



FEWEEK



APPRENTICE PRICE ABUSE REVIEW

- › DfE commissions research to find out if max funding claimed despite prior learning
- › ESFA beefs up rules and threatens clawback as IfATE flags concerns with DfE
- › Ofsted exposes lack of new learning as NAO prepares to report on value for money
- › Auditor says they typically find prior learning has not been fully accounted for

Exclusive

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The Open University to offer free functional skills courses

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Exclusive

A pilot scheme to provide free functional skills online is being launched by the Open University in partnership with three FE colleges.

The scheme is expected to allow tens of thousands of learners to develop level one skills in English and maths, and receive a functional skills qualification from a local college partner.

The pilot, which is being funded by the Department for Education's flexible learning fund, is being supported by the Bedford College Group, Middlesbrough College and West Herts College.

Andrew Law, head of propositions at the Open University, said the scheme is hoping to reach up to 30,000 learners a year via the university's OpenLearn platform, which he said is specifically designed to cater for people with "low confidence or barriers preventing them from getting into education".

"This is a flexible, low-risk way for people to develop their basic skills, gaining confidence and even a

qualification. It could transform their career prospects," he told *FE Week*.

"Working in partnership to combine our digital learning expertise with course design and practical, local support from FE colleges is a great offer for anyone who wants to gain functional skills."

Last month, the Education and Skills Funding Agency U-turned on plans to bar 16- to 19-year-olds who have passed GCSE maths and English from following level one study programmes. The planned rule change, originally announced in December, was scrapped after feedback from a "small but significant number of providers".

Under the Open University scheme, learners will be able to access online course materials for free, and to learn at home or receive support and careers guidance from their local college.

There is an open licence on the materials, so that others – including colleges and other providers – can copy and re-use the content for their own teaching and learning, and Mr Law said

the university was "keen" for that to happen.

The scheme is initially offering two courses, Everyday Maths and Everyday English, and each will take 48 hours of study to complete. Learners are being recruited this month and the pilot will run until July 2019, at which point it will be reviewed before being made accessible "for the foreseeable future".

Mr Law said the Open University intended to roll out level two versions of the courses in the spring, before introducing sector-specific functional skills courses tailored towards health and social care, and science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

The scheme will also involve collaborations with organisations and community groups to encourage potential learners to take the "first

step" in education. These groups are set to include local enterprise partnerships, the Workers' Educational Association, Unison, and health and welfare charity Leonard Cheshire Disability.



Andrew Law

FE teacher bursaries scrapped

A decision by the Department for Education to terminate FE teacher bursaries has been called "a slap in the face for the FE sector".

It was announced on Wednesday that subject knowledge enhancement funding and initial teacher education bursaries will end with this academic year.

The executive director of the

Universities Council for the Education of Teachers, James Noble-Rogers, said the decision was "a slap in the face for the FE sector" and would lead to fewer people entering the profession.

Skills minister Anne Milton said the government is spending £20 million on new programmes to recruit and develop FE teachers.

DfE issues AEB claw-back warning

The government is encouraging under-performing colleges to reduce their 2018/19 adult education budget now, to avoid cashflow problems as a result of the ESFA clawing back funding.

An Education and Skills Funding Agency notice was released on Tuesday and said if a provider considers it "may not fully spend

your 2018 to 2019 AEB allocation, we can discuss reducing it with you immediately after the mid-year claim in February".

"It is in your interest to reduce your allocation now so you can manage your cashflow over a number of months rather than having to fund a large recovery in December," it added

FE a hot topic in the Commons

The skills minister reiterated her awareness of the funding challenges facing the FE sector during education questions in the Commons this week.

Skills minister Anne Milton said during the Monday debate: "I know the sector faces significant challenges – indeed, we had a Westminster Hall debate on the issue and I think 53 colleagues from

across the House contributed to that.

"We are putting in £500 million of disadvantage funding and £127 million of discretionary bursary funding.

"Money has been going in, but I am aware of the fact that although the base rate for 16- to 19-year-olds has been protected, that still leaves the FE sector with challenges."

Principal defends taking on college in merger facilitated by £30 million bailout

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Exclusive

Merging with a college that was "struggling for financial survival" and required a £30 million bailout from the government was the "right thing to do", says the principal of Trafford College Group.

Stockport College was rated 'inadequate' three times in five years and required a rescue package of £30 million from the government's restructuring facility to help with its merger to Trafford College in April 2018, the latest financial accounts reveal.

Despite the financial assistance, Stockport College's merger still resulted in a loss of £31 million for the newly formed Trafford College Group and ongoing merger plans are based on "assumptions" that could "adversely

impact" financial performance if they are not met.

The college said the £30 million received so far was only part of the overall agreed financial support package it secured from the government.

Speaking to *FE Week*, Lesley Davies, principal of the Trafford College Group said: "Merging with a college that unfortunately struggled for financial survival for many years and received more than one 'inadequate' judgement from Ofsted was always going to be a challenge, but we knew, on behalf of learners and the wider Stockport community, it was the right thing to do."

"We are committed to transforming the College's education provision, and to dramatically improve the learning environment to ensure our learners are ready for the next steps in their career, and we are already making significant strides in a number of areas.

"I'm delighted that at the end of the academic year 2017/18 and within four

months of merger we have successfully raised achievement rates."

The accounts said the money was needed to "repay an outstanding loan held by Stockport College, create a stable property base at the Stockport campus and lay the foundations to enable the Trafford College Group to move forward with confidence".

Key areas of spend listed in the accounts including £15.3 million in loan repayments and £9.7 million repayment of exceptional financial support from the ESFA.

The Trafford College Group has also received a £16 million skills capital grant from the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), earmarked for "upgrading the poor condition of the current campus in Stockport" and creating "high-quality facilities".

GMCA is shouldering more than two-thirds of the costs of the redevelopment, which is expected to cost £23.3 million in total, with the college contributing the

remaining third.

According to the accounts, the group "recognised a loss of £31,120,000 in respect of the liabilities transferred from Stockport College upon the merger".

"The merger plan includes a number of assumptions regarding savings and efficiencies which, if not achieved, could adversely impact on the Trafford College Group financial performance," the accounts stated, adding that a "turnaround specialist" was assisting with the merging process.

Trafford College Group also has a debt to Barclays Bank, after Trafford College was loaned £8 million in 2008/09. The accounts say it still owed £6.72 million as of July 31, 2018 and expects to repay £671,000 annually until 2036.

Stockport College received its first grade four rating in September 2013, followed by 'requires improvement' in December 2014. However, it slipped back to 'inadequate' in October 2016, and received the same damning grade in a

report published in March last year, just one month before the merger.

The college has also had a notice of concern for financial health since December 2010, longer than any other college. It was placed in administered status by former FE commissioner David Collins in 2013.

Trafford College, which was rated 'good' by Ofsted, said in its 2016/17 accounts that the merger was dependent on a "successful outcome to the application for restructuring funds" to "address Stockport College's significant legacy liabilities".

A Department for Education spokesperson said: "The Trafford College Group was given funding after applying to the restructuring facility fund, to deliver a significant financial and quality turnaround.

"All funding is delivered with strict oversight, including terms and conditions on the funding that is linked to the college's improvement."

News

DfE commission research to review high prices for apprentices with prior learning

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From front

Exclusive

The government is looking into whether apprenticeship delivery is being adjusted to account for apprentices' prior learning, a sign that funding overclaims could soon be clamped down on.

A tender was launched by the Department for Education last week for suppliers to research if and how providers and employers are adapting training and the associated costs to take into account the prior learning of apprentices.

It comes ahead of the National Audit Office's second probe into the apprenticeship programme since the launch of the levy, which will examine whether it is providing value for money.

Prior learning refers to skills and knowledge gained by learners before they start their apprenticeship, and must be taken into account by providers when negotiating a price with an employer to ensure cash is not being used to teach an apprentice something they already know.

"We may take action to recover apprenticeship funding where this happens," the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) rules for 2018/19 warn.

The DfE declined to comment on the reasoning behind its new tender, but FE Week understands the government considers non-compliance with the prior learning rule to be a major issue.

And a highly respected funding auditor has told FE Week that apprenticeship providers are typically not complying.

Stephanie Mason, head of further education and skills at the audit firm RSM, said: "The ESFA strengthened their funding rules this year and make it very clear that they will claw back funding when providers fail to reduce apprenticeship funding for prior knowledge, skills and behaviour.

"When conducting reviews since the introduction of the levy, we typically find providers have not fully accounted for prior learning."

"We typically find providers have not fully accounted for prior learning"

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) "flagged concerns about how best to ensure that prices for apprenticeship training were being appropriately adjusted to take account of prior learning", according to the minutes from a meeting of its approval and funding committee last June.

The committee flagged some specific standards to the DfE for consideration of how the department should monitor how prior learning was being taken into account for apprenticeships, however the names of the standards were redacted and the institute has refused to share them with FE Week.

An IfATE spokesperson said: "The institute and our partners on the quality alliance take the concerns flagged by the committee seriously.

"Our quality statement stresses that an initial assessment of prior

learning against the standard is a key facet of quality apprenticeships.

"We recognise that it is an important precondition of designing training plans that are tailored to individual learners' needs, and also for ensuring value for money."

Last March it was revealed that employers were paying the maximum amount in more than 95 per cent of apprenticeship starts since May 2017, when maximum funding rate caps were introduced.

And Ofsted has been finding problems at apprenticeship providers like Citrus Training Solutions, where inspectors found last December that many of its

188 apprentices were enrolled on "inappropriate" programmes which merely accredited existing knowledge, skills and behaviours.

Such as in the case of level two construction learners who completed their course in the first few months of the 12-month course with "very little training".

Leaders and managers at Citrus Training Solutions were "unaware that many apprentices do not learn anything new" and are "not fully conversant with the funding

Accounting for prior learning

- P197.** Funds must not be used to pay for training for skills, knowledge and behaviours already attained by the apprentice. We may take action to recover apprenticeship funding where this happens.
- P198.** You must account for prior learning when negotiating a price with the employer. You must reduce the content, duration and price, where the individual has prior learning necessary to achieve occupational competence.
- P199.** Where you account for prior learning and the reduction of content would mean the apprenticeship would take less than the minimum duration to complete (as set out in paragraphs P45 to P61), or fail to meet the requirement for the apprentice to spend 20% of their time in off-the-job training (as set out in paragraph P31), the apprenticeship is ineligible for funding.
- P200.** You must assess the individual's prior learning before starting the apprenticeship. You must quantify and evidence the proportion of prior learning already attained, quantify the proportion of off-the-job training content that will not be covered, and quantify the amount that the funding will be reduced by.
- P201.** You must include a thorough appraisal of the apprentice's existing knowledge, skills and behaviours against those required to achieve occupational competence. Where applicable, you must include in your appraisal any knowledge, skills and behaviours gained from the following:
- P201.1** work experience, particularly where the apprentice is an existing employee;
 - P201.2** prior education or training and associated qualifications in a related sector subject area; and
 - P201.3** any previous apprenticeship undertaken.
- P202.** The initial assessment must be documented in the evidence pack.

Section added to the ESFA apprenticeship funding rules for 2018/19

requirements of an apprenticeship and so claim funding for apprentices who have not completed any learning", according to the report.

"Assessors readily acknowledge they will not submit a claim for the completion of the apprenticeship for another eight months, even though they do not plan any further training.

"We will assess spending and budgeting, oversight and number and types of apprenticeships"

"They state that this is to comply with the minimum apprenticeship duration that is set by the ESFA and the Institute for Apprenticeships."

DfE has intervened in providers that are not teaching apprentices new skills before. Last year, the ESFA terminated its contract of Premier People Solutions

Limited after Ofsted found many of its 686 civil service apprentices were not developing substantial new skills, knowledge or behaviours.

In her annual report for 2018, Ofsted chief inspector Amanda Spielman highlighted how apprentices were "not learning anything new", but were just getting accreditation for knowledge and skills they already had.

An NAO spokesperson confirmed that its upcoming review of apprenticeships will address whether the apprenticeship programme is providing value for money, and said, as part of that "we will assess spending and budgeting, oversight and number and types of apprenticeships".

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 scheme was scrapped in 2001 after abuse by unscrupulous providers that led to a reported £67 million fraud.

Expressions of interest for the DfE's contract have to be submitted by February 15, with the research due to start in the week commencing April 1. The final report will be issued on August 30.

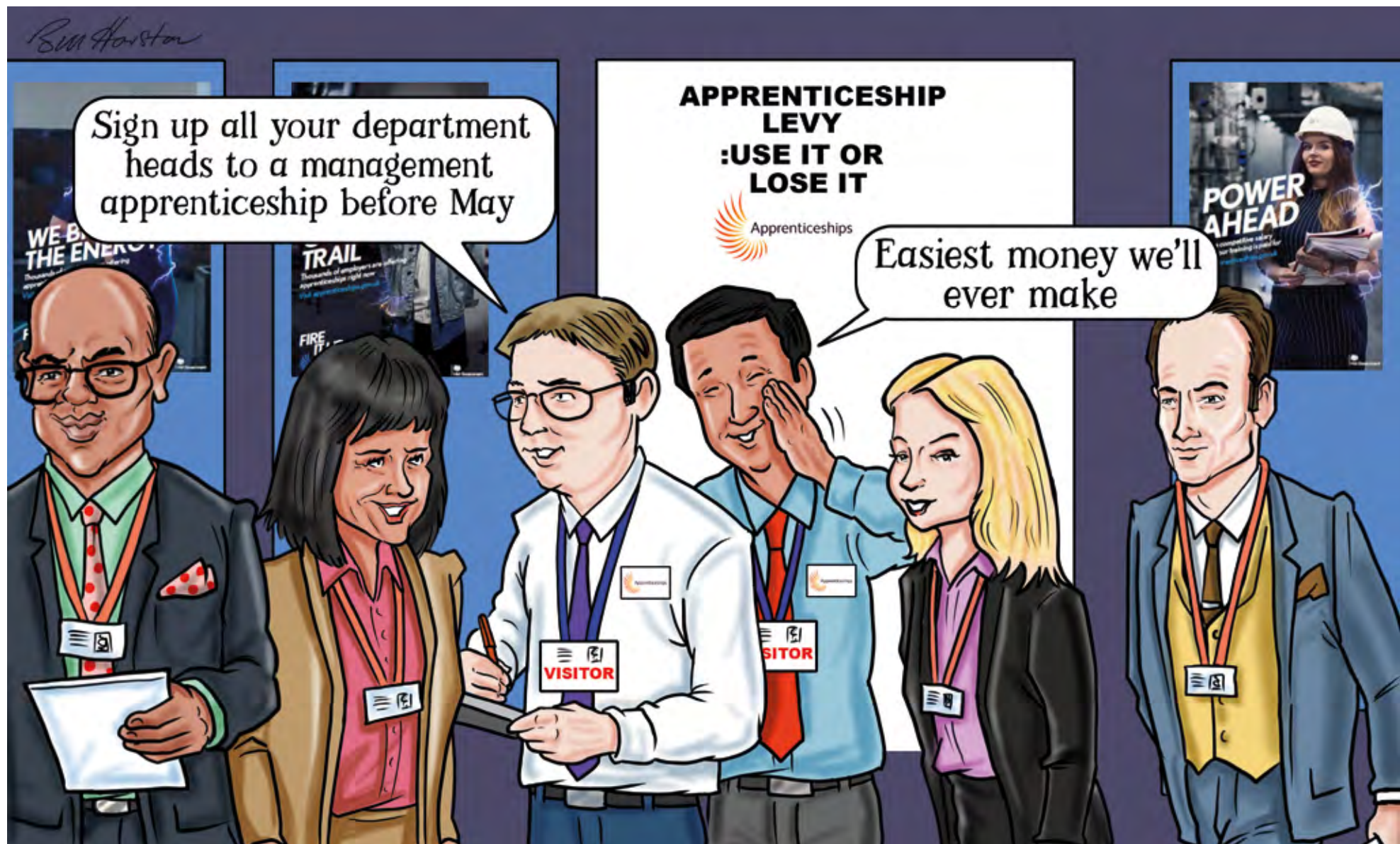
one provider that had swiftly recruited apprentices over the past year was not providing apprenticeships that were fit for purpose. Apprentices were not learning anything new, they were just getting accreditation for knowledge and skills they already had. The majority did not even know they were an apprentice. There have been high-profile cases of mismanagement and significant falls in standards. In one case, the Education & Skills Funding

Ofsted's 2018 annual report

apprenticeship. Most apprentices are unhappy that their tutors merely ask them to collect evidence of work, which they have completed as part of their current job role, to enable them to accredit existing skills and knowledge. Apprentices report that they are not learning anything new on their apprenticeship; instead, they 'shoehorn' existing work in a portfolio to get a free qualification.

Directors are unjustifiably optimistic in their evaluation that they provide high

Key6's Ofsted report showing prior learning wasn't taken into account in apprenticeships

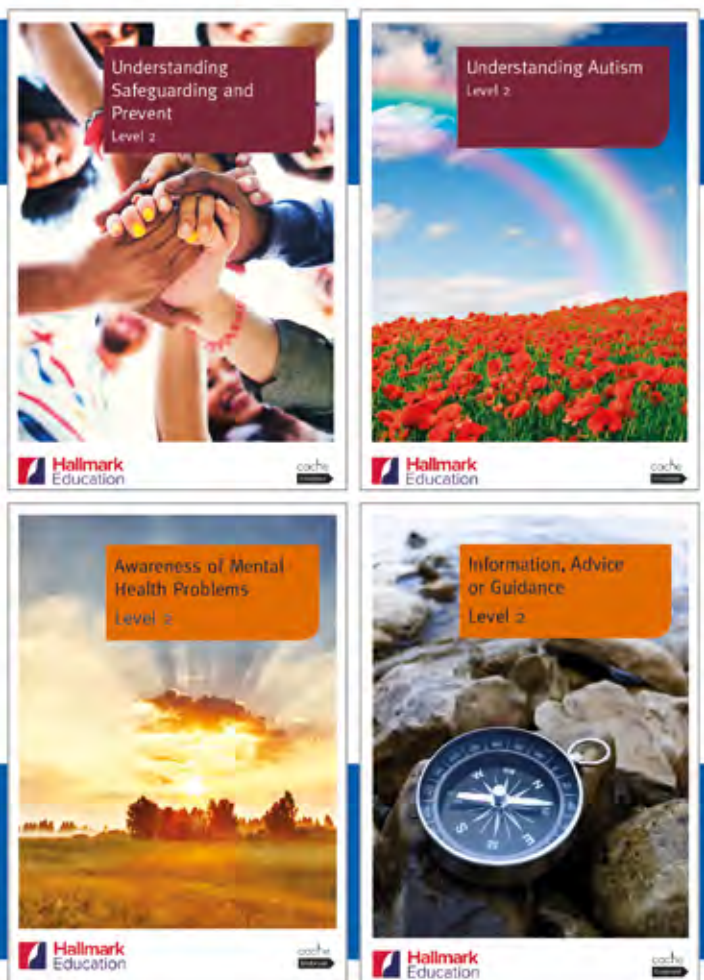


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News

FE Commissioner exposes 'historical' corporate failure at North Herts College

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A college was placed in administered status at the end of January after the FE Commissioner found it was facing a "financial crisis" that "threatens" its future, following historical "corporate failure".

FE Week revealed last week that North Hertfordshire College recorded a £5 million deficit in 2017/18 and received a recent £2.5 million bailout from the government.

An FE Commissioner visit, which was triggered by the college's request for exceptional financial support, took place over two days in September – the report of which was published on Thursday.

It warned that the new "chair and chief executive are facing a financial crisis that threatens the future of the college".

In addition to the £2.5 million exceptional financial support North Herts received at the end of 2018, the college was given a £1.485 million medium-term bailout in February 2016 to "support its cashflow" – the funds of which were repaid to the government in July that year.

The FE Commissioner's report stated that management accounting and its reporting are "not fit for purpose" and the "operating deficit has had a significant adverse effect on the college cashflow and it is assumed that this will not recover allowing the

college to repay loans and EFS from the proceeds of land sales".

The report states that the "previous chief executive" as "accounting officer must take responsibility for the setting of the 17/18 budget".

It adds the former principal did "greatly improve the management information in the college and corrected issues of accuracy and led the college to a very successful outcome in its last Ofsted inspection".

However, the report notes that Ofsted "did not explore the financial stewardship skills" of the board.

North Herts' former principal, Matt Hamnett, resigned with immediate effect in November 2017.

His £294,000 salary made him the highest-paid principal in 2016/17, and he received a £74,000 payment in lieu of notice in 2017/18, according to the college's accounts.

Commenting on the FE Commissioner report, Mr Hamnett told FE Week: "The college's performance and underlying position improved markedly whilst I was chief executive.

"It's now 14 months since I left. I can't comment on how the college has performed or managed its position in that time.

"I am sure that my former colleagues are working hard to address the college's current issues in what is an incredibly challenging sector context."

Kit Davies was appointed as chief executive of North Herts in April 2018.

The FE Commissioner reported that

despite its financial trouble, the college is starting to turn itself around.

"The staff interviewed at the time of the FEC assessment had noticed positive leadership changes since the current chief executive was appointed," the report said.

"They described him as highly visible, giving clear direction, providing stability, and at the same time being rigorous in holding them to account.

"There is reasonable confidence that the senior team including the chair and chief executive can deliver recovery."

Describing how North Herts got into financial trouble, the report said: "The ESFA has serious concerns with the college's forecasting accuracy and the college often made, what was seen as, over-optimistic projections and often circumvented local and regional ESFA officers in requesting additional funding.

"The curriculum planning for 2017/18 lacked cohesion. The projected forecast for new apprentice starts for 2017/18 was over-estimated and unachievable."

It added that its 2017/18 management accounts "did not comply with best practice in a number of important aspects".

The accounts "did not go to the board, an extract was included in the principal's update" and "governors therefore did not have information on which to fulfil their fiduciary duty to the college".



FE Commissioner Richard Atkins

In the report's recommendations it said: "Historically, the board has displayed an unacceptable appetite for risk, resulting in corporate failure, and this approach must cease. The use of public money demands measured responses from the board based on accurate and well-analysed officer information."

The board should "also review the senior management team's role in the recent corporate failure which resulted in the need for EFS".

The college should "immediately be placed in administered status with the ESFA as observers on the board". The funding agency and FE Commissioner

will now "monitor key decisions".

A North Herts spokesperson said: "We have a robust recovery plan in place and have taken a number of actions to strengthen our financial position including making substantial cost savings and exiting from non-core activities.

"Despite the financial challenges we have an immensely positive, supportive culture at North Hertfordshire College with everyone from the governors and leadership team down doing their very best for our students, the communities we serve and the businesses we work with."

Baker clause blasted as 'law without teeth' as DfE admits lack of action against non-compliant schools

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Exclusive

The Baker clause has been labelled a "law without teeth" after it emerged the government did not take any action against schools for non-compliance in the first year of its existence.

The Department for Education also admitted it only wrote to half of the trusts it originally claimed to have contacted in relation to non-

compliance. Around two-thirds of secondary schools are thought to be breaking the law.

Introduced last January, the so-called Baker clause requires schools to publish a policy statement online to show how they ensure providers can access pupils to talk about technical education and apprenticeships, and details of their career programmes.

In response to a freedom of information request from FE Week, the DfE confirmed "no action was taken against schools in England that failed to comply with the Baker clause" between January 2 2018 and

January 2 2019.

It has also emerged that letters were sent to just five of the largest trusts last month to remind them of their duty, despite a claim by the DfE last month that skills minister Anne Milton would be writing to the 10 largest non-compliant trusts.

The department has now admitted this was an error, and only five were contacted. Although "appropriate

action" can include direct intervention in schools, a spokesperson was unable to confirm what this involves.

Last month, the DfE said the letters were classed as a "reminder" rather than an intervention.

Charles Parker, executive director of the Baker Dearing Educational Trust, said there "doesn't seem to be much point in passing a law if you don't follow it up" and called the clause a "law without teeth".

Charles Parker

"I'm afraid I don't think they can do much more. The law is pretty toothless. There isn't a sanction built into the way it's drafted," he said.

"The best we can hope for, frankly, is to get the government's weight behind its own law."

He added that the government should write to every local authority and trust about their obligations, before sending "crisply worded letters" to those who do not comply.

A report from the Institute for Public Policy Research warned last month that two-thirds of secondary schools are still not compliant.



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where I want to be.”

Rachna Udasi, BTEC Student of the Year 2018,
St David's College



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FEWEEK & AELP AAC APPRENTICESHIP AWARDS

Finalists for 2019 AAC Apprenticeship Awards

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The national finalists of the AAC Apprenticeship Awards 2019 have been unveiled.

More than 350 entries were submitted from colleges, training providers and employers for the awards, which are in their second year and run by FE Week and the Association of Education and Learning Providers.

Following the success of last year's inaugural awards organisers introduced several new categories for 2019. There are now two types of awards: Route Apprenticeship Provider of the Year and National Awards.

The former will celebrate excellence in 13 individual apprenticeship routes, and winners will be named 'apprenticeship provider of the year'. Organisers have also introduced an award to recognise employers and providers work with SEND apprentices and increasing diversity.

Winners of all awards will be announced at a glittering ceremony during the Annual Apprenticeship Conference Gala Dinner on March 28 at the ICC in Birmingham.

Those shortlisted will also be invited to attend special reception at

the Houses of Parliament, hosted by Commons education select committee chair Robert Halfon, on March 4.

Managing director of FE Week publisher Lsect, and chair of the judging panel, Shane Mann, said: "These awards are a brilliant opportunity to demonstrate and celebrate the importance of apprenticeships in England and the incredible hard work that employers, providers and individuals put into them.

"The volume of entries we've received in our second year has been overwhelming and showcases just how much talent there is in the sector.

"We'd like to thank everyone who submitted a nomination and our judges for their time and consideration. I look forward to kicking off the celebrations at our parliamentary reception at the start of National Apprenticeship Week in March."

AELP chief executive Mark Dawe said: "The second year's entry nominations for these awards underline why it was totally right for FE Week and AELP to team up and shine a spotlight on the work that employers and providers are doing to promote apprenticeships.

"As this year's array of finalists demonstrates, the fantastic training being delivered to young people and



AAC Apprenticeship Awards 2018 ceremony

to existing employees who need to enhance their skills in the face of current economic uncertainty never ceases to amaze me.

"Providers, employers and the apprentices themselves never fail to rise to fresh challenges, and I can't wait for the awards night in Birmingham."

"Providers, employers and the apprentices themselves never fail to rise to fresh challenges"

Mr Halfon, who received last year's Lifetime Achievement Award and will host a parliamentary reception for those shortlisted said: "After last year's success, it's fantastic that the AAC Awards are continuing to highlight the incredible work and achievements of colleges and training providers.

"As my committee's work over the last year has shown, apprenticeships can play a crucial role in fighting injustices in our society, and I would like to congratulate all those nominated who do so much to deliver



The Mini Big Band performing at the AAC Apprenticeship Awards 2018 ceremony



2018 award winners Construction Industry Training Board (CITB)



All the winners from the AAC Apprenticeship Awards 2018

excellent training and provide a ladder of opportunity for so many people."

The awards are part of the Annual Apprenticeship Conference, which is run in partnership with the Department for Education and will take place from 27 to 28 March at Birmingham's ICC..

More than 1,250 delegates will attend the flagship national

apprenticeship conference for employers and providers, with over 60 workshops plus keynote speeches from Ofsted chief inspector Amanda Spielman and the chief executive of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education Sir Gerry Berragan. Organisers will be announcing further keynote speakers in February.



Robert Halfon



Shane Mann



Mark Dawe

FEWEEK & AELP AAC APPRENTICESHIP AWARDS

Apprenticeship Awards announced

Agriculture, Environmental & Animal Care Apprenticeship provider of the year

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Business & Administration Apprenticeship provider of the year

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Seetec
Key Training Ltd

Care Services Apprenticeship provider of the year

Sponsored by **ncfe.**

Qube Qualifications and Development Ltd
Paragon Skills Ltd

Catering & Hospitality Apprenticeship provider of the year

Sponsored by **Pearson**

Lifetime Training
Umbrella Training Ltd

Construction Apprenticeship provider of the year

Sponsored by **nocn**

Fareham College
Telford College

Digital Apprenticeship provider of the year

Sponsored by **DCS | RITech**

Arch Apprentices
Just IT Training Ltd

Education & Childcare Apprenticeship provider of the year

Sponsored by **ncfe.**

Interserve Learning & Employment
Academies Enterprise Trust

Engineering & Manufacturing Apprenticeship provider of the year

Sponsored by **City & Guilds | ilm**

Uniper Engineering Academy
In-Comm Training

Hair & Beauty Apprenticeship provider of the year

Sponsored by **City & Guilds | ilm**

Milton Keynes College
HAHA Training

Health & Science Apprenticeship provider of the year

Sponsored by **Pearson**

Gower College Swansea
Coventry University

Legal, Finance & Accounting Apprenticeship provider of the year

Sponsored by **nocn**

FNTC Training
CILEx Law School

Transport & Logistics Apprenticeship provider of the year

Sponsored by **INNOVATE AWARDS**

Outsource Training and Development
PTP Training Limited

Apprenticeship Diversity Award

Sponsored by **aelp**

Sheffield City Council
Lookers Plc
Nottinghamshire Police

SEND Apprenticeship Champion Award

Sponsored by **SMARTAPPRENTICES**

Interserve
Remit
Weston College

Promoting Apprenticeships campaign of the year

Sponsored by **SMARTAPPRENTICES**

Aston University
Umbrella Training Ltd
Performance Through People

Outstanding contribution to the development of apprenticeships

Employer	Provider	Individual
Eddie Stobart	Gloucestershire College	Steve Williams Gower College Swansea
Thatchers Cider	Interserve Learning & Employment	Debra Woodruff Oldham College
Blanchard Wells	Skills Training UK	Jenny Pelling CILEx Law School

Apprentice employer of the year

Royal Air Force
BT
Wessex Water

Apprenticeship provider of the year

In-Comm Training
Gen2
Abingdon & Witney College

News

FE bosses criticise 'ridiculous variability' of external quality assurance charges

BILLY CAMDEN
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Exclusive

Sector leaders have hit out at the "ridiculous variability" in approved external quality assurance charges, ranging from a free service to a whopping £179 per apprentice.

There are currently 18 approved external quality assurance (EQA) bodies that monitor end-point assessment organisations (EPAOs), to ensure the process is "fair, consistent and robust".

The EQA bodies are allowed to apply a charge as long as it is on a "cost-recovery basis" – the amount of which is taken directly from the government funding given to training providers to deliver the apprenticeship.

When shown the *FE Week* analysis of costs published by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE), Graham Hasting-Evans, group managing director of NOCN, an end-point assessment organisation, said he was "very concerned" about the high level of EQA charges, which are "up to 10 per cent of the EPA cost in some cases" as well as the "considerable inconsistency".

"This will just add another unnecessary administration cost circulating money around the system for no real benefit," he told *FE Week*.

Tom Bewick, chief executive of the Federation of Awarding Bodies, representing many of the 199 currently approved EPAOs, said in the absence of a "single quality assurance framework for apprenticeship, including proper regulation of the charging rates of EQA providers", it is "no wonder we have ended up with such ridiculous variability".

"These practices run the risk of bringing the entire reforms into disrepute," he added.

"Training providers are not charged by Ofsted for inspection visits so it is nonsensical for EPAOs to be charged for a check of their activities."

Mr Bewick suggested the "sensible thing to do" would be for IfATE to "see quality assurance as a national infrastructure cost, by top-slicing the levy to fund it, and therefore offering EQA consistently free at the point of delivery for all standards".

A spokesperson for the IfATE said external quality assurance needs to "respond to the specific nature of the apprenticeship standards involved".

"Therefore, what constitutes cost

recovery will vary for different EQA providers depending on a variety of factors such as the mix of standards they work on, volumes on those standards and the cost of expertise in the sector," he added.

"We will keep these charges under review going forward."

The ESFA sets a funding band for each apprenticeship standard, which is usually the value given to providers to deliver the training.

Of the total funding, up to 20 per cent is available to fund the end-point assessment. The EQA cost is paid by the end-point assessment organisation and is factored into the EPA price.

The EQA provider that charges the most is the Institute of Groundsmanship, at a cost of £179 per apprentice.

A "letter of recognition" on the IfATE's website recognises that this is a "relatively high amount but reflects the anticipated low volume of apprentices".

"Therefore, if volumes do increase we would expect costs to decrease," it adds.

Tim Gray, the director of membership and business development at the Institute of Groundsmanship, said his company is not for profit and provides the EQA for the level two sports turf operatives standard "purely on a cost-

EQA provider name	Number of standards covered	Charge per apprentice
Academy for Healthcare Science	4	£58
CILEx Regulation	1	£87
College of Policing	1	£60
Construction Industry Training Board	16	Free
Engineering Construction Industry Training Board	2	Free
Engineering Equipment and Material Users Association	1	Not yet agreed
Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education	191	Free
Institute of Groundsmanship	1	£179
National Skills Academy for Rail	29	£78
Ofqual	63	Free
People 1st International	18	£41
Retail Motor Industry Standards and Certification	1	£45
Skills for Care	2	£40
Solicitors Regulation Authority	1	Free
The Institution of Railway Operators	2	£60
Tri-Service	1	Free
UK Fashion & Textile Association	10	£44
Worshipful Company of Saddlers	1	£50

Source: Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education

recovery basis".

Lantra, an awarding organisation that delivers the EPA for the sports and turf operatives standard, which has a funding band of £5,000, will charge £1,000 per apprentice for its service.

Marcus Potter, Lantra's chief executive, told *FE Week* his organisation does "face some challenges in delivering the assessment within the available funding – this is partly because of the

additional EQA cost".

The Institution of Railway Operators contested the £60 per apprentice charge stated in its letter of recognition.

It said its proposed EQA methodology was: "Stage one, annual charge of £2,750 (+VAT) per EPAO; stage two, charge per visit of £1,850 (+VAT), per EPAO."

The institution added that it "can't imagine getting to the equivalent of £60 per head".

Providers turning apprentices away as non-levy cash dries up

BILLY CAMDEN
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Exclusive

Training providers' non-levy funding is running dry and some are even having to turn apprentices away – but the government can't offer more cash as it doesn't have any left in the system.

The unprecedented issue, which one sector leader has described as "market failure", comes just weeks after the Department for Education launched a new campaign to drive up the number of apprenticeships in England.

Around £500 million was allocated by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) for delivering apprenticeships to small employers for the 15 months from January 2018 to March 2019 – a major fall on the £1 billion that was available for this provision in the previous 12-month period, according to a previous estimate from the Association of Employment and Learning Providers.

Nearly 700 providers currently share the pot but many started to feel the

financial strain towards the end of last year after being denied opportunities for in-year growth funding, and some have now run out of the cash altogether.

"We can't put more 16- to 18-year-olds on programme because we haven't got the funding," said William Howarth, the co-founder of Cheynes Training, which trains hairdressing apprentices across the UK.

"We're turning people away. We are confident we could have had another 120 learners on over that November to March period."

In November, *FE Week* revealed that the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education said there could be a £500 million overspend on the apprenticeship budget in 2018/19 – which would explain why the government can't offer any more non-levy funding.

The AELP is now advising its members to be "very careful in calculating the risk" of going ahead with new starts as it is "still no nearer resolving the medium- and longer-term issue of how SME [small and medium-sized] apprenticeships will be funded as

the levy gets consumed by the levy-paying employers".

"Now the infamous IfA slide on levy spend is official, our immediate concern is the tank running dry for non-levy," said AELP boss Mark Dawe.

"Several training providers started reporting before Christmas that they were up to the hilt on their contracts.

"This number is growing, which

"This is a market failure for SMEs and young people"

means smaller businesses will be starved of apprenticeships."

The ESFA said last week that it is reviewing providers' delivery on current contracts and could release "over delivery" for some.

Mr Dawe said this announcement "kicked the can down the road" and providers are "far from being out of the woods on meeting demand from non-levy employers".

David Hughes, the chief executive of the Association of Colleges, said he is "getting increasingly worried that more and more employers are being turned away" leading to "young people missing out on opportunities".

"This is a market failure for SMEs and young people," he added. "The government needs to intervene."

Cheynes Training has around 30 apprenticeship academies in England and had a non-levy contract worth just over £1 million to use this year.

It rallied MPs from around 20 of the constituencies that the various academies are in to plea with the DfE for more cash, but the provider still had four appeals for growth turned down.

"In terms of impact we then lost employers because they wanted to put people on the programme but we didn't have the funding for new starts over the November to March period," Mr Howarth told *FE Week*.

"In previous years we might have put those learners on, safe in the knowledge that the ESFA would fund it eventually, but, sadly, we have lost confidence in that happening."

A DfE spokesperson said: "It is our intention to fund all learners until the end of their programmes. However, as always, if providers deliver more than their total contract value, it is at their own risk."

In August, the ESFA announced it would extend current non-levy contracts from April 2019 to March 2020, but no growth funding will be available unless a "significant budget" becomes available.

The 10 per cent fee that small businesses must currently pay when they take on apprentices is also expected to be halved this year, although it is not clear when this change will take place.

When the five per cent co-investment is introduced, the government predicts it will cost the Treasury an extra £70 million a year by 2022.

The non-levy crisis comes after the DfE launched its new 'Fire It Up' apprenticeships campaign on January 17.

At the time, education secretary Damian Hinds said: "It's vital that we challenge people's thinking about apprenticeships, which is why the government's new campaign will aim to shift deeply held views and drive more people towards an apprenticeship."



Director of Training Services

Up to £55,000 per annum

St Helens Chamber is a first class training and business support company, employing 110+ people and recognised through quality marks including : Queen's Award for Enterprise, Investors in People Gold, Ofsted Good; Chamber of the Year 2016 and Matrix Accreditation.

We are seeking an experienced senior manager to lead our highly successful Training Services department and join our Senior Management Team.

With responsibility for 50 staff and a budget of £3m, you will have demonstrated an ability to lead a high-performing team, coupled with the technical knowledge this role demands.

Our Training Services department delivers Apprenticeship training to over 600 Apprentices across Merseyside, in addition to delivering Adult Education programmes and a range of projects to improve the skills of local people and businesses.

Our implementation of the Apprenticeship reforms has been highly successful, strongly supported by

both levy payers and smaller businesses, and we have progressed well in making the switch from Frameworks to Standards. We deliver across a wide range of Apprenticeship sectors including Health & Social Care, Business, Leadership & Management, Logistics, Construction and Hairdressing.

We pride ourselves in maintaining high quality delivery – evidenced by our achievement rates, employer and learner satisfaction rates and Ofsted grades of Good, with Outstanding for Personal Development, Behaviour and Welfare.

If you share our passion for training and development and have a proven track record of managing Apprenticeship delivery, then we want to hear from you. This role suits a proactive, market-orientated person inspired by the opportunity to develop outstanding training for local people and our business community.

Whilst being based in St Helens you will be required to travel across Merseyside and surrounding areas so the use of your own car is essential.

If you would like to apply for this vacancy please forward a copy of your CV with a covering letter stating your current salary to **Louise Johnson, HR Assistant, St Helens Chamber, Salisbury Street, St Helens WA10 1FY** or to vacancyinfo@sthelenschamber.com

Further information can be found on our website www.sthelenschamber.com Closing date for receipt of applications is 26th February 2019. An enhanced DBS check is a requirement for this role.



Chief Finance Officer
Permanent
37 hours per week

The College is looking to appoint a new Chief Finance Officer. This role will be a senior post-holder with responsibility for the overall financial management of Tyne Coast College and the Tyne Coast Academy Trust, which is sponsored by the College. The post-holder will report to the Chief Executive of the College.

As a multi-million pound organisation with international reach and reputation, we are committed to ongoing investment in the north east, the local communities we serve, our facilities, our staff and our students' experience.

This role would suit an inspirational and innovative leader, able to meet the challenges facing the Further Education sector while

ensuring the College delivers value for money, and adheres to comprehensive and rigorous financial controls.

This is an exciting but demanding period of growth for the College and as such will require a dynamic Chief Finance Officer who is committed to continuously improving the financial service provided to the College and Academy Trust.

If you would like to discuss the role in more detail please contact Catherine Donnelly, Executive Director of Human Resources on **0191 427 3905** or email Catherine.Donnelly@stc.ac.uk

Closing date for applications Date Monday 25th February 2019

Interviews to be confirmed but expected to be held w/c 18th March 2019

To apply and to view details of further exciting opportunities, please visit www.stc.ac.uk or contact the HR Department, email on hr@stc.ac.uk or Tel: **0191 427 3583**. Please quote the appropriate post reference. All positions at the College are subject to DBS clearance.

Please note if you are successful at the shortlisting stage interview details will be sent to the e-mail address you applied from.

The College is an Equal Opportunities employer. All employees have a responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and vulnerable adults.



Principal & Chief Executive



Location: Fareham, Hampshire **Salary:** £110,000 - £120,000 **Closing Date:** Monday 11th February 2019

Our Successes:

- "Outstanding" Ofsted November 2017
- "TES FE Awards for FE College of the Year" February 2018
- "Nominated for TES Apprenticeship Programme of the Year November" 2018
- Setting the agenda for improving teaching and learning for post-16 Maths with investment from the Department for Education to develop a regional "Centre of Excellence in Basic Maths" – awarded October 2018
- Fareham College wins Apprenticeship Initiative Award at Constructing Excellence SECBE Awards 2018 in July
- "Awarded T-Level Pilot" – June 2018. Fareham College is one of only 9 colleges in the south-east to be offered the opportunity to deliver the first 3 T-level subjects in 2020.
- Fareham College scoops Teaching Excellence Framework Award in June 2018

Fareham College offers state of the art facilities comprising workshops, teaching classrooms, learning resource centres, restaurants, a theatre, a hair & beauty salon and associated facilities. We operate over a number of sites which are either purpose

built or significantly updated and refurbished following an investment of £34m.

In November 2017, the College received an 'Outstanding' judgement in its latest Ofsted inspection, one of only a handful of colleges to have converted to the highest grade in more than two years.

Our success is supported by a team of over 300 academic and business support staff. We work closely with employers to provide the very best technical and professional training to set our students on the path to exciting and rewarding careers.

We are looking for a Principal with proven experience/skills in the following areas:

- Advanced leadership skills - adapting and managing change projects, making difficult decisions whilst still maintaining a motivated team
- Financial acumen to understand key drivers and respond with clear timely and measurable recommendations
- Advanced communication skills and the ability to adapt to different groups, students, employers, politicians, educationalists and Governors

- Student engagement to deliver high quality outcomes and tracking students into employment
- Employer engagement and responding to sector opportunities, including partnering individual organisations and groups of businesses within sectors
- Exploit the reputational opportunities arising from an "outstanding" organisation and deliver growth in student numbers and continually improve quality
- Able to respond effectively in a rapidly changing environment
- Open management style and most importantly a sense of humour - making the experience fun

Interview Dates: 20th & 21st March 2019

Follow us on LinkedIn and view our latest college updates.

For any application queries, please contact Sarah Allen, HR Adviser on 01329 815 394. More information on the position can be found here: www.fareham.ac.uk/college-overview/fareham-college-principal-recruitment/

We are not using agencies to recruit to this position.



DIRECTOR OF QUALITY

Hours: 37 hours per week

Tenure: Permanent

Salary: £70,000 - £80,000

West London's College demonstrates its commitment to our learners through our values; Excellence, Ambition, Focus, Accountability, Inclusion and Integrity. The post holder will strive to improve lives through, education, training, skills and development, fostering social and economic success, in line with the College's overall mission.

As Director of Quality you will join the College at a key time and deliver organisation-wide improvements in quality systems, procedures and staff development.

THE ROLE

The successful candidate will be joining at an exciting time as the college continues its journey through a period of growth, whilst maintaining excellent student outcomes, which are amongst the best in London. As part of our strategic Leadership Team, you will lead on the quality improvement of every aspect of the college's performance, including both academic and support functions.

You will lead, manage and develop a team of quality professionals, embedding the College's core values of Excellence, Ambitious, Focus, Accountability, Inclusion and Integrity. Providing strategic oversight for quality across the College, you will have overall responsibility for the management and development of exemplar QI and QA, with a particular focus on excellence in teaching and learning. You will be a completer-finisher and have relentless drive and focus on ensuring that an outstanding quality profile will be realised across the organisation.

THE PERSON

The successful candidate will be a proven leader and manager with extensive experience in the delivery of organisation-wide quality processes and systems. You should be able to demonstrate a passion for teaching and learning and an understanding of how to develop quality processes that support staff to excel in delivering the best possible education experience for every student. You will be able to demonstrate a track record of success and outline the value that you will bring to the College.

With comprehensive experience in business and quality improvement techniques and strategies to raise achievement and the ability to motivate and inspire a group of professional staff you will come to this role with a clear and transparent vision, and be able to deliver the quality interventions that will underpin the College's behaviours and core values. In addition you will be:

- Able to use data and statistics to enable improvements across the whole College.
- Skilled in developing positive working relationships and promoting the College.
- Financially astute, with an understanding of the impact on costs and funding relating to quality improvement.
- Experienced in delivering change along with working in a large multi-site environment.

Our aim is to recruit the best staff possible and to deliver first class teaching to our learners. We are committed to equality and diversity and expect our staff to share this commitment.

The safety and welfare of our staff and learners is extremely important to us and is why we pride ourselves on our Safeguarding procedures.

To apply, please visit www.wlc.ac.uk/your-college/jobs

Closing Date: 10th February 2019



To apply, please send your CV to recruitment@wea.org.uk

CLOSING DATE AND TIME

Sun, 10/02/2019 - 23:59



Adult Learning Within Reach

WHO WE ARE

The Workers' Educational Association is a unique charity and the UK's largest voluntary sector provider of adult education. With a clear vision and a strong social purpose, we bring great teaching to local communities, with life-changing courses held in community centres, workplaces, schools and almost anywhere else you can think of. Since 1903, we have been giving disadvantaged people the opportunity to return to learning - inspiring them to realise their full potential and become active, engaged citizens. We see education as a tool for social justice, not just self-improvement, and we pride ourselves on making learning accessible. Volunteers play a central role in everything we do, from governance through to classroom support, helping us deliver courses to 50,000 people in 2,300 locations.

ABOUT THE ROLE

The post holder will promote achievement of education performance indicators in line with the WEA's strategic aspirations and business plan, across the full range of funded provision in the WEA's activity in England. This includes Adult Education budget, Mayoral Combined Authority and a range of contracts and full cost recovery educational activity across the WEA's 4 themes, Employability, Community Engagement, Health and Wellbeing and Culture. This will include supporting education project implementation and delivery across England

ABOUT YOU

You will hold a level 4 teaching qualification and Prince 2 or equivalent project management qualification, with experience of contract management.

You will have previous experience of management of Education and Skills Funding Agency contracts and of management and interpretation of complex data and along with excellent communication and interpersonal skills and ability to build relationships, a high attention to detail and the ability to organise and prioritise your own work.

You should be able to motivate, inspire and inform those around you to achieve the best outputs for the organisation.

SENIOR EDUCATION DELIVERY MANAGER

HOURS

35 hours per week

SALARY

39,161 to 41,221

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

The WEA is looking for a Senior Education Delivery Manager to promote education performance achievements in line with our strategic aspirations and business plan.



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EDITORIAL



Why are providers charging the maximum apprenticeship price?

The apprenticeship levy brought with it a radical overhaul of provider funding, dispensing with fixed rates set by the funding agency.

Instead, the ESFA listed maximum values for apprenticeship frameworks and standards, up to £27,000, but “expected to see employers and providers negotiating on price below the funding band upper limit”.

But, as *FE Week* reported last March, nearly all providers are charging the maximum rate and failing to do any negotiation.

Claiming more funding

than is always necessary would not be a big problem if it were not for the fact that apprenticeship funding is public money.

An experienced manager needs less training than someone new to the role, so the funding should be reduced accordingly.

The ESFA appears to have realised this and beefed up the prior learning section within their 2018/19 funding rules, threatening to take funding back from providers overcharging by failing to account for existing knowledge, skills and behaviours.

And, as we report today,

the DfE has commissioned research into “If and how providers and employers are adapting training and the associated costs to take into account the prior learning.”

Providers should pay particular attention to the new prior attainment section within the funding rules, as auditors will be sharpening their pencils.

Increased scrutiny from Ofsted in apprenticeship monitoring reports has also identified providers failing to identify and or make adjustments for prior learning, particularly for existing employees.

Consider this: if all

apprentices are funded at the cap it must mean none of them had any relevant existing knowledge, skills and behaviours at the start of the course. Sound plausible?

As if drawing down excessive public funding was not bad enough, consider the impact on the overall budget and those that will miss out.

Apprenticeships for young people and those at the lower levels with no prior learning is shrinking yet the unstoppable rise of existing employees on management apprenticeships continues.

The IfATE has already

warned of budget pressures and is pushing down many of the maximum caps.

The ESFA has recently said there is unlikely to be any additional funding for small employers in the coming year.

So it will be an uncomfortable message for many, but providers charging at the cap, with no consideration for prior learning, will only have themselves to blame when the money runs out and the auditors come knocking.

Nick Linford, Editor
news@feweek.co.uk

Readers' reply



EMAIL



TWITTER



FACEBOOK



WEBSITE

The ESFA needs to talk about sex

Totally agree with this – it's just pointlessly restrictive (as indeed are many people's views on the subject, but we won't get into that).

We use City and Guilds for some qualifications and they require the gender so you can search for candidate records. Why? It doesn't narrow down the results well and it really isn't relevant to much else.

Cris Hale

Scrap the apprentice minimum wage, AELP demands

Whilst I fully support fair wages it should be pointed out that an apprentice being employed for a 40-hour week is really only working less than 32 hours and that is not taking into account the extra time they are expected to put into training

during a normal working day. In certain lower-paid industries doubling the wage would mean far fewer apprenticeships.

Andrew Sutherland

More than half of 3aaa's former apprentices are still without a new provider

That is because the EFSA absolutely bungled the transition with some massively understaffed and overwhelmed email address, tried to look like white knights, but then forced employers to deal with the problem. Meanwhile, other providers were grabbing 3aaa's ex-staff, causing GDPR breaches, lying to apprentices and so on and so forth. An absolute sham!

Bob Spode

UCU members strike over pay in 13 colleges across England

Crucial the Universities and Colleges Union makes an

explicit link between FE funding and curriculum cuts and community impact. Basis of a coalition between the UCU and community activists and groups to invest in further adult community education. Not just a UCU issue.

Tutor Voices

Secrecy around funding band formulas protects against 'misuse', says IfATE chief executive

Everyone will realise that the 'calculus' relies far too much on the imaginary numbers and the unknown (guessed) constant.

Marches Skills Provider Network

What a bloody insult to trailblazers this organisation is, acting in a rogue manner.

Tim Buchanan

REPLY OF THE WEEK

Budget 2018: Apprenticeship fees halved to five per cent for small businesses



When will the government provide clear guidelines on the potential reduction to SMEs? Is this happening in April 2019?

We work with many organisations that would be more accommodating in upskilling staff via the apprenticeship route and the possible contributions should this be reduced, especially by 50 per cent.

We need to be working with these employers now. Letting them know the training is more affordable.

Rebecca Cartledge

Experts

JACQUI CANTON

Deputy Principal, Abingdon and Witney College



If it works for apprentices and employers, it works for Ofsted

Over a six-year period, our college rating for apprenticeships improved from 'inadequate' to 'outstanding' – and we weren't even focusing on inspections, says Jacqui Canton. Do the right things for the right reasons and good results will follow

It's not often that I gain management inspiration from cult films of the 1990s, but Ofsted definitely makes me think of the Brad Pitt classic, *Fight Club*, although perhaps not for the reasons you might think. The first rule of *Fight Club* is: you do not talk about *Fight Club*. And, for me, the first rule of becoming 'outstanding' is: you do not talk about Ofsted.

Preparing for Ofsted feels much like pushing a heavy boulder up a steep mountain, and it is all too easy to get bogged down in folders of evidence, examples of impact and reams of data. We know inspectors don't want to see folders of evidence now, but I'm sure many of us keep our own files anyway,

if only to organise our thoughts. Using the common inspection framework (CIF) criteria as a checklist can feel like a security blanket (and you should probably take more than a cursory glance at the criteria every now and then), but, honestly, don't focus too much on Ofsted.

Abingdon and Witney College was graded inadequate for apprenticeships in 2011. Six years later we had grown exponentially, engaged with hundreds of amazing employers and positively changed the lives of hundreds of apprentices. We had delivered the highest general further education college timely achievement rates in England for 16-18s in 2013/14, and the second highest in England for all apprentices in 2016/17. We had won numerous awards and our apprentices had been recognised nationally. Ofsted agreed that we were outstanding.

We did this by doing the right things, for the right reasons. We weren't seduced by big-name

employers, by potential gaps in the market or by national contracts. We designed programmes that worked for local employers, and that gave apprentices the skills they needed. We used initial assessments to make sensible decisions about whether

“We weren't seduced by big-name employers or national contracts”

programmes were right for applicants. We tracked and monitored progress well, and worked hard to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment on and off the job, and in and out of the classroom. We were obsessive about paperwork and admin (we all should love our

Management Information System teams a little more than we do), and adapted college systems where they didn't work for apprenticeships. We invested in expertise through a stand-alone apprenticeship unit and ensured senior team commitment for apprenticeships was clear. And, despite aiming for growth, we didn't take on employers who weren't committed to training or applicants who weren't ready for an apprenticeship. We didn't talk a lot about Ofsted.

But, we ticked the Ofsted boxes anyway. Amazing provision that works for apprentices, employers and the teams delivering the provision, also works for Ofsted. It certainly did under the CIF, and I am sure will work even more so under the proposed new Education Inspection Framework (EIF). The key drivers of intent, implementation and impact that are central to the EIF are, I think, in keeping with my (admittedly less

sophisticated) description of “doing the right things, for the right reasons”.

Of course, you have to keep doing the right things, for the right reasons. If you've pushed that boulder to the top of the mountain and achieved outstanding, the hard work doesn't stop. No one wants a quick trip down the slippery slope on the other side of the mountain. We had a celebratory debrief the morning after the inspection, and, only five minutes in, my team started talking about the areas that they still wanted to improve. It's that truly embedded (slightly obsessive) culture of continuous improvement that ensures they continue to deliver outstanding outcomes. We don't get it right all the time and are far from perfect, but we always strive to do better for our apprentices, employers, ourselves and the college. If your team can do that then, we can all follow Tyler Durden's lead in *Fight Club*: stop talking about Ofsted and just be outstanding.

MIKE HOPKINS

Principal, South and City College Birmingham



It isn't always easy, but college mergers can be a real success

A merger can be a trying and testing time, says Mike Hopkins. But do it right and you can be left with a leaner, more financially efficient operation with the same pool of students

During my 12 years as principal, South and City College Birmingham has been through two mergers: the first between the former South Birmingham College and City College Birmingham, and most recently with Bournville College.

Both mergers were model “B” - we took over the other colleges - and came about following financial difficulty within both.

Neither college could continue as they were, as technically they were insolvent. Neither was performing well and both were in bad shape educationally. They required serious improvement and there were no other realistic solutions.

Before our most recent merger, Bournville had become a failing

college and was in Education Skills Funding Agency intervention. Now, just 15 months later, both South & City College Birmingham (now incorporating Bournville College) have been awarded a grade 2 Ofsted inspection result, achieving a “good” across all areas.

I'm proud to be at the forefront of this, and I believe the experience makes me able to understand fully how to bring about and get the best out of a college merger. They can be a trying and testing time for any institution, but with the right preparation and know-how, a merger can be a real success.

If done right, an institution can combine the best departments of each college and be left with a leaner, more financially efficient operation with the same pool of students, but without the need to build new facilities.

A merger can also offer a significant and positive cultural change, with happier staff and students.

The biggest issues I found were the significant government bureaucracy, financing and the major cost and time commitment involved. We have planned, managed and undertaken each merger ourselves, but it is still a drain on resource to do so.

“A merger may not be the best strategy for every institution”

You have to consider a lot of things at the same time. You're bringing a lot of assets and a lot of staff together. Any underlying problems will inevitably come out of the woodwork so it is vital to address them early. A principal must fully understand their own facility, as well as having thorough research into

the institution that they are merging with.

Consider the drivers for your merger, carefully observe the financial state of the college you intend to partner with and think about the considerable amount of time and commitment that you need to invest. This will mean you will be involved in a lot more than just the day-to-day running of the institution. Importantly, remember that colleges are people organisations and the focus on staff and the implications for them will be critical to success.

With our second merger we knew exactly what needed to be done and the processes that were involved, so we were able to do things a lot more rapidly. All preparation for the merger was done in-house and we planned everything down to the last detail.

There is no right or wrong merger model. We can provide evidence from our latest inspection report that

we are here to provide for students from many different backgrounds. We believe that if we get the student and staff parts right, everything else follows.

However, a merger may not be the best strategy for every institution. The key reason is that a college is having serious difficulties, either financially, educationally or both, with little capacity to resolve this in the long term. Importantly, the merger has to be able to provide benefit to both colleges and their students.

If your college is considering a merger, make sure you fully understand what you are undertaking and what it will mean for the colleges and the local area.

In our experience the mergers needed to happen for the greater good of the people living in and around the city, and to improve the overall educational and skills attainment picture for the local area and for our local economy.

PROFESSOR EWART KEEP

Director of SKOPE,
Oxford University



Alliance will lead debate on long-term role of colleges

The new Four Nations College Alliance will help colleges go beyond their borders to learn more about best practice and common issues, says Ewart Keep

Last month *FE Week* covered the launch of the joint report by the UK's four college associations – Developing a Four Nations College Blueprint for a post-Brexit economy. The report is important because it results from partnership working and co-production by college leaders from across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland in response to what are perceived as shared challenges.

As the case studies demonstrate, there is much that colleges in each country can learn from one another in terms of best practice and approaches to common issues, such as how to further excellence in vocational education and training (E&T).

Moreover, the report marks a decision by the national college associations to

create a Four Nations College Alliance that will develop thinking on the future development of vocational education and its closer integration with industrial policy, economic development and innovation. The alliance will also seek to lead public debate on the role, funding and governance of colleges.

This is a timely development. Although E&T policy is now fully devolved and each country is empowered to do its own thing, there are good reasons for colleges across the UK seeking to learn from and influence policy development beyond their own borders. For instance, the UK government sometimes acts unilaterally on E&T issues in ways that directly impact on the other three nations. Examples include the decision to stop funding the sector skills councils (SSCs), the abolition of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, university funding and tuition fee policies (which have knock-on effects in the other jurisdictions), and the apprenticeship

levy, which was treated as tax measure by HM Treasury and therefore an undeveloped matter.

Plus we now possess (by accident rather than design) the opportunities afforded by a policy learning laboratory, where the UK nations share an integrated economy, a set of large

“Tumult and turmoil are largely confined to the English marketplace”

national and multinational firms, and a common labour market and employment regulation framework. As skills policies diverge between the four, a close comparison of policy performance is possible because other structural factors are broadly held constant and in common.

For example, policy learning can embrace the relative performance of a market-based versus a systems-based approach to delivering E&T. England has favoured a marketplace in schooling, higher education, apprenticeship and further education.

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have remained wedded to a systems approach. Scotland has also introduced a joined-up policy framework that embraces economic development, business support and improvement, job quality and fair wages, skills and innovation. This policy model may be of interest to some English combined authorities.

Scotland has also created an over-arching board to superintend the work of the two skills agencies (Scottish Funding Council and Skills Development Scotland) and the economic development agencies (Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise). In Wales, the existing higher education funding council will be

abolished and a new tertiary education body created to fund HE, FE and ultimately school sixth forms.

In all four countries, FE and the college sector face major challenges, but the kind of tumult and turmoil that now regularly fills the news pages of *FE Week* as colleges' finances collapse, large independent training providers go to the wall due to fraudulent behaviour, and providers cry foul as competitive funding bidding systems deliver unexpected and unwanted outcomes are largely confined to the English marketplace. Comparing the relative costs and benefits of system and market across the UK nations will be an interesting exercise that is liable to gather pace as more data becomes available.

The Four Nations Alliance will soon be launching a commission to review and advise on the long-term role of colleges. The aim is create a vision for the development of colleges across the UK over the next decade.

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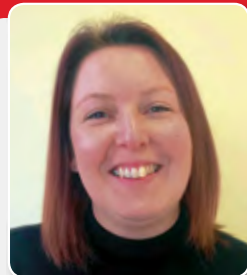
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Olivia Morton

Corporate Communications and Events Manager for The Bedford College Group

Start date 21 January 2019

Previous job

Business Development Coordinator, GSSArchitecture

Interesting fact

At eight-years-old Olivia introduced 80s punk rock band New Model Army to an audience of over 8,000 fans in Birmingham.



Gareth Jones

Relationship Manager- Adult Education Budget, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority

Start date January 2019

Previous job

Apprenticeship Programme Manager at Royal Mail Group

Interesting fact

He watched over 120 sporting fixtures in 2018.



Adrian Sugden

Principal, Henshaws Specialist College

Start date January 2019

Previous job

Interim Principal at a school for children with Social Emotional and Mental Health difficulties (SEMH) which is part of The Education Village Academy Trust

Interesting fact

He trained as a cabinet maker and still enjoys woodwork and making furniture as a hobby.



David McVean

Chair, Moulton College

Start date February 2019

Previous job

Education management consultant (he remains in post)

Interesting fact

He used to drive an ice cream van for a living

Movers & Shakers

...

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FE Week Sudoku challenge

How to play: Fill in all blank squares making sure that each row, column and 3 by 3 box contains the numbers 1 to 9

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

Difficulty:
Easy

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

Difficulty:
Medium

Solutions: See right

Spot the difference
To WIN an FE Week mug



Spot five differences. **First correct entry wins an FE Week mug.**
Email your name and picture of your completed spot the difference to: news@feweek.co.uk.



Last Edition's winner: Ken Fisher

Solutions

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

Difficulty: Easy

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

Difficulty: Medium

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