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FE WEEK

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3AAA SCANDAL REVEALED

Exclusive

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NAO to review gaps in the checks made on apprenticeship training

Sir Amyas Morse

BILLY CAMDEN
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Exclusive

Concern over thousands of apprentices without a regulator responsible for checking the quality of their training is being reviewed by the National Audit Office.

FE Week revealed last week that providers who deliver level 6 and 7 apprenticeships that have no prescribed HE qualification, such as a degree, and are not on the Office for Students' "register", go without any regulation.

The Department for Education has now confirmed the grey area exists and has committed to fixing it by expanding the OfS' remit.

However, a solution might not be found for some time as the HE regulator will not decide how to assess providers not on its register until the huge task of signing off on current applications to its register is completed, which is likely to run into late 2019.

The NAO, led by comptroller and auditor general Sir Amyas Morse, has now weighed into the debacle and has promised to review the arrangements for oversight in its upcoming follow-up review of apprenticeships, due to be published in "early 2019".

"We are aware of the concerns raised on the regulation of Level 6 and 7 apprenticeships," said a spokesperson.

"As part of our study on the apprenticeships programme, we will review the arrangements for oversight, inspection and regulation of training provision at all levels of apprenticeship."

The NAO's review will focus on whether the apprenticeship reform programme is delivering value for money.

It comes after its 2016 report warned that without more robust risk planning the reforms risked seeing repeats of the frauds that plagued failed Individual Learning Accounts.

The failure of this scheme – which was scrapped in 2001 after abuse by unscrupulous providers led to a reported £67 million fraud – was blamed on poor planning and risk management by the government.

The NAO has raised concerns that lessons had not been learned – as it warned the DfE had not done enough to identify how providers, employers and assessment bodies might react to the apprenticeship reforms, raising the risk of "market abuse".

The previous NAO report has a section on apprenticeship oversight, but does not mention regulation for level 6 and 7 degree or non-degree programmes.

FE Week analysis shows there are 15 approved standards at higher levels with no degree element, which have had a combined total of 4,443 starts on them since 2016/17.

One of the standards, the level 7 accountancy and taxation professional, had over 3,500 starts in 2017/18 alone.

Any HE provider that is delivering these standards is still subject to OfS regulation if they are on its register, so some of the starts in question would have been assessed.

The issue of no oversight lies with providers, such as Kent County Council, which deliver the high-level apprenticeships but are not on the OfS register and therefore not subject to their regulation.

The Department for Education stayed silent on the embarrassing situation last week but has now confirmed there is currently no regulator responsible.

"The OfS and the DfE are working together to make sure apprenticeship training is high-quality at levels 6 and 7, whether the provider is registered with the OfS or not," a spokesperson told *FE Week*.

"All providers are required to be on the register of apprenticeship training providers – including the small number of providers offering non-degree apprenticeships at Level 6 and 7 – and must deliver high-quality programmes that meet our strict funding rules."

The OfS confirmed an arrangement was being thought up, but added it would not be decided on until the completion of the current application round to its own provider register, to which there are over 300 applications.

"We are developing arrangements with the DfE to assess quality and standards for providers delivering apprenticeships at level 6 and above, but which have not registered with the OfS," a spokesperson said.

"However, we need to finish the OfS registration process before we can say which providers will become eligible for these new arrangements. DfE and OfS will make an announcement when this is clear."

She continued: "While the OfS regulates higher education, we are not an inspectorate like Ofsted. In that capacity, we have been assessing hundreds of applications from all kinds of higher-education providers through our registration process, including all apprenticeships and other provision at level 4 to 7, whether this has a qualification or not.

"If an application doesn't meet our high-quality threshold we can put conditions on a registration, add extra scrutiny or we can refuse their application altogether."

Glowing Ofsted report for first national college

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The first of the new national colleges to be inspected by Ofsted has received a glowing report.

The National College for Digital Skills was highly praised by the inspectorate for its effective teaching, "enthusiastic" learners, "excellent" careers advice and focus on increasing diversity in the digital sector.

The college, which is known as Ada after the nineteenth century pioneer of computers Ada Lovelace, was rated 'good' overall in its first full inspection published on Thursday, and received an 'outstanding' grade for the personal development, behaviour and welfare of learners.

Ada, which operates out of two campuses in northeast London, is one of the five national colleges created by the government with the aim of training more than 20,000 students between them by 2020, and the first to be inspected.

Inspectors praised senior leaders and governors for being "relentless in their ambitions to establish the National College for Digital Skills as a sector leader in its field."

The college received particular praise for its efforts to encourage participation in digital skills from women and those from deprived backgrounds.

The report said leaders had "fulfilled their goal to recruit learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, and to recruit more females to study for a career in the computer science industry.

"They have deliberately chosen to locate the college in an area of significant deprivation in London and have overcome substantial challenges to find suitable premises".

Despite difficulties with retaining learners in the early stages of their study programmes, inspectors found managers had taken effective action to increase participation and were now attracting learners from across London for their sixth-form provision, including a "high proportion of learners from the most deprived areas".

The report said teachers have good industrial expertise and teaching qualifications, and are encouraged to keep up to date with their professional and vocational skills.

They use "imaginative teaching methods" which develop the independence and self-confidence of learner, and lessons are designed to "develop learners' curiosity and deepen their conceptual understanding".

Tom Fogden, chief operating officer and dean of Ada, said the college had set out to support under-represented groups "on a journey from 16 years of age through to highly skilled digital roles and flourishing lives".

"In just two years of operation, we are incredibly proud to be realising that ambition," he said.

The college has 129 learners on level three study programmes, and 125 adult apprentices working towards a level four apprenticeship in digital skills. Apprentices work for companies including Google, Siemens and Deloitte.

Shadowy training provider given £16.5m remains tight-lipped as questions mount

BILLY CAMDEN
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Exclusive

Both Ofsted and the government are looking into a mysterious training provider after *FE Week* revealed it has secured multi-million-pound subcontracting deals despite employing fewer than 10 staff, it is understood.

SCL Security Ltd, a private provider based in Kent that is run by Andrew Merritt, has taken £16.5 million from Brooklands College over the last three years to deliver hundreds of level-three IT apprenticeships, for mostly 16-to-18-year-olds.

It also subcontracts for Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College, with a current deal worth £1.7 million.

But questions surround exactly who the apprentices at SCL Security are, and where it trains them.

The provider only employed eight people in 2017, according to its most recent company accounts, and seven the year before.

Mr Merritt has refused to release exact training-delivery addresses despite multiple requests.

But *FE Week* understands that Ofsted has taken interest in the provider, as well as Brooklands. SCL secured its first direct Education and Skills Funding Agency contract this year, bringing it in scope for inspection. Brooklands was rated 'good' by Ofsted five years ago.

It is also understood that the ESFA has itself raised an eyebrow at the situation and is making enquiries.

One area of interest to them will be SCL Security's relationship with a recruitment firm called Workforce Solutions Group Ltd, which is headed up by two brothers who were at the centre of an *FE Week* investigation in 2016.

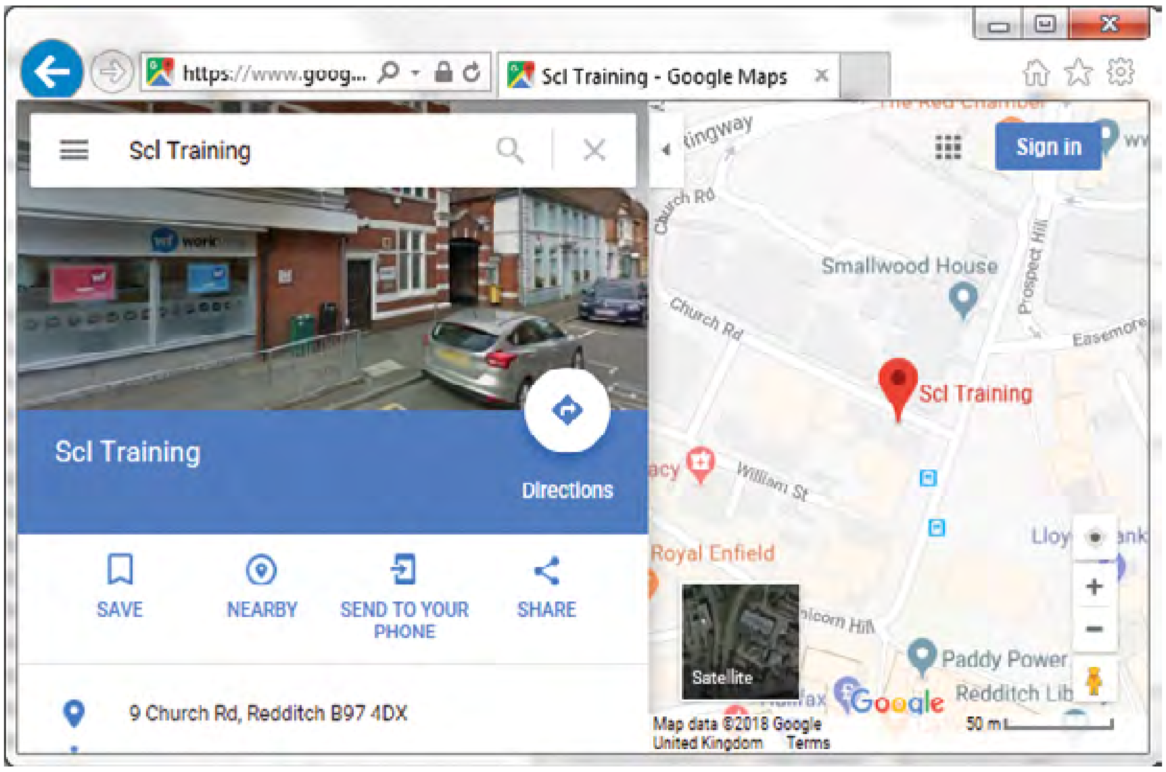
Paul and Joe Alekna switched the ownership of a successful provider they ran from one parent company – eResponse – to another, before transferring out £6 million, liquidating it and leaving learners and creditors on the hook for millions of pounds.

Meanwhile, the brothers continued to run another provider called Options 2 Workplace. But when *FE Week* exposed the situation the ESFA cancelled its contract.

SCL claims on the government's Find Apprenticeship Training website to "operate training centres nationwide", but its own website makes no reference to any training venues – the only address is for a head office in Kent.

However, a Google maps search locates one of their training sites as "9 Church Rd, Redditch" – the same building that Workforce Solutions Group operates out of.

Paul Alekna told *FE Week* that Workforce "specialises in temporary and permanent staffing focusing in the manufacturing, logistics & transport, food-manufacturing and office-



appointments sectors", and insisted "that's all we do".

He refused to deny that Workforce and SCL Security have a working relationship.

Mr Merritt offered a list of "delivery locations", which includes Hounslow, Greenwich, Ashford and Nottingham.

He said all are "under short-term rental/lease arrangements responding to demand" and the Redditch location was "one such rented room", but declined to comment on the relationship between SCL and Workforce.

He added that the "exact addresses" of the other locations "are known to all learners, staff, delivery partners and all official bodies" but refused to give them to *FE Week*.

Brooklands College also refused to release the addresses of where its apprentices are trained with SCL Security.

A spokesperson would only say: "Brooklands College has very successful apprenticeship provision and works in partnership with training providers to meet the needs of a range of employers.

"Brooklands College is not able to comment on commercially sensitive information."

The DfE said it could not comment on individual cases, but a spokesperson reiterated that it has a "duty to protect learners and ensure that public money has been used in accordance with the condition in which it was given".

Ofsted said: "As part of our risk-assessment process, we take account of all of the relevant information we have about an individual provider.

"However, we cannot disclose when we will inspect individual colleges and skills providers."

Careers advice worse at schools with sixth forms

JESS STAUFENBERG
SCHOOLS WEEK REPORTER

Exclusive

Schools with sixth forms have been exposed as failing to provide students the same level of careers advice as schools without sixth forms, with experts concerned competition for pupils amid stagnating funding is fuelling the situation.

Exclusive analysis for *FE Week* shows schools with sixth forms are 16 percentage points less likely to give students information about other further-education or higher-education providers.

They are also 20 percentage points less likely to offer personal careers guidance to pupils than those without sixth forms, the Careers & Enterprise Company analysis found.

It is not the first time schools with sixth forms have been called out for restricting careers information for their students – however, the new data is the most wide-ranging to date.

Bill Watkin, chief executive of the Sixth Form Colleges Association, said the government must increase the funding rate for 16 to 18-year-old learners, which is frozen at £4,000 per pupil, so sixth forms aren't desperate to keep their pupils.

He added that competition for pupils is "not a situation that is going to lend itself to impartial advice and guidance".

Colleges report schools with sixth forms being "reluctant to allow them to address their students at open evenings", Mr Watkin added.

The education select committee warned five years ago that schools with sixth forms were "putting their interests ahead of their pupils" by restricting their access to other education providers to fill their own post-16 places.

Now the CEC has collected data from 2,937 schools and 355 further-education institutions for its 2018 State of the Nation report to see if they meet the eight Gatsby benchmarks, which are markers of excellence in careers advice.

Analysis seen exclusively by *FE Week* reveals a higher proportion of schools without a sixth form met every benchmark than schools with a sixth form.

The difference was especially pronounced for the seventh benchmark, which measures students' "encounters with further and higher education".

Only 46 per cent of schools with a sixth form met this benchmark, compared with 62 per cent of schools without.

The gap was even wider for the eighth benchmark on "personal guidance" – only 53 per cent of schools with a sixth form met this, compared with 73 per cent of schools without.

It comes despite schools being required under the Technical and Further Education Act to follow the Baker clause, which states schools must allow training providers and colleges to offer year 8-to-13 pupils non-academic routes.

Further analysis on the seventh benchmark showed only 45 per cent of schools with a sixth form gave students "meaningful encounters with further-education colleges", compared with 78 per cent of those without sixth forms.

However Kevin Gilmartin, post-16 and colleges specialist at the Association of School and College Leaders, warned the benchmarks don't always measure "informal advice" offered by schools with sixth forms.

The CEC report also found the best-performing areas for the Gatsby benchmarks were in deprived communities including Hull, the Isle of Wight and Norfolk and Suffolk coasts, possibly because they "prioritise careers support" to improve social mobility.

Overall, schools and colleges are achieving 2.13 of the eight Gatsby benchmarks compared with 1.87 last year. Meanwhile, the proportion of schools and colleges not achieving any benchmarks has fallen from 20.6 per cent to 18 per cent.

But only 21 schools and colleges are achieving all Gatsby benchmarks, added the CEC.

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News

Slow take up of scheme to transfer levy funds from larger to smaller employers

JUDE BURKE
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Only a tiny proportion of large employers' apprenticeship cash was passed on to smaller employers in the first three months of the transfer scheme, the skills minister has revealed.

Since May this year levy-paying employers have been able to transfer up to 10 per cent of their funds to smaller employers in their supply chains.

Take-up was understood to have been low, and this has now been confirmed by Anne Milton.

In the three months from May to July "less than 1 per cent of levy funds in employer apprenticeship service accounts were used to fund apprenticeships in this way for non-levy paying employers," she said in response to a parliamentary question.

Despite multiple enquiries, *FE Week* has only been able to find a handful of employers that have passed their levy funds along in this way

Last month the chancellor Philip Hammond announced an increase in the amount of cash that employers will be able to pass on from April 2019, up to 25 per cent.

Ms Milton said at the time that she hoped this would boost take-up "because then it's a substantial proportion".

Speaking to *FE Week* at the Conservative party conference in October, she admitted that "possibly yes" the 10 per cent wasn't being passed on because it was "too small to make it worthwhile".

"By January, I'd like to see some real progress. My challenge to employers is to go and transfer it," she said.

"Employers say they really want to be able to help their supply chains. There are lots of enlightened ways you could use that transfer to grow apprenticeships – that's what we want to see."

A spokesperson for Health Education England, which supports apprenticeships in the NHS, said it was "providing support for employers seeking to transfer out and receive levy".

"This includes transfers between trusts and primary-care employers such as GP practices, pharmacies and dental practices."

However, she was unable to name any of the trusts involved.

Last month HEE wrote to all NHS trusts encouraging them to use or transfer their levy funds, after finding their annual £200 million pot was not being spent fast enough.


Anne Milton

Mike Cherry, the Federation of Small Businesses' national chairman, said the government should be "looking at solutions to encourage larger levy-paying firms to transfer their unspent funds" such as a matching service "where levy-paying businesses can locate smaller businesses to receive funding".

Plans to allow levy payers to transfer funds to smaller employers in their supply chain, to support them to recruit apprentices, were first announced in October 2016.

When the policy first came into effect employers were limited to passing cash on to a single employer, although this restriction was subsequently lifted.

Following Mr Hammond's announcement in October, a number of large employers, including Specsavers and the Co-op, voiced concerns that the increase to the transfer facility would have "little impact".

"We are continuing to work with employers to build awareness on how businesses can use their apprenticeship-levy fund," a Department for Education spokesperson said.

This included supporting them "to make sure they make best use of the levy transfer and their own levy funds", she said.

FE Week reported last week that employers had used just 14 per cent of their apprenticeship-levy funds in the 18 months since the charge was brought in.

Just £370 million of the £2.7 billion total balance of employers' apprenticeship service accounts had been spent as of the end of September, a freedom of information request revealed.

Five colleges handed DfE warnings over finances

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Five struggling colleges have been hit with a notice to improve by the government this week, after they were all assessed to have 'inadequate' financial health.

Three of the warning notices have been dished out to North Hertfordshire College, Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College, and Coulsdon Sixth Form College after they requested an unspecified amount of exceptional financial support.

Northumberland College and Worthing College had theirs handed to them following an assessment of their financial plans.

North Hertfordshire College came under fire earlier this year after its chief executive, Matt Hamnett, was paid almost £300,000 in 2016/17 – a £68,000 increase and nearly double the sector average.

This was despite the college only having an annual turnover of £30 million. Mr Hamnett left the college in November 2017 but it has now been brought into scope for FE commissioner intervention.

EHWLC received a damning FE commissioner report two weeks ago in which it was revealed the college was now dependent on government bailouts for its survival.

It found a total failure of leadership and governance. Garry Phillips was principal at the time but jumped ship before the findings could be revealed.

But the fallout from the report has led to Mr Phillips leaving his new post at City College Plymouth, following pressure from unions for him to resign.

Coulsdon Sixth Form College was referred to Richard Atkins, the FE commissioner, on October 2017 and an independent assessment of the college's "capability and capacity" led to a structure and prospects appraisal in January this year.

Its financial notice says the outcome of the SPA was a "recommendation for a Type B merger with Croydon College", which is planned to take place on January 1, 2019.

Northumberland College was visited by Mr Atkins' team earlier this year.

His report, published in October, stated that the college has undergone a "cash-flow crisis" and could see its finances plummet further.

It revealed declining learner recruitment, inadequate apprenticeship delivery, low

achievement and "last-minute negotiations" to defer loan repayments at the college, and warned that it may yet need to request exceptional financial support.

Worthing College is also now in scope for FE commissioner intervention.

Its financial notice stated the college was now committed to a merger with the Chichester College Group, which is a "change to the original recommendation for Worthing College following the Sussex area review".

"As part of this process, the FE commissioner was made aware that Worthing College's financial health would be assessed as inadequate based on the latest financial plans," it added.

"The commissioner supported the change of area review recommendation on the grounds that a merger would help protect the long-term viability of the college and bring benefits in terms of quality and the curriculum offer.

"The FE commissioner's team will assess whether any further review of the college's position is required in response to this notice."

All five colleges will now have to keep a close eye on their cash-flow positions while keeping the ESFA informed.

News

Majority of UTCs run up debts by overestimating student numbers

PIPPA ALLEN-KINROSS
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Exclusive

Almost two thirds of university technical colleges overestimated their student numbers last year and will have to repay funding to the government, with five owing more than half a million pounds each.

A freedom of information request has revealed that a total of 30 of the 49 UTCs which are still open drastically misjudged their ability to recruit learners in 2017/18 and now face paying over £6.5 million back to the Education and Skills Funding Agency between them.

The five worst offenders accumulated debts of over £500,000 each, with Bolton UTC furthest in the red with a debt of -£688,364.

It was closely followed by London's Elutec on -£672,075, and Salford's UTC@MediaCityUK on -£657,273. Wigan UTC and Medway UTC also made the top five, with -£609,038 and -£504,496 respectively.

A spokesperson for the Baker Dearing Trust, which represents all UTCs, insisted pupil numbers were rising at the controversial 14-to-19 free schools.

However, as *FE Week* reported last week, although the overall number of learners has risen at UTCs as more have opened, the average intake of 14-year-old learners per UTC has actually fallen this year.

The BDT spokesperson said: "Estimating pupil numbers is hard for UTCs. There are many factors involved.

"Nearly all other secondary schools have feeders and recruit at a standard age so they can estimate their numbers more easily."

She added that the total amount owed by UTCs has fallen since 2016/17 last year, from £11 million to £6.6 million, and said all UTCs have a financial recovery plan to repay the money owed to the ESFA.

A spokesperson for the Department for Education said the timescales for repayment "vary on a case-by-case basis".

"Funding that is provided to set up new free schools and UTCs is based on estimates of pupil numbers," she said. "Once the school or UTC opens, this funding is then adjusted to reflect actual figures and where necessary we work with the institutions to recover funding.

"We have agreed recovery plans in place for most free schools and UTCs that have pupil-number adjustments, and we are in discussion with the others about terms for recovery."

> "The average intake of 14-year-old learners per UTC has fallen this year"

Most UTCs have a capacity for 600 learners. In 2017/18, Wigan UTC had the fewest learners of the top five, with just 116 enrolled students, leaving it 81 per cent below its maximum capacity. UTC@MediaCityUK had the most at 372, but was still just 62 per cent full.

Medway UTC was the only one of the five owing more than £500,000 to respond to requests for comment. Medway, which was rated 'inadequate' by Ofsted in May, was renamed as Waterfront UTC when it joined The Howard Academy Trust earlier this month.

Lord Baker

A spokesperson said none of the UTC's existing team were in post when the estimated pupil numbers were submitted and so it could not comment on why they had been overestimated, but said a repayment plan had been agreed with the ESFA as part of its transfer to the new trust.

Studio schools have fared slightly better than their technical cousins, with 11 out of a possible 21 left owing the government money after overestimating pupil numbers last year. However, just one studio school has a debt of over £500,000, with Manchester Creative Studio owing -£521,297.

Manchester Creative Studio closed this summer after being dogged by low pupil numbers and significant financial challenges. It had been placed in special measures after being rated 'inadequate' in every category in March 2017 and did not take on any new pupils in September of that year.

Martin Shevill, chair of the school's trustees, said the pupil-prediction numbers had been submitted shortly before the previous trust board had disbanded, and the closing financial position of the trust was being finalised with the DfE.

"The remit of the new trust board was to assess the viability of the school going forward. Very early on we made the decision that the school should not take in another intake of Year 10s and Year 12s while the school's future was so uncertain," he said.

"This meant that the school population was effectively halved. In addition, other parents made the decision to withdraw their child from the school following a difficult Ofsted inspection.

"As a result, there was a significant gap between the optimistic pupil predictions that the previous trust submitted, and Manchester Creative School's actual student population once critical decisions had been made."

Studio schools were designed to take on cohorts of up to 300 learners. In its final year, Manchester Creative Studio had around 40.

Pupil number adjustment

Name	2017/18 PNA	Provider
Bolton UTC	-£688,364.60	UTC
elutec	-£672,075.87	UTC
UTC@MediaCityUK	-£657,273.68	UTC
Wigan UTC	-£609,038.02	UTC
Manchester Creative Studio	-£521,297.38	Studio
Medway UTC	-£504,496.09	UTC

News

WorldSkills UK Live 2018: Skills minister kicks off 'bigger and better' trades show

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The skills minister declared herself to be having an "absolutely fantastic time" as she got stuck into the heart of the action on the first day of the "bigger and better" WorldSkills UK Live on Thursday.

Anne Milton met with apprentices and had a go at a number of trades – including virtual engineering and floristry – as she toured the show, which runs for three days at the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham.

"If you want to get into a skilled occupation this is the place that you will find skilled occupations," Ms Milton said.

"The message is that university's right for some people, but university's not right for everybody."

The show has a number of benefits, including the opportunity to have a go at different occupations, Ms Milton said.

"There's nothing quite like having some hands-on experience," she said.

"What's also important is that you don't realise when you're in school the huge range of possible occupations out there."

"There are record numbers of young people coming through here, and half of them are girls and young women, which is fantastic. We're seeing some real gender diversity."

Among the stops on Ms Milton's tour were BAE Systems, Bosch, the National Careers Service and the Apprenticeships Service.

As well as trying out virtual engineering, having a selfie taken by a robot and climbing up into the cab of a lorry she spoke to a wide range of apprentices "who've just got such good stories to tell".

At the heart of WorldSkills UK Live are the national finals of the WorldSkills UK competitions.

Young people are competing in over 70 different skills over two days.

Ms Milton wished all the competitors "so much luck", and said she had her "fingers crossed for all of them".

"If you've not witnessed it you can have no idea what these young people have to go through," she said.

> **"Young people are competing in over 70 different skills over the two days"**

"This is two days of really intensive competition. It's the skills Olympics, but unlike most Olympics events which last minutes or seconds these kids are at this for two days."

Launched in 2012, following the UK's hosting of the international WorldSkills competition, WorldSkills UK Live – formerly known as the Skills Show until it rebranded earlier this year – has grown into the nation's largest skills, apprenticeships and careers event.

This is set to be the biggest show ever, with 80,000 visitors expected over the three days, from November 15 to 17.

Exhibitors at the show include BMW Group UK, Airbus, Royal Navy, Health Education England and colleges including Bedford College, North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College and Grimsby Institute.

Spotlight stages will feature a wide range of speakers over the three days, giving an insight into different careers including science, the automotive industry, healthcare, architecture, visual effects – even professional football.

And visitors will be able to take part in many hands-on activities, including autobody repair, carpentry and landing a virtual plane.

FE Week and *Schools Week* are proud media partner of WorldSkills UK, WorldSkills UK Live, WorldSkills UK Competition finals. Watch out for our supplement on the show next week.

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Investigates

Police focus on 3aaa dodgy data and use

Recap: how the scandal unfolded

A scandal involving one of the country's biggest apprenticeship providers has engrossed the sector ever since the turn of this academic year – but details on exactly what caused it have been few and far between.

FE Week can now reveal just why Aspire Achieve Advance, better known as 3aaa, is being investigated by the government and the police.

But first, let's recap how we got here.

The ESFA's investigation was sparked earlier this year when a whistleblower approached the agency.

Owing to this, Ofsted declared its latest inspection of the provider, which was expected to result in another 'outstanding' rating, as incomplete in June.

It was in September when events really began to heat up. 3aaa's co-owners Peter Marples and Di McEvoy-Robinson, who founded the provider together in 2008, resigned from the company claiming that they wanted to "take the opportunity to focus on our health and families".

The training provider saw significant growth under their leadership. 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 total allocation, which was mostly for 16-to-18 apprenticeships in industries including IT, business administration and accountancy, stood at nearly £31 million by the end of 2017/18.

The provider was suspended from recruiting apprentices following its owners' resignations, but *FE Week* revealed that senior employees were later "instructed" to tell its staff to not date any paperwork for "planned enrolments".

This newspaper then uncovered a highly confidential previous government investigation report, codenamed 'Project Vanilla', into 3aaa which revealed it was given a £7 million contract increase in 2016 despite being found to have carried out dozens of funding and success-rate "overclaims".

Despite attempting to convince its employers and staff that the company was moving forward under "new management", the provider put itself up for a quick sale in early October but later went bust when the ESFA terminated its skills contracts as a result of the findings of this year's investigation.

Around 4,500 learners had to find new training providers and up to 500 jobs were lost.

The ESFA's findings have been passed on to the police, through Action Fraud, and 3aaa has been placed into compulsory liquidation. Anthony Hannon is the Official Receiver handling the insolvency.

Now that you're up to speed, *FE Week* can reveal the truth behind the investigations...

Inflated achievement rates

BILLY CAMDEN
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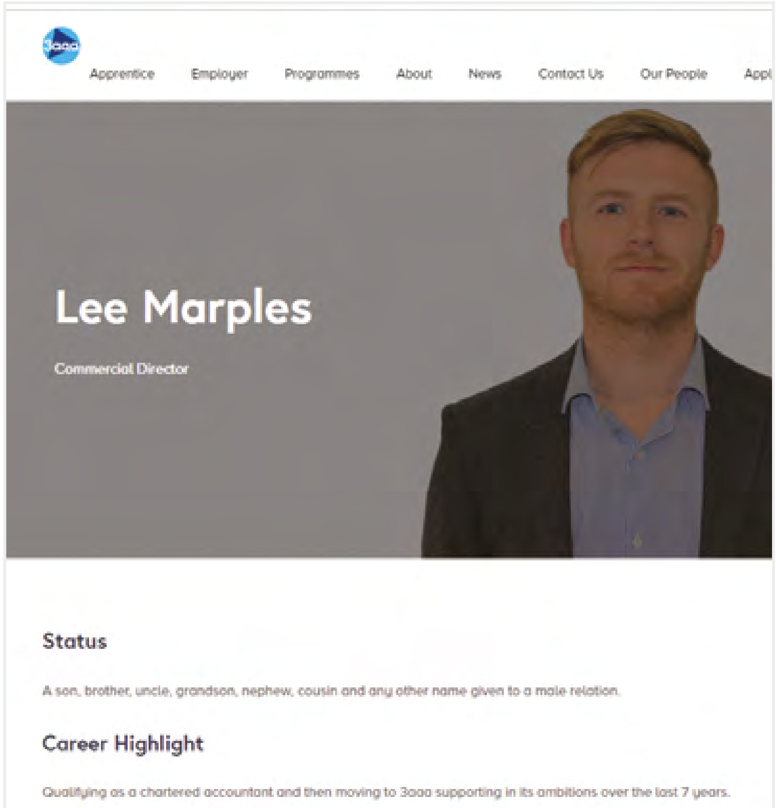
From front | Exclusive



Alleged manipulation of Individualised Learner Records, to artificially inflate achievement rates, is at the heart of the investigations.

FE Week understands that Lee Marples, 3aaa's commercial director and nephew to owner Peter Marples, is central to this part of the ESFA's probe.

Evidence from a whistleblower shows how achievement rates were inflated by more than 20 percentage points.

FE Week understands Lee Marples, who boasted on 3aaa's website to have "always had a thing for numbers", would personally change ILR data late at night and at times from a remote login.

3aaa used a well-known commercial ILR "learning management system" for apprenticeships called Maytas, and this newspaper has seen data extracts showing hundreds of changes were made using a Lee Marples login.

FE Week has also had sight of internal 3aaa emails from Lee Marples which suggest the purpose of changing data was to inflate achievement rates.

In addition to ILR manipulation, 3aaa sales documents show a potential £700,000 ESFA clawback. It is understood that this relates to a range of apprenticeship and traineeship-funding overclaims made via ILR submissions.

As revealed by *FE Week* in June, Ofsted almost gave the provider another 'outstanding' rating before pausing the inspection once inspectors heard the ESFA had an active investigation.

A spokesperson for the education watchdog told *FE Week* this week it is continuing to look into the provider.

"We are currently considering options for completing our inspection," he said.

Lee Marples' biography on the 3aaa website bragged about his "understanding of the funding mechanisms, rules and regulations".

Lee Marples did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

REVEALED: HOW 3AAA SPLASHED THE CASH

Elton John concert and sports club sponsorship

As previously revealed by *FE Week*, 3aaa spent £1.6m on sponsorship at sports clubs, of which £480,420 was with the Derbyshire Country Cricket club to include naming rights for the ground.

Confidential documents seen by *FE Week* also show 3aaa spent £69,000 for corporate hospitality at the 3aaa County Ground for an Elton John concert on June 4, 2017.

It is understood that in addition to the music show that evening, the cost included a "delicious three-course dinner and private bar".

Flashy Tesla cars for 3aaa's owners

Hire purchase agreements within the 3aaa sales documents show the company was paying monthly for 33 cars up until at least July 2018.

Two Model S Tesla's in particular stand out, costing £3,600 per month at a total cost for the two cars by January 2020 of £288,000.

One of the Tesla's was in the name of Patrick McEvoy, Di McEvoy-Robinson's husband, and the other was in the name of Peter Marples.

e of apprenticeship grant for employers

Kept £1.2m employer incentive payments

On the other side there is alleged misuse of grants from an apprenticeship incentive scheme in which 3aaa held on to £1.2 million that was supposed to go to employers.

The programme, known as the Apprenticeship Grant for Employers (AGE), was run by the government from 2014 to July 2017 as a way of incentivising employers to take on 16- to 24-year-olds whom they would not otherwise be in a position to recruit.

Eligible employers – those with fewer than 50 staff – qualified to receive £1,500 once an apprentice completed 13 weeks "in-learning" on their programme.

The skills funding agency would transfer the funds "to your training organisation once the 13-week qualification point has been met and correctly recorded on the Individualised Learner Record as submitted by the training organisation," according to AGE guidance.

"Your training organisation must make arrangements to pay the funds to you within 30 days of receipt," it added.

However, a 3aaa sales document that was being shown to potential buyers in October, and has been obtained by *FE Week*, reveals that the provider held on to £1.2 million for over a year after the scheme ended. The ESFA has investigated and now wants the money back.

"The outlook is impacted by potential ESFA clawbacks and deal fees ˜£2.4 million (this is management's view of the maximum including Age Grant £1.2 million, fees £0.5 million settlement £0.7 million)," the document said.

The £1.2 million for AGE and £700,000 clawback was listed in 3aaa's cash-flow forecast for October (see image).

It meant that anyone who bought the provider, majority owned by co-founders Peter Marples and Di McEvoy-Robinson, would have to pay the amount back to the ESFA.

Derbyshire Constabulary is leading on the inquiry for Action Fraud, and confirmed it was investigating the allegation of the misuse of the employer incentive.

"Derbyshire Constabulary is aware of the allegations and has received an Action Fraud referral in relation to 3aaa and enquiries are ongoing," a spokesperson said.

He added that a "criminal investigation has not begun as the Department for Education has not yet completed its work at 3aaa" and the police would "not comment on the specifics of enquiries – or be giving a running commentary on the state of the case".

The DfE could not comment directly on the allegation as its investigation is still live, but offered this statement: "We have terminated our contracts with 3aaa. Our priority now is to find new training providers as quickly as possible for the affected learners.

"Following our investigation we have referred our findings to the police, through Action Fraud.

"We will look very carefully at what lessons can be learned as a result of this investigation."

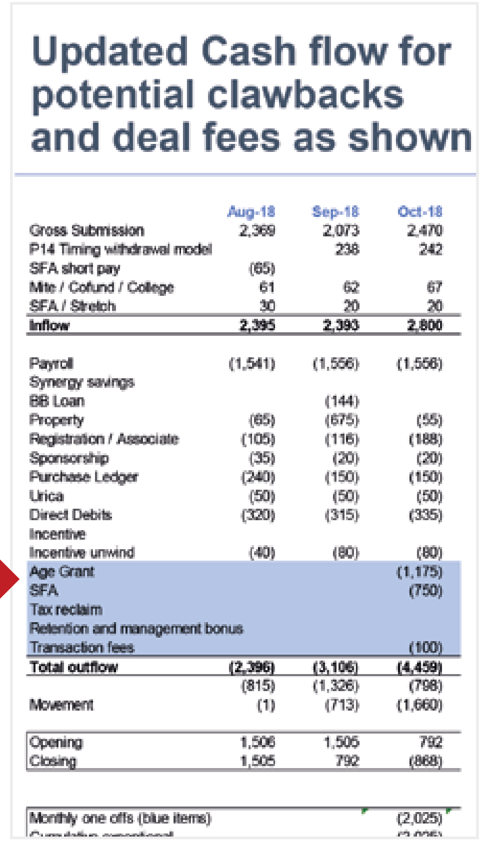
A spokesperson for the Official Receiver said: "The Official Receiver has a duty to investigate the cause of failure of the company and the conduct of all individuals involved in its management.

"If any misconduct is identified then the Official Receiver can refer matters to the relevant prosecuting authority, while also having the option of applying for a disqualification order for a period between two and 15 years."

Mr Marples and Ms McEvoy-Robinson did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Di McEvoy-Robinson

Peter Marples



Updated Cash flow for potential clawbacks and deal fees as shown

	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18
Gross Submission	2,369	2,073	2,470
P14 Timing withdrawal model		238	242
SFA short pay	(65)		
Mite / Cofund / College	61	62	67
SFA / Stretch	30	20	20
Inflow	**2,395**	**2,393**	**2,800**
Payroll	(1,541)	(1,556)	(1,556)
Synergy savings			
BB Loan		(144)	
Property	(65)	(675)	(55)
Registration / Associate	(105)	(116)	(188)
Sponsorship	(35)	(20)	(20)
Purchase Ledger	(240)	(150)	(150)
Urica	(50)	(50)	(50)
Direct Debits	(320)	(315)	(335)
Incentive			
Incentive unwind	(40)	(80)	(80)
Age Grant			(1,175)
SFA			(750)
Tax reclaim			
Retention and management bonus			
Transaction fees			(100)
Total outflow	**(2,396)**	**(3,106)**	**(4,459)**
	(815)	(1,326)	(798)
Movement	(1)	(713)	(1,660)
Opening	1,506	1,506	792
Closing	1,505	792	(868)
Monthly one offs (blue items)			(2,025)

DIRECTOR LOANS AND THE MANSIONS

3aaa received nearly all of its income from the Education and Skills Funding Agency. Its most recent accounts show that the company recorded a £2.5 million post-tax loss in the 18 months to January 2018. Despite this, the same accounts show that its owners, Peter Marples and Di McEvoy-Robinson, had huge directors loans.

As at January 31, 2018, Mr Marples had £2,745,859 outstanding. *FE Week* has seen documents that he then took a further director's loan of £102,000 between February and July 2018. Ms McEvoy Robinson had £1,280,509 outstanding at January 31, 2018, and again, took out a further £102,000 director's loan between February and July 2018. At the end of 2015, both owners purchased multi-million pound properties.

Land registry documents show Ms McEvoy-Robinson purchased Horsley Hall in Derbyshire for £3 million (below), in December 2015.

Land registry documents show that Mr Marples purchased a house in Burton-on-Trent for £1,795,000 (right top) in November 2015. It is understood the house was demolished, and *FE Week* has seen plans for an ultra- modern new build with out-door swimming pool, but it is believed this was never built.

Mr Marples also owned Morley Manor in Derbyshire (right middle). The mansion was put on the market for £1.6m several weeks ago and it is unclear whether it has now been sold.

Mr Marples also owns a 9 bedroom mansion in Florida, which he rents (below). The rental site boasts it is the "largest private rental property in Orlando". It has been on the market for over a year and the current price tag is $2.75m.

Investigates

Highlights for year to end of Augu

Full inspections plummet by 32 per cent

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Ofsted has denied cuts to its budget have affected the number of FE inspections it carries out, despite analysis by *FE Week* finding full inspections plunged by a third in just one year.

Inspections with an apprenticeship grade saw the most dramatic fall of over 40 per cent, leading to the shadow secretary of state for skills describing a "black hole on what we know about their quality".

The findings come less than three weeks before the chief inspector of Ofsted is due to publish her state of the nation annual report, on December 4.

The figures to August 31 2018 show that just 203 FE providers received full Ofsted inspections in 2017/18, a fall of 32 per cent from the year before when 298 were inspected.

Most strikingly, the number of ITPs – including employer providers – which received full inspections almost halved, falling 44 per cent from 126 to 70.

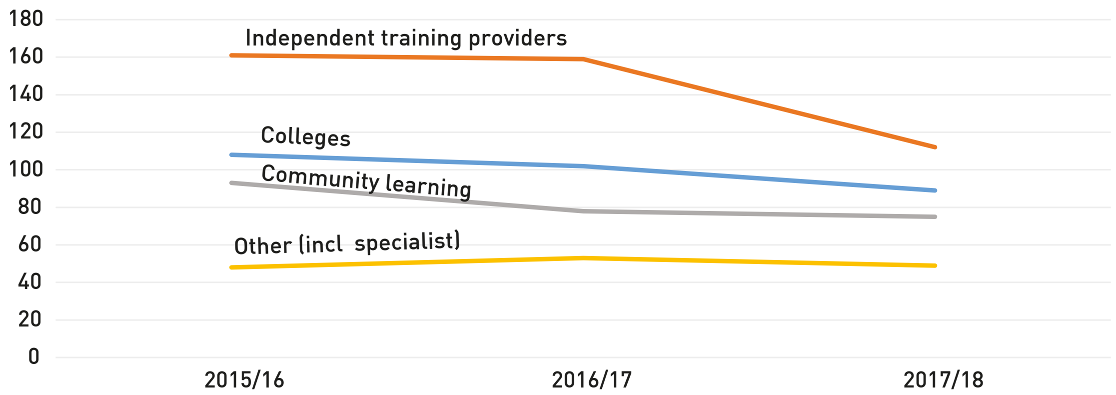
And the number of full inspections which graded providers on their apprenticeship provision dropped 42 per cent from 189 to 109.

However, the inspectorate has insisted that the fall in inspections "isn't a funding issue" and has "nothing to do with funding".

"We carried out the number of inspections that we intended to carry out in 2017/18, and included a sample of monitoring visits to new providers," a spokesperson said, adding that Ofsted now has the extra cash needed to monitor and inspect all new providers in 2018/19 and 2019/20.

"We deployed our inspection resources in 2017/18 to ensure that providers were inspected in accordance with the timescales and frequencies detailed within the handbook.

Ofsted full and short inspections



All inspections by provider type	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Shift last year	
Colleges	108	102	89	-13%	-13
ITPs (incl. employer providers)	161	159	112	-30%	-47
Community learning providers (incl. LAs)	93	78	75	-4%	-3
Other (incl. HE and specialist)	48	53	49	-8%	-4
Total inspections	**410**	**392**	**325**	**-17%**	**-67**

Full inspections by provider type	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Shift last year	
Colleges	84	83	67	-19%	-16
ITPs (incl. employer providers)	112	126	70	-44%	-56
Community learning providers (incl. LAs)	61	43	37	-14%	-6
Other (incl. HE and specialist)	40	46	29	-37%	-17
Total	**297**	**298**	**203**	**-32%**	**-95**

Short inspections by provider type	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Shift last year	
Colleges	24	19	22	16%	3
ITPs (incl. employer providers)	49	33	42	27%	9
Community learning providers (incl. LAs)	32	35	38	9%	3
Other (incl. HE and specialist)	8	7	20	186%	13
Total	**113**	**94**	**122**	**30%**	**28**

Full inspections by provision type	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Shift last year	
of which with 16-19 learning grade	*129*	*150*	*95*	*-37%*	*-55*
of which with adult learning grade	*134*	*121*	*118*	*-2%*	*-3*
of which with apprenticeship grade	*181*	*189*	*109*	*-42%*	*-80*

"We completed all the inspections we were required to, and in addition we deployed our remaining inspector resource to inspect a number of providers identified through our risk-assessment process, and conducted a limited number of new provider monitoring visits."

However, shadow skills minister Gordon Marsden warned that the government's "failure to fund Ofsted adequately for colleges and apprenticeships is leaving a black hole on what we know about their quality.

"Taken together with the Department for Education's snail pace on delivering end-point assessment, it adds up to the department being asleep on the job whilst FE becomes ever more fragile."

Ofsted is in line to lose £15 million between 2016/17 and 2019/20 from its inspection budget, which is predicted to fall by 10 per cent from £141,685,000 to £127,100,000. Between 2010/11 and 2016/17, the watchdog's financial resource was reduced by over £54 million.

In April, *FE Week* reported that Ofsted was in line to save around £400,000 this academic year by elongating the maximum period between inspections for 'good' providers. Grade two providers previously received a short inspection within three years, but now can wait for up to five years before they are visited again.

A spokesperson for Ofsted said one of the reasons for the drop in the number of full inspections was because there were "a greater proportion of short inspections carried out last year" ahead of the change.

However, although short inspections did rise by almost a third – from 94 to 122 – this was not sufficient to make up for the plummeting levels of full inspections. The total number of inspections, when taking full and short together, still fell by 17 per cent last year, from 392 to 325.

The spokesperson also said apprenticeship provision is only graded in full inspections, hence the fall in the number of reports which inspected it.

Although Ofsted has now introduced monitoring visits of new apprenticeship providers, she admitted that even when these visits are added to the number of apprenticeship judgments made in full inspections there was still an eight per cent drop compared with 2016/17.

The monitoring visits only assess providers on three measures – or four if they offer adult education – and only concentrate on new providers, meaning that existing apprenticeship providers are still going unmonitored.

The DfE declined to comment.

ust ahead of Ofsted annual report

while the quality of FE colleges rises...

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More than three quarters of colleges are now rated 'good' or 'outstanding' and none are deemed 'inadequate' by Ofsted as further education continues its ascent into excellence.

FE Week analysis of Ofsted results shows that an impressive 76 per cent of all general FE colleges are now rated in the inspectorate's top two categories, up from 69 per cent in 2016/17.

The last academic year also saw more than twice as many colleges move into Ofsted's sweet spot of grade one or two than fall out of the top ranks.

A total of 19 colleges moved up to grade two in 2018, with one climbing up the ranks from 'inadequate' to 'good'. In contrast, just eight fell out of the top category, with seven becoming grade three after being 'good' and one falling from 'outstanding' to 'requires improvement.'

David Corke, director of policy at the Association of Colleges, said: "This analysis only further goes to affirm the good work and support colleges provide to the 2.2 million people studying and training in colleges every day.

"As we edge ever closer to leaving the European Union, colleges will need to be supported adequately as they look to provide the right training and solutions – and this means the right level of investment."

There are currently no colleges labelled as Ofsted's lowest grade of 'inadequate'. However, part of the reason for this is the mergers of poorly rated colleges which have been carried out over the past year. When two colleges merge, both have their Ofsted grades wiped.

Stockport College, Huntingdonshire Regional College, Mid-Cheshire College of Further Education, Redcar and Cleveland College and Amersham Wycombe College all lost their grade-four ratings after a series of mergers.

The proportion of sixth-form colleges rated 'good' or 'outstanding' has remained steady at 81 per cent, after falling from 89 per cent in 2016. Independent learning providers, including employer providers, have experienced a small fall from 81 per cent in the top two categories last year to 78 per cent this year.

Across the entire FE sector, 63 per cent of providers were rated 'good' or 'outstanding' in inspections this year, bringing the total in the top half of Ofsted grades up to 80 per cent.

Amanda Spielman, the head of Ofsted, backed calls for more 16-to-18 funding last month, and warned that some colleges were struggling to reach the top Ofsted grades because of their tight finances.

In a letter to the public accounts committee on October 30, she warned that "real-terms cuts to FE and skills funding are affecting the sustainability and quality of FE and skills provision", and said this verdict was "based on our inspection evidence".

"My strong view is that the government should use the forthcoming spending review to increase the base rate for 16-to-18 funding," she wrote.

"Over time our evidence shows that many colleges have reduced the teaching time allocated to some programmes of study, reduced the number of teaching and/or support staff employed, reduced the number of courses offered and reduced the amount of enrichment or extracurricular activity provided.

"These measures all have an impact on the provision offered."

> "Across the entire FE sector, 63 per cent of providers were rated 'good' or outstanding' in inspections this year"

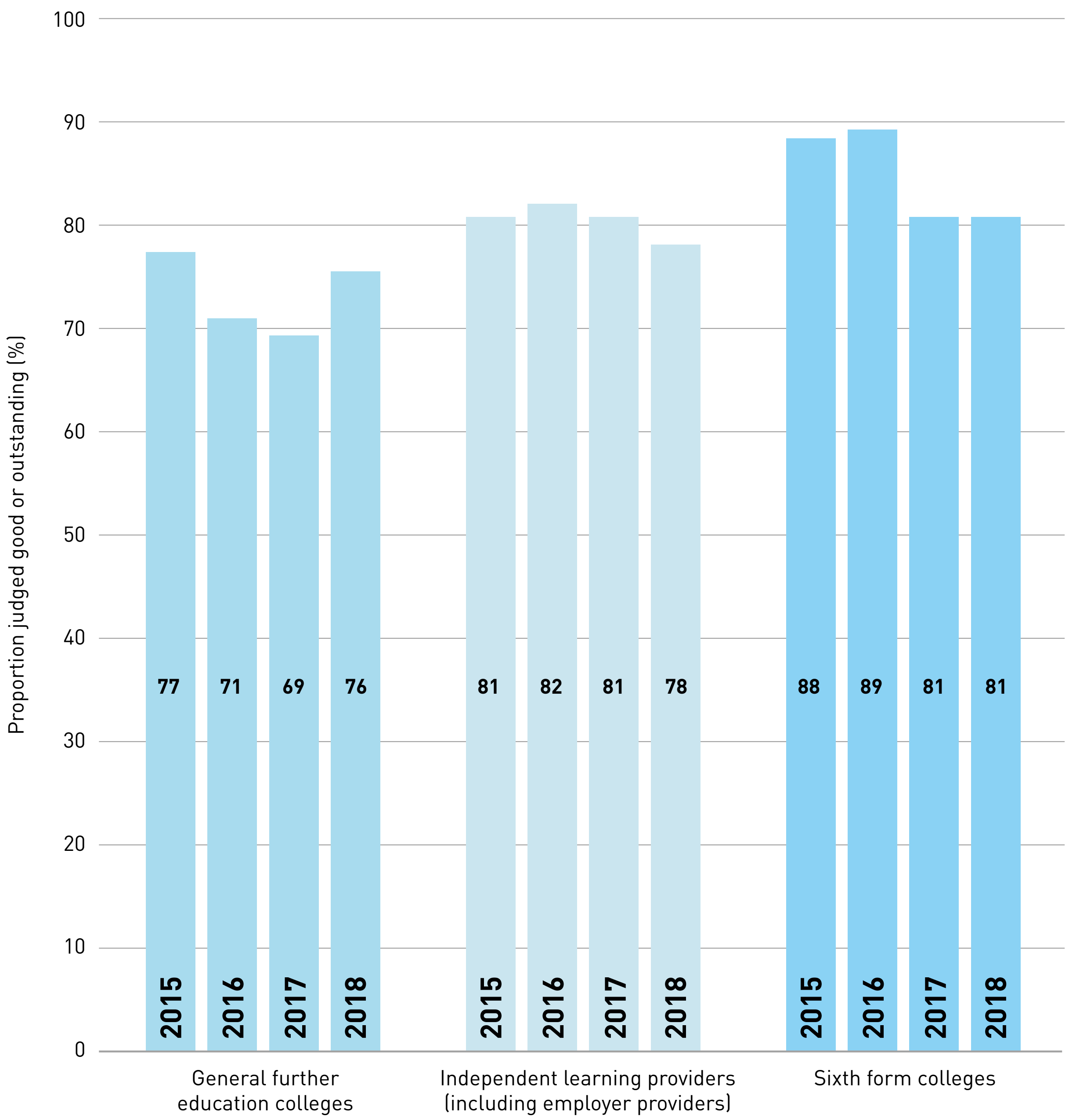
FE Week also discovered that six of the highest-rated sixth-form colleges have not been inspected in over a decade.

Hills Road Sixth Form College, Circencester College, Woodhouse College, Carmel College, Richard Huish College and Winstanley College are all still rated as 'outstanding', despite the fact they were all last inspected between the November 2006 and October 2007.

Ms Spielman, the head of Ofsted, has previously urged the government to authorise more regular inspections of 'outstanding' schools and warned they lack oversight and create "real blind spots" for the inspectorate.

A spokesperson for Ofsted confirmed Ms Spielman's comments about the outstanding exemption, which was introduced in 2011, applied to all providers including FE.

Proportion of post-16 education and skills providers judged good or outstanding for overall effectiveness at their most recent inspection



Source: Analysis by *FE Week*

News

Early-monitoring visits find a quarter of ap

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Exclusive

A quarter of apprenticeship providers that have received early-monitoring visits from Ofsted so far have been rated as making 'insufficient progress'.

The inspectorate has published 90 of its new early-monitoring visit reports since they began in March this year, and 22 of these have been found to be 'insufficient' in at least one category.

Of the 20,298 apprentices in providers assessed under the new visits, 4,914 (24 per cent) are receiving training from providers that have been found to be 'insufficient' in one or more category.

In August, the Education and Skills Funding Agency confirmed that any new apprenticeship provider which Ofsted deemed to be making 'insufficient' progress would be barred from taking on new apprentices, either directly or through subcontracting arrangements.

The ban will continue until the provider receives a full inspection, which should take place within a year, and has been awarded at least a grade three for its apprenticeship provision. The ESFA can overrule this guidance only if it identifies an "exceptional extenuating circumstance".

Providers are rated on whether they are meeting the requirements of apprenticeship provision, and the quality of their training and safeguarding, with some also graded on their adult-education provision. There are three possible results: insufficient progress, reasonable progress or significant progress.

Fourteen of the 90 reports published so far have included at least one 'significant' rating, accounting for 3,415 learners (16 per cent).

Just three providers have received the highest possible grade of 'significant progress' in every category – the National Logistics Academy, WhiteHat Group and Marshall of Cambridge Aerospace – accounting for only 415 learners.

In comparison, six have received the lowest possible grade, accounting for 1,110 learners. Premier People Solutions, Develop-U, Construction Gateway, NC Training, Care Training Solutions and Key6 Group have all been rated as making 'insufficient progress' in every category.

So far, the ESFA has held true to its word and enforced a ban on all 20 providers which received at least one 'insufficient' rating in reports published up until October 25.

Two providers have been rated 'insufficient' since October 25, BPP University and Premier People Solutions.

Skills minister Anne Milton exclusively revealed to *FE Week* that the ESFA had decided to terminate its levy contract with Premier after the damning inspection report revealed unsafe recruitment practices for teachers who subsequently trained apprentices in government departments. This means Premier

will be removed from the register of apprenticeship providers in December.

However, the fate of BPP University, part of the global BPP Professional Education Group, is still unclear. Even if BPP University is banned, the BPP group appears on RoATP another three times – as BPP Holdings, BPP Professional Education and BPP Actuarial Education – and none of these companies would be affected by a ban.

Any ban from Ofsted would also not include its level six and seven apprenticeship provision, which falls under the remit of the Office for Students. A spokesperson for OfS said it was "aware of the issue" and working with Ofsted and the Department for Education to address it.

Ofsted has received £5.4 million in government funding to carry out its early-monitoring visits of all new apprenticeship providers, which are thought to number as many as 1,200.

Learner numbers were not available for three providers: Moy Park, University of Suffolk and Sporting Futures Training (UK).

Labour accuses government of 'slipping out' damning Ofsted monitoring report during Brexit announcements

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Exclusive

Labour has accused the government of "slipping out" a damning report that raises huge concerns about the security risk posed by a government apprenticeship provider on the same day as the Brexit announcement.

The cabinet office-approved provider, which trained hundreds of apprentices in offices including the Department for Work and Pensions, HM Revenue and Customs and the Home Office, was slated as 'insufficient' across the board in an Ofsted monitoring visit published on Thursday.

The report found that the recruitment processes followed by Premier People Solutions Limited, which trades as Premier Partnership, were "not safe enough" and warned leaders and managers "cannot be sure that their members of staff are safe to work in the sensitive environments".

Anne Milton, the skills minister, confirmed exclusively to *FE Week* that the Education and Skills Funding Agency had terminated Premier's levy agreement just three weeks after the damning inspection, and two days before it was published.

"With effect from November 13, the ESFA terminated the levy agreement of Premier People Solutions Limited. The provider has been given 30 days' notice and the agreement will end on December 12," she said.

"Our overriding priority is to protect the apprentices to ensure minimum disruption to their learning."

However, Labour has accused the government of sneaking out the report on the same day as the Brexit announcement to try to detract attention from its findings.

Angela Rayner, shadow secretary of state for education, said: "These revelations, slipped out on the same day as the Brexit announcement, raise serious concerns about both the Tories' apprenticeships programme and their management of government itself.

"That the government's preferred provider of apprentices to its own departments has been found inadequate across the board is a stark reminder that they are failing to deliver high-quality apprenticeships for all those who want them.

"But it is also deeply alarming that there were staff working across the public sector with no assurances that it was safe for them to access sensitive information."

She added: "Ministers must come clean on how this happened, what steps will be taken to provide new training providers and what assessment has been made of potential security risks arising from these disturbing events."

The cabinet office confirmed the government departments included HMRC, the DWP and the Home Office, including the UK Visas and Immigration service.

When asked about the Ofsted criticisms concerning security, a spokesperson said it was for individual departments to comment.

She said all affected civil-service apprentices "will be able to continue their education and training as normal after this change in training provider".

Premier has been delivering apprenticeships to public-sector departments for over six months. It had 686 apprentices at the time of the Ofsted visit, and all but five were on the level three public service delivery officer standard.

It will now be removed from the register of apprenticeship providers. Usually when a provider is rated 'insufficient' after an Ofsted monitoring

Angela Rayner

visit it only receives a temporary ban on recruiting new starts until a full inspection can be carried out within a year.

The Ofsted report warned that leaders and managers "do not have safe enough recruitment procedures".

"They do not hold references for too many of the trainers who they employ to work with apprentices. Leaders apply for references, but if they are not returned, they do not pursue them. In addition, they accept references that are not from the trainer's most recent previous employer.

"As a result, leaders and managers cannot be sure that their members of staff are safe to work in the sensitive environments of the employers for whom their apprentices work."

It also found that government departments were failing to release apprentices for the off-the-job training they are entitled to, largely due to "high workloads".

David Pearson, managing director at Premier, said the provider had faced "considerable challenges" around learners being released for training.

"I believed this is the key reason for our monitoring result and removal from RoATP," he told *FE Week*.

"Premier Partnership takes safeguarding extremely seriously and Ofsted noted that all of our team are appropriately trained, and our policies and procedures are sound and implemented."

News

pprenticeship providers to be ‘insufficient’

New apprenticeship provider Ofsted monitoring visits, as at 15 November 2018

Provider name	Ofsted visit	Published	Apprentices	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	RoAPT type	RoAPT status
Key6 Group Limited	15/02/2018	15/03/2018	208	IP	IP	IP	Main	Banned from starts
London College of Apprenticeship Training	28/02/2018	05/04/2018	360	SP	RP	RP	Main	
Jigsaw Training (J&S Blackhurst Ltd)	15/03/2018	10/04/2018	281	RP	RP	RP	Main	
North West Ambulance Service NHS Trust	13/04/2018	01/05/2018	169	RP	RP	RP	Employer	
Quest Vocational Training Ltd	19/04/2018	11/05/2018	172	RP	RP	RP	Main	
A R C Academy UK Limited	12/04/2018	17/05/2018	221	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Virgin Trains Sales Limited	25/04/2018	17/05/2018	96	SP	RP	RP	Employer	
Mooreskills Ltd	12/04/2018	21/05/2018	223	IP	IP	RP	Main	Banned from starts
Lean Education and Development Ltd	25/04/2018	21/05/2018	475	SP	SP	RP	Main	
Apprentice Team Ltd	12/04/2018	22/05/2018	176	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Mears Learning Limited	12/04/2018	30/05/2018	53	IP	RP	RP	Main	Banned from starts
Learndirect Apprenticeships	26/04/2018	31/05/2018	3900	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Watertrain	19/04/2018	13/06/2018	192	IP	IP	RP	Main	Banned from starts
Peacocks Stores Ltd	10/05/2018	15/06/2018	144	IP	IP	RP	Main	Banned from starts
CQM Training and Consultancy Limited	10/05/2018	19/06/2018	298	RP	SP	RP	Main	
Group Horizon Limited	24/05/2018	19/06/2018	97	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Ginger Nut Media Ltd	26/04/2018	22/06/2018	98	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Youth Force Limited	06/06/2018	25/06/2018	130	RP	RP	RP	Main	
GLP Training	03/05/2018	26/06/2018	150	SP	SP	RP	Main	
Let Me Play Limited	23/05/2018	27/06/2018	119	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Norse Commercial Services Limited	03/05/2018	27/06/2018	61	SP	RP	RP	Main	
Impact Futures Training Limited	06/06/2018	06/07/2018	161	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Northwest Education and Training Limited	26/06/2018	09/07/2018	129	RP	RP	RP	Main	
FWD Training and Consultancy	06/06/2018	11/07/2018	650	RP	RP	RP	Main	
SIGTA Limited	21/06/2018	11/07/2018	26	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Bauer Radio Limited	26/06/2018	18/07/2018	120	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Sccu Ltd	07/06/2018	19/07/2018	87	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Deere Apprenticeships Ltd	12/07/2018	27/07/2018	91	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Buttercups Training Limited	06/07/2018	01/08/2018	344	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Flight Centre (UK) Limited	12/07/2018	03/08/2018	136	RP	RP	RP	Employer	
KPMG Limited Liability Partnership	12/07/2018	06/08/2018	366	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Rentokil Initial (1986) Ltd	18/07/2018	13/08/2018	178	RP	RP	RP	Employer	
Halifax Opportunities Trust	20/07/2018	14/08/2018	22	SP	SP	RP	Main	
National Logistics Academy Ltd	11/07/2018	15/08/2018	107	SP	SP	SP	Main	
University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust	19/07/2018	15/08/2018	114	RP	RP	RP	Main	
The Education and Skills Partnership Limited	16/07/2018	16/08/2018	175	IP	IP	RP	Main	Banned from starts
N A College Trust	13/07/2018	16/08/2018	485	SP	SP	RP	Main	
Nuffield Health	26/07/2018	16/08/2018	80	RP	RP	RP	Employer	
Corndel Limited	12/07/2018	18/08/2018	980	RP	SP	RP	Main	
Moy Park Limited	02/08/2018	21/08/2018	Doesn't say	RP	RP	RP	Employer	
N-Gaged Training and Recruitment Ltd	02/08/2018	22/08/2018	101	RP	RP	IP	Main	Banned from starts
Utilities Academy Limited	18/07/2018	22/08/2018	96	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust	02/07/2018	24/08/2018	119	RP	RP	RP	Main	
KnowledgeBrief Limited	26/07/2018	29/08/2018	180	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust	26/07/2018	31/08/2018	308	RP	RP	RP	Employer	
University College Of Estate Management	09/08/2018	05/09/2018	100	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Firebrand Training Limited	02/08/2018	06/09/2018	180	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Management Academy Ltd	19/07/2018	06/09/2018	10	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Estio Training Limited	08/08/2018	07/09/2018	592	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Unique Training Solutions Limited	01/08/2018	10/09/2018	147	IP	RP	RP	Main	Banned from starts
East Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust	26/09/2018	10/09/2018	107	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Fuel Learning Limited	02/08/2018	10/09/2018	270	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Entrust Support Services Limited	09/08/2018	11/09/2018	137	IP	IP	RP	Main	Banned from starts
Knights Training Academy Limited	15/08/2018	11/09/2018	37	RP	RP	RP	Main	
University of Suffolk	11/07/2018	11/09/2018	Doesn't say	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Care Training Solutions Limited	09/08/2018	14/09/2018	13	IP	IP	IP	Main	Banned from starts
icount Training	13/08/2018	17/09/2018	8	RP	RP	RP		
Mitre Group Limited	09/08/2018	18/09/2018	89	IP	IP	RP	Main	Banned from starts
Securitas Security Services (Uk) Limited	17/08/2018	19/09/2018	650	IP	IP	RP	Employer	Banned from starts
ABM Training (UK) Limited	23/08/2018	19/09/2018	100	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Darwin Training Limited	21/08/2018	21/09/2018	43	RP	RP	SP	Main	
Ensis Solutions	08/08/2018	01/10/2018	123	RP	IP	RP	Main	Banned from starts
The NVQ Training Centre	04/10/2018	03/10/2018	162	RP	RP	RP	Main	
The Pennine Acute Hospitals National Health Service Trust	12/09/2018	03/10/2018	52	RP	RP	RP	Employer	
Sporting Futures Training (UK) Ltd	12/09/2018	03/10/2018	Doesn't say	RP	RP	RP	Main	
GTG Training	13/09/2018	04/10/2018	196	IP	IP	RP	Main	Banned from starts
Bright Direction Training Limited	12/09/2018	04/10/2018	19	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Kashmir Youth Project	11/09/2018	05/10/2018	53	IP	IP	RP	Main	Banned from starts
Penshaw View Training Limited	18/09/2017	05/10/2018	66	RP	RP	RP		
Train Together	12/09/2018	05/10/2018	119	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Seymour Davies Ltd	13/09/2018	09/10/2018	39	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Tees, Eesk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust	12/09/2018	10/10/2018	218	RP	RP	RP	Employer	
NC Training	18/09/2018	11/10/2018	73	IP	IP	IP	Main	Banned from starts
Partnership Training Limited	19/09/2018	11/10/2018	330	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust	26/09/2018	12/10/2018	25	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Whitehat Group Limited	15/06/2018	12/10/2018	188	SP	SP	SP	Main	
First Intuition Limited	29/08/2018	15/10/2018	79	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Invisage Limited	19/09/2018	17/10/2018	147	IP	IP	RP	Main	Banned from starts
Construction Gateway	13/09/2018	19/10/2018	79	IP	IP	IP	Main	Banned from starts
NSL Limited	12/09/2018	19/10/2018	124	IP	IP	RP	Main	Banned from starts
The Recalvi Enterprise Ltd	20/09/2018	22/10/2018	30	SP	RP	SP	Main	
Develop-U	19/09/2018	25/10/2018	51	IP	IP	IP	Main	Banned from starts
Qualitrain Limited	27/09/2018	25/10/2018	332	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Accountancy Learning Ltd	25/09/2018	29/10/2018	51	RP	RP	RP	Main	
BPP University	27/10/2018	31/10/2018	1250	IP	IP	RP	Main	
Develop Training Limited	02/08/2018	31/10/2018	56	RP	RP	RP	Main	
C2C Training Limited	18/10/2018	08/11/2018	69	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Manufacturing Excellence Limited	09/10/2018	12/11/2018	400	RP	RP	RP	Main	
Premier People Solutions Limited	23/10/2018	15/11/2018	686	IP	IP	IP	Main	*will be removed on Dec 12
Marshall of Cambridge Aerospace Limited	05/10/2018	15/11/2018	120	SP	SP	SP	Employer	

IP = Insufficient progress RP = Reasonable progress SP = Significant progress

Theme 1 = Meeting requirements of apprenticeship provision Theme 2 = Ensuring apprentices benefit from high quality training Theme 3 = Safeguarding

News

What is behind the spate of re

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An exodus of college leaders has rocked the FE sector over the past two months. Meanwhile, regulations that will allow colleges to go bust for the first time will come into effect in just two and a half months' time. FE Week asks: is there a connection?

Garry Phillips' resignation from City College Plymouth on Tuesday [see below] follows that of other high-profile leaders, including Dame Asha Khemka, former principal of West Nottinghamshire College, and Joe Docherty, ex-boss of college mega-group NCG.

In total eight leaders of some of the nation's biggest colleges have stepped aside in the space of 50 days.

Between them the eight colleges had a combined income of £439 million in 2016/17, according to Education and Skills Funding Agency figures.

That gives an average income of £59 million – more than twice the sector average of £22.2 million – with average learner and staff numbers also above average at 16,000 and 950 respectively.

The spate of departures [see next page] comes ahead of the introduction of new rules that will mean colleges will be allowed to go bust for the first time.

These had been set to take effect this year, but a spokesperson for the Department for Education has now confirmed that "due to parliamentary scheduling, the new insolvency regime will now come into force on 31 January 2019".

"New rules will mean that colleges will be allowed to go bust"

Half of the leaders to have left were in charge of colleges in active intervention for financial health while warning signs suggested the remaining four may have been heading that way – indicating that their departures are part of a crackdown on poor leadership ahead of the regime's introduction.

Speaking in parliament last month, the skills minister Anne Milton stressed the importance of "outstanding leadership" to the "financial resilience of the FE sector".

"We want every college to have great leaders, both principals and governing bodies," she said during a debate in support of the draft further-education bodies (insolvency) regulations 2018 – part of the insolvency regime – on October 31.

"Leaders that manage their colleges effectively will be key to preventing financial distress," Ms Milton said.

The DfE has previously made it clear that once the insolvency regime comes into effect, the exceptional financial-support tap will be switched off.

This is cash, available as a grant or loan, for colleges that are "encountering financial, or cashflow, difficulties that put the continuation of provision at risk".


Richard Atkins

Another form of financial support for struggling colleges, the restructuring facility, closed for applications last month.

This was originally intended to fund changes resulting from the area reviews of post-16 education and training, which ended in March 2017, but has been increasingly used to prop up failing colleges – although both the DfE and Ms Milton have repeatedly denied this.

Hull College reportedly received an eye-watering £54 million earlier this year, after reporting a deficit of close to £13 million in one year.

And Lambeth College is dependent on the £29 million it requested from the facility to keep it afloat until its merger with London South Bank University goes ahead later this year.

In an expert piece in this week's paper, Julian Gravatt, the Association of Colleges' deputy chief executive, said the "restructuring deals have mainly been used to pay down debt and to replace bank loans with ones from government".

"This is about clearing up messes. Big ones," he said.

"People in top jobs in every sort of organisation make mistakes. In the college-restructuring cases, it's the successors who have had to sort things out."

Both Ms Milton and the FE commissioner, Richard Atkins, have said they expect the number of colleges that actually go bust will be very small.

"Of course I don't expect large numbers of colleges to become insolvent," Ms Milton wrote in her monthly *FE Week* column last week.

"I know that some colleges do face challenges and it is vital that their boards are able to take decisive action and provide effective leadership to help improve matters."

Appealing to college boards directly, she added: "If you think you're heading into financial difficulties, I'd encourage you to tell us early and we can talk about what kind of support might be available."

Mr Atkins has previously told *FE Week* he expected that he and his team would be called in to try to find a solution for a college in danger of going insolvent.

A DfE spokesperson said it would be publishing guidance for governors ahead of the insolvency regime taking effect.

"The Education and Skills Funding Agency and the FE commissioner will continue to play a role in supporting colleges with their financial health and resilience," he said.

Principal who jumped ship before financial failings exposed leaves his new college

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"External pressures" that had become a "material distraction" were blamed for the resignation this week of a principal who had jumped ship from his previous college before its financial failings were exposed.

Garry Phillips' departure from City College Plymouth on Tuesday came days after members of the FE commissioner's team visited the college, and a week and a half after a damning report into his leadership of Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College was published.

His resignation was confirmed in a statement from the college's chair, Pauline Odulinski, hours after *FE Week* broke the news.

"Regrettably, external pressures on the corporation and Garry have become a material distraction to the college's core purpose of supporting its students," she said.

Ms Odulinski said Mr Phillips had been appointed "following a rigorous process of selection facilitated by an external company and for totally personal reasons decided to accept the corporation's offer of employment".

Since taking up the role, in July, Mr Phillips "did a great deal of good work", including putting in place an "effective financial-improvement plan, which the corporation believes will place the college's finances on a sound footing".

Ben Manning, currently vice principal, has stepped up to acting principal until a replacement for Mr Phillips is appointed.

FE Week has asked the college if it was Mr Phillips' decision to resign or if he was forced, and if he has received a payoff, but we have yet to receive a response.

The FE commissioner's team visited the college for a two-day diagnostic assessment on November 8 and 9, according to an all-staff email sent by Mr Phillips last week and seen by *FE Week*.

That email said the visit was prompted by the college being in early intervention for financial health by the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

It was consulting on a proposed restructure that could see up to 70 jobs being cut.

"A proposed restructure could see up to 70 jobs cut at the college"

At the same time, members of the University and College Union at the college overwhelmingly backed a vote of no confidence in Mr Phillips' leadership on Friday, with 349 out of 350 members voting against him.

UCU regional official Philippa Davey said: "Following Mr Phillips' departure, it is time to halt his redundancy plans and for the governors to work with us to move forwards.

"It is frustrating that staff were forced to deliver such a damning no-confidence vote in Phillips and the governors for action to be taken. We now need to all work together to help move this fantastic college forward."

Luke Pollard, MP for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport, tweeted on Tuesday that Mr Phillips was "right" to have resigned as his position had "become mired with controversy".

"We now need a leadership that will recognise the excellence among its staff and put the college back on the right track," he said.

The FE commissioner's report into EHWLC, which Mr Phillips led until he took up his current role, published on November 2, revealed a catalogue of leadership and governance failings.

According to the report, which was based on visits to the college in August, its financial situation was so bad it would be "unable to meet its commitments from early October without support".

The true picture of the college's financial difficulties did not become apparent until March this year – the same month in which the finance director left and Mr Phillips announced his departure.

Governors, senior managers, staff and unions all reported feeling "kept in the dark" or "misled" about the situation, according to the report.

Despite EHWLC's financial difficulties, Mr Phillips received a 31 per cent pay rise in 2016/17, up to £260,000 – making him the fifth highest-paid principal in the country.

An *FE Week* freedom of information request has revealed that Mr Phillips' salary at Plymouth was between £160,000 and £170,000 – an increase of up to 17 per cent on his predecessor's £145,000 salary.

esignations of college leaders?

Joe Docherty
NCG
Date left: 10/10/2018

Salary (2016/17)
£227,000

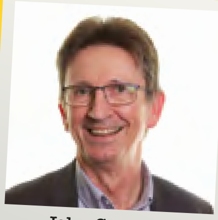
COLLEGE SIZE 2016/17:

Income	Staff (FTE)
£131.2m	2,122
Learners	**Deficit/Surplus**
36,888	£72,000

INTERVENTION:

FE commissioner	ESFA
No	No

Joe Docherty was the third high profile and highly paid college boss to resign with immediate effect, on October 10. The move followed a turbulent year for the country's largest college group, which included being downgraded by Ofsted to 'requires improvement', a fall in its achievement rates, mass redundancies and a series of staff strikes. Mr Docherty was paid a £227,000 salary in 2016/17, along with £33,000 in pension contributions and £21,000 from benefits in kind.



John Connolly
RNN Group
Date left: 15/10/2018

Salary (2016/17)
£144,000

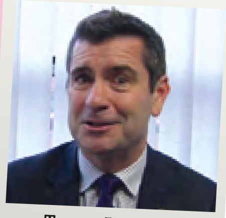
COLLEGE SIZE 2016/17:

Income	Staff (FTE)
£47m	993.71
Learners	**Deficit/Surplus**
17,650	£867,665

INTERVENTION:

FE commissioner	ESFA
No	No

John Connolly stepped down with immediate effect from the top job at the RNN Group on October 15, after concluding he was no longer the "right person" to lead it. The group, made up of Rotherham, North Nottinghamshire and Dearne Valley colleges, is the 23rd largest college in the country, with an income of £47.1 million in 2016/17. It made a surplus of almost £900,000 that year, but according to board minutes from March this year it's projected to make a loss of £1.3 million in 2018/19.



Terry Jones
Peterborough Regional College
Date left: 18/10/2018

Salary (2016/17)
£120,000

COLLEGE SIZE 2016/17:

Income	Staff (FTE)
£26.8m	576
Learners	**Deficit/Surplus**
5,592	-£955,000

INTERVENTION:

FE commissioner	ESFA
No	No

Terry Jones stood down as principal of Peterborough Regional College on October 18, having agreed with the board that a "different skill set is now required". The college had an income of £26.8 million in 2016/17, but generated a deficit of almost £1 million. It's not clear if the college has had any intervention since then, either by the FE commissioner or the Education and Skills Funding Agency. Mr Jones' resignation as principal took effect immediately, but he continues as chief executive until the end of the year.

Andrew Cleaves
Birmingham Metropolitan College
Date left: 24/09/2018

Salary (2016/17)
£266,000

COLLEGE SIZE 2016/17:

Income	Staff (FTE)
£61.3m	947.34
Learners	**Deficit/Surplus**
16,287	-£2.4m

INTERVENTION:

FE commissioner	ESFA
No	Yes

Andrew Cleaves, the second mostly highly paid principal in 2016/17, resigned with immediate effect from Birmingham Metropolitan College at the end of September. He earned a massive £266,000 in 2016/17, despite the college owing almost £14 million in exceptional financial support cash – more than any other college. Its total debt for the year was £23.4 million, and it has held a notice of concern for financial health since July 2015, when it also received a visit from the FE commissioner.

Dame Asha Khemka
West Nottinghamshire College
Date left: 01/10/2018

Salary (2016/17)
£262,000

COLLEGE SIZE 2016/17:

Income	Staff (FTE)
£51m	770
Learners	**Deficit/Surplus**
26,000	-£3.9m

INTERVENTION:

FE commissioner	ESFA
Yes	Yes

One of the best-paid principals in the country, Dame Asha Khemka, resigned from West Nottinghamshire College at the beginning of October, just weeks after the scale of the college's financial crisis was revealed. It received a £2.1 million bailout from the Education and Skills Funding Agency in July, which FE Week reported in September was requested just 48 hours before it would have run out of money. Earlier in the year the college cut more than 100 jobs in an effort to make £2.7 million savings, which it blamed on changes in apprenticeship subcontracting rules.

Raoul Humphreys
Cornwall College
Date left: 01/11/2018

Salary (2016/17)
£139,000

COLLEGE SIZE 2016/17:

Income	Staff (FTE)
£66.5m	1,206
Learners	**Deficit/Surplus**
11,764	-£35,000

INTERVENTION:

FE commissioner	ESFA
Yes	Yes

Raoul Humphreys resigned with immediate effect from the top job at Cornwall College on November 1 to "expedite" its government bailout. The college received £3.5 million in emergency government funding in December last year, after it ended 2016/17 with £2.25 million less in the bank than planned. Its operating deficit for that year was £35,000, down from £4 million the previous year. The college was "close to finalising a re-financing package" from the restructuring facility at the time of Mr Humpreys' resignation.

Garry Phillips
City College Plymouth
Date left: 13/11/2018

Salary (2017/18)
£160 - £170,000

COLLEGE SIZE 2016/17:

Income	Staff (FTE)
£30.8m	596
Learners	**Deficit/Surplus**
8,034	-£1.3m

INTERVENTION:

FE commissioner	ESFA
Yes	No

The "external pressures" on Garry Phillips that created a "material distraction" were blamed by City College Plymouth when he stood down with immediate effect on Tuesday. Mr Phillips had been heavily criticised by the FE commissioner in a recent report into his former college, Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College. That prompted concerns at Plymouth, given its precarious financial position: it's in early intervention by the Education and Skills Funding Agency and had a £1.3 million deficit in 2016/17.

Maria Thompson
Havering College
Date left: 28/09/2018

Salary (2016/17)
£142,249

COLLEGE SIZE 2016/17:

Income	Staff (FTE)
£23.9m	409
Learners	**Deficit/Surplus**
5,828	-£3m

INTERVENTION:

FE commissioner	ESFA
Uncertain	Yes

Maria Thompson retired with immediate effect from financially troubled Havering College at the end of September, at the same time as a federation ahead of a planned merger with New City College took effect. The college was hit with a financial notice to improve in June, after it reported a £3 million loss in 2016/17. However, a college spokesperson said Ms Thompson's retirement wasn't connected to its financial problems, and had instead been known to the board for some time.

News

Protests at the deadline for sixth-form colleges' conversion to academies

BILLY CAMDEN
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Exclusive

The Sixth Form Colleges Association is urging the government to keep the option for its members to convert to academy status open indefinitely, as the "arbitrary" deadline for doing so fast approaches.

Becoming an academy, and in doing so enjoying the luxury of not paying VAT, has been a possibility for nearly all SFCs since former chancellor George Osborne changed the rules in November 2015.

However, the window of opportunity closes in March when the £726 million restructuring facility – a fund designed to help colleges implement area-review changes – ends and reverts back to the Treasury.

Bill Watkin, the chief executive of the SFCA, said this "cannot be right" and there is no "logical reason for rejecting colleges after an arbitrary date".

"The government must continue to support those colleges that wish to academise after March – after all, some, such as the Catholic colleges, have not yet been free to adopt academy status because of a technical barrier that is no fault of theirs," he told *FE Week*.

"The restructuring facility has not been deployed as much as was originally envisaged and should be extended."

Guidance on applying to become an academy for SFCs, updated in January 2017, confirms that the option is "linked to the area-review process".

It adds, however, that the government will "consider in the light of experience from the area reviews whether further opportunities to apply should be available once the reviews are complete.

"But this opportunity does not exist at the moment, and colleges which wish to submit an application will need to do so as part of the relevant area review."

When asked whether the Department for Education has made a decision on allowing SFCs to academise beyond March 2019, a spokesperson would only tell *FE Week* that the option is being looked at and more information would be available in due course.

Becoming an academy means SFCs no longer have to pay VAT – letting them off an average annual bill of £385,000.

The first to convert was Hereford SFC in March last year. Nineteen have since followed suit, leaving 62 designated SFCs. Three of these are, however, in the process of converting.

In an update from the ESFA about the restructuring facility last month, it was revealed that 30 applications to the fund have been made from 31 sixth-form colleges "expressing plans to convert to academy status", but the "majority have not been allocated any funding to support this conversion".

A group of 14 which are Catholic-run have been completely prevented from converting due to their religious character, which would not be maintained under current government rules.

If they converted, they would lose protections in areas of curriculum, acts of worship and governance. The SFCA and Catholic Education Service have been trying to get the government to add a clause to the education bill to rectify this, but the DfE has not obliged.

Mr Watkin said "some more colleges are still interested in the possibility of converting" but academisation has "not always been an easy process".

"The ESFA and the Transaction Unit [which administers the restructuring facility] have had to come up with solutions to unanticipated conversion problems; regional schools commissioners have had to adapt to a new and unfamiliar landscape; and pioneering colleges have had to navigate an untrodden path and overcome some significant snagging issues," he told *FE Week*.

"RSCs and the national schools commissioner were not always on the same page and there were regional variations; some gave permission to colleges to become single-academy trusts, some insisted


Bill Watkin

on a multi-academy trust (even if an unpopulated MAT); some then insisted on a populated MAT and now some are saying that there are already too many MATs in the region, they don't want another one, so a college must join an existing MAT."

He added: "None of this was explored at the time when the government opened up the academy option to colleges as a way of offering VAT relief."

Provider challenges inspection after Ofsted found learners 'unaware' they took out an FE loan

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Exclusive

A provider has been slammed with a grade four after Ofsted found its 500 learners received "no teaching" and some were "not aware" they had taken out an advanced learner loan.

Harrow-based Academy Training Group was branded 'inadequate' across the board in its first-ever inspection, published today, which claimed the provider has "no strengths" and does not use funding "appropriately".

However, the provider challenged the judgment before it was made public and is continuing to do so. It insists that Ofsted "lacks understanding of the environment we work under and the constraints placed on us" to deliver loans provision.

At the time of inspection Academy Training Group was training nearly 550 adults, who fund their courses using the government's advance learning loans, in areas including carpentry, fenestration, occupational work supervision and painting and decorating.

The provider has received £4.2 million from the ESFA ever since 2014 to deliver this provision.

Ofsted found that staff do not provide learners, many of whom speak English as a second language, with "appropriate information about the qualifications they are enrolled on or the advanced learning loan prior to the start of the course".

They added that "too many learners are not aware that they have taken out an advanced learning loan to pay for their course and that they are required to pay this back".

The provider's operations director, Paul Marsh, hit back at this "widely biased" finding, claiming that the Student Loans Company has vetted its recruitment process itself.

"It is explained to learners through the registration process that it [the qualification] is a loan," he told *FE Week*.

"They have to apply for it themselves through the SLC loans portal, and there are various checks they do."

He admitted that the provider has had a "very small number of learners who have queried whether it is a loan or not" since 2014, but the SLC "has shown them the documentation and cleared it up".

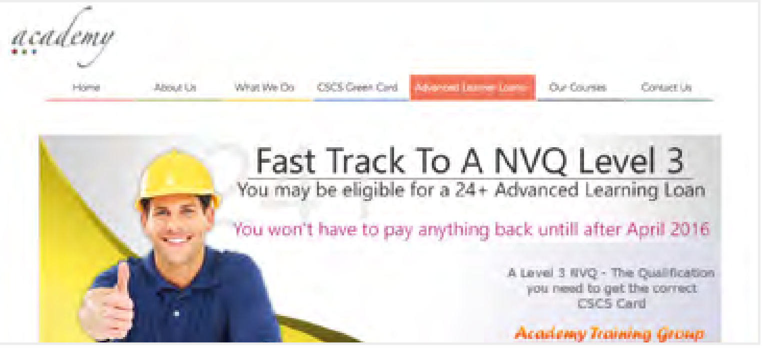
An SLC spokesperson said: "Anyone taking out an advanced learner loan signs a declaration that makes it clear that it is a loan that is repayable. Both the online and paper applications make it clear that the learner is applying for a loan, and they are issued with a notice of entitlement which confirms that a loan has been granted.

"Payments are not released to a provider unless this signed declaration has been received and recorded on our systems."

Ofsted also criticised the provider for having "failed to establish an appropriate training programme".

"Learners do not develop any new or more complex construction skills," inspectors said. "No teaching takes place and assessors merely accredit learners for what they already know or can do as a result of working in the construction industry."

Mr Marsh claimed it was not the job



of the provider to teach the learners new technical skills.

"These guys are not apprentices, they are very experienced workers who have been doing their trade for 10 years but just haven't got their qualification," he told *FE Week*.

"What we are largely doing is verifying their skills. Unlike a college, we're working on construction sites where we have no authority."

He claimed that ESFA officials have visited the provider themselves and "said our work was exemplary in terms of making sure the loans were appropriate".

Ofsted said the report is "clear about our findings and judgments, and we stand by them entirely".

The provider has a £1.6 million Education and Skills Funding Agency loans contract for 2018/19. The agency typically gives providers a three-month termination warning notice following a grade four.

A Department for Education spokesperson said: "We will always take action to protect learners if a training provider is not fit for purpose. We are currently assessing Ofsted's findings and will be contacting Academy Training Group Limited to set out the action we will be taking in due course."

The spokesperson would not confirm or deny whether the ESFA had visited the provider itself.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Introducing...

JUDITH DOYLE CBE

Principal and CEO, Gateshead College

CATH MURRAY
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FE Week **travelled to Newcastle to meet the college principal who was recognised in the New Year's honours for her services to skills education in the north-east, and who's spent her entire career in the same institution**

Two images of Judith Doyle stick with me – long after I've walked the Tyne Bridge back north of the river from Gateshead College's main campus, paused to take in the stunning view of the setting sun, and caught the fast train back to London.

The first is of Doyle's home growing up – bursting with people – friends, cousins piling in on top of the four kids, their "very hospitable, very larger than life" shipyard-engineer dad, and their mam in the corner, bashing out tunes on the piano. "She's quite shy, my mam," says the Gateshead College principal, affectionately. "She used to say, 'I'm not playing the piano'. But she always ended up playing, so we used to have sing-songs. Just stuff that families do, you know. They don't do that now."

The second picture that sticks is of early-career Doyle, zooming from school to community centre, overseeing the community provision for Gateshead College. "I loved it – it was a challenge, I was always on the go – the car was the office," she recalls with a grin. "There were boxes everywhere."

Her pace quickens as the story progresses: "We taught everything from foreign languages to politics to sport to loads and loads of IT – it was 20 years ago and everyone was getting a PC, so I trained hundreds of people in Gateshead how to use Word and databases." They offered classes in schools and community centres all over Gateshead from 6-9 pm – which Doyle had to balance with the fact she had a husband and daughter at home. "One of the big comprehensives had a thousand learners coming to us, in term time. I used to be dark-haired," she quips, "That's why I'm this colour!"

We're sitting around a large table in a spacious office in the heart of the city. It's a gorgeous autumn afternoon and through the windows, glass and steel towers soar into blue skies. Just a stone's throw away are two major arts venues – the Sage Gateshead and the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art. There's a definite buzz to the place.

Doyle is unusual in that she's spent her entire career working her way up the ranks at the college she now leads. And despite managing a multi-million pound business, she manages to strike that balance between high-flying corporate CEO and someone you'd enjoy a night with in the pub.

Doyle receiving her CBE at Buckingham Palace

It was the role heading up community education that marked her transition from teacher to manager.

"There were people in the college who thought, 'That community stuff is rubbish'," recalls Doyle – and she took that as a personal challenge. "I'm very determined, and if I have a clarity to what I want to do, I can push on with it. And I had a point to prove about, 'This can be done'."

"We can't say something isn't working and then sit back and not do anything"

The job taught her the business elements of working in a college, such as "Why it's important to get the register done, so you can get your funding."

Her most important lesson, however, was how to build a solid, trustworthy team. "I identified very quickly who the stars were, so they became my team and I would come in and give them a nice lunch and all that... They were very loyal to me and I'd ask them to do crazy things at the last minute – they would have done anything." She says this without boasting, and I believe her.

Her outcomes spoke for themselves, and after managing community learning for three years, she moved into her first senior management role – overseeing teaching and learning, at a time when there was a growing awareness of the need to prioritise it. "It seems ridiculous now, that people weren't realising how important that was. I think it had been the case in schools, but colleges maybe had a different focus and different priorities.

"I was a teaching and learning specialist – that was my thing – I tried to promote that and gained a reputation for someone who championed it."

Two decades and several management posts later, she hasn't lost that focus. It's all about the quality of the product, she insists. "If everything in John Lewis was rubbish, there's no way they would be successful. The moment we think that other things are more important, then we'll stop being successful.

"Everything else, all these wonderful buildings and the wonderful things people say about us, it's just window dressing. If our students aren't successful, we're not spending public money for what it's intended."

Since taking over as principal, the college has gone from an Ofsted grade 3 to a grade 1, and now has the second highest achievement rate in the country.

"I'm absolutely a perfectionist," admits Doyle. "It's about standards and I think things should be done well. I get a little bit irritated sometimes, I don't like sloppiness, I don't like things being half-hearted."

She was awarded a CBE in the 2018 New Year's honours, in recognition of her contribution to skills education in the north-east – and took her mam, her daughter and her younger brother to Buckingham Palace to receive the award.

The college has almost 30,000 students across six campuses. So how does she keep tabs on what's going on?

"It's about consistent messages. It's about being visible," she replies.

"Consistency when I took over the college was something that we struggled with a little bit. I introduced a concept called One College, because we did have people who did feel out of it. Really, there was a separate organisation almost, at this campus.

"I've got a very high performing and loyal team, who buy in very much to what we do. We have fun. We tend not to take ourselves too seriously. We're serious about what we do, but we have a laugh."

One thing she's struggled to achieve, however, is working effectively with all the local schools. So when the skills minister put out a call to colleges to report schools that weren't complying with the Baker clause, Gateshead College did just that. "We can't say something isn't working and then if there's a request for 'what do you mean, help us,' you sit back and don't do

"I gained a reputation as someone who championed teaching and learning"

Doyle with the winners of the Gateshead College annual student and employee Edge Awards

anything," she says, matter-of-fact.

"I think it's an equality issue," she adds, emphatically – glancing first at her marketing manager as if to apologise in advance for the impending diatribe. "Those young people and their parents who most need that information – maybe they're second and third generation unemployed – they don't know the way out and they're relying on the schools to give them the information, because they trust them. And when they're not told about it and they go on a route that isn't right for them, and they miss the great opportunities we and other FE provision could have given them, then I think they're being denied what they need and I think that's an equality issue."

We've been chatting for so long that it's an hour later than Doyle thought it was when she last glanced at her watch. She's mortified. Having just insisted to me how important teaching and learning is to her, she's late for the teaching and learning governors meeting.

CV

GATESHEAD COLLEGE

Aug 2013 – Present
Principal and CEO

Jul 2009 – Jul 2013
Deputy principal

Jul 2006 – Jul 2009
Assistant principal: quality and performance

Jan 2004 – Jul 2006
Director of school of teaching and learning

Jan 2000 – Dec 2003
Community learning provision manager

1990 – 2000
Teacher of English, communications and teacher education

1987 – 2000
Teacher of English and employability skills

It's a personal thing

What do you do to switch off from work?

Shop! I do like a good shop, actually. I also see my mam. We watch *Strictly* together on Saturdays. I also like to cook. I'm a foodie. I'm obsessed with food. I like to read, and I'm a big *EastEnders* fan, I love that.

What's your favourite thing to read?

I like detective fiction. I like puzzles and mysteries. I've always been one to solve the problem. Ruth Rendell and Agatha Christie, I read them when I was about 10. All those kinds of things. But I'm reading LJ Ross at the moment, who's a bestselling local writer. They're all set in different parts of the north east, and it's easy to read. But they're good as well.

Have you got a favourite book of all time?

Everybody asks me that. I like *Wuthering Heights*, because it has very sentimental ... connotations. It's one of those things that as an English student kind of hooked me in. The idea was all very romantic and passionate, that kind of thing. I was of that age. I like *Jane Eyre* as well.

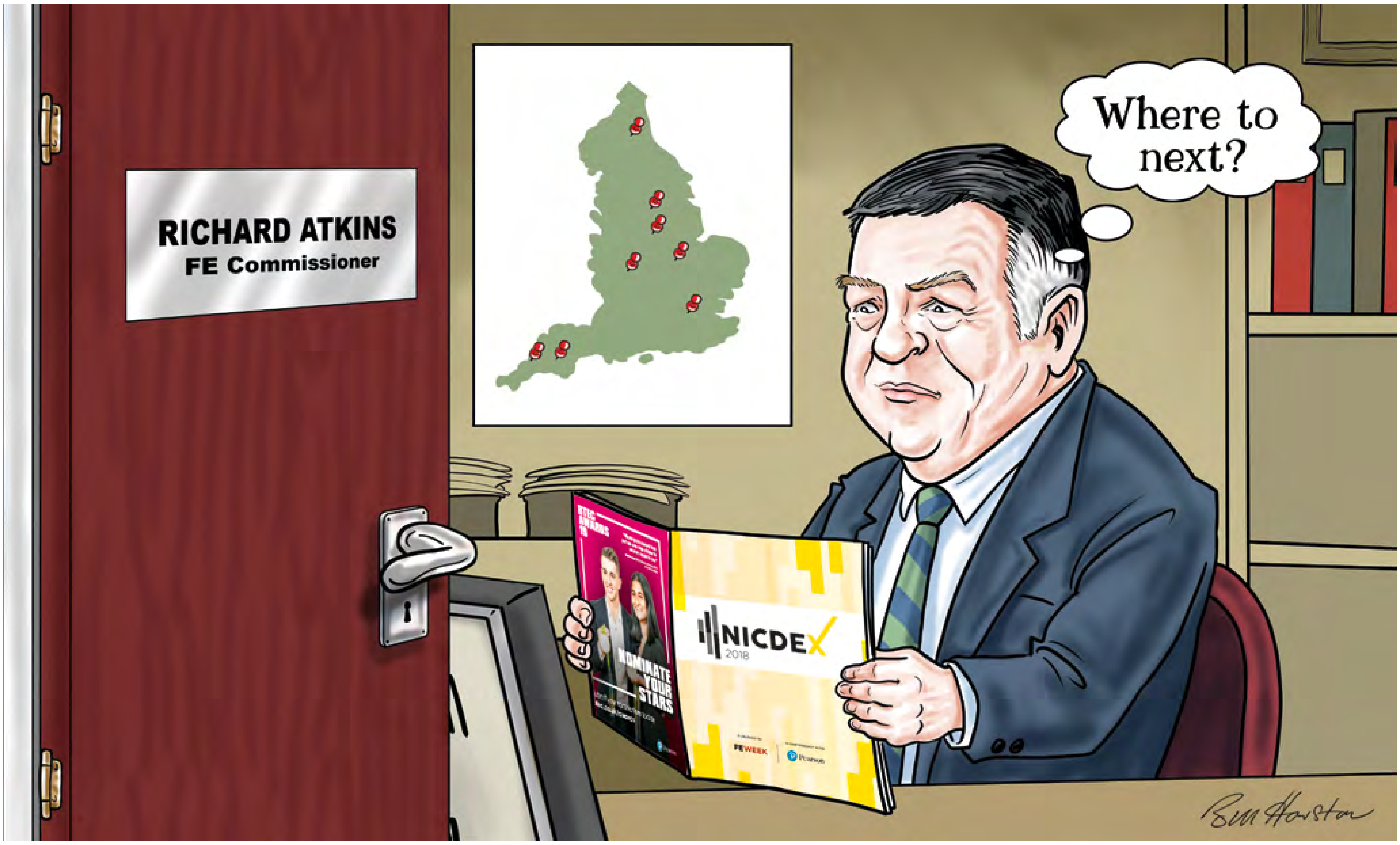
What flaw would you like to change about yourself?

Probably too many to mention. What flaw do I have? I think I overthink things. And I think I put myself under too much pressure, which often manifests itself as carrying that pressure to other people sometimes.

How do you cope under stress?

I like to be with my family. I like to spend time with my daughter. She is the absolute joy of my life. She lives in the south but I'll drive down there. She's an accountant. She graduated from Durham and went to PWC on the graduate programme – that's how she ended up in London. But now she works for the NHS, on NHS improvement.

News



Funding rate set to be slashed by a third for another popular management apprenticeship

PIPPA ALLEN-KINROSS
PIPPA@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Fears are growing for the future of a popular management apprenticeship as the government deliberates on whether to slash its funding by a third.

The level 4 associate project management standard is in line to have its funding rates cut from £9,000 a year to £6,000, according to the Association for Project Management which is campaigning to stop the reduction.

The standard had 180 starts in 2016/17, but provisional figures suggest this number rose to 2,005 starts in 2017/18.

The proposed cut is part of the Institute for Apprenticeships' funding band review, which began in May and covers 31 standards. A spokesperson for the IfA confirmed the government was deciding on the final funding for the associate project management standard, but would not confirm that it had proposed the £3,000 cut.

> "This proposed cut would render it financially non-viable for providers"

APM has warned that such a drastic fall in funding would render delivering the standard "a virtual impossibility" and has today written to skills minister Anne Milton urging her to reject the proposed cuts. It said initial estimates from employers suggest starts on the standard are set to rise to at least 2,600 next year if funding is not reduced.

APM, the chartered body for the project profession, said it has received backing from several high-profile corporations in its campaign to save the standard, including BT, British Airways, Royal Mail, Savills and awarding organisation NCFE.

Debbie Dore, chief executive of APM, said the proposed cut "would render it financially non-viable for providers to continue to run high-quality apprenticeship programmes.

"Ultimately this will result in a reduction of the talent pipeline and a very real impact on the UK Economy, which is heavily reliant on the project profession for success."

APM said it has consulted with employers who make up over 50 per cent of all project-management delivery, and the evidence suggests businesses "will simply not be willing to enrol apprenticeships on to lower-quality programmes and will be unable to afford to stump up the 33 per cent shortfall themselves".

A spokesperson for the IfA said: "The recommended reviewed funding band for the level 4 associate project manager standard is with the secretary of state for consideration, and we cannot comment further at this time."

> "Ultimately this will result in a reduction of the talent pipeline"

In October the final funding bands for 12 of the standards under review were signed off. Of these, seven had their funding cut, two saw an increase and three standards remained the same.

However, a decision has not yet been made about the fate of three of the most popular management standards after the employer group behind them launched an appeal against proposed cuts.

The level 5 operations/departmental manager standard, which made up two thirds of all level 5 standards last year, was set to drop from £9,000 to £7,000, while the level 3 team leader/supervisor standard, which accounted for a fifth of all level 3 starts, faced a cut from £5,000 to £4,500. The level 6 chartered manager degree apprenticeship could also see its funding cap cut from £27,000 to £22,000.

The outcome of the appeal is still pending.

FE Week revealed last week that the proportion of learners taking management apprenticeships has doubled in the last two years, with just 10 management standards now making up a fifth of all apprenticeship starts on standards.

ACHIEVING MORE FOR

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GLASGOW CLYDE COLLEGE

Glasgow Clyde College is a welcoming, ambitious and innovative college committed to seeing potential, finding solutions and achieving more. Home to over 7,000 full time and 10,000 part time students, we are one of the largest further education institutions in Scotland offering a wide array of educational and career opportunities across three key campuses.

HEAD OF CURRICULUM - School of Media and Performing Arts

Salary: £49,603.50 per annum
Location: Anniesland Campus. You will be required to travel and work within all Glasgow Clyde campuses
Job Reference: 57/EXT/10/18
Closing Date: Tuesday, 20th November 2018 (5PM)

Based within the Faculty of Business, Creative and Digital Industries you will provide academic leadership, direction and management for the School of Media and Performing Arts, ensuring that all development, planning, quality and administrative systems are carried out in line with College operational and external requirements.

The successful candidate will support the Assistant Principal of the Faculty in devising and implementing strategies to develop and effectively manage the Curriculum Area and the Faculty. You will maintain an up-to-date knowledge of sector and workplace developments which affect the curriculum areas within the School in order to ensure the portfolio meets local, regional and national economic and social needs.

Implementing open and consistent management practices across the School to create and ensure effective and coherent work practices are optimised, you will manage curriculum programme teams to achieve School, Faculty and College targets for student enrolment, retention, attainment, achievement, progression and articulation.

Candidates must have excellent interpersonal and motivational skills with experience of managing the implementation of quality systems to meet both College and awarding body requirements. Previous experience of managing a curriculum area including line management and resource management is desirable.

For further details on the role and person specification, please view the Job Description.

HEAD OF CURRICULUM - School of Fashion, Textiles and Design

Salary: £49,603.50 per annum
Location: Anniesland Campus. You will be required to travel and work within all Glasgow Clyde campuses
Job Reference: 57/EXT/10/18
Closing Date: Tuesday, 20th November 2018 (5PM)

Based within the Faculty of Business, Creative and Digital Industries you will provide academic leadership, direction and management for the School of Fashion, Textiles and Design, ensuring that all development, planning, quality and administrative systems are carried out in line with College operational and external requirements.

The successful candidate will support the Assistant Principal of the Faculty in devising and implementing strategies to develop and effectively manage the Curriculum Area and the Faculty. You will maintain an up-to-date knowledge of sector and workplace developments which affect the curriculum areas within the School in order to ensure the portfolio meets local, regional and national economic and social needs.

Implementing open and consistent management practices across the School to create and ensure effective and coherent work practices are optimised, you will manage curriculum programme teams to achieve School, Faculty and College targets for student enrolment, retention, attainment, achievement, progression and articulation.

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For further details on the role and person specification, please view the Job Description.

If you believe you have the qualities to fill either role, please download, complete and email, an Application Form and an Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form to **humanresourcesrecruitment@glasgowclyde.ac.uk**

Please view our Job Applicant Privacy Notice.

Further information can be obtained from the Human Resources Unit;

Telephone: **0141 272 3232**

E-mail: **humanresourcesrecruitment@glasgowclyde.ac.uk**

BUTTERCUPS TRAINING IS HIRING!

Buttercups Training
The specialist in pharmacy training

Who are Buttercups?
Since our inception in 1988, we have evolved from a small team solely providing workshops to pharmacy staff, to a team of over 140 delivering more than 25 blended learning courses across all pharmacy sectors, Despite the transition across the years, Buttercups' mission has always remained the same; to deliver high quality training programmes to pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, dispensing assistants and support staff working in hospitals, the community, dispensing doctors' practices and the Armed Forces.
We are the largest training provider in the pharmacy sector serving pharmacies from the largest multiples to independents, dispensing doctors, the MOD and NHS Trusts.

Buttercups Culture
Despite our growth over the years, Buttercups still maintains a "family business" culture. We all know and converse with each other – we have open plan offices and this assists with our very friendly and open culture. There is a strong ethos of teamwork and everyone is approachable. There are many opportunities to get to know people in the company that you may not work closely with, such as sporting activities and social events. We have a very healthy work social life and we believe in work life balance! We embrace the value of wellness and encourage employees who are in the office to break out for fresh air, table tennis, a musical interlude or simply coffee in our spacious and relaxing refectory. We empower employees to respond to the challenges of an ever-changing pharmacy landscape and see our diverse team as innovators building the Buttercups of tomorrow and beyond.

Our Vacancies

Buttercups Training is currently seeking enthusiastic and motivated pharmacy assessors, tutors and science graduates or teachers. The successful applicants will demonstrate excellent communication skills as well as the ability to deliver high quality teaching, learning and assessment to our learners via our blended learning delivery.

What do we mean by blended learning?

At Buttercups Training, we use a range of different teaching techniques to best suit the needs of our learners. The following is an overview of what we mean:

Buttercups virtual classrooms – these are interactive online classrooms delivered by Buttercups tutors.

Broadcast webinars – these are a more structured version of our virtual classroom, delivered in a lecture-like way.

e-Learning – this is online interactive learning using our suite of education tools, such as our b-Hive learner management platform and Virtual Pharmacy. Our Virtual Pharmacy is an interactive learning tool, which simulates various medicines counter scenarios and gives real-time feedback on the learner's decisions.

1 to 1 tutorials – these are delivered online or over the telephone.

VACANCIES

Assessors and Tutors
Candidates must hold relevant teaching or assessing qualifications and have experience in the pharmacy sector and/or a registrant of the GPhC.

Science Graduates or Teachers
Candidates must be located within a commutable distance to our Nottingham head office, as intensive training will be required. The following science degrees are suitable:
Physiology
Medicine
Nursing
Pharmacology
Human Biology

For more information, please visit:
https://www.buttercupstraining.co.uk/content/vacancies

EDITORIAL

Ofsted's focus on new providers should be an extra, not an instead

The Ofsted annual state-of-the-nation report is due for publication next month and I've spent much of this week crunching the figures.

The first thing that stood out was the stark decline in full inspections, overall falling by nearly a third, despite the rising number of FE and skills providers.

Naturally a lot of focus has been on the new apprenticeship provider monitoring visits, but it is particularly concerning that full inspections at independent training providers fell from 126 to just 70, a 44 per cent cut.

It is unclear why the inspectorate has suddenly shown less interest in the existing provider base, claiming it has nothing to do with well documented budget cuts or reallocation of funds to other activities, such as research.

Nobody is suggesting Ofsted is failing to meet their statutory duties, but dramatic reductions in quality oversight during turbulent times should concern us all.

The second highlight from the inspection figures is some welcome good news, in the form of the general further education college grade profile.

As we report this week, the number colleges with 'outstanding' and 'good' grades as at 31 August has shot up to 76 per cent, from a low of 69 per cent just 12 months before.

FE Week has been following the trend, since September 2017, of grade three colleges rising to grade two, which is to be celebrated.

And there are now no general further education colleges with a grade four.

But a closer look at the Ofsted spreadsheets reveal part of the reason rests with college mergers.

When colleges merge, Ofsted remove all existence of them from the statistics.

In fact, by 31 August there were only 140 general further education colleges with inspection grades, down from 188 the previous year.

Merged colleges will return to the figures when inspected, so time will tell whether the college grade profile will continue to improve.

How much time will depend on Ofsted's appetite for quality assuring the existing provider base, which if last year is anything to go by, is low.

Nick Linford, Editor
news@feweek.co.uk

Readers' reply

EMAIL TWITTER FACEBOOK WEBSITE

Management apprenticeships double to make up a fifth of all starts on standards

Owen

When we are claiming there is a massive underspend on the levy – what is the problem with spending funds on management apprenticeships? Over the years I have seen a huge deficit in management skills despite people being in those positions. Surely, the apprenticeships will help with this? From experience, my Level 3 management apprenticeship was very helpful when I first moved into a management position. So why not upskill when there is a need to upskill?

Contradictory claims over UTC learner numbers from Baker Dearing Trust

Chris

How can you have any confidence in BDT?

When Hackney UTC announced closure it pointed to how successful Royal Greenwich UTC was – which is of course now closed.

In November 2017 the Chief Executive said that BDT had carried out a "thorough" audit of all remaining UTCs after 4 closed in the September. This audit failed to pick up the slew of inadequate & requires improvement judgments that hit UTCs in 2018.

Only last month the Chief Executive claimed that EPI, who issued a highly critical report of UTCs, had not visited any UTCS – when in fact they HAD visited a UTC in the company of Lord Baker! Barking

ESFA terminates levy contract for apprenticeship provider after Ofsted report critical of government departments

@ktebailey

Another one bites the dust – we need more oversight & more resource to effectively sort out this chaos. The ESFA have been cut too fine. Businesses lose faith, standards lose value with the public and ultimately it's the learners who suffer. How many times will we make this mistake?

@duncangotobed

When will training providers stop seeing apprenticeships as a gravy train?

Revealed: ESFA bans another four new providers from taking on apprentices

@tonyaas1

One way of cutting the numbers on RoATP. Keep this up Ofsted and there will be no need for refresh!

@CrowtherSi

This new apprenticeship system seem to be going well then Phil Golding @PhilGolding_UK Is there another way to refer to these providers rather than 'new'? I get that it is the first time they have had their own Ofsted visits, but many of them have been delivering apprenticeships for years as subcontractors. Probably £10+million worth of training over the years.

REPLY OF THE WEEK

Employers use just 14% of their levy in first 18 months

Spending levy funds will become even more difficult for some employers with the funding-band changes that have recently been announced.

It was already near impossible to deliver quality training on some standards with the monies available, and it's likely many training providers will now withdraw from delivering certain standards as it's not worthwhile, just leaving shoddy providers to deliver.

Michelle Quirk

Experts

JULIAN GRAVATT

Deputy chief executive of the Association of Colleges

The restructuring of colleges is complex, secretive and costly

Julian Gravatt analyses the finances of colleges and explains why the restructuring fund will be nowhere near adequate in meeting the needs of the sector

Between now and March 2019, the Department for Education expects to spend £150 million from its restructuring fund on loans and grants to colleges. These will be the last payments from a three-year fund that will consume £300 million when it closes on March 31 2019. This is a large sum of money. At a time when there's a funding campaign, when a large training provider has gone out of business and when universities have been warned there will be no bailouts, it's worth having a closer look.

The first point about the restructuring facility is the secrecy. This is deliberate. HM Treasury controls the budget and signs off every application. A team in the funding agency negotiates every deal and insists on confidentiality. Officials promise information in future but do not want one college to use another's deal at a going rate.

A second starting point is that this is about clearing up messes. Big ones. People in top jobs in every sort of organisation make mistakes. In the college-restructuring cases, it's the successors who have had to sort things out. And the process is no picnic. The application hurdle is high. It takes nine months to complete and costs a small fortune in professional fees.

The restructuring deals have mainly been used to pay down debt and to replace bank loans with ones from government. For various reasons, several colleges ended up in 2016 with unsustainable debts. In many cases the debt originated from a partly funded capital project. Government has consistently limited its capital grants to colleges on the assumption that colleges will make up the rest. Compounding this, colleges in trouble generally lost funding and did not make redundancies fast enough to compensate.

So why did the government step in? Surely if the bank says less, you ask another one? This is where colleges have been at the wrong end of a broken banking market. There is very little competition in the UK for business banking and the college sector is serviced by names who are busy removing themselves from your local high street. Faced with "market-concentration risk" and a bleak short-term outlook for further education, the banks have reduced their overall lending. Total bank lending to colleges fell by £300 million (20 per cent) in the two years after 2015 and is still falling.

> "This is about clearing up messes. Big ones."

There are obvious reasons why government steps in to help colleges. They have a local presence, lots of students and capacity that government relies upon. But there are also technical reasons that make their financial position different from training providers. When the government created statutory college and university corporations more than 25 years ago, it didn't anticipate insolvencies so there are no rules to prevent disorderly ones. There is now legislation to resolve the position for colleges but this doesn't come into effect until 2019. It also, incidentally, doesn't apply to university corporations. Once these laws take effect, there will be an option for government to walk away, but it might not want to. More loans might be called in as the banks run for the door. And there's a wall of £3 billion in local-government pension-scheme obligations that colleges have been locked into for decades. A statutory college insolvency would be the demolition of a terraced house. Get it wrong and you might destabilise the whole street.

People work in colleges because they love education and want to help others. People become governors because they think they can make a difference. Unfortunately, we're working in a difficult system. Core funding is squeezed so a few colleges end up with bailouts. Time, money and attention is consumed by intervention processes. There will be rising further-education demand in the 2020s but we are cutting capacity now. The restructuring fund has been a useful prop to the college sector's balance sheet but it falls well short of the investment in buildings and technology that is needed for the future.

DIANE DALBY

Senior Research Fellow, University of Nottingham and former FE college manager

How the sums don't add up in recruitment of maths staff

It can be a struggle to recruit suitable maths staff – and it won't get any easier as numbers drop in the future, says Diane Dalby

Managing the unprecedented expansion of maths provision in FE that has resulted from the condition of funding is one of the biggest challenges facing colleges today. It is an example of a well-intentioned policy that is threatened by weak strategic design and inadequate national workforce planning.

College leaders have done their best to meet the challenge of recruiting suitable staff, but well-qualified maths teachers are in short supply. Non-maths specialists have been retrained and staff already in post have covered unfilled vacancies. Resourceful colleges have developed multi-faceted recruitment strategies that include enhanced pay schemes, grow-your-own schemes, graduate schemes and internal retraining. These are having some effect, but maths teacher recruitment remains an on-going problem, placing an additional burden on a sector already struggling financially.

The Nuffield Foundation-funded Mathematics in FE Colleges (MiFEC) project is exploring the complex challenges in this critically important area. This summer the MiFEC team surveyed nearly 500 maths teachers in general FE colleges across England. The data points to reasonably good short-term stability in the maths teacher workforce, but the long-term position is less certain. Two thirds of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with their current roles, but the numbers retiring or moving to other employment over the next few years are likely to exceed new entrants.

Despite the tremendous efforts of FE colleges, there is no room for complacency about the supply of maths teachers. There are, however, some grounds for cautious optimism. The survey shows that teaching maths in FE is an attractive career choice or progression opportunity. The reasons are arguably different from pursuing a career teaching maths in school, such as enjoyment of the subject. Less than half of the respondents cited personal enjoyment of maths as one of their reasons to teach the subject. The reasons varied widely, but "wanting to work with 16 to 18-year-olds" or to "move away from school teaching" featured strongly. In a culture where FE is systematically overlooked and the working conditions often portrayed negatively, these positive reasons for choosing FE teaching need wider communication and celebration.

> "Teaching FE maths is a peculiarly challenging role"

Routes into teaching mathematics in FE differ from a traditional pathway into school teaching. For the survey respondents, the most common pathway was from business, industry or self-employment, but transition from teaching another subject in FE, or from teaching maths in school, were also common. These trajectories involve either a significant career change, a transition between subjects or an adaptation to a new educational environment. These different routes demand targeted training programmes rather than a one-size-fits-all model. Decision-makers, managers, trainers and CPD providers need to pay greater attention to these differences in the composition of the workforce.

FE maths teachers face different challenges to many teachers in secondary schools. In FE there is a strong emphasis on being able to motivate disaffected students and reverse under-achievement in a short time with limited resources. This makes it a peculiarly challenging role. Recruiting and retaining sufficient numbers of teachers fit for this task is time-consuming, resource-heavy and has financial implications. The Department for Education's Centres for Excellence programme should provide welcome support for teachers, but its long-term impact will be reduced unless there is greater stability in the workforce.

To sustain current staffing levels, the sector will need to go beyond what it has already done. If we want better learning experiences for these young people, maths teachers in FE really need to count more - in the sense of increased numbers and public recognition of their value. This means wider positive promotion of the profession and appropriate high-quality initial training to meet their needs.

Co- written by Andrew Noyes, professor of mathematics education, University of Nottingham

Experts

RUPERT CROSSLAND

Head of Compliance, Professional Assessment Ltd

Complicated relationships can work out in the end

Subcontractors can cost providers more than they would like, but the benefit to apprentices can make it worth it, says Rupert Crossland

Subcontracting in apprenticeships is a reasonably complex concept. So complex, that the Association of Colleges (AoC) recently published a 50-page guide to help stakeholders make sense of the rules and establish a fair approach.

But a sector-wide consensus on these fees remains a convoluted issue because of persistent reports of inflated, profit-oriented models and, since the apprenticeship funding reforms, the individual nature of main provider/subcontractor relationships.

As with most complicated matters, the devil is in the detail; all subcontractors need different levels of input, support and monitoring. This might depend on the starting point of the subcontractor, whether they are a known quantity to the primary provider or whether previous dealings have prompted tighter controls. Remember, the main provider is ultimately accountable for all aspects of quality and compliance regarding their subcontractors and carries all of the risks.

Within their guide, the AoC suggests that main providers should adopt a risk-based approach when agreeing on fees, but, where the main provider is not delivering anything towards the provision, "it would be highly unusual for any fee to exceed 20 per cent and generally it would be expected to be less". The guide also states: "Best practice would suggest that the most effective fees and charges are negotiated with each subcontractor and regularly reviewed". In other words, the subcontractor should be empowered to make sure they are getting value for money from the outset and receive clear information about how, when and why fees may be reassessed.

As an example of how this might work, a main provider we support initially charged a subcontractor, who was new to the apprenticeship market, fees of 20 per cent based on the increased amount of input and monitoring needed. Clear measures were put in place to manage and mitigate the risk exposure of the main provider, and the fees were significantly reduced after nine months once delivery was stable and monitoring decreased. Crucially, it was evident from the outset what support was available, and costing was transparent.

> "The subcontractor should be empowered to get value for money"

It seems clear-cut that nobody is suggesting that subcontracting fees should be 20 per cent or more in normal circumstances; the AoC guide advises that main providers demanding unwarranted or ongoing high charges are reported to the Education and Skills Funding Agency. Some have voiced concern that, where supporting and monitoring a subcontractor requires fees of more than 20 per cent, the inherent risk to the main provider is too significant to warrant moving forward with the relationship.

It's important to consider what apprentices stand to gain. There are many examples where potential subcontractors offered relatively high levels of risk regarding their track record and experience, but delivered specialist aspects of the apprenticeship to a higher standard than the main provider. The support and monitoring required to mitigate risk exposures were high, and the fees reflected this, but the benefit to the apprentices was worth the effort.

It's also important to consider that initial higher fees might be part of a broader strategy for the subcontractor. Many employers have aspirations to become employer-providers in the long term, but their starting point is such that they need extensive support from a main provider to get to a stage where they are confident enough to deliver the entire programme and can adequately manage quality and compliance requirements. The extra "hand-holding" and the development they stand to gain from the main provider means that most employers understand the necessity for higher fees in the short term. Long term, the market gains a new provider that is more able to face the challenges of the sector and offer valuable opportunities to learners.

I agree with the advice in the AoC guide; a risk-based approach to subcontracting is sensible, and fees should be fair and take into account individual circumstances. I'm sure nobody would dispute that funding should ultimately benefit the apprentice, and that subcontracting should not be used as a source of additional profit for main providers.

News

Movers & Shakers

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

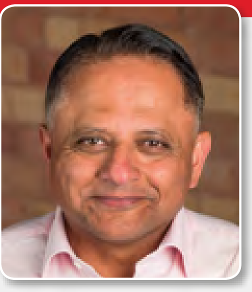
Jason Faulkner

Campus principal, Redcar and Cleveland College

Start date August 2018

Previous job
Vice principal curriculum, Stockton Riverside College

Interesting fact
At the age of 19, Jason – along with seven army colleagues – retraced part of the journey Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton took to rescue the crew of the Endurance in 1916



Rooney Anand

Chair, WorldSkills UK

Start date January 2019

Previous job
Chief executive, Greene King (to continue in role)

Interesting fact
My parents were doctors – but I was too squeamish to follow in their footsteps. So I went in to construction instead

Paula Wells

Director, YMCA Awards

Start date October 2018

Previous job
Operations director, Premier Global NASM

Interesting fact
Paula is a qualified boxing coach and is a former UK dance champion, specialising in ballroom and Latin dancing

Judith Allen

Chief operating officer, Learning Curve Group

Start Date October 2018

Previous job
CEO of Profound Services and Northern Care Training Ltd (Profound Group)

Interesting fact
Judith abseiled off the Tyne Bridge in Newcastle and completed Total Warrior for Butterwick Hospice Care charity

Ben Manning

Acting principal, City College Plymouth

Start date November 2018

Previous job
Vice principal, curriculum and quality, City College Plymouth

Interesting fact
Ben has a deep connection to the college – not only is he a former student, he also met his wife while working there

Liza-Jo Guyatt

Executive head of Roundhouse technical skills college, Derby College Group

Start Date August 2018

Previous job
Head of faculty vocational skills, New College Nottingham

Interesting fact
Liza-Jo is an advocate for adult and community learning having returned to further education at the age of 28. Her next goal is gaining a Doctor of Education

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

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

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

Difficulty: Medium

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

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: Alyson Shields

Solutions

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

Difficulty: Easy

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

Difficulty: Medium

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