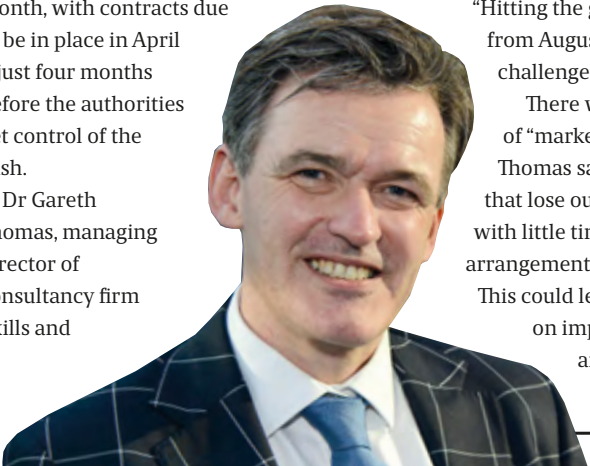
A Tees Valley spokesperson said its tender would involve a “single-stage application process for its current base of over 170 education, skills and training providers”, with a minimum contract value of £50,000.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority didn’t say when it would be going out to tender, but did say it was “currently finalising its procurement plan, which will culminate with contracts being awarded in April 2019”.

The West Midlands Combined Authority will be issuing its pre-procurement notice “shortly”, and the procurement process “will be launched early in the new year”, a spokesperson said.

A spokesperson for Greater Manchester Combined Authority, which launched a pre-procurement exercise in July, said further details of its plans would be available shortly.

The West of England Combined Authority said it was still finalising its approach.



Mark Dawe

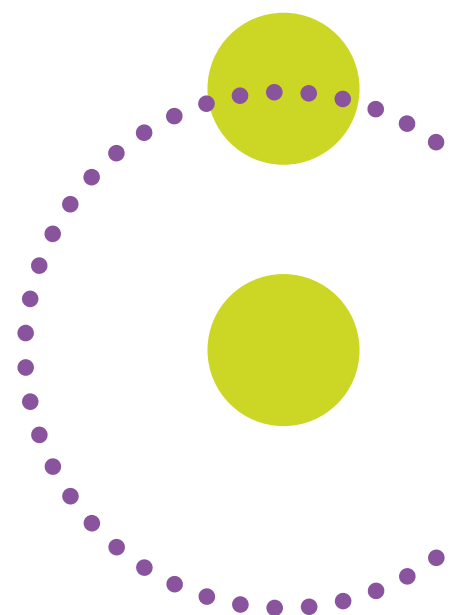


Gareth Thomas

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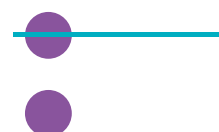


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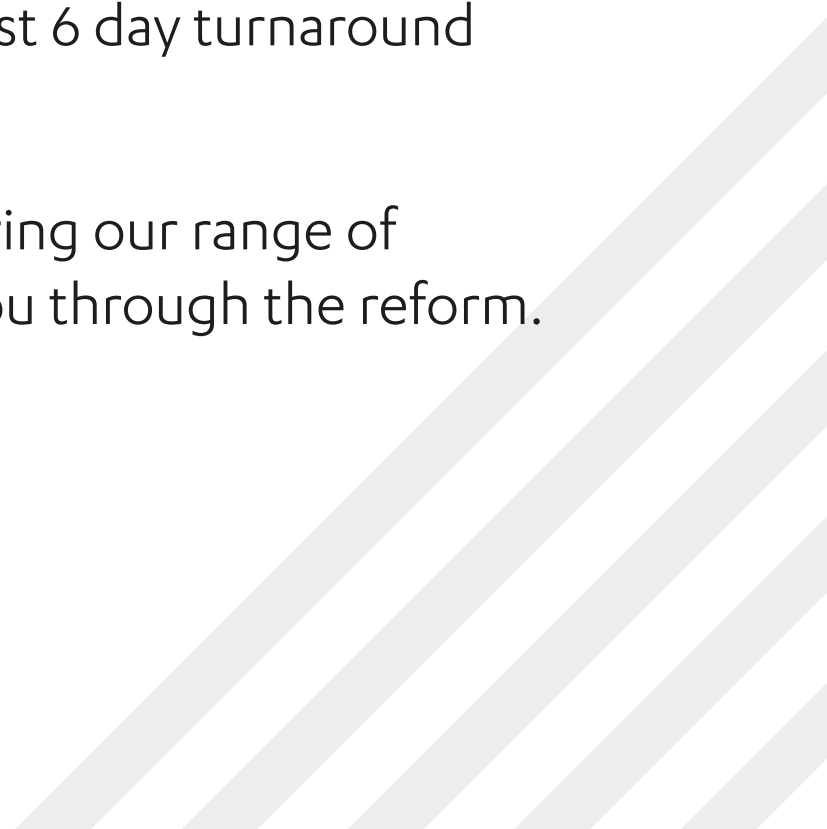
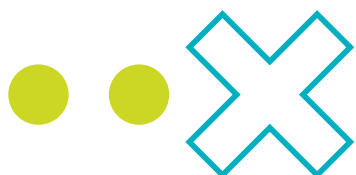
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# Conservative pa

## Chancellor's levy reforms come under fire

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Plans to reform the apprenticeship levy have been criticised by some large employers, who have voiced concerns that changes to the transfer facility will have “little impact”.

Speaking to delegates at the Conservative party conference in Birmingham on Monday, the chancellor, Philip Hammond, hailed the “flexibility” of increasing the annual apprenticeship levy transfer facility from 10 to 25 per cent.

This means large levy-paying employers will be allowed to share more of their annual funds with smaller organisations from April 2019.

### “Employers are much more concerned about off-the-job training”

Mr Hammond said the government had “heard the concerns about how the apprenticeship levy is working” and will “engage with business on our plans for the long-term operation of the levy” after 2020.



Chancellor Philip Hammond

However, employers have hit back at the plans and voiced concerns that changing the amount available to be transferred will make little difference overall.

Mark Corden, head of apprenticeships at Specsavers, said: “It’s not flexibility in who we transfer funds to which is the flexibility that is most sought. Any employer can access apprenticeships in the system; there is a difference in how much they contribute.

“The 10 per cent transfer flexibility is probably only attractive to a small number of the largest public-sector levy

payers (I’m guessing). Moving to 25 per cent will have little impact across the wider employer base.”

Tony Allen, formerly the Skills Funding Agency’s deputy director of large companies, described the announcement as “just tinkering”.

“From my conversations with employers, even if you made the transfer level 100 per cent, it would not make that much difference.

“Employers are much more concerned about 10 per cent, 20 per cent off-the-job training, and increasingly inherent problems with end point

assessment.”

Brian Berry, chief executive of the Federation of Master Builders, said Mr Hammond had “in part” listened to the concerns of business, but needs to “go further and make 100 per cent of the vouchers transferable from large to small companies”.

Helen Webb, chief people officer at the Co-op, said the increase to 25 per cent is a “step in the right direction”, but it would be better if changes could be brought in “sooner”, including a review of the current arrangements on how funds can be spent from the levy.

“If the government is serious about making apprenticeships work as a means of equipping our workforce with the skills they need, the remit of what the levy can be spent on needs to be broadened,” she added.

Mike Cherry, national chair of the Federation of Small Businesses, welcomed Mr Hammond’s announcement. He said it has been “a key ask of FSB to stop the decline in the number of people taking up apprenticeships”.

However Labour’s shadow skills minister, Gordon Marsden, criticised the chancellor’s plans, which he said will “do little to address the shambles of Department for Education ministers missing their target of three million apprenticeships by 2020, or the continuing plummeting start levels for them”.

As reported in *FE Week*, large employers used just 10 per cent of their levy funds in the first year since it was launched in May 2017, and monthly starts figures continue to be well below pre-levy levels.

The Conservative party manifesto in 2017 committed to “allow large firms to pass levy funds to small firms in their supply chain”, a policy that was introduced in May 2018.

*FE Week* understands that in the six months since the policy’s introduction, take-up has been very low, despite employer groups lobbying heavily for such flexibility.

## Skills minister backs Trip Advisor-style assessments of trainers 😊

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Allowing employers and apprentices to give “smiley faces” as reviews of training providers is a better indicator of quality than “tick box” inspections, according to the skills minister.

Anne Milton was speaking in favour of the Education and Skills Funding Agency’s new service, which will allow employers to score training providers in an online review tool similar to Trip

Advisor.

The service, which is due to begin running “very soon”, will also be rolled out to apprentices, allowing them to give feedback on their experiences of training providers too.

Speaking at a fringe event at the Conservative party conference on Tuesday, Ms Milton suggested the new tool would give a better sense of a training provider than a traditional Ofsted inspection.

“You can do all sorts of inspections but you often miss the point,” she said.

“You tick your boxes, but overall what did it feel like? Did it feel good? You miss that.

“So one of the best correlators is smiley faces, interestingly. You know, they did some research in care homes and smiley faces or not smiley faces correlated best with what was actually going on.

“If everyone has to do live reporting of their training provision we will get better and earlier indication as to which providers are not up to scratch.

“There is always, and there will

always be, in any system a strain of people defrauding the system, not giving the quality that we expect. What we have to try and do is find the best means, the least bureaucratic means – because the bureaucracy is a shame when people are good – but the most immediate means of identifying where there are problems so we can take action.”

Ms Milton was quizzed on the government’s upcoming refreshed register of apprenticeship training providers during the session as well,

but she refused to be drawn on details of its development.

The only comment she offered was: “A good proportion of people on the register of training providers aren’t delivering any training. They’re sitting there dormant, if you like, and I don’t think that’s helpful.”

The minister also used the session to say she was “open to” raising the apprenticeship levy transfer facility above 25 per cent, but admitted that “fraud has been an issue” within the current system.

“All that matters to me is that the levy is spent on the purpose for which it was intended,” she said.

“We have to have rules, and they’re irritating and bureaucratic, but fraud has been an issue. Fraud is always an issue in any system you set up.”

*FE Week* understands that there is a concern there may be a rise in

# Party conference 2018

## Funding boost for first wave of T-level providers

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Schools and colleges taking part in the first wave of T-levels will receive a share of £38 million to fund “cutting edge equipment and facilities”, the education secretary has announced.

The funding will be available from spring next year, before the first T-levels begin in September 2020. The government will be investing the money for capital costs including computers and heavy machinery.

Damian Hinds revealed the funding boost during a speech to the Conservative party conference in Birmingham on Tuesday, when he told delegates: “Many of our state schools, large parts of our university sector, are world class, but there is another area which in years gone by has not had enough focus.

“I’m talking about technical and vocational education, which for decades has not had as much attention as it should.”

There are three different pathways in the first wave of the new post-16 technical qualifications: digital (production, design and development); childcare and education; and

construction (planning and design).

Although 54 providers have so far been selected to deliver the digital and childcare and education pathways, those chosen for construction are still unknown. A spokesperson for the Department for Education said more information on the remaining providers should be available later this month.

This means the £38 million will be shared between an unknown total number of providers, with each likely to receive less than £700,000.

David Hughes, chief executive of the Association of Colleges, called the announcement “a sure sign that the government is pushing ahead with its plans” but warned T-levels will not be “a silver-bullet solution”.

“There will remain hundreds of thousands of 16- to 18-year-olds and more than a million adults in colleges across England on different routes that also need capital and better revenue funding if we are to deliver a successful economy and strong communities post-Brexit. The government can’t continue to overlook these,” he added.

“There is a genuine commitment across government to deliver a world-class technical education system. To do

that, we need to invest in every college, across the breadth of their students.”

T-levels were originally supposed to begin in 2019, but in July last year the skills minister Anne Milton announced they had been put back to 2020.

In May this year, it emerged that Mr Hinds had refused a request from the DfE’s permanent secretary Jonathan Slater to delay T-levels until 2021. In a letter to Mr Slater, he said he was “convinced of the case to press ahead”.

“The delivery of T-levels in 2020 is focused in a measured way on a small number of T-levels in a small number of providers,” he added. “I want us now to put all of our collective weight behind delivering these T-levels to begin in 2020.”

The names of the 21 colleges selected to receive funding as maths centres for excellence were also revealed on Tuesday.

The centres are designed to test new ways to teach students who are resitting their maths GCSEs, and will share £40 million over the next five years.

The programme will be expected to design innovative and improved teaching approaches, develop teaching resources, build up teachers’ skills and spread best practice through maths



Education secretary Damian Hinds

networks.

Plans for the centres – which aim to improve the quality of basic maths provision for low-attaining post-16 learners – were first announced in last year’s autumn budget.

Colleges were eligible to apply to become a maths centre of excellence in May if they had at least 250 students with prior attainment in GCSE maths that is below grades 9-4.

At the time, the DfE said the programme would work “through trialling pedagogical approaches and

sharing this expertise across the post-16 sector.

“At this stage, we expect that the centres could be grant funded with a minimum of £140,000 per annum and up to a maximum of £300,000 per annum, depending on the total number of centres that the panel wishes to fund and the quality of the agreed plans.”

If the £40 million funding is divided equally, each of the 21 institutions will receive over £38,000 a year for each of the five years.

fraudulent inducement associated with transfer funding.

On Monday, the chancellor Philip Hammond announced the transfer facility would rise from 10 per cent to 25 per cent by April 2019, allowing large levy-paying employers to share more of their annual funds with smaller organisations.

Ms Milton said the “hope” was that raising the level allowed to be transferred to 25 per cent would encourage more businesses to use the system.

Robert Halfon, former skills minister and chair of the education select committee, expressed his own concerns about malpractice within apprenticeship subcontracting – an issue that Ms Milton said was “on my radar”.

“I worry hugely about apprenticeship subcontracting,” he said. “It’s entirely

wrong that companies get whacking great management fees.”

The committee’s report on the apprenticeship system is due to be published next week. Mr Halfon said it will include “recommendations” on subcontracting.

Ms Milton also used the event to criticise the National Education Union, and said she has had a “big go” at the unions for focusing on schools at the expense of FE.

“If you always go on about schools, then you crowd out the argument about post-16,” she said.

“I can only do so much as one person, as the minister of state who is passing through government, for however long it is.

“It actually needs to have a tidal wave of opinion and voices talking about the importance of apprenticeships, talking about the importance of FE.”



From left: Anne Milton and Robert Halfon



News

# You beauty! Team UK wins gold at EuroSkills 2018

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

There were celebrations in Budapest last week as Team UK bagged one gold and three bronze medals to retain its top-10 position at EuroSkills.

Twenty two talented young tradespeople flew out to Hungary on September 24 to compete in the international competition against 26 other countries in skills ranging



from cabinet making to web design, and cooking to mechatronics.

Following three days of brutal competition against more than 500 opponents, Team UK placed in joint ninth position overall when their medal successes were combined with their medallion of excellence haul of seven.

Picking up gold was Holly-Mae Cotterell, who was voted Europe's best beauty therapist. She also won Team UK's Best of Nation award.

"I feel absolutely over the moon and amazing," the 20-year-old, who works and trains at Reds Hair Company in Herefordshire, told FE Week on the night.

"I was sobbing walking up on stage. I didn't expect that to be the outcome

Beauty therapist Holly-Mae Cotterell



Team UK at the EuroSkills Budapest 2018 closing ceremony

but I am so chuffed."

She added that coming into EuroSkills she was "nervous and didn't know what it was going to be like" but she "took on all the advice from boot camp and the mind-set training" to succeed.

Her goal is to now to "get back in training as soon as possible and fight to be selected for WorldSkills Kazan next year".

Holly-Mae celebrated gold at an emotional closing ceremony in front of thousands of spectators at the Papp László Budapest Sportaréna, which was streamed live for the world to watch.

Team UK's bronze medallists included a mechatronics duo from Toyota, Danny Slater and Jack Dakin.

"We're feeling speechless but on top of the world," said 24-year-old Jack.

"We knew it was going to be tight. We could've come third, fourth, sixth or seventh, it was that close. To have just done enough to get bronze is amazing"

Mechanical engineering CAD competitor Ross Megahy, from New College Lanarkshire, also picked up a bronze.

"It's been an unbelievable experience this," said the 21-year-old.

"With the media crews and so many people watching you it feels like you're a mini celebrity. It's just amazing."

And hairdresser Gavin Jon Kyte, who is also from Reds Hair Company, was ecstatic to come third in his skill.

"It's been a massively emotional but brilliant journey," the 21-year-old said.

"I'll take all the experience I have

from this onto the next competition."

Medallions of excellence were awarded to competitors who reached the international standard in their skill.

The Team UK recipients were: ICT specialists Cameron Barr and Shane Carpenter; cooking competitor Nicolle Finnie; florist Elizabeth Newcombe; welder Scott Kerr; plumbing and heating competitor Matthew Barton; restaurant services competitor Collette Gorvett; and joiner Christopher Caine.

EuroSkills is the sister competition to WorldSkills, which is often referred to as the "Olympics of skills", and takes place every two years.

The young people chosen to represent Team UK were selected after triumphing through regional heats, a national final, and months of intensive training.

Dr Neil Bentley, chief executive of WorldSkills UK, said it was a "fantastic result for Team UK and the country as a whole".

"We were gunning for a top-10 position and we got it," he added.

"These brilliant young people – who we are training and preparing to be among the very best across Europe – are the UK's new generation of high flyers."

The Russian Federation led the medal table with nine golds, eight silvers, two bronzes and 10 medallions of excellence in Budapest.

In second place was Austria, followed by France in third.

FE Week's souvenir supplement covering Team UK's journey to EuroSkills Budapest 2018, in partnership with Pearson, is published alongside this edition and can be downloaded from [www.fewweek.co.uk](http://www.fewweek.co.uk).

Position	Member	Total Points	Number of Competitors	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Medallion for Excellence
1	Russian Federation	74.00	37	9	8	2	10
2	Austria	65.00	32	4	12	2	9
3	France	43.00	25	3	3	6	10
4	Hungary	35.00	26	3	3	3	8
5	Germany	31.00	19	3	3	2	6
6	Switzerland	22.00	8	4	0	2	2
7	Finland	18.00	22	1	0	4	6
7	Norway	18.00	12	1	1	3	5
9	Sweden	17.00	26	3	0	1	3
9	United Kingdom	17.00	19	1	0	3	7

# EUROSKILLS BUDAPEST 2018

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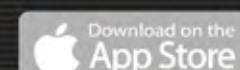
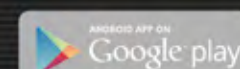
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# Ofsted criticised for delaying 3aaa insp

BILLY CAMDEN  
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Exclusive

Ofsted delayed inspecting the beleaguered Aspire Achieve Advance for years despite its achievement rates plummeting when apprentice numbers nearly quadrupled and severe safeguarding concerns were brought forward by a whistleblower.

An FE Week investigation has uncovered the serious failing by the education watchdog, which has now come under fire from chair of the influential Public Accounts Committee, Meg Hillier, who fears the situation mirrors the Learndirect scandal.

The apprenticeship giant, commonly known as 3aaa, was rated ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted in November 2014.

Inspectors went back into the provider this year and were due to give it another grade one before declaring the inspection “incomplete” following the launch of a second Education and Skills Funding Agency investigation into its achievement rates.

Since then its co-founders have resigned, the agency has suspended it from recruiting apprentices and the company has put itself up for sale – but is falsely claiming it achieved an ‘outstanding’ Ofsted rating in May 2018 and is using that as a key selling point.

In the education watchdog’s 2014 report, 3aaa was lauded for its overall success rates being “high” while rates for completion within the expected timescale were “extremely high”.

Its achievement rates for 2014/15 sat

at 82 per cent for teaching a cohort of 560 apprentices.

But a year later when the provider’s apprenticeship numbers nearly quadrupled to just under 2,000 its success rate plummeted to 65 per cent – a 17 percentage point drop.

It placed 3aaa below the national average and close to the government’s minimum standard of 62 per cent.

On top of this, in 2016, the government launched its first investigation into 3aaa and found dozens of funding and success rate “overclaims”. Ofsted was, however, kept in the dark about this significant but confidential report.

But FE Week’s investigation also discovered the watchdog failed to act on serious safeguarding concerns from a whistleblower in May 2017. The complaint was also sent to the ESFA who joined Ofsted in telling the person to take the matter up with the provider instead of taking action, even though the whistleblower was a 3aaa employee and feared losing their job.

An Ofsted document published in May 2018 states that ‘good’ and ‘outstanding’ FE providers will be risk assessed based on their “achievement rate data, complaints about provision, and the size and complexity of the provider and any recent changes to these”.

If red flags against those factors are raised then a full inspection should be triggered.

When asked why it failed to go back into 3aaa earlier than this year, Ofsted blamed a lack of funding from the Department for Education for not having enough resource, as well



“Ofsted should have gone in sooner given the sudden plummet in results”

as a change in the way the Education and Skills Funding Agency reported achievement rates.

3aaa previously, however, admitted to FE Week that its success rates drop was nothing to do with the change in algorithm, it was simply a decline in performance.

A spokesperson for the inspectorate said it was still “waiting for further information before deciding when to complete” its current inspection of 3aaa.

“No judgement about a provider

is final until the inspection has been fully completed, and a report has been published,” she added.

Ms Hillier was sympathetic to the inspectorate for its lack of resource but criticised it for not going in sooner considering the private provider was growing through taxpayers’ money.

She told FE Week it reminded her of the Learndirect saga – where the inspectorate delayed revisiting the nation’s largest FE provider when it put itself up for sale even though its achievement rates plunged and

## OFSTED’S DEFENCE

“Our risk assessment process at the time did identify a decline in performance at this provider during the 2015/16 performance year; achievement rates fell to 65 per cent.

“However, it is worth being aware of the wider context that year, when achievement rates declined nationally to 67 per cent following the strengthening of achievement rate reporting rules introduced by the funding agency.

“As this was the first time performance had declined in this provider, and as performance was around that of similar providers, and not in the bottom 20 per cent of all providers, we did not select this provider for inspection. Ofsted has limited resources and needs to prioritise inspection to providers that are in most need.

“When performance data for 2016/17 was published and risk-assessment completed, although the provider’s performance data had improved to above national rates, our risk assessment process did identify two consecutive years of performance data that suggested the provider was no longer outstanding.

“This data, together with other risk factors led to the provider being selected for inspection. Our risk assessment process is kept under continual review and any lessons learned are incorporated into revised methodology.

“We believe the approach taken to the inspection of this provider is appropriate and proportionate. Inspection and risk-assessment is not all about one year’s data.”

## OFSTED KEPT IN THE DARK ABOUT DAMNING KPMG REPORT

Ofsted was kept hidden from a damning government investigation into 3aaa in 2016, which found dozens of funding and success rate “overclaims”.

FE Week revealed last week that the investigation, carried out by auditing firm KPGM and code named “Project Vanilla”, was conducted in the same year that the Department for Education gave the provider a £7 million apprenticeships contract increase.

Prompted by a whistleblower, claims about 3aaa included: incorrect start dates resulting in failure to reach minimum duration; incorrect use of “break in learning” status which is inflating success rates; apprentices with long periods without learning activity.

The probe found dozens of “errors which

support the allegations or which have an impact on funding of success rates”.

FE Week understands the investigation resulted in the company paying back a substantial six figure sum.

Despite the significant findings of the report, Ofsted was never informed of its existence.

When asked for a response to the KPMG report, a spokesperson for the inspectorate would only say: “We can confirm that Ofsted has no record of being informed about the investigation carried out in 2016.”

FE Week asked the DfE why it hid the report from Ofsted. “We do not comment on individual provider investigations,” is all they would say.



# Protection despite multiple warning signs



Meg Hillier

learners suffered from poor training while its government skills contracts grew to £100 million.

When Ofsted finally came knocking, four years after being rated ‘good’, Learndirect was branded ‘inadequate’ and eventually had its government skills contracts taken away.

3aaa’s apprenticeship allocations have grown rapidly since being launched by co-founders Peter Marples and Di McEvoy-Robinson, who resigned from the company last month, in 2008.

Direct ESFA funding has increased from just £390,000 in 2012/13 to more than £31 million in 2017/18.

## WHISTLEBLOWER’S CONCERNS BATTED AWAY

A whistleblower raised “serious concerns” about safeguarding of 3aaa “learners’ personal data” in May last year, but both Ofsted and the Education and Skills Funding Agency refused to act on them.

Instead, the person was told to take up the issue with the company itself, even though they were a staff member and feared any complaint would put their job at risk.

The whistleblower said learners were not “protected against safeguarding issues on the internet, such as those detailed in the prevent duty, as we no longer have any form of web filtering”.

“We also have no firewalls in any academy, or even up in the head office where the computers that hold all the student data are,” they added.

“We have had complaints from our students that the site they upload their work to is not even secure – google advises them of this each time they log on, but so far IT have taken no action as far as I can tell.

“None of the laptops used by staff are encrypted – these have got student information on them – what happens if they get stolen?”

The whistleblower concluded: “The company presents a great facade claiming grade one Ofsted, but underneath the surface there are huge issues which need investigating, which will tell a very

different story.”

In response to the concerns, the ESFA said: “We understand that you have not issued a formal complaint to the training provider. Therefore, we would not be able to formally investigate your concerns.”

Ofsted also told the whistleblower to “formally raise your concerns through the provider’s own complaint process” but said “a summary of your concerns will be available to the lead inspector for consideration at the provider’s next inspection to assist with their inspection planning or at the next monitoring visit where these are taking place”.

When quizzed by *FE Week* about the situation, Ofsted said the whistleblower’s complaints were passed onto the inspection team prior to their 3aaa visit.

A spokesperson added: “Ofsted’s role is to inspect and report as we find. We are unable to investigate individual complaints about FE providers – this falls to the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

“Complaints of this kind when received by Ofsted are held so that inspectors can access them when it comes to the next inspection. They are one source of information, that will be considered alongside a range of other information, before arriving at inspection judgements.”

## PAC CHAIR LAYS INTO OFSTED AND DFE

The head of the Public Accounts Committee hit out at Ofsted for not going in “sooner” when 3aaa’s success rates sank but learner numbers and apprenticeship funding surged.

“Frankly this is our money, we all pay our taxes to get a decent service and people are profiting and not delivering,” Meg Hillier told *FE Week*.

Following the Learndirect fiasco last year, the PAC criticised Ofsted for not taking “full account of the company’s size and the consequences for learners of its declining performance”.

It recommended the watchdog “urgently” revisits how it “prioritises its use of resources and the different type of risk attached to a private sector failure, in a way that takes account of risks to high numbers of learners and the changing provider-base in FE”.

“Ofsted should have gone in sooner given the sudden plummet in results,” Ms Hillier said when shown the evidence of 3aaa’s size and declining performance.

“If a provider is growing that fast then that should also trigger an inspection.”

Ms Hillier extended her condemnation to the Department for Education for “handing out taxpayers’ money” to private providers without giving the education watchdog “proper resource to inspect them”.

“The resources they [Ofsted] have got are stretched ridiculously thin,” she said.

“They have all these new [apprenticeship] providers they need to keep an eye on.

“If we are going to have a market set up like this then we have got to make sure we have the proper safeguards and regulation.”

She continued to lay into the government: “The government should be wary of handing out taxpayers’ money for a private provider to expand.

“You wouldn’t ask someone who is building an extension on your home to suddenly build a new house next door without doing some major checks on their capabilities.”

## 3AAA UP FOR SALE

3aaa has put itself up for sale with the government’s backing, but is falsely claiming it achieved an ‘outstanding’ Ofsted rating in May 2018 and is using it as a key selling point.

The company hired accountancy firm BDO to seek potential bidders and the deadline for indicative offers was October 4.

There are however concerns that the sale will further delay Ofsted’s reinspection of 3aaa, like it did for Learndirect.

The watchdog originally planned to visit Learndirect at the start of November 2016, but agreed to defer its inspection when the provider claimed it was negotiating the sale of its apprenticeships business.

This sale never actually went through but delayed inspection for four months.

Following its inquiry into Learndirect, the Public Accounts Committee told Ofsted to develop a “specific deferral policy for

commercial providers, to ensure that learners’ interests always take priority over the pursuit of profit”.

3aaa finalised a significant cash loan of around £5 million in April 2018 from Beechbrook Capital.

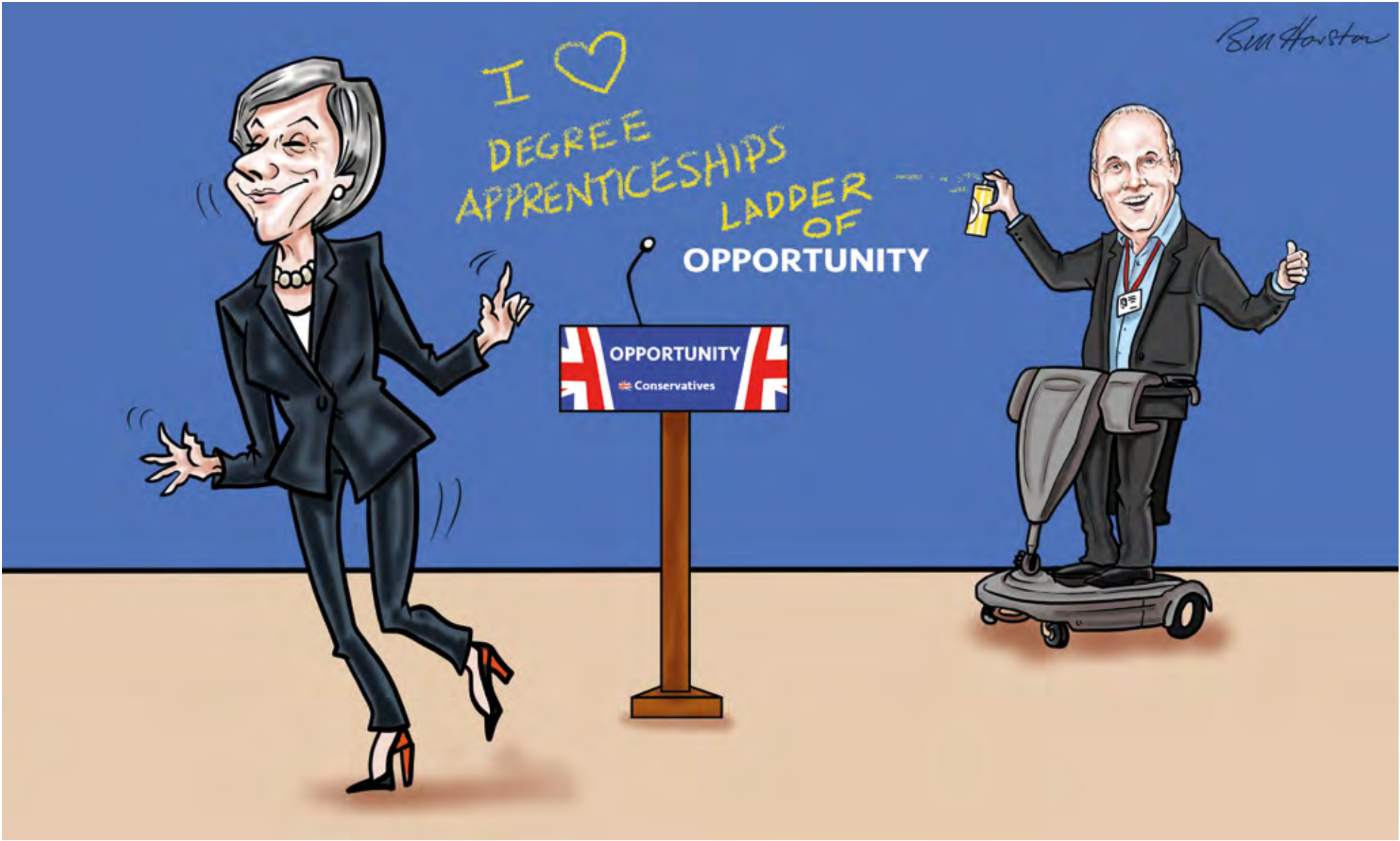
*FE Week* understands that one reason for the sale is because the terms of that loan have been broken and the lender wants to claim their money back.

An “investment opportunity” document, code named ‘Project Alphabet’, has been obtained by *FE Week* and states: “The ESFA has placed a temporary block on new learners whilst an investigation is undertaken in to achievement rates, prompting the shareholders to seek an exit.”

A separate “overview information” document about the sale, claims that the business “delivers the highest quality learning provision with all areas graded outstanding in the draft Ofsted report (May 2018)”.

Academic year	3aaa Overall (all age, all level)		3aaa Timely (all age, all level)		ESFA allocation by end of year
	Apprenticeship cohort	Achievement rate	Apprenticeship cohort	Achievement rate	
2013/14	60	89.5%	60	80%	£4,950,691
2014/15	540	82%	610	73.2%	£15,146,549
2015/16	1,930	65.1%	2,040	55.3%	£25,016,921
Shift in two years	+1,870	-24.4% points	+1,980	-24.7% points	+£20,066,230

Source: ESFA National Achievement Rate Tables and ESFA funding allocations to training providers



# Degree apprenticeships a ‘concern’, says skills minister

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

The skills minister has highlighted the “risks” associated with degree apprenticeships after her predecessor evangelised about how they are his “two favourite words”.

Anne Milton and Robert Halfon engaged in a heated exchange about the high level qualifications during a fringe event at the Conservative party conference.

Mr Halfon, now chair of the education select committee, said there needs to be a



Anne Milton and Nick Linford

“radical change at the Institute for Apprenticeships and a lot more funding” going into degree apprenticeships, which are seen as being central to the government’s plans to put technical education on a par with academic education.

His remark follow comments by IfA chief Sir Gerry Berragan who previously told the committee he was “agnostic” about the qualifications.

Ms Milton jumped to the defence of “poor old Gerry” and said he was “not agnostic” about them, but she and he think “we need to be careful we don’t crowd out levels 2, 3, 4 and 5”.

FE Week’s editor Nick Linford interviewed the skills minister after the showdown and quizzed her on her concerns.

**“I think the danger is the word degree is linked to universities”**

“I think there are risks around degree apprenticeships,” she said.

“One is that all that’s happening is that people who would have gone through a traditional full-time degree are doing a degree apprenticeship.

“That’s great, possibly for the

productivity of the country, because you get your degree and you’re working at the same time.

“But actually the whole idea of apprenticeships is that it gives people an opportunity that you wouldn’t otherwise have.”

She added that the “danger” is that the word degree is “linked to universities and one of the problems that I have is struggling to get the word further education out in the public domain”.

“Because the conversation in the mainstream media is about degrees and universities, everyone talks about degrees and universities,” Ms Milton continued.

“Parents think that’s the only option for their children, and so you can end up unwittingly reinforcing the fact that it’s got to be a degree.

“In fact 50 per cent of people don’t go to university, currently. So what’s happening to those 50 per cent? A lot of them had a bad experience at school.

“So FE plays a crucial part. What matters is getting the pathway for people to do even a level one.

“I was talking to the principal from an FE college in Birmingham today, and they’ve just had a graduation ceremony and I think she said 100 students graduated in the ICC.

“Of those students graduating were people who came to them to do level 2 qualifications who never thought in a million years they would do a degree.

“And I don’t want the conversation about degrees to crowd out.”

Asked if degree apprenticeships were in danger of taking the rungs out of Mr Halfon’s ladder of opportunity, she replied: “Or to take the paving stones out on my path.

“The point is that it mustn’t crowd it out. We mustn’t see, because in some jobs level 4 and 5 is absolutely fine.

“And you can go on and get to quite a senior level even run the company without having a degree. Look at me, I don’t have a degree. I got to be minister of state for skills and apprenticeships.”



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**Closing Date:** 20 October 2018

It is intended that interviews will be held in London; short listed candidate will be advised of the process.

WorldSkills UK is committed to making appointments on merit by fair and open processes, taking account of equality and diversity.

## How to apply

Applications should be submitted no later than Saturday 20 October 2018 and should include:

- A curriculum vitae detailing your full career history; and
- A supporting statement with evidence of your suitability for the role, taking into account the points listed in the role description and person specification (throughout the recruitment process we will be looking for examples and evidence of your experience, knowledge and skills).

Applications should be submitted by email or post (marked 'Private and Confidential') to: **Meryem Ozbilgolu**, Senior HR Manager [jobs@worldskillsuk.org](mailto:jobs@worldskillsuk.org) WorldSkills UK, 151 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 9SZ

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**Closing Date:** 19th October 2018 at 12:00 noon

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**Closing date: 21st October 2018**

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### Moderator

Professional Cookery - Qualification No: **6100**

Food Preparation & Service - Qualification No: **7178**

Food & Beverage Service - Qualification No: **6103**

Cookery and Service for the Hospitality Industry - Qualification No: **6106**

Theatrical & Media Makeup - Qualification No: **6010**

Land & Wildlife - Qualification No: **0173**

Constructing the Built Environment - Qualification No: **6720**

Project - Qualification No: **2935**

### Assessment Development Consultant and Examiner

Hospitality & Catering - Qualification Nos: **6100, 7178, 6103**

Construction - Qualification Nos: **6720, 7905, 7906, 7907, 7908**

Building Services Engineering - Qualification Nos: **8202**

Land Based Services - Qualification Nos: **0170, 0171, 0172, 0173, 0174, 0175, 7863**

### How to apply

If you are interested in the Principal Moderator or Moderator role, please visit the below website for application details: <https://www.cityandguilds.com/techbac/technical-qualifications/moderator-vacancies>

If you are interested in the Assessment Development Consultant or Examiner role, please visit the below website for application details: <https://www.cityandguilds.com/delivering-our-qualifications/exams-and-admin/examiner-vacancies>



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- To lead the development of a high quality student experience, creating partnerships between academic and

professional service teams

- To work across the whole College as a member of the College Leadership Team promoting and actively demonstrating the College's values of *integrity, respect, ambition and pride*, fostering a culture of high expectations for staff and students

You will be qualified to degree level or hold an equivalent professional qualification. You will also hold a teaching and / or assessing qualification in further education and have experience of leading and managing engineering provision up to level 5 and of successfully leading and performance managing a team of teaching and assessing staff.

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**Closing date: 21 October 2018**

**Interview Date: 1 November 2018**

Please refer to our website for further information and to apply – [www.cityofbristol.ac.uk](http://www.cityofbristol.ac.uk)



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illustration by Lucy Vigrass



EDITORIAL



Ofsted in dark but also to blame

With an initial 2014/15 contract value of £3.1m, 3aaa was a relatively small apprenticeship provider when it received its first Ofsted inspection in October 2014.

The resulting ‘outstanding’ grade proved a catalyst for very rapid growth with help from the ESFA in the form of funding increases to an allocation of £31m less than two years later.

The Ofsted grade one also proved hugely important in one of several failed attempts to sell the business as soon as April 2015, with a price tag rumoured to be well in excess of £50 million.

What we now know is that after a whistle blower came forward the ESFA employed KPMG to conduct a highly

secretive investigation in 2016 that found inflated achievement rates.

The ESFA did not tell Ofsted, despite the high achievement rates featuring prominently in the 2014 inspection.

More whistleblowers followed, and the ESFA has spent most of 2018 conducting a second investigation, resulting in the founders resigning, a stop being put on starts and supporting the sale of the business to protect the learners.

Again, the second investigation found concern over inflated achievement rates but again Ofsted has been kept in the dark, now more than four months since they paused their 2018 inspection.

As if to reinforce the

commercial significance of a grade one, the paused inspection even features in current 3aaa sales documents, telling potential buyers they have the “highest quality learning provision with all areas graded outstanding in the draft Ofsted report (May 2018)”.

It would of course be easy to excuse Ofsted for the grade one ratings, on the basis the ESFA was either hiding or withholding the investigation findings from them.

But as reported this week, Ofsted could and should have inspected last year when a number of the inspectorates own risk measures would have been flashing red.

Published achievement rates had plummeted, the volume of provision had quadrupled within

a single year and at least one whistle blower had raised safe guarding concerns.

How many more reasons do they need to inspect a huge apprenticeship provider trading on their grade one from 2014?

Presented with all the evidence, an Ofsted spokesperson blamed a lack of resources and a change in the achievement rate calculation for the decision not to inspect in 2017.

This is of course all history now, but we have not reached the end of this story.

Ofsted now know the ESFA hid evidence of achievement rate inflation from them in 2016, which should surely bring into question the validity of the 2014 inspection.

And Ofsted are still sat waiting for an answer from the ESFA as to what they found in the 2018 investigation.

Is the ESFA refusing to share information with Ofsted to keep them away, whilst they support a sale?

And will Ofsted ever conclude their paused inspection if the sale goes through?

Once the sorry 3aaa saga has ended, the lesson is surely going to be that oversight from the agencies we rely on, has failed, like with Learndirect, again.


And as with Learndirect, the National Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee may well come knocking for answers of their own.

Nick Linford, Editor  
news@feweek.co.uk

Readers' reply




Chancellor set to announce apprenticeship levy changes

 This will make no difference at all. It has no benefit to the levy payer. If the smaller company wants to take an apprentice they will. Or have I missed why it's beneficial to the levy payer?


@easmech

You beauty! Team UK wins gold at EuroSkills 2018

 A fantastic result and a huge well done to all who have worked so hard to compete at this level.


@AnneMilton

Revealed: The 21 colleges that will share £40m Maths Centres of Excellence cash

 Congratulations to all of the successful colleges. From a bystander's perspective it is surprising to see some of the colleges listed given their historic very weak performance in GCSE maths. I recognise that the selection process was rightly not


derived from outcomes alone but the badges of excellence, whilst delivering 9-4 (A\*-C) GCSE maths pass rates in the teens, sits uneasy.

JP

 Nottingham has disgracefully low levels of Maths but the college didn't get any of this money!


@DonaldBEHayes

Damian Hinds reveals £38m T-levels capital funding boost

 Would Anne Milton recommend to her children now?

@marches\_skills

Milton bashes unions for lack of FE focus in fight for funding

 Wow! You couldn't make it up. Amazing attempted spin. A conservative minister blames the unions for cuts to FE because the unions allegedly concentrated their fire on schools.


Deploying that logic at scale,

I propose that everyone should equally complain about everything, as that will obviously result in more money for everybody - doesn't quite work does it.

It's almost rude that Milton thinks that this is a plausible and acceptable explanation.

Geoff

Minister open to raising apprenticeship transfer funding but concerned about fraud

 @AnneMilton you are more out of touch with businesses that even I imagined. Employers don't want to transfer money to smaller organisations! Please, stop this smoke screen. The levy isn't working because it's too time demanding. Apprenticeship reputation is at an all-time low.


@LisaMaple5

 I'd love to see that famous list of employers they speak to.

@LisaMaple5

REPLY OF THE WEEK

Chancellor set to announce apprenticeship levy changes

 Speaking from a large, levy-paying employer perspective, it's not flexibility in who we transfer funds to which is the flexibility that is most sought. Any employer can access apprenticeships in the system; there is a difference in how much they contribute.

The 10 per cent transfer flexibility is probably only attractive to a small number of the largest public-sector levy payers (I'm guessing); moving to 25 per cent will have little impact across the wider employer base.

Mark Corden

Experts

MANDY CRAWFORD-LEE

Director of policy and operations, UVAC



Does the IfA really believe in degree apprenticeship?

The IfA's review of the DTSP will be a key test of whether it really listens to employers (and apprentices), says Mandy Crawford-Lee

The Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA) has started a review of existing standards on the digital route, which includes the flagship Digital Technology Solutions Professional (DTSP) degree apprenticeship.

To date the DTSP has been the most successful degree apprenticeship. It is used by employers that include Accenture, Capgemini, IBM, Lloyds Bank, Fujitsu and Quicksilva and it's being offered by a growing number of leading institutions, including Aston University, BPP, the Open University, Manchester Metropolitan University, the University of Portsmouth and the University of Salford.

We've also seen some really new and innovative delivery partnerships that also involve colleges and independent training providers. Employers love it, as do individuals, and early evidence from

the Department for Education's Degree Apprenticeship Development Fund projects suggest it's having a positive impact on attracting women into tech roles.

There's one major negative: the twice-run Education and Skills Funding Agency procurement for non-levy-paying employers means a postcode lottery in the availability of DTSP provision for SMEs. But overall we've got the rare example of an English approach to vocational learning that's applauded and, more importantly, is working for employers and fulfilling the objectives of the apprenticeship programme.

So in terms of the IfA review, if it's meeting a major skills need, is supported by employers and is starting to make an impact on widening participation and access, then given a bit of updating this should be a formality, shouldn't it?

Unfortunately, no. The problem is the IfA's so-called "faster and better" approach to approving apprenticeship

standards and assessment plans introduced earlier this year, with negligible consultation. And, more specifically, its mandatory qualification rule.

A trailblazer can only specify a mandatory qualification in an apprenticeship standard, including a degree, if it's a requirement of a

**"The IfA could scuttle its own flagship standard"**

professional body, regulator or used in hard-sifting for job interviews. The DTSP meets none of these requirements. If the IfA applies its mandatory qualifications rule to the DTSP, the degree will be removed and the IfA will scuttle its own flagship apprenticeship standard.

This would be a tragedy. The

trailblazer, large employers and SMEs have all emphasised the importance of the degree in the apprenticeship and its role in opening up a new talent pipeline to senior level digital occupations. Every DTSP degree apprentice I've met says the degree is essential to the credibility and standing of the apprenticeship and is a, if not the, key reason why they chose the apprenticeship route.

To resolve this "problem" UVAC has proposed to the Office for Students (OfS, the higher education regulator), the DfE and the IfA that for the institute's mandatory qualification, the following criterion be introduced:

*"Employers through the trailblazer process can also specify a mandatory degree in an apprenticeship where they can demonstrate its inclusion will support social mobility and is in the interests of employers in the sector (eg, the degree 'professionalises' an occupation, helps attract new talent, raises performance standards for the occupation)."*

Given the OfS's role in protecting the student interest, and the importance

to a student of a degree in terms of national and international recognition, transferability and the breadth of skills developed, OfS supports our proposal. Not to put too fine a point on it, the IfA's mandatory qualification rule when applied in higher education runs counter to the student interest – it is OfS's role to protect this "interest". I also suspect the DfE will want to ensure the future success of the DTSP. But the decision will rest with the IfA.

The IfA's approach to the review of the DTSP will be a key test of whether it believes in degree apprenticeships, whether it really listens to employers, if it wants to transform apprenticeship in England into an aspirational choice and if it's committed to ensuring we have an employer-led apprenticeship programme that delivers the skills needed by the UK economy. We would support leaving this one to carry on as it is without tinkering and, instead, concentrate review resources on standards that are less successful at delivering core objectives.

TOM RICHMOND

Senior Research Fellow, Policy Exchange



Brexit means British bosses must invest in their employees

The UK has long relied on EU workers. Now employers must improve the training of homegrown staff, says Tom Richmond

"What we want to see is people here in the UK being trained to take on the jobs which are available" said the prime minister to Radio 4 listeners during the Conservative Party conference. With almost 1.3 million EU citizens currently employed in low-skill (e.g. cleaning) or lower-middle-skill roles (e.g. drivers), a new set of rules for who can enter the UK might force a major shift in employers' thinking.

Mrs May's proposed approach is a sensible one. In our report Immigration After Brexit published earlier this year, Policy Exchange called for our immigration system to clamp down on low-skilled EU immigration (with some exceptions such as reintroducing the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme) but adopt a lighter-touch approach for students and professionals who

wish to study and work in the UK. This was because we believe that the government must do more to encourage businesses to invest in their staff, particularly lower-skill roles, instead of simply allowing them to import workers from other countries. Since the mid-2000s businesses have too often cut their training budgets after gaining access to huge pools of migrant workers from Eastern Europe. This will no longer be tenable once the prime minister has implemented her new vision.

Several strands of government policy in recent years have attempted to encourage employers to engage with education and training in a more substantive way. For example, employers were asked to design new "apprenticeship standards" for their industry sectors. The new "T-levels" for 16 to 19-year-olds that the government wishes to introduce from 2020 are being overseen by panels of employers in each sector as well.

The apprenticeship levy for large employers that commenced in April 2017 was another clear signal from ministers that they wanted employers to invest more in their staff as part of the drive towards the target for three

**"Businesses have too often cut their training budgets"**

million apprenticeship starts between 2015 and 2020. Although the target has been frequently criticised (by me and many others) and the design and implementation of the levy have been far from perfect, the underlying goal of making employers pay closer attention to their recruitment and training

strategies has only become more important following this country's vote to leave the EU.

Achieving such a dramatic shift in some employers' attitudes will not happen overnight. The levy may have generated hundreds of millions to be spent on training but many low-skill roles that require minimal instruction are being routed through the government's apprenticeship reforms. When standing at a hotel reception desk or serving customers in a coffee shop are labelled "apprenticeships" by employers, it seems that some businesses are still not taking their responsibilities seriously.

The fact that many employers are choosing to spend their levy money on providing management-training courses (including MBAs) for experienced members of staff will also do little to improve the prospects of current and future employees at the other end of the labour market. What's more, it remains unclear whether

the levy has increased the amount of training provided by each employer or merely encouraged them to rebadge their existing training schemes as "apprenticeships".

Needless to say, any employer that has continued to recruit UK workers as well as develop and train their employees has no reason to be concerned about a new immigration system. If we are serious about providing better job opportunities, improving our economic productivity and helping people of all ages to progress in their chosen career, an over-reliance on low-skill EU workers is unlikely to help.

Many organisations, both large and small, view investing in their staff as the right decision for their business, and they deserve praise for doing so. Any employer that has not yet shown this same commitment to training and professional development should heed the prime minister's words sooner rather than later.



## STEPHEN EVANS

Chief executive, Learning and Work Institute



## Lessons from Tory conference: next steps for FE and skills

**Brexit is grabbing the headlines. But many debates at the Conservative Party conference concluded that lifelong learning and apprenticeships are central to life beyond March next year, says Stephen Evans**

There are some great debates at party conferences if you know where to find them. They're usually away from the main conference halls, though Damian Hinds's announcement of new capital funding for T-levels was welcome.

At this year's Conservative Party conference, there were two main themes at these debates. The first was about next steps on the apprenticeship levy. The chancellor announced that employers would be able to transfer 25 per cent of their levy funds to their supply chain, up from 10 per cent, and that its operation would be reviewed. Speaking to a number of employers and employers' groups, the key message I picked up was that it needs to be simpler

and more flexible, but please don't rip it up and start again!

The latter point is really important. The levy is a good idea. It needs change, but to start from scratch now would be to repeat past mistakes. Further education is perhaps the most over-reformed sector, to within an inch of its life. What we need now are stability and evolution.

There were some good ideas for this evolution. These include making the standards process quicker and simpler (time for an "even faster and better" initiative from the Institute for Apprenticeships, perhaps?).

We also should benchmark standards against the best in the world, and we definitely need more action on access to apprenticeships. Learning and Work Institute research has shown systematic inequalities, including underrepresentation of people from BAME backgrounds and gender segregation. That's why we've argued for

an apprentice premium, targeting extra resources at under-represented groups like the pupil premium does in schools. But whatever the method, we need to turbocharge our efforts on fair access to apprenticeships.

**"FE is over-reformed. We need stability and evolution"**

The second theme was a broader one about getting beyond Brexit and back to the prime minister's commitment, on taking office, to tackle burning injustices. Living standards have flatlined and it's clear some people and places feel left behind. The combination of an aging population and a new technological revolution risks worsening these

inequalities, unless we act.

Most of the debates I attended argued that more lifelong learning should be part of the answer, but things got a bit vague when it came to how to do this. Apprenticeships, T-levels and the national retraining scheme were all mentioned. But I think we also need an overarching vision, a strategy for how these building blocks fit together.

The good news is that, between us, we've got lots of answers. It was great to see so many people from FE taking part in these debates, raising the sector's profile and providing solutions.

Will all this result in greater investment in FE and lifelong learning? It's too soon to tell – we're higher up the political agenda, but it's a long way to next year's spending review.

The skills minister Anne Milton told our Festival of Learning reception earlier this year that it's the squeaky wheel that gets the grease. To be as squeaky as possible I think we need to:

- **Continue raising our profile.** Things like Colleges Week can help show the difference FE makes. But we also need to convince the treasury we're a good investment.
- **Build a coalition of support.** We need employers and leaders from other sectors to say how vital further education is. Sharing personal stories of the impact of learning, as we do through our Festival of Learning, can help.
- **Inspire employers and individuals to learn.** This is not just about government. In our survey, the biggest reason individuals give for not learning, is not seeing the relevance. We also need to raise employer investment and engagement. There are lots of great examples of this – how do we scale them up?

Memories of conference debates soon fade; we need to keep the pressure on to win hearts and minds.



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Advertorial

# Delivering education into prisons – a new landscape

There's no doubt of the scale of the challenge when it comes to delivering education effectively into prisons. Many individuals within prisons struggle to engage with learning, having had negative experiences of education in their past.

A government target of 50% of prisoners engaged in learning set at the foundation of OLASS contracts back in 2004 is far from being met, with only 23% of prisoner reportedly engaged in learning in 2014. The Coates Review in 2016 identified some significant changes to support an uplift in performance when it comes to prison education. Prison governors should become responsible for the commissioning and performance of education contracts in their establishment, prison performance should be directly linked to OFSTED outcome and every prisoner must have a Personal Learning Plan.

As a result, the process of delivering education into prisons is going through considerable changes and we understand that providers are now navigating a completely different landscape when it comes to how they might work with prisons.

Prison Education Framework (PEF) is replacing the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) contracts and these new contracts will commence in April of next year with a prime provider appointed per region. The core PEF contracts will be supplemented by a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) allowing governors to directly procure local and niche services.

The DPS allows smaller organisations to contract directly with prison governors through the MoJ, providing education services directly in prisons. Preparing a compelling offer for prison governors is the next crucial step for organisations bidding to be approved on the DPS and offering qualifications that learners in custody can achieve is an invaluable part of any offer.

At NCFE, we understand that it's difficult to find learning



solutions which improve the prospect of real job outcomes whilst meeting a wide range of learning and regional needs. With this in mind, NCFE is able to offer an end-to-end learning solution providing the foundation for a pathway to sustainable employment and helping learners to reintegrate into society.

NCFE has extensive experience of delivering educational solutions into prison over many years, working with prime providers of OLASS contracts in over 95 prisons and flexing to meet the changing needs of learners.

We offer a range of qualifications such as creative qualifications, employability skills and Occupational Studies, and qualifications to support wellbeing, personal and social interaction as well as life skills. We also offer unregulated

qualifications through our Accreditation and Employer Services which can be written and owned by you to make the programme of learning bespoke to a prison environment.

What's more, we offer a collaborative approach, a high level of quality assurance and a personalised and dedicated account management service.

We believe in the importance of preparing those in custody for life in the community and for the world of work. Our core purpose as an organisation is to create opportunities for success to enrich society, and by equipping individuals with the tools they need to succeed, we're doing just that.

You can find out more about NCFE and our offer for prisons on our website here: <https://www.ncfe.org.uk/delivering-education-into-prisons>

NOT TO BE MISSED

# UPCOMING EVENTS

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**Cliff Hall**

Interim principal and CEO,  
Birmingham Metropolitan College

**Start date** October 1 2018

**Previous job**  
Interim Principal, Nescot College

**Interesting fact**  
Cliff has worked in further education roles throughout his career and one of his former A-level students is Olympic gold medallist Denise Lewis, OBE




**Morag Davis**

Assistant principal – technical curriculum, Nelson and Colne College

**Start date** September 2018

**Previous job**  
Head of division for creative and digital, Nelson and Colne College

**Interesting fact**  
Morag is an extreme sports enthusiast, in particular surfing and snowboarding, and she is a qualified snowboarding instructor




**David Marsh**

CEO, Babington

**Start date** October 1 2018

**Previous job**  
Managing director, Knowledgepool training division, Capita plc

**Interesting fact**  
David has had a varied career: he started out as a maths and physics teacher, and has also worked at the Ministry of Defence



**Fionnuala Swann**

Assistant principal – academic curriculum, Nelson and Colne College

**Start date** September 2018

**Previous job**  
Head of division for business, humanities and languages, Nelson and Colne College

**Interesting fact**  
Fionnuala is an elite fell and mountain runner and a former British Open Fell Runners' Association Veteran Ladies' Champion

# Movers & Shakers

...

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



**Marcus Clinton**

Principal and CEO, Reaseheath College

**Start date** July 30 2018

**Previous job**  
Principal and CEO, Northumberland College

**Interesting fact**  
Marcus collects model lighthouses, and co-authored a textbook on horse business management

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](mailto:news@feweek.co.uk)

FEWEEK



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