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FE WEEK

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LONDON DEVOLUTION ‘IN JEOPARDY’?

EXCLUSIVE: GLA costs balloon for development of AEB payment software

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LEVY LOST AND FOUND

£300,000 VANISHES FROM EMPLOYER POT IN NOVEMBER

DFE RETURNS IT ALL WITHIN HOURS OF FE WEEK ENQUIRY

JESSICA FINO JESSICA@FEWEEK.CO.UK

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CAN ESFA DATA BE TRUSTED?

- **Over 30 apprenticeship providers had ‘unreliable’ achievement rates, ESFA admits**
- **UK Statistics Authority investigates if ‘code’ for government statistics was broken**

Exclusive BILLY CAMDEN BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

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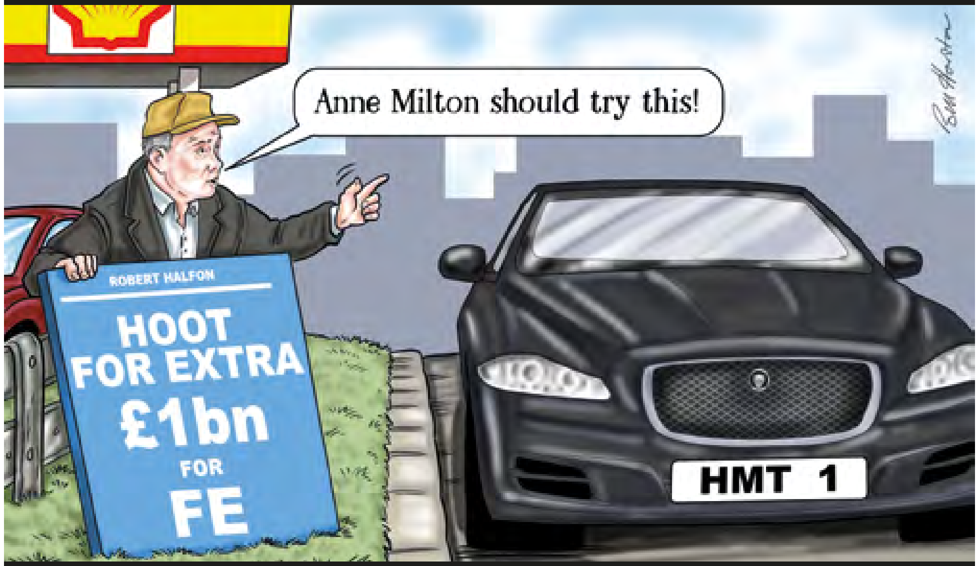

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News

ESFA apologises for apprenticeship off-the-job calculation blunder

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The Education and Skills Funding Agency has apologised for causing confusion in its off-the-job training rule and has updated its policy guidance to clarify how providers should be calculating it.

Providers were left baffled when the agency updated its "apprenticeship off the-job training policy background and examples" document on March 22, which for the first time stated that the 20 per cent calculation for full-time staff should be always be based on 30 hours of work per week, even where apprentices are paid for many more hours.

Official funding rules for 2018/19 make no reference to a 30-hour cap in the calculation, and providers have been including all "paid hours".

To add to the confusion, the ESFA later told *FE Week* that the off-the-job section in the funding rules "is not intended to be read in isolation; the 30 hours is referenced in the minimum duration section".

However, speaking at last week's Annual Apprenticeship Conference, the agency's director of apprenticeships, Keith Smith, said that while the guidance was "intended to help you interpret the rules in the best way possible", there was a "contradiction between the planned 30 hours and the paid contracted hours".

In an update published on Wednesday, the ESFA acknowledged the mistake and removed the section that refers to the 30-hour cap.

"On Friday March 22 we published version 2 of the off-the-job training guide and a compliant commitment statement template," it said.

"It was brought to our attention that there was an error in paragraph 69 of the guide. We have reviewed this text, updated the documents accordingly on the off-the-job training page and apologise for any confusion.

"To help us understand the availability of off-the-job training information and how the policy is working in practice, we encourage you to complete this short survey by Friday April 12, 2019."

Many in the sector will be relieved to hear the clarification, having made use of online forum FE Connect, managed by the ESFA, to raise concern about the issue last week.

One person, with the username PaulB, said the 30 hours cap would have "significantly reduced the number of OTJ hours required for our learners", some by "around 100 hours".

"In view of what I think is a change, and not a clarification, of policy, I think most providers will need to review the OTJ requirement for all apprentices," FE consultant Martin West warned at the time.

But it may also be the case that the confusion has not fully been removed.

MartinOutlaw on FE Connect points out that a note on the new commitment statement says: "The provider should enter the number of hours the apprentice works on average each week", rather than basing the calculation on a total of actual contracted hours.

Training provider director jailed for 8 months for fraud

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A former director of a training provider who falsified exam papers for individuals seeking to gain security guard licenses has been jailed for eight months.

Shamin Uddin, who headed up SAS Training Academy in Telford, Shropshire, was handed the sentence on March 29 at Shrewsbury Crown Court for fraud that was investigated in 2015.

He is also required to pay £2,000 court costs, payable within 12 months.

The sentence brings to an end a four-year process initiated by the sector's regulating body Security Industry Authority (SIA) that investigated malpractice at SAS Training's operations in East London, its headquarters at Wednesbury in the West Midlands and in Inverness, Scotland.

It was prompted by an undercover BBC investigation which aired in March 2015. In the report, it was alleged that staff at Ashley Commerce College, in Ilford, were prepared to sit exams for students training to work as security guards.

The British Institute of Innkeeping Awarding Body (BIIAB) investigated SAS Training Academy Ltd's premises in June 2015 after finding evidence of training malpractice.

The awarding organisation then suspended SAS Training Academy, withdrew their certification, and referred the complaint to the SIA which reviewed 270 qualifications.

The Honourable Recorder Jackson said this case "is particularly serious because it strikes at the heart of the (licensing) system…using training to deal with members of public.

"Organisations rely upon staff they believe to be properly trained to deal with those situations.

"The public needs to have confidence in those that work within the security industry."

He added: "This matter is so serious that only an immediate custodial sentence is justified due to possible effects of behaviour, that such offending has a wide-ranging monetary effect on individuals and businesses."

Nathan Salmon, one of the SIA's criminal investigations manager's, said: "We have satisfied ourselves that no licences were granted following Mr Uddin's actions. A number of learners had to attend alternative courses with other training providers.

"The potential damage Mr Uddin might have done to the reputation of the private security industry is immeasurable. This action, brought against him as the proprietor of SAS Training by the SIA, demonstrates that any suspicious training provision will be identified and may be prosecuted.

"The SIA will not tolerate malpractice in the provision of training to an industry that is working hard to be respected and reputable."

Ofqual published a report in January 2017 in response to concerns about qualifications used in the private security industry.

It led to the exams regulator auditing awarding organisations with regard to the "control" they have over their individual centres, after finding evidence it has reduced in recent years.

By law, security operatives working under contract must hold and display a valid SIA licence.

During the British Institute of Innkeeping Awarding Body's investigations in June 2015, verifiers found no candidates present at SAS Training Academy's operations in Barking, Essex. The alleged exam room was said to be too small to fit the number of expected learners.

In the same month, the BIIAB made an unannounced external quality assurance visit to SAS Training Academy offices in Wednesbury. Investigators discovered that the correct answers had been highlighted on some exam papers in order to help candidates.

When questioned, Uddin denied that the examination process was insecure and allegedly refused to allow the awarding body's representatives to talk with other members of staff present.

The SIA investigation found that examination papers were being submitted to the BIIAB from various examination venues across the UK with false learner details being added to the list of genuine learners.

A trainer was interviewed regarding courses he allegedly provided on behalf of SAS Training Academy. He confirmed that he had not conducted the training, and disputed that it was his personal details and signature on the paperwork submitted. At other venues false details of alleged learners' names had been added to examination paperwork.

SAS Training Academy Ltd ceased operating in December 2016.

News

Overspend: GLA warns of risk to AEB devo project

FRASER WHIELDON
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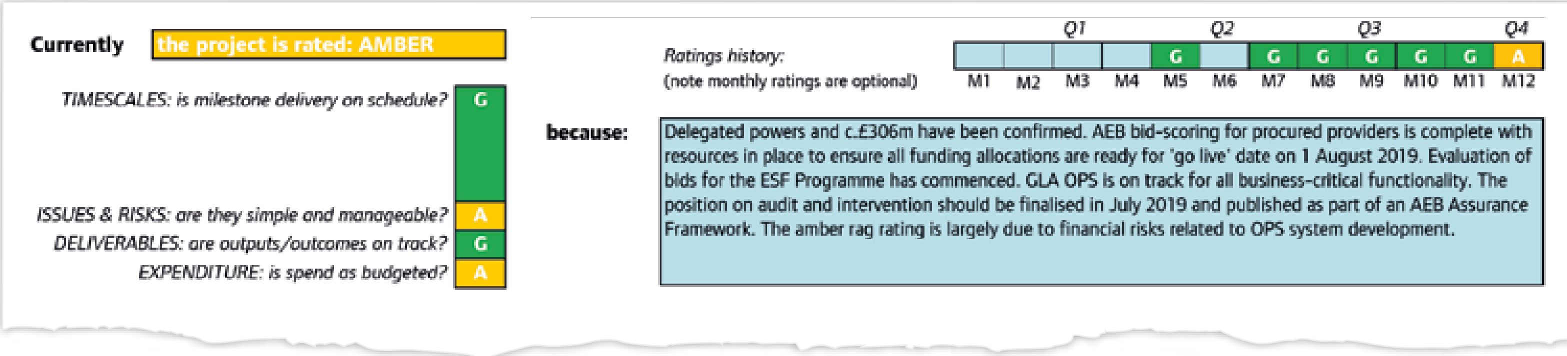
From front | Exclusive

The Greater London Authority has denied that devolution of the adult education budget is at risk due to spiralling IT costs, despite warning the Mayor that failure to find the extra cash could "jeopardise" the project.

The GLA is due to take control of London's £306 million adult education budget from the Education and Skills Funding Agency on August 1, 2019.

But according to the papers to be discussed by both the mayor, Sadiq Khan, and deputy mayor, Jules Pipe, at next Wednesday's AEB board meeting, the risk rating for the programme has moved from green to amber for the first time.


Currently: the project is rated: AMBER

TIMESCALES: is milestone delivery on schedule?	G
ISSUES & RISKS: are they simple and manageable?	A
DELIVERABLES: are outputs/outcomes on track?	G
EXPENDITURE: is spend as budgeted?	A

Ratings history: (note monthly ratings are optional)

	Q1			Q2			Q3			Q4		
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9	M10	M11	M12
					G		G	G	G	G	G	A

because: Delegated powers and c.£306m have been confirmed. AEB bid-scoring for procured providers is complete with resources in place to ensure all funding allocations are ready for 'go live' date on 1 August 2019. Evaluation of bids for the ESF Programme has commenced. GLA OPS is on track for all business-critical functionality. The position on audit and intervention should be finalised in July 2019 and published as part of an AEB Assurance Framework. The amber rag rating is largely due to financial risks related to OPS system development.


Sadiq Khan

"There is a risk," the paper reads, "the GLA doesn't meet the projected overspend costs from other budgets, thus jeopardising the programme".

A prime culprit for the spiralling costs is the AEB Programme Data and Contract Management Systems being built into the functionality of an existing software system known as the GLA Open Project System (OPS).

The GLA will ask the board at next week's meeting to endorse the assembly spending a further £441,000 on system development between now and the end of July, with a doubling of the monthly expenditure.

A review in February had already increased the amount of money being put into developing systems for the AEB programme, from an average of £54,000 per month to £105,000 per month, to ensure that the work was done by August.

> "There is a risk the GLA doesn't meet projected overspend costs, thus jeopardising the programme"

Asked why this work had been left so late, the GLA claimed that critical elements required by the launch date are in the final phase of user testing and that contingency plans were in place which could be implemented if there are any delays with the system.

This means the GLA could still be developing the AEB systems days before it is meant to take control of the whole apparatus for the capital.

The request for additional funding is dependent on agreement by the board, followed by the GLA's formal decision-making process, which the GLA told *FE Week* was "a formality". Asked what would happen if it was not approved, the GLA said this was "not a realistic prospect".

"It is standard practice for risk registers to consider a range of scenarios, however unlikely. The risk that we will not meet the projected increase in costs is not realistic because covering these costs is entirely at the Mayor's discretion and within our capacity." said a spokesperson.

In addition to the additional IT costs, the overall cost of management and administration appears to have rocketed 50 per cent to £4.6m.

FE Week reported in May 2018 that Sadiq Khan planned to top-slice £3 million from the AEB to pay for around 70 staff to distribute AEB funding.

However, the agenda for Wednesday's minutes lists management and administration costs for 2019/20 year as £4.6 million.

The GLA justified the top-slice from the AEB budget on the basis that the DfE has provided no operational funds, but refused to be drawn on why this has already grown to a predicted £4.6 million for the 12 months between August 2019 and July 2020, or the impact on staffing numbers.

Universities and training providers clash on apprenticeship priorities

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It is "entirely unacceptable" to expect public sector employers to subsidise low-level apprenticeships for chefs and hairdressers, a university membership organisation has said, calling on government to better support levels 6 and 7 instead.

Adrian Anderson, chief executive of University Vocational Awards Council, the body that represents over 90 universities delivering apprenticeships, said the decline in level 2 apprenticeships was "welcomed" as he believes these are "not what employers are looking for".

The statement comes as the Association of Employment and Learning Providers called for all levels 6 and 7, including those with integrated degrees, to be removed from the scope of levy funding in order to prioritise low-level funding as pressure on the budget mounts.

In a letter sent to skills minister Anne Milton ahead of spending review decisions, Anderson argues that prioritising lower level apprenticeships would "run counter to the concept of employer leadership" and "entirely undermine" the productivity and social mobility objectives of the apprenticeship system.

He asked her: "From a productivity perspective, is there any justification for the state providing substantial subsidies for low-level business administration, customer service or retail apprenticeships?"

"I doubt our international competitors are focusing their skills budgets on low-level apprenticeships [like these]," he added.

Anderson explained that the public sector is "by far the largest levy payer" and the NHS, police forces and local authorities "must be allowed to spend 'their' levy payments on occupations that have the most impact on the delivery of public services, e.g. police officers, registered nurses, social workers".

He said these bodies could, if non-levy-paying employers and lower level apprenticeship provision were prioritised, "see their levy payments transferred to small private sector businesses to train chefs, hairdressers etc."

UVAC suggested that levy payments made by the public sector should be "ringfenced" and public sector employers should be "able to recover the full cost of using apprenticeships for the occupations (from level 2 to 7) they need to deliver high-quality public sector services".

Anderson suggested other changes to the current "incredibly generous" funding system, including by significantly increasing employer co-investment for lower level apprenticeships and reducing the state's contribution to around 75 per cent.

The radically differing proposals from the AELP and UVAC come after the National Audit Office said there is a "clear risk" the apprenticeship programme is not financially sustainable after finding levy-payers are "developing and choosing more expensive standards at higher levels than was expected".

Prior to this, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education estimated that it could be overspent by £0.5 billion this year, rising to £1.5 billion during 2021/22.

The AELP estimates that up to £573 million has been committed to level 6 and 7 apprenticeship starts since August 2016, and suggested these should be funded by employers, a student loan to the apprentice, and any government grant which is available to full-time HE students.

"What the AELP is saying is that it doesn't believe that the NHS should be able to recover the levy payments that they need to train registered nurses, or police forces to train police constables, because they think that levy should be prioritised to level 2," Anderson told *FE Week*.

"It seems very odd to me. In my perspective, the level 2 area is what the schools system should be concentrating on. The fact that we have a third of young people completing compulsory education after 11 years without a level 2 qualification is appalling.

"Why should employers have to be billed for that when they need to invest and train their staff to deliver the productivity of their companies that would then translate into higher skills standards in the country as a whole?"

A DfE spokesperson said: "Overall the number of people starting on lower level apprenticeships accounts for over 81 per cent of all apprenticeship starts. We want to make sure all these people have the chance to progress to however far they want to go.

"Our apprenticeship programme was designed specifically to put employers, not the government, in the driving seat, helping apprentices gain the skills that businesses really need. As long as employers are using government-approved apprenticeships which meet our high-quality criteria they are free to spend their levy funds on the training programmes that best meet their needs."


Adrian Anderson

News

It's *FE Week* wot won it: 5 month mystery of missing £300,000 levy 'resolved' by ESFA

JESSICA FINO
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From front | Exclusive

The Education and Skills Funding Agency has finally returned £300,000 to a large high-profile employer within hours of *FE Week* asking for an explanation.

The employer, that did not wish to be named, saw the money mysteriously disappear from their apprenticeship levy pot in November without warning or reason.

After reporting the missing funds to the ESFA, the National Apprenticeship Service replied via email that they "have been able to raise this issue to our technical team". It added: "I hope this issue is resolved for you soon."

The employer then received weekly helpdesk emails – a total of 15 so far – including updates such as: "Thank you for your patience whilst our second line support team investigate this. We are looking into your incident with great detail and will be in touch within five working days to provide another update."

In February this year, the employer was told: "The technical support team have stated that they are conducting a full analysis to rectify your account, and other employers who have been affected by the same issue."

When asked to escalate the issue, the agency said this was already being dealt with at the highest levels.

However, the employer had not been given a reason to why the money, which represents nearly all its levy budget for a year, disappeared from its accounts.

The business told *FE Week*: "Nobody seems able or willing to explain why we've lost £300,000 from our levy account, more than four months since it disappeared. It is also clear we are not the only employers that this has happened to. It is incredibly frustrating and we would like it returned as soon as possible."

The employer received an email in February from the ESFA's digital service saying that whilst the incident remains unresolved, when the levy runs out in its account it should tell its providers that they will not be chased by the ESFA for collection of the co-investment.

"During the call you have mentioned that some of your training providers have not received payments because of the amount that is missing from your account and I explained that this issue was affecting multiple employer accounts and that a fix is being applied to the affected account since December 2018.

"I have notified the Technical Support Team of the fact that you have been unable to pay for apprenticeships and have asked if they are able to try and prioritise your account when applying the fixes to the affected accounts... I hope you can forward this information to your training providers", reads the email.

The company said that as well as hoping to see the money back into its accounts soon, it wants to know how its providers will get paid the co-investment and what impact this will have on the sun-setting policy which kicks in next month.

An ESFA member of staff said in a FE Connect post where *FE Week* raised the issue: "We are working with affected employers to address the issue on an individual basis."

FE Week asked for an explanation from the Department for Education, with permission from the employer, and

within eight hours the £300,000 had returned to the employers levy account.

A spokesperson for the employer said: "Of course we are pleased that the £300,000 has now been returned to our account following enquires to the DfE from *FE Week* and look forward to an explanation from the ESFA. In future, we hope incidents like this can be resolved far more quickly."

A Department for Education spokesperson told *FE Week*: "We are aware of the issue that impacted the employer and can confirm that this has been fully resolved, and we have confirmed to them no funds have been lost.

"The ESFA has sought to ensure this issue has been resolved and we continue to work with all employers to ensure the service delivers to the highest standards. We apologise for any inconvenience this has caused."

It remains unclear whether the situation has been resolved for other employers affected.

Tenth UTC closure announced

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Yet another university technical college will close later this year, taking the total to 10 for the troubled programme.

Wigan UTC, which is rated "good" by Ofsted but which has had a chequered history, has announced it will shut at the end of August 2019 after failing to recruit enough students to become financially viable.

The college, a 14-to-19 institution with a vocational focus, opened in 2013 and planned to recruit up to 500 students, but it currently only has 108 on roll.

A spokesperson said the numbers were "not sufficient for the UTC to operate without a crippling deficit, which will severely hamper the quality of education it can provide".

As revealed by *FE Week* in January, Wigan UTC received a government bailout totalling £169,000 last year. Its deficit stands at £516,000, according to the 2017/18 accounts for its academy sponsor, the Northern Schools Trust.

"I am really sad that we have had to come to the conclusion that the Wigan UTC must, in principle, close," said Rod Dubrow-Marshall, the UTC's chair of governors.

"This is entirely a reflection of the unsustainable financial position of the school and nothing to do with the wonderful outcomes for our students and our dedicated and hardworking staff, who have helped transform the lives of so many students and their families."

The governing body said it is working in partnership with the Department for Education to "agree a way forward which will allow support for families through this difficult time".

It is also "working closely with Wigan Local Authority and partner secondary schools in the area and expressed thanks for their commitment to working in the best interest of our families".

"Parents of all students at Wigan UTC have been informed this morning and the school will host a series of meetings to ensure all concerns are dealt with quickly and communicated fully," a spokesperson said.

"Parents and students will also have the opportunity over the next four weeks to express any views on the processes for closure."

Wigan UTC will be the tenth institution of its kind to close, leaving 47 open.

FE Week has reported extensively on the troubles of the programme, which has been hit with poor Ofsted ratings and low recruitment numbers leading to deteriorating finances since the programme launched in 2010.

Wigan UTC has had a mixed past. In May 2015 it was rated "good" by Ofsted, and inspectors highlighted that "good teaching and learning are enabling all students to achieve expected progress and a significant number to achieve above expected progress".

But in December 2017 *FE Week*'s sister paper *Schools Week* reported that it was one of only two schools to have been rebrokered twice since records


Wigan UTC

began. The UTC was also originally in its own single-academy trust, but left to join Bright Futures Educational Trust in March 2015. But when Bright Futures realised it would be a "long and uphill battle" to get the college to full capacity, it was passed over to the Northern Schools Trust.

In November 2018 *FE Week* discovered that Wigan UTC had to pay back £609,038 to the DfE after it overestimated student numbers the year before. This newspaper later revealed it was in receipt of a £169,000 government bailout in 2017/18.

"On behalf of the local governing body I want to wholeheartedly thank all our staff and our students and their families for being the lifeblood of the Wigan UTC – we share your feelings of sadness right now and we will work with you all to help ensure really good progression for you in your future education and careers," Dubrow-Marshall said.

There was some good news to come out of the UTC programme this week, however, as Bolton UTC climbed its way up to a grade two Ofsted rating after being hit with an "inadequate" judgement in February 2017.

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News

Investigation by statistics watchdog after ESFA lists 'unreliable' providers

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From front Exclusive

The country's national statistics regulator is investigating whether the Education and Skills Funding Agency's apprenticeship achievement rate data can be trusted.

Last Thursday the national achievement rate tables published for 2017/18 came with a list of more than 30 apprenticeship providers with "unreliable" data that had been included in the headline figures.

The ESFA says the unreliable data is included to "provide a complete view of performance" and acknowledges that by doing so this year's rate is 1.5 per cent lower than it would be if it was excluded.

"If we had excluded them for apprenticeships, then the national rate would be 68.8 per cent which would be 1.5 per cent higher than the published figure," its report, published alongside the tables, said.

After *FE Week* shared the finding with the UK Statistics Authority, which had previously pressured the DfE into changing the way it presents its achievement data for 2015/16, the authority said it would look at the matter further.

The government's achievement rate data must comply with the UK Statistic Authority's "code of practice", which says official statistics must ensure they are "worthy of trust".

"The code ensures that the statistics published by government serve the public," according to the authority's website.

"When producers of official statistics comply with the code, it gives users of statistics and citizens confidence that published government statistics are of public value, are high quality and are produced by people and organisations that are worthy of trust."

FE Week analysis of the national achievement rate tables for 2017/18 shows there were 23,940 apprenticeships across 34 providers that have unreliable data, including at two large high-profile colleges.

The total combined cohort for all providers in 2017/18 was 412,190, which means data for 5.8 per cent of the apprenticeships in that year cannot be trusted.

FE Week took a look back at the achievement rate data for 2016/17 and found that the DfE also included the unreliable data in the headline rate in that year. "If we had excluded them for apprenticeships, then the national rate would be 68.6 per cent, which would be 0.9 per cent higher than the published figure," it said at the time.

In 2016/17 there were 10,610 apprenticeships across 21 providers that were redacted for having unreliable data, which was 2.5 per cent of the 409,020 total cohort.

The largest provider to be excluded for having unreliable data in 2017/18 was the troubled West Nottinghamshire College, which had an apprenticeship cohort of 4,900.

The college ran into financial difficulties last year that has led to substantial government bailouts, a high number of job losses, and, ultimately, the resignation of its longstanding, high-profile principal, Dame Asha Khemka.

Commenting on its unreliable data, a West Notts spokesperson said: "The college discovered some inaccuracies in its apprenticeship data for 2017/18, primarily in relation to directly delivered apprentices, who had been incorrectly rolled-over from the previous year.

"This was identified as part of an internal review of our data and was subsequently reported to the ESFA. We are currently working with the agency to resolve these issues."

The other high-profile provider to be excluded from the DfE's official achievement rate data for 2017/18 was grade one Dudley College.

Its chief executive Lowell Williams last week apologised after *FE Week* reported how an audit exposed dodgy data with regards to late withdrawals that resulted in more than £500,000 being paid back to the government.

It is understood that the exclusion of some of the providers from the official data this year is a result of the ESFA's recent mystery audits.

As previously reported by *FE Week*, this major review of apprenticeship data is expected to result in the sector being officially warned about unacceptable data practices, as was the case nearly a decade ago when the then chief executive of the funding agency published a letter to the sector.

Asked what the sanctions are for providers who are excluded from the official data, the DfE declined to comment.

In July 2017 it came to light that the DfE was pressured into its major U-turn on the publication of hidden achievement rate data.

The department released 2015/16 national achievement rate tables for individual providers in June 2017, a few months after it closed several "loopholes", causing significant achievement-rate drops.

However, it refused at first to provide comparable figures for previous years, prompting many in the sector to accuse it of a cover-up.

A letter written by Ed Humpherson, the director-general for regulation at the UK Statistics Authority, later revealed that his team effectively leaned on the DfE, apparently after reading *FE Week*'s reports on the scandal, before it finally agreed to publish the figures on July 27.

Institution Name	Overall Cohort	Overall Achievement Rate %
WEST NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COLLEGE	4,900	67.0
ASPIRE ACHIEVE ADVANCE LIMITED	2,510	71.2
TALENT TRAINING (UK) LLP	2,500	6.7
EQL SOLUTIONS LIMITED	2,120	16.2
PDM TRAINING & CONSULTANCY LIMITED	2,050	25.5
DUDLEY COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY	1,510	82.7
MITIE GROUP PLC	1,480	26.8
ITL TRAINING LIMITED	1,030	36.0
MARDELL ASSOCIATES LIMITED	990	30.1
CHAPMAN BENNETT ASSOCIATES LIMITED	680	23.4
THE VOCATIONAL COLLEGE LIMITED	570	92.0
CARILLION CONSTRUCTION LIMITED	410	42.3
ANNE CLARKE ASSOCIATES LIMITED	380	12.9
LIVERPOOL CHAMBER TRAINING LTD	310	0.0
WOLSELEY UK LIMITED	260	27.6
NESTOR PRIMECARE SERVICES LIMITED	230	37.9
TEAM WEARSIDE LIMITED	230	71.7
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Source: DfE, NARTS transparency data: redactions 2017 to 2018

UK Statistics Authority

News

Third of apprentices on standards not ready for planned EPA in 17/18

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One-third of apprentices on standards were not ready for their planned end-point assessment last year, the government has revealed.

The Department for Education released the national achievement rate tables for 2017/18 last week which showed the slower than expected pace at which learners are completing the training part of the new "more rigorous" apprenticeships.

For apprentices on the old-style frameworks, just 10 per cent had to continue and achieve in the year after their anticipated end-year.

But for those on standards, a huge 34 per cent who were expected to complete in 2017/18 have continued into 2018/19.

The figure matches information that *FE Week* has been given recently, that there is a major problem brewing of apprentices on standards not being ready for gateway and end-point assessment.

The gateway is the point at which the training finishes and assessment begins for apprenticeship standards.

Graham Hasting-Evans, group managing director of NOCN, an EPAO for 47 standards, said the government's analysis "strikes a chord with our own experiences", adding that his organisation is "currently seeing on average around three- to four-month delays, which means many people moving back a reporting year".

This has "considerable implications for EPAOs," he told *FE Week*.

"It makes it extremely difficult to plan, could result in difficult-to-manage spikes in demand when the apprenticeships start to come through and also add to the finance burden for EPAOs, as payment is moved back. Hopefully, this will settle down after another year."

Cindy Rampersaud, senior vice president for BTECs and apprenticeships at Pearson, which is the EPAO for 27 standards, said the "non-preparedness of apprentices for gateway and EPA is largely a result of the market still being in transition as the apprenticeships model moves from frameworks to standards".

"In delivering EPAs, we have experienced instances where the apprentices have not been ready for gateway or EPA and we have pushed back on EPA dates to give sufficient preparation time to the apprentices so as not to disadvantage them," she added.

Kelle McQuade, head of end-point assessment at Training Qualifications UK, which does the EPAO for 30 standards, echoed Hasting-Evans' concerns and said her organisation is finding that gateway dates are being delayed "for a variety of reasons".

"Late engagement between EPAOs and training providers/employers has a knock-on effect with knowledge and understanding," she told *FE Week*. "It can be difficult because until they approach us to register learners, we don't always know who they are. Sometimes there is no time between an employer selecting us to be their EPAO and apprentices being ready for assessment.

"With many training providers piloting EPAOs and no set rules about when registrations must happen, providers are often leaving it late giving us little time to prepare."

She added that there is also an "overall nervousness about putting apprentices forward in this new world as there is a fear of failure".

End-point assessment is designed to be a more rigorous and costly process than the sign-off in the old apprenticeship frameworks.

Therefore, the aim at the gateway decision point is to put forward only people who are expected to at least pass, demonstrating the appropriate level of knowledge, competencies and behaviours.

The sign-off is a joint one by the training provider and the employer, whereas under the frameworks it was just the training provider.


Cindy Rampersaud

"As a result of this fundamental change it is our experience that training providers and employers are being more cautious about putting people forward," Hasting-Evans explained.

"The high cost of EPA and hence the high cost of re-sits is a factor in this."

News

DfE launches new stronger interve

New 'triggers' for government intervention in colleges revealed

BILLY CAMDEN
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Colleges that experience "serious" cash flow pressures, breach bank covenants, or have significantly delayed accounts will be placed into formal intervention from now on, the Department for Education has said.

A new "one-stop document" that sets out a "strengthened college oversight" regime has been published by the DfE this week.

It follows the introduction of the new insolvency regime that will allow colleges to go bust for the first time This spells the end for the long-term government bailouts that have been available to colleges during the post-16 area review process.

Minister for skills and apprenticeships Anne Milton said: "We want to make sure all colleges succeed. Occasionally we know that some colleges find themselves in difficulty

> "Intervention will follow if a college requests emergency funding"

"The strengthened college oversight guidance is a new 'one-stop document' that sets out how we will work with colleges to identify issues early on, make sure they are aware of the support available and, where problems persist, explains how we will intervene and support them." (See Anne Milton's column on page 16.)

The oversight regime lists a number of new "triggers" for early and formal intervention.

If the DfE finds that a college is at "risk of becoming insolvent within two years" or has "significant cash flow pressures" they will now be placed into early intervention.

At this stage, the FE Commissioner will conduct a two-day "diagnostic assessment" and will review the college's financial and educational performance, self-assessment and improvement plans, as well as meet with key personnel to assess the "capacity and capability of leadership and governance to deliver timely improvement".

Formal intervention will follow if a college requests emergency funding at any time, if their cash flow issues become "serious", and if there are "debt-recovery slippages on re-profiling", which includes failing to pay back government loans on time or breaching a bank covenant where the college's bank takes action.

Upheld investigations related to college financial management and governance and/or funding audits and/ or significant fraud or fraud practice will also lead to formal intervention.

This will "include, but is not limited to, related party transactions and evidence of action taken by an accounting officer and/or governors outside of the college, departmental controls/policies".

A college will also be placed into formal intervention if there is "evidence of financial practice taken by an accounting officer that is not in the best interests of: value for money, the protection of public funds, the effective delivery of service for learners, does not meet the public benefit test".

Subcontracting where in the ESFA's assessment there has been a non-compliance with rules could also lead to formal intervention, as well as failure to submit financial accounts within "30 days of the published deadline or 30 days of any agreed deadline beyond the published date".

Richard Atkins

If a college is placed into formal intervention, the FE Commissioner will be deployed to undertake an "intervention assessment".

The commissioner's role during this is to "assess the capacity and capability of the existing governance and leadership to deliver rapid and sustainable improvement where serious weaknesses and risk of failure have been identified".

> "Upheld investigations into college financial management will also lead to intervention"

Recommendations are then discussed with the college, after which the FE Commissioner will "prepare a summary report setting out their findings, conclusions and recommendations".

The policy document also sets out the DfE's "preventative function" to identify problems at colleges sooner through "financial dashboards for colleges and with additional indicators to alert the ESFA to investigate the college's position in more detail and take follow-up action if required".

It also details a "strengthened" role for the FE Commissioner to review provision in a local area, use of independent business reviews to "support effective decision-making", and the introduction of the statutory college insolvency regime (see page 10).

The Association of Colleges criticised the new local area reviews for not including small "non-viable" school sixth forms (see box out below).

Other minor changes to the DfE regime include renaming the "satisfactory" financial health category to "requires improvement", and renaming "administered-college status" (which involves "enhanced monitoring, such as ESFA observers attending college board meetings") to "supervised-college status".

Milton concluded: "I encourage all college leaders and governors to read this document and to act early if they see problems ahead. We can then do our best to help."

Government underfunding will lead to more external intervention, warns AoC

In response to the new intervention regime, the Association of College's deputy chief executive, Julian Gravatt, said: "Colleges are successful partly because they are self-governing. DfE's oversight document sets out some new triggers that will prompt external intervention but also emphasises the need for early action to avoid intervention altogether.

"Colleges are under financial pressure but they are already acting in the areas highlighted as triggers for intervention. They have cut back capital spending to conserve cash; have sold assets to repay debts and have ended sub-contracts in line with the new apprenticeship funding rules.

"We have no particular disagreement with ESFA's longer list of formal intervention triggers but we have encouraged officials to keep the system under review. Government underfunding and an excessively complicated set of rules for colleges mean there is a risk that more colleges will be tied up in external intervention. It is important

Julian Gravatt

to tackle the cause as well as treat the symptoms.

"There have been more than 60 FE Commissioner interventions and 39 area review visits over the past five years. The process works well in most cases but it is increasingly difficult to know how colleges can improve if funding continues to fall behind costs.

"The new local provision reviews may help in some cases, but we are disappointed DfE still sees this as a college-only process.

"In many towns and cities, students, staff and money are spread across a number of small, non-viable sixth forms."

ntion regime for colleges and ITPs

Minimum standards policy to be scrapped

BILLY CAMDEN
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The Education and Skills Funding Agency is going to scrap its minimum standards policy as part of an earlier and stronger intervention regime.

New "oversight of independent training providers" guidance was published this week which details how the agency aims to "eradicate low-quality training provision, protect learners and public funds".

Currently, the ESFA only routinely takes action when a private provider has been judged "inadequate" by Ofsted, or has failed to meet minimum standards or financial health requirements.

But as part of its new strategy, the agency will bin its focus on minimum standards and instead use "all education performance data available to us earlier in our overall risk assessments".

"The policy and related intervention trigger for minimum standards has been in place for over a decade and is ripe for review," the guidance states.

"We will cease taking intervention action on the basis of the 16-to-19 and 19+ education measures under the current policy after the application this year to 2017 to 2018 data. Reformed apprenticeship measures, however, require a more fundamental review as we move from frameworks to standards.

> "Independent providers will also be required to have an 'exit plan'"

"We will apply the current minimum standards policy to apprenticeship provision (all ages) in 2020 (academic year 2019 to 2020), based on 2018 to 2019 data, for one final year."

It added: "Further information on the apprenticeship threshold for 2020, and how provider performance in apprenticeship delivery beyond 2020 will be considered, will be published later in the year."

Matt Atkinson

One of the other major changes in the new oversight of independent training providers' guidance was the introduction of financial health reviews, which will look at private providers' ownership and be overseen by the Provider Market Oversight directorate at the ESFA.

The directorate is headed by Matthew Atkinson, who was appointed last year and whose responsibilities include managing both financial data analysis for ESFA and provider risk assurance; and leading a specialist restructuring team and the ESFA's prevention strategy.

Financial information that will be requested from independent providers could include "management accounts and/ or a rolling 12-month cash flow forecast, in-year qualitative key performance indicators, information to support contract performance in terms of learner profile of recruitment, in-learning, retention, progress and achievement and/or evidence of audit or self-assessment findings including outcomes from regular PDSATs, feedback from learners, staff and/or employers".

As part of the new intervention strategy, independent providers will also be required to have an "exit plan" from the 2019/20 contracting year.

> "ESFA can now apply sanctions including suspension of recruiting"

The plan will need to detail how the provider will "assist" the ESFA to transfer learners if a provider ceases trading. It must "cover the areas of learners, data and evidence (including for subcontracted delivery)".

Where data and analysis shows there is a "risk to learners or public fund", the ESFA reiterated that it can now apply sanctions to independent providers including suspension of recruitment or restricting growth.

ESFA chief executive Eileen Milner said: "ITPs are vital to the further education infrastructure, supporting learners and employers through the delivery of apprenticeships, adult skills, education for young people and specialist provision.

"Whilst the majority of training providers' delivery meets our training standards, there will always be a small number who start to fall short of these standards.

"We must continue to ensure that learners have a quality learning experience and that every pound of the public purse is invested wisely. By introducing stronger early intervention measures and closer contract management arrangements it will minimise the disruption to learners and risk to public funds when provider failures start to become apparent."

Eileen Milner

Thumbs up from the AELP

The Association of Employment and Learning Providers has said it "fully supports" the proposals from the ESFA to oversee independent training providers.

Chief executive Mark Dawe said the proposals to tackle poor provision and protect both funds and learners are what the AELP has recommended all along.

This includes the risk-based approach to managing subcontracting contracts, which Dawe says is the agency "moving towards" a risk-based approach to introducing caps on the growth of providers.

He continued: "It is also good to see ESFA adopt our recommendation for the return of contract managers.

"We agree that stronger early intervention will lead to less chance of disruption to learners and less risk to public funds."

He repeated the words of the ESFA chief executive, Eileen Milner, who said the discussion about failing independent training providers only concerns a small number of providers which are falling short of the required standards. However, Dawe added: "It is the learners' interests that we must protect."

Mark Dawe

He criticised the proposals for every provider to produce an exit plan for if it goes bust. He said: "The exit plan proposals might sound like a sensible idea, but what will materialise is probably a bureaucratic box-ticking exercise, which will not reflect the reality of the situation when there are problems."

The AELP would prefer a working group of providers that can be called upon to assist if another provider fails, according to Dawe.

He said this group would ensure hour-by-hour support of the apprentices as and when a situation arises.

CATH ON CAMPUS

The principal who took over two fa

CATH MURRAY
@CATHMURRAY_

Mike Hopkins has more experience than most principals of overseeing college mergers. In January of this year South and City College Birmingham, which he heads, received its second successive grade 2 Ofsted, despite having absorbed two failing colleges in the past seven years. *FE Week* asked how they managed it

In 2012, before area reviews were even a twinkle in the FE commissioner's eye (in fact before the role of commissioner was established), South Birmingham College found out that its neighbour, City College Birmingham, was in dire financial straits.

"It wasn't until they'd exhausted pretty much everything, that they then had a conversation with us," says Mike Hopkins, then the South Birmingham College principal.

The two colleges shared a campus and had worked closely over the years, so their fates were already intertwined.

"What we couldn't be in a position for at that time was to have a competitor take over a college that was on our campus," Hopkins says, leaning back in his chair at the Bournville campus of what is now South and City College Birmingham, a 25,000-learner general FE college spread over eight campuses across the south and centre of the city.

South Birmingham stepped in, taking over City College "with no support from the government. We had to absorb everything in terms of the financial impact," Hopkins says. The college went from financial good health to taking on millions in debt, some of which is still being paid off.

But it wasn't just the finances that left it to sink or swim. "To be honest at

"We had to absorb everything in terms of the financial impact"

the point at which we signed all the documents, all the various agencies said, 'Oh, thank you very much', and we didn't hear from them again. We were on speed dial until then, and they just disappeared."

It took three years of slog to get systems integrated, staff aligned, and the finances back on an even keel. They told tutors to forget about the finance and focus on the students, but behind the scenes the admin team was working frantically to stay afloat. Hopkins describes the period as being like a "swan going across the water, you don't see the legs going mad".

By 2015 the college managed a grade 2 across the board in its Ofsted inspection, which said that "leaders have been successful in raising the overall success rates following a decline brought about by the merger three years ago".

But just as things were starting to feel settled, it was hit with £15 million in austerity cuts to its adult education budget and the area review process began, in which the FE Commissioner was tasked with assessing provision in each part of the country and recommending potential mergers. Birmingham was one of the first to come under scrutiny and Hopkins recalls that "the commissioner came in with a clear view of what he wanted, which was a merger of us, Birmingham Met because it was in trouble, and Bournville College".

Birmingham Metropolitan College, a 30,000-learner, seven-campus giant with a grade 3 Ofsted rating, had already received £4.5 million in exceptional financial support in the previous 12 months and had its financial management branded "not acceptable" by David Collins, then the FE commissioner.

Bournville, a medium-sized college on the site of the former Rover factory in Longbridge, was also in financial dire straits. "We knew that no college could take on Bournville's debts," Hopkins says.

He was clear that taking on both, to form the largest college in the country, "wasn't doable without potentially collapsing everything". He refused.

But there was a local issue that the college governors and executive felt a responsibility to help with. Bournville College was relocated in 2011 from its University of Birmingham home to a

purpose-built campus on the former Rover site as part of the government's strategy to redevelop the area after Rover MG went into administration in 2005, leaving 6,000 people without jobs.

South and City offered to enter conversations about a deal to take over Bournville – as long the government would cover the debt. But the way Hopkins describes the discussions, as soon as it hinted it would be prepared to consider the merger, the "floodgates" opened.

This was a time when everything was in flux. "The insolvency regime was on the horizon," he recalls, "so the banks had changed their standpoint completely, the pension fund was jumping around all over the place because of the insolvency regime and were saying, well, colleges are now a massive risk. Then they brought in something called the transaction unit, which was bureaucracy gone mad."

"The transaction unit was bureaucracy gone mad"

The transaction unit is a team in the Education, Skills and Funding Agency tasked with allocating funds for mergers arising from the area reviews – from the "restructuring facility" fund

A civil engineering student operates a theodolite at the construction facility at Bordesley Green

Posters reinforcing the Bournville behaviour culture are displayed across the college campus

iled colleges and came out smiling

of £726 million.

South and City received some financial support from this fund (the amount is confidential), but it was still lumped with a £15 million mortgage and at least £5 million in bank loans with "stupidly high interest rates" and penalty clauses preventing it from paying them off early.

The 2017-18 accounts show bank loans of £26 million, plus £3.6 million owed to the ESFA. The college is currently trying to sell properties to allow it to restructure its debt, Hopkins says, which will take at least ten years to pay off.

"Bluntly, the government got it wrong. We were one of the first two through and it told us it couldn't get rid of bank debts, so we inherited bank debts. It subsequently got rid of bank debts in other colleges. That would have put us in a far stronger position.

"What we could do with is the transaction unit coming back in reviewing what it did and then addressing it and saying actually, we'll inject some more to get rid of at least one of the bank loans."

The restructuring facility fund, however, closed last year with £256 million still left unspent.

In the meantime, the senior team at South and City is keen to push the narrative that students are entirely protected from the impact – and Ofsted awarded its provision another solid grade 2 in January of this year. When pressed, however, Hopkins admits that as well as freezing staff pay, it has had to slash support services such as mentors and mental health workers. "Having those sort of key people to work in community with families and with the students, that's the bit that's gone out the window."

Hopkins' £180,000 salary for an institution with a turnover of £78 million seems relatively modest when benchmarked against others in the sector. Last year 73 principals were paid more than £150,000 and the highest paid, Matt Hamnett, the former principal of North Hertfordshire College, received £294,000 for a college with a turnover of £30 million.

For someone who's taken a massive institution through the fire, twice, Hopkins comes over as remarkably stoical – something he attributes to the "excessive amounts of exercise" he does as a racing cyclist. My questions about work-life balance don't seem to compute. "I live and breathe this," he insists. "I get a real buzz out of what I do and what we achieve. I love it and I haven't run out of energy yet, I haven't stopped enjoying what I do, and I mean even with all the downsides."

His management style is to be relentlessly present. "A lot of the staff at Bournville think I spend most of my time here. If you ask the people at Digbeth [another of the eight campuses], they'll say the same thing."

The key to a successful merger, he insists, is creating an open culture. One of the first things he did at Bournville was to move the senior managers down from their fifth-floor "glass tower" to the first floor and institute an open-door policy, with doors literally propped open unless a meeting is going on. "I accept it might be disruptive, but the other thing is, you're available to students."

"I live and breathe this... I haven't run out of energy yet"

He runs a "principal's question time" once a term at seven of the campuses, which has created a culture where the students feel they can chat to him at any time.

A "relentless attention to behaviour" was another crucial part of the Bournville turnaround, he insists, telling how he's recently witnessed cleaning staff pick up students for wearing a hoodie or dropping litter. The posters on the walls "give them a sort of back-up" – and the catering, security and cleaning staff feel more buy-in now that they are all employed in-house and paid the living wage.

It's intriguing that Hopkins has agreed to meet me at all, given that he's uninterested in making a name for himself, refusing invitations to speak at the Association of Colleges conference, for example.


Mike Hopkins

He was "dumbfounded" by how many principals approached him after he wrote a short piece in *FE Week* earlier this year, giving tips on how to manage a college merger – but says he didn't have time to engage with the people who asked him for more advice.

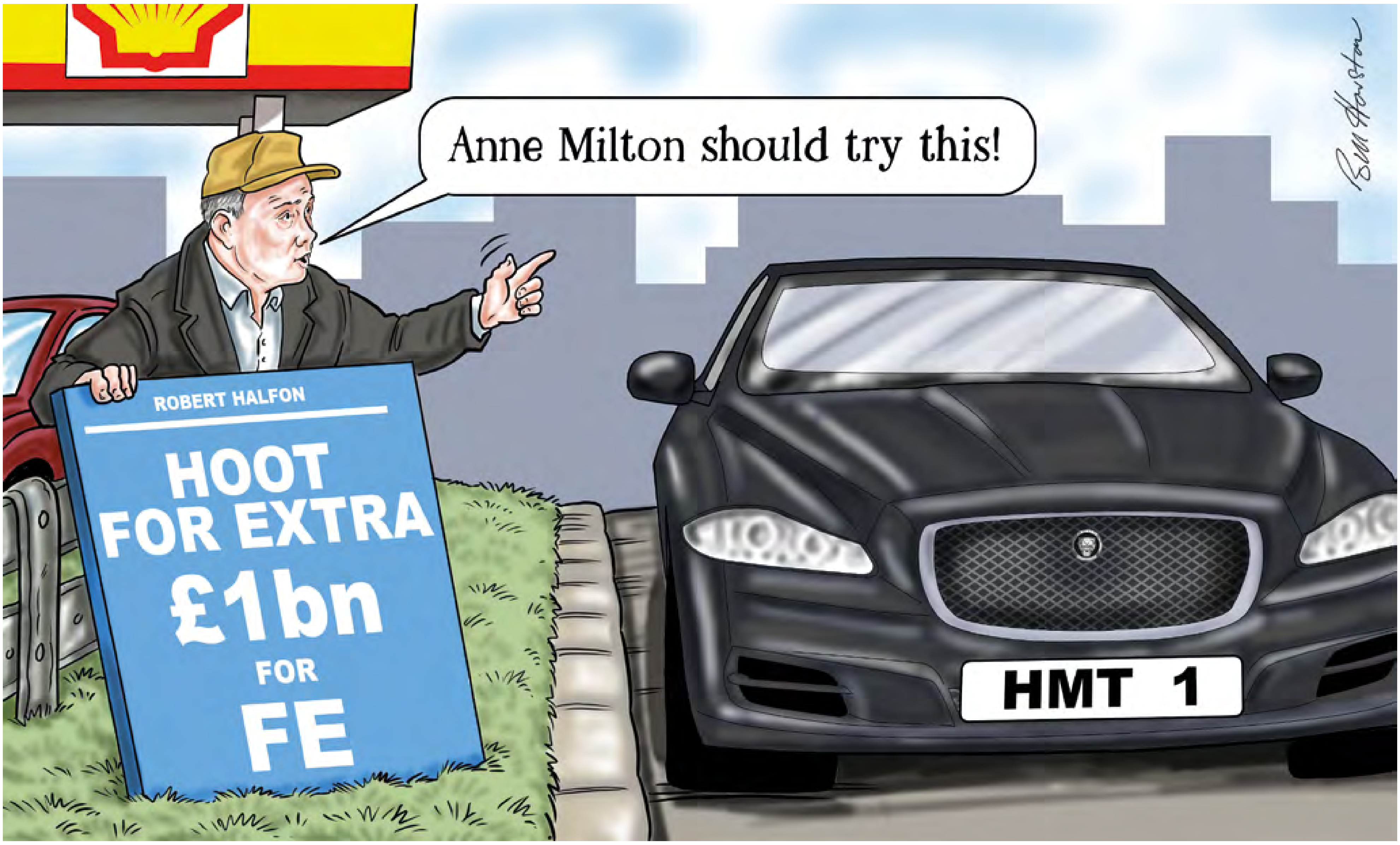
"I'll help colleges regionally, I will help and support, but I'm not going to spend lots of time and effort for things which I have no gain.

"I'm paid to run this college, so spending lots of time ingratiating myself with everybody on the national scene, well, how does that help the college? What benefit do the staff and students have if I'm somewhere else doing things which are not about the college?"

KEY DATES

August 2012	South Birmingham College merges with City College to become South and City College Birmingham
September 2015	Area reviews process begins, with Birmingham in the first wave
November 2015	South and City College Birmingham gets an Ofsted grade 2
February 2016	ESFA transaction unit created to administer financial support for mergers
August 2017	South and City College Birmingham merges with Bournville College
September 2018	The transaction unit's restructuring facility closes with £256 million unspent
November 2018	South and City College Birmingham gets an Ofsted grade 2

News



Select committee chair and skills minister clash over Spending Review strategy

FRASER WHIELDON
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The skills minister and the chair of the education select committee were at loggerheads this week after Anne Milton refused to say how much extra FE funding she is requesting from the Treasury.

Committee chair Robert Halfon argued that education ministers would be more likely to win over the Treasury if they were openly campaigning for an amount of extra funding or percentage increase.

He likened the discussions between the Department for Education and the Treasury to cardinals secretly deciding on the next pope, and waiting for "white smoke coming through the roof," rather than discussing it in public.

This came after (in answer to a question about the department's priorities for the upcoming Treasury spending review) schools minister Nick Gibb told the education select committee hearing that he was "concerned" about post-16 funding, since it had not been "protected" like the schools budget.

> "You two say there needs to be more money, but will not make the argument publicly"

Asked by Halfon how much extra funding the DfE wanted for FE, Milton said she would like to see the base rate rise, as FE providers are "risk-averse and concerned about balancing their books".

Pressed by the committee chair for a figure, Milton said she "would not like to say off the top of the head" and it would be "inappropriate" for her to say.

Halfon hit back: "You have acknowledged there needs to be more funding and there are extra costs.

"You two say there needs to be more money, but will not make the argument publicly.

"What you should be doing is to say 'this is how much we think a five-year funding settlement will look like and this is what a proper 10-year strategic plan should look like, and this is the case we are making to the Treasury'."

Milton countered by saying, "It is above our pay grade to say exactly what that figure is. That's for the Secretary of State."

"Do not doubt," she continued, "that we don't think we would like more money. Just asking for more money is not enough."

However, the chair said that Milton was before the committee to give them a figure.

He argued that the DfE ought to follow the lead of the Health Secretary and NHS England, which both argued constantly and publicly for a specified amount of extra funding for the NHS. The government eventually published the NHS five-year plan last year, which includes an average 3.4 per cent a year real-terms increase in funding over the next five years.

A number of FE organisations have pushed Chancellor Philip Hammond to increase the amount of money allocated for each student in the upcoming spending review.

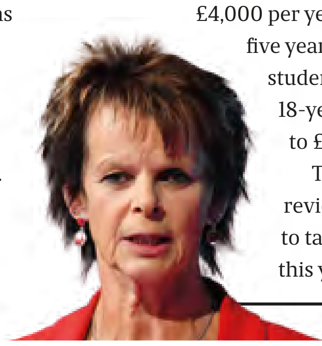
The Raise the Rate campaign, led by the Sixth Form Colleges Association, has called for the base rate for 16- to 18-year-olds to be upped from £4,000 to at least £4,760 per student per year, and then in line with inflation each year after.

In February, the Association of Colleges, which backs the Raise the Rate campaign, increased this call to £5,000 per student after crunching the figures needed to make T-levels financially viable for colleges to deliver.

The base rate funding per 16- and 17-year-old student has been stuck at £4,000 per year for the past five years, while per-student funding for 18-year-olds was cut to £3,300 in 2014.

The spending review is expected to take place later this year.


Robert Halfon


Anne Milton

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Location - Wolverhampton with the requirement for National Travel

As Apprenticeships Quality Manager at Veolia, you will work as part of our People Development Team in Wolverhampton. We pride ourselves in providing the best in class Learning and Development to our colleagues and as a vital part of our team you will be 'Developing our People to Deliver a Difference'.

We have embraced the Apprenticeship levy, which has resulted in both improvements to our apprenticeship provision and a sharp increase in the number of apprentices across a wide range of apprenticeship standards.

What you'll do

As an Apprenticeships Quality Manager, your overall objective will be to raise standards across the apprenticeship provision.

- Support the Apprenticeships manager in the completion and regular evaluation of the department's Self Assessment Review and Quality Improvement Plan.
- Supporting all Subject Matter Experts in standardisation meetings and embed any changes to achieve high-quality outcomes.
- Collating, evaluating and supporting the use of stakeholder feedback to drive improvements.
- Evaluating performance data and supporting the Subject Matter Experts to use these effectively to improve provision.
- Effective line management of a small team of Apprenticeship specialists, ensuring that all of the team's KPIs are monitored via regular 1:1, setting actions plans where necessary.
- Evaluate and develop the Teaching, Learning and Assessment observation cycle, including the use of peer observations in order to drive the quality of teaching and assessment across the provision.

The experience you will need

For success in this role, it is essential that you hold a Diploma in Education and Training (Level 5), as well as the TAQA Level 4, however, an equivalent qualification is acceptable for both elements. Ideally, you will have a PGCE and Level 5 in Leadership & Management.

In terms of the previous experience; We are ideally looking for someone with excellent knowledge of Apprenticeship provision through the experience of working in FE establishments (training provider, college or large levy paying employer). You will also have experience of working with regulatory and awarding bodies such as Ofsted, City & Guilds and CMI. You will have experience of generating an accurate and robust Self Assessment Plan as well as Quality Improvement Plans which have resulted in improved outcomes. This would also include carrying out formal observations, giving high-quality feedback and carrying out audits.

About Veolia

We are the UK leader in Environmental Solutions. We offer services and expertise in waste, water and energy management helping to build a more sustainable future. As a global organisation, our work focuses on delivering simple but innovative solutions to preserving natural resources, reducing pollution and protecting our environment.

How to apply

Please send a CV and supporting statement to **uki.resourcing@veolia.com** - quoting reference 98807.

For more information on Veolia and for the full job advert, please visit our website - **www.veolia.co.uk/careers/working-us**.

SUPPORT TEACHING & LEARNING (STL) TRAINER-ASSESSORS

QUEST

A quality Apprenticeship Training Provider is looking for self-motivated experienced and trainee individuals to join their Trainer-Assessor team to deliver high quality Apprenticeships. You need to enjoy developing people in a learning environment and occupationally competent in Support Teaching & Learning with a special needs background. We are looking for Trainer-Assessors in the Bromley area of South East London to work in both mainstream and non-mainstream schools/ adult colleges.

Main Purpose of the Job

Responsible for managing a caseload of learners, able to organise and prioritise work to ensure that learners are motivated to achieve their Apprenticeship in a timely manner. Successful applicants will be required to work within a 50 mile radius of their base and attend the main office in Ferndown, Dorset at least once a month or as required.

Key Tasks:

- Teach and assess all aspects of the Apprenticeship framework.
- Record learners progress using OneFile, an online ePortfolio and online tracking platform.
- Self-generate starts to maintain and maximise caseload.

Education, Experience and Skills Required:

- You should hold a relevant A1 - D32/D33 - TAQA qualification or equivalent or be willing to undertake a qualification as a trainee Assessor.
- You should occupationally competent in Support Teaching & Learning.

Other Requirements:

- DBS check as appropriate
- Mobile and flexible working is required

Benefits include:

- Competitive salary.
- Business mileage paid at 35p per mile.
- 25 days paid holiday increasing to 30 days per year plus bank holidays.

Salary:

- £19,000 to £21,000 (Trainee)
- £21,000 to £26,000 (Experienced)

To apply, please visit: http://www.quest-vocational-training.co.uk/information/careers/

ADMINISTRATOR

QUEST

Full Time
Salary: £15000 - £19000 p.a.

An experienced Administrator is required to support a quality Apprenticeship Training Provider.

Main Purpose of the Job

Responsible for carrying out general administration duties in a timely manner, adhering to compliance and meeting targets as directed by the Director of Funding & Compliance. The successful applicant will work from the main office in Ferndown, Dorset and the role will primarily be office based.

Key Tasks

- Preparing start packs and training materials
- Inputting new learner starts, updates and achievements onto the Learner Management System (PICS) and other systems
- Protecting funding at all times ensuring forms (paper & electronic) are fully compliant prior to processing
- Ensuring learner files and employer files are secure at all times, including robust archiving
- Distributing incoming post and ensuring that outgoing post is dealt with timely
- Maintaining stocks of stationery and other materials as appropriate
- Providing an effective telephone service, dealing with enquiries and taking messages

Education, Experience and Skills Required

- General administration skills
- Data input skills with experience of PICS
- Knowledge of Government funding requirements
- Experience of working in a training provider setting

Salary

- £15000 - £19000 p.a.

To apply, please visit: http://www.quest-vocational-training.co.uk/information/careers/

EDITORIAL

Creeping complexity has reached critical levels in FE

There is a theme across four stories in *FE Week* today which combined might suggest there is a critical business problem with funding rules and data requirements – complexity.

Let's look at the stories in turn.

1. ESFA finds achievement rate data 'unreliable'. Behind the scenes the ESFA audit teams continue to grapple with providers inflating achievement rates and funding claims by knowingly or unwittingly manipulating their Individualised Learner Record (ILR) data returns. The highly complex algorithm to calculate achievement rates using 'hybrid ends years' has required several changes, such as to the treatment of breaks in learning and transfers, in an attempt to close loopholes. But the situation has now got so bad that more than 30 apprenticeship providers have been singled out, and the UK Statistics Authority in looking into whether the headline achievement rates can be trusted.

2. Confusion over how to calculate and record off-the-job minimum hours. In an effort to be helpful the ESFA put out guidance, nearly two years after implementation, which said to comply with the funding rules the off-the-job minimum hours should be based on a 30 hour week for all apprentices. A week later, after claiming this was not a change the rules, the ESFA apologised and withdrew the 30 hour section of the guidance. Trouble is, a quick glance at the dozens of comments on the ESFA message board, FE Connect, shows providers are still grappling with complex issues like the difference between paid and contract hours leaving them unsure if they actually comply with the off-the-job minimum hour calculation rules.

3. Devolution of AEB at risk of falling at first data hurdle. The GLA has revealed in papers going to their board next week that developing a contracting and payments system, to include collection of FE data, is at high risk of creating an overspend. The ESFA already operates a very expensive and complex funding system based on monthly ILR submissions, so we should perhaps not be surprised trying to recreate it from scratch is both difficult and also wasteful duplication.

4. Employer left bemused after Apprenticeship System wipes £300,000 from their account. After five months, the ESFA still could not explain or resolve what appears to be a significant problem with the Apprenticeship System. Within hours of *FE Week* asking for an explanation the money reappeared, but questions remain over how and why this can happen. And the ESFA has delayed access to the system for small employers indefinitely as it grapples with issues like how to simplify complex functionality as well as ration the funding between established and untested providers.

Performance information needs to be trustworthy, funding rules need to be clear enough to comply with and payment and contracting systems simply need to work.

There are no easy solutions, but if these cannot be achieved then the tougher intervention regimes for colleges and training providers (also featured in the paper this week) are doomed to fail.

Nick Linford, Editor
news@feweek.co.uk

Readers' reply

EMAIL TWITTER FACEBOOK WEBSITE

Grade one college chief executive says sorry after dodgy data exposed

A difficult story for Dudley College: the report in *FE Week* is broadly accurate, though the RSM review did not conclude there was "data manipulation".

There's never been a more challenging time to work in FE. The complexity of our world increases. I acknowledge mistakes were made. I guess leadership is about accepting errors and learning from them. #BlackBoxThinking.

Lowell Williams

'Serious concern' as training provider cashes in on controversial management consultancy apprenticeship

Maybe these are areas that have been neglected for years. Apprenticeships are employer-led, perhaps this is exactly what employers need.

The better educated and skilled the workforce, the greater the organisation's capacity to improve and adapt.

Perhaps the honourable lady should talk to the employers and employees to understand the benefits of these programmes.

Maria Parker

When I was a lad at an FE college "winding up" a lecturer about the amount of holiday (14 weeks then), his response was, "if you see a good screw, don't criticise, get in on it'", but this seems a little over the top?

Marches Skills Provider Network

Tenth UTC closure announced

Whilst a few years ago, our experiences of a UTC were very disappointing.

Management team were more like marketing executives, and whilst facilities were excellent, some teaching staff seemed out of their depth. My son left and returned to local mainstream as level of challenge was low at the UTC, despite endless promises.

Lee Alexander

DfE needs to get a grip on this programme. Too many pupils' lives affected to treat it as just an interesting experiment

Mick Fletcher

REPLY OF THE WEEK

Incentivise the apprenticeships that actually boost productivity

This research seems based on a very narrow idea of benefits, as well as incorrect assumptions about the impact of AI. If value to society were measurable only in terms of productivity, we would hardly need care workers, nurses, emergency services or teachers. People choose careers for reasons other than salary, so why should apprentices feel any differently? Young people's opportunities are not enhanced by restricting their options to engineering and construction. The hospitality sector offers varied, people-facing roles that apprentices enjoy and that offer progression. Salaries won't match those of skills-intensive roles in construction.

But for some, the appeal of local work and stability is preferable to the volatility of sectors more exposed to economic conditions. Secondly, job replacement by AI is not uniformly disruptive to lower-paid professions. Try automating hairdressing! On the contrary, AI is dramatically impacting recruitment to knowledge-based professions, such as financial and legal services, not to mention research... Of course, policymakers and training providers should be aware of trends in skills demand, salaries and technology. However, focusing on a single metric is short-sighted.

To divert funds in the manner suggested would be detrimental to the sectors and SMEs that contribute most to the UK economy.

Sheridan Nye

Experts

MINISTERIAL MUSINGS

Anne Milton, Minister for skills and apprenticeships

The new insolvency regime plus a review of level 3 and below

The lowdown on new rules for insolvency, plus level 3 and below changes, explained by Anne Milton

I thought it would be helpful to highlight two important areas that colleges and further education providers should be aware of.

Firstly, I know that every college principal, finance director and governor will already be aware by now that new insolvency legislation came into force on January 31, and also that arrangements for exceptional financial support and the restructuring facility have come to an end.

I will keep banging the drum for the FE sector because you are all doing amazing work helping people of all ages and backgrounds to progress and get the skills they need to get great jobs. I am very aware that finances are challenging, and it is possible that some colleges will find themselves with more serious problems. The earlier we know about a problem, the more likely it is that we can help. Therefore, colleges should talk to their ESFA territorial team contact as soon as possible, to get the support that is needed.

> "The current system at level 3 and below is complex and confusing"

We recognise that the introduction of insolvency is a big change, so we have developed a new "one-stop" policy document – College Oversight: Support and Intervention Policy

This sets out how we will work with colleges to identify issues early on, before they become serious, to make sure colleges are aware of the support available from the ESFA and FE Commissioner, and, where problems persist, outline how we will intervene. In extreme cases it details how the insolvency regime will work in practice. So I urge you all, if you have not already done so, please take a look!

The second thing I want to mention is our review of qualifications at level 3 and below. We have made great progress to improve the quality of technical education and training. We will be starting to roll out new T-levels from September next year and have worked with leading firms to create new high-quality apprenticeships standards.

Alongside A -levels, T-levels and apprenticeships will be the gold standard choice for students after they complete their GCSEs, but if a student chooses another qualification at level 3 or below, we want to make sure they are equally high-quality.

The current system at level 3 and below is complex and confusing, with over 12,000 courses available, often with multiple qualifications in the same subject areas. At the moment, if a young person wants to study history or geography after GCSEs, they know they can take an A-level, which is understood and trusted by parents, universities and employers.

But if a student wants to study an engineering qualification after GCSEs, there are over 200 options to choose from. It's very hard for young people to know which will give them the best chance of getting the skills they need and for employers to know which qualifications they should be looking for.

> "A 'one size fits all' approach is not going to work"

We know that many of these qualifications are well recognised and valued; however, there are also many that we have been told offer little value to students or employers.

To help streamline and boost the quality of education, earlier this month, we launched the first of a two-part consultation reviewing qualifications at level 3 and below – excluding A-levels and GCSEs. The aim of the review is to make sure that every single qualification is high quality, necessary and has a clear purpose.

It's clear a 'one size fits all' approach is not going to work. We want to take the time to get these changes right and listen carefully to everyone's views. We are consulting in two stages – firstly, we are looking at the principles that should guide the review, before moving to publish detailed proposals for change in the second-stage consultation later this year.

Please take part in the consultation. Your views are really important and will help make sure we get these changes right.

LUCY OTTEWELL-KEY

Executive director, Workforce Skills and Partnerships, Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education

Be an 'ultra-negotiator' in the new world of apprenticeships

Apprenticeship funding rules require that we demonstrate our negotiations. Lucy Ottewell-Key outlines the core principles to consider

The new apprenticeship world can be confusing and unfamiliar to the education sector. Negotiate? How? What does it mean to be in a commercial and competitive market?

What indicators, funding rules, features, benefits and unique selling points support strong negotiation? How do you differentiate from another provider? Why would an employer pay more for your provision than someone else's? Providers need to dive deep into strategies, training, processes and procedures to support business growth, while manoeuvring within complex funding rules and providing an outstanding service.

Not only do we need to negotiate, we need to prove we have done so. Apprenticeship funding rules state that providers must collect evidence to prove negotiation to employers, ESFA, Ofsted and internal compliance teams.

Negotiation is an art rather than a science. Core principles to consider:

1 Be knowledgeable and prepare. You must understand and have detailed knowledge of apprenticeships, the funding and technical guidance. What is an apprenticeship? What are the roles and responsibilities of each party? What is your offer, your curriculum plan, how do you deliver it? What can be bespoke? What is standard? Does the employer understand off-the-job and EPA? Are your team prepared to "sell"? Have they had suitable training?

2 Determine your desired outcome before you start. Do your research. Does your offer and curriculum meet their needs? How can you support the employer to navigate apprenticeships?

3 Build rapport. In many cases people buy from people, not companies, so building a rapport is the first step to sustainable relationships.

4 Understand your worth. You are a quality provider that offers outstanding apprenticeships and amazing customer service. Prove it, live it and shout about it!

> "Negotiation is an art, rather than a science"

5 Listen. You need to understand what that business needs from their apprenticeship programmes. Go for a tour, speak to staff!

6 Complete negotiations feeling it is a good deal for both sides. Apprenticeships are about supporting individuals to progress into their chosen careers and reducing skills gaps. Feel sure that you have made a positive impact on a business, which will, in turn, support an individual.

7 If you can't, stay professional and walk away. If it does not fit with your ethos, maybe that business is not for you.

One way in which apprenticeship negotiation differs from other products and services is that we have an added layer of negotiation: *prior learning*. The interesting point to note with prior learning adjustments is that until you have completed a recruitment process, you cannot confirm the price.

This process involves stages such as advice and guidance, initial assessments, checking prior qualifications and ensuring the employer and training provider feel the candidate is suitable for the apprenticeship. Providers may have a core pricing plan based on the quality of provision and the fundable elements of the programme, but until you have a potential individual, you are a little stuck.

Funding guidance states that all knowledge, skills and behaviours set out in the standard should be considered when reviewing prior learning. How can you prove to an auditor or an inspector that you and the employer are confident that public money is not being used to fund knowledge, skills or behaviours that individual already has? Can the apprenticeship meet minimum requirements, such as duration or off-the-job?

In conclusion, apprenticeship price negotiation is a complex, two-stage process. First of all, why pick you when a number of other providers are knocking at the door? And secondly, can you, as a provider, ensure that the candidate is appropriate? The implications for not getting this right are pretty serious.

Good luck and get negotiating!

Experts

CHRIS CHERRY

Senior Associate, Strategic Development Network

How to know when your apprentice is 'gateway ready'

Chris Cherry provides key insights that will avoid misunderstanding and poor practice

In the world of apprenticeship standards, the gateway is the door between the two core stages of the apprenticeship – the on-programme training and the end-point assessment. The apprentice passes through the gate when they have met minimum requirements and are performing consistently at (or above) the level of competence expected for that occupation.

At the gateway (the end of the training period), the employer in consultation with the training provider, unlatches the gate because they believe the apprentice is competent in the occupation and ready to demonstrate this during the end-point assessment.

But how do you really know when the apprentice is ready?

It's a question we've been asked a lot, from our work with over 5,000 apprenticeship practitioners. So, here's a few insights to get you thinking.

Let's start with the mandatory gateway requirements

Mandatory requirements are different in each assessment plan. Here are a few common examples:

- achievement of level 1 English and mathematics and evidence of attempting a level 2 test
- achievement of a required qualification (particularly in regulated occupations)
- completion of a workplace portfolio
- a letter signed by the employer confirming readiness for assessment
- apprentice self-assessment.

It's important that you are in close contact with the End-Point Assessment Organisation (EPAO) to make the gateway decision. Some training providers have wrongly assumed that the gateway is an opportunity to check with the EPAO whether the apprentice is ready for assessment. This is not the case, and you won't be able to submit evidence to the EPAO to check in advance. This cuts across independence and opens the door for misunderstanding and poor practice. EPAOs are encouraged to provide guidance on how to manage the gateway.

In some assessment plans, there are tasks that the apprentice needs to complete during training, or during a gateway period, which then feed into final assessment. These could be a project, presentation or portfolio.

> "It's important that apprentices aren't just being 'trained to the test'"

It's worth remembering that the gateway is not the point where the employer feels the apprentice is guaranteed to pass, but where further training would not make the apprentice more assessment-ready. Holding back on readiness could have the reverse effect on performance. There are issues of timing and funding for the training provider that may influence the gateway, but in pure teaching and learning terms, assessment should quickly follow the completion of training when the apprentice is performing at (or above) the required standard of competence.

"OK," you may say, "but what about the apprentice's level of competence?"

As you reach the end of training, you will get – using your professional judgement – a sense that the apprentice is ready.

Training providers take different approaches with their employers, but here are four linked questions that many have found useful in discovering whether the apprentice is gateway-ready.

- Is there sufficient evidence that the apprentice is ready?
- Is there a body of work you can reference that shows the apprentice has consistently been working towards the standard and is familiar and comfortable with the assessment methods used at the end-point?
- Does that evidence show achievement of the elements?
- Are you confident there is evidence the apprentice has gained each knowledge, skill and behavioural element that could be assessed at the end-point?
- Is there a certainty that achievement is at the level required?
- Do you and the employer both feel that the apprentice is able to work in that occupation, at the necessary performance level? It's important that apprentices aren't just being "trained to the test".
- Do you consider the apprentice to be competent?

Once you are certain the above criteria have been met, you should feel confident that the apprentice will be able to demonstrate that competency.

It is at this point that the employer will be required to confirm their apprentice is ready. The EPAO will then check the evidence and open the gate to the end-point assessment.

Bulletin

Movers & Shakers

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

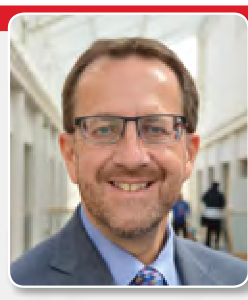
Amanda Melton

Member, Independent Commission on the College of the Future

Start date March 2019

Concurrent job
Principal and chief executive, Nelson and Colne College

Interesting fact
She is aiming to complete 5K runs at 50 different parkrun locations in UK and abroad, and has completed one in New Zealand.



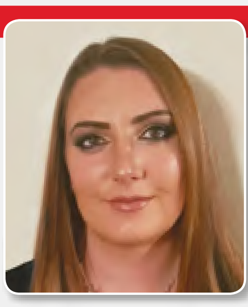
Lawrence Frewin

Principal and chief executive, South Devon College

Start date September 2019

Previous job
Vice principal and deputy CEO, South Devon College

Interesting fact
He plans to complete his first ever half-marathon later in the year.



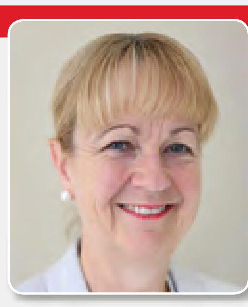
Briony Fawcett

Acting Managing Director, PHX Training

Start date March 2019

Previous job
Head Of Programmes, TCV Training

Interesting fact
She plays roller derby for Border City Rollers.



Alison White

Chair, Architects Registration Board

Start date March 2019

Previous job
Chair, General Osteopathic Council

Interesting fact
She is a passionate golfer and in the evening after her first ARB Board meeting scored an eagle.

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

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FE Week Sudoku challenge

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

Difficulty: Easy

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

Difficulty: Medium

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

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: Nicola March

Solutions

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

Difficulty: Easy

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

Difficulty: Medium

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