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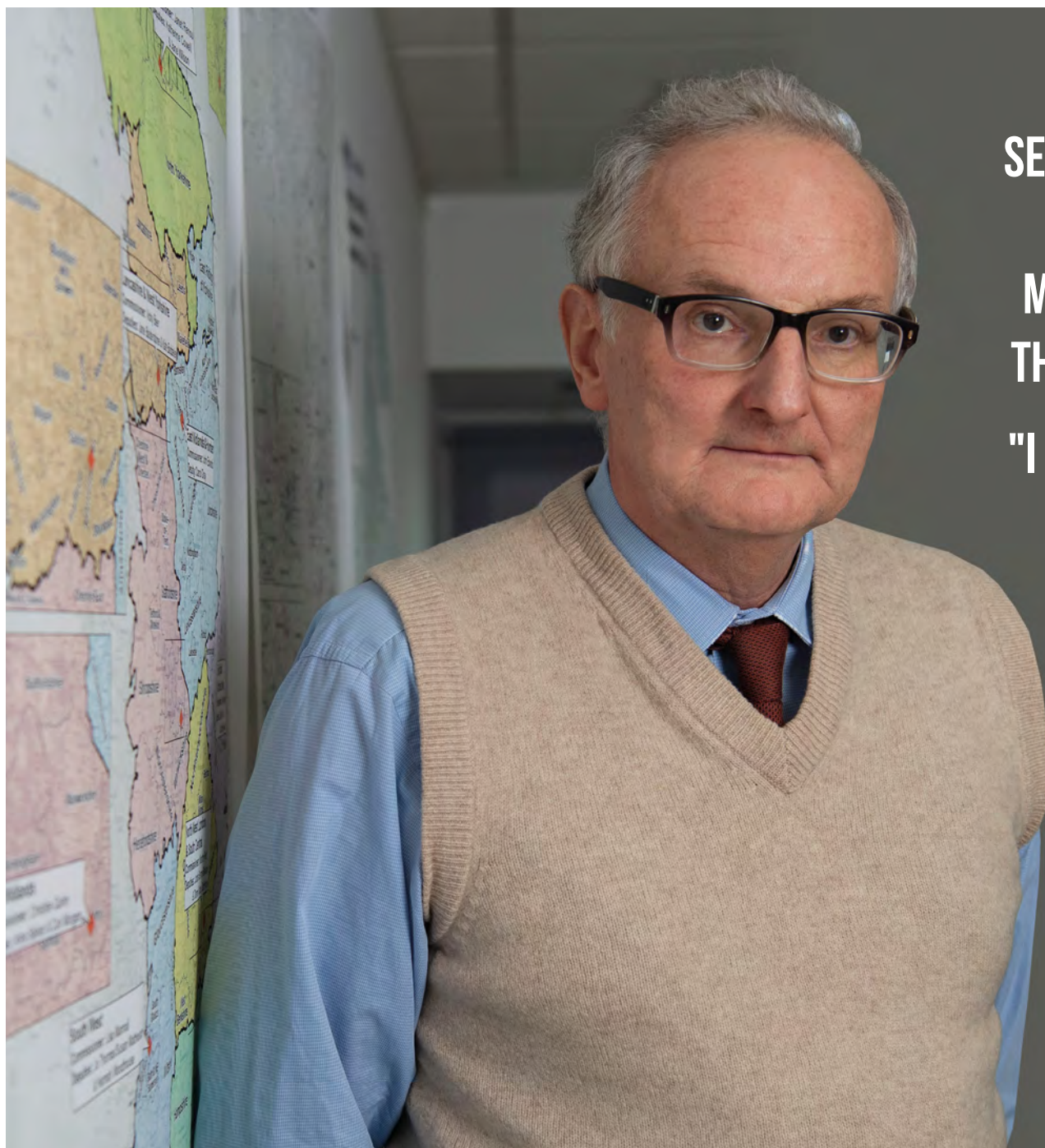
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2019  
EDITION 291

## NEPOTISM AND SPENDING INVESTIGATED

DfE 'carefully monitoring' investigation into leadership at Hull College Group

NICK LINFORD NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

See exclusive on page 4



"I WILL BE WORKING WITH THE SECTOR TO ENSURE THAT COLLEGE LEADERS TREAT TAXPAYERS' MONEY WITH CARE AND IN A WAY THAT BENEFITS THEIR STUDENTS"

"I WILL NOT HESITATE TO STEP IN"

Education minister, Lord Agnew, writing exclusively for *FE WEEK*

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**Nick Linford**  
EDITOR

@NICKLINFORD  
NICK@LSECT.COM



**Shane Mann**  
MANAGING DIRECTOR

@SHANERMANN  
SHANE@LSECT.COM

Please inform the FE Week editor of any errors or issues of concern regarding this publication.



**Billy Camden**  
CHIEF REPORTER

@BILLYCAMDEN  
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK



**JL Dutaut**  
COMMISSIONING EDITOR

@DUTAUT  
JL.DUTAUT@FEWEEK.CO.UK



**Fraser Whieldon**  
REPORTER

@FRASERWHIELDON  
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK



**Yasemin Craggs Mersinoglu**  
REPORTER

@YASEMIN\_CM  
YASEMIN@FEWEEK.CO.UK



**Simon Kay**  
DESIGNER

SIMON@FEWEEK.CO.UK

THE TEAM

- |  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| HEAD DESIGNER                          | Nicky Phillips    |
| DESIGNER                               | Simon Kay         |
| SALES TEAM LEADER                      | Bridget Stockdale |
| ADMINISTRATION                         | Georgina Heath    |
| EA TO MANAGING DIRECTOR AND FINANCIALS | Victoria Boyle    |

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The College of the Future

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# FAB 2019

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## News

# DfE 'closely monitoring' independent investigation at Hull College Group

NICK LINFORD  
NICK@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Exclusive

The government is "carefully monitoring" an independent investigation into allegations regarding the management of Hull College Group.

FE Week has spoken to numerous current and former employees and understands that a whistleblower contacted the FE Commissioner Richard Atkins earlier this year alleging nepotism and inappropriate use of funds by college bosses.

Education minister Lord Agnew told this newspaper that the college has launched an independent investigation into the allegations regarding the management of Hull College Group.

He said: "Any financial wrongdoing, if it has occurred, is treated extremely seriously and we will be carefully monitoring events as the information becomes available."

Allegations of nepotism first surfaced in 2018, but it is understood that it is appointments that have occurred in recent months that are under investigation.

**"Any financial wrongdoing, if it has occurred, is treated extremely seriously"**

The Hull College Group chief executive and principal is Michelle Swithenbank, who joined in January 2017 as deputy chief executive.

Swithenbank became the top boss in August 2018. This was around



the time that the college received a bailout of more than £50 million and slashed more than 300 staff to balance the books as part of a 'Fresh Start' programme overseen by the FE Commissioner.

Published accounts for 2017/18 reveal a "partner of a senior post-holder" was appointed in January 2018 and resigned their position in August 2018 after being paid £36,640.

The senior post-holder is the now chief executive Michelle Swithenbank and the partner, now husband, is Graham Raddings.

Raddings was appointed to a new senior post, executive director of marketing and innovation.

FE Week understands that in February 2018 a whistleblower informed the FE Commissioner of the relationship.

In April, an anonymous twitter account believed to be set up by Graham Raddings tweeted: "Been sacked. Quite pissed off. Wonder what Hull Coll have to say about it. #shitcollege."

The tweet, seen by FE Week, was deleted shortly after.

Raddings did not respond to a request for comment and has removed his LinkedIn profile.

In July 2018, he married Swithenbank, according to

Raddings's Twitter account.

Several sources also claim that at a staff event in late 2018, Swithenbank told staff that the low point in the year for her was "being forced to sack my husband".

The college has told FE Week that full disclosure of a family connection was made to the board and claim it was a fixed term marketing role concluding in August 2018.

The current investigation is understood to relate to the use of college funds and appointments in recent months, and is being conducted by a law firm with experience of the FE sector which will report back to the chair, Dafydd Williams.

Lord Agnew, who was announced as a minister for FE earlier this month and now oversees the FE Commissioner, said: "The Education and Skills Funding Agency has been made aware of allegations regarding the management of Hull College Group. The college has launched an independent investigation into these issues. The ESFA has contacted the college to seek assurances that the investigation is independent and is monitoring the situation."

Writing in FE Week this week, he said many colleges are "already working hard to" balance the books and "curb excessive costs". However, he added, "in the rare circumstances when this does not happen, I will not hesitate to step in".

**"We will be carefully monitoring events as the information becomes available"**

A spokesperson for Hull College Group said: "With regards the ongoing investigation, as FE Week will be aware, it would be inappropriate for this to be discussed publicly until it has been allowed to conclude without risk of interference or prejudice."

The college remains in financial intervention and is reviewed on a quarterly basis.



Michelle Swithenbank

Dafydd Williams

# Lord Agnew: I will not hesitate to step in on college spending



Lord Agnew

**Education minister Lord Agnew has in recent weeks had his brief widened beyond schools to include financial oversight of colleges. In this, his first article on FE, he sets out why good governance is key to a thriving sector making good use of tax-payers money and the support that is available to colleges struggling**

One thing that comes pretty close to a cast-iron guarantee in life is that if you don't have good governance - whether you are making widgets, running a multinational company, or the corner shop - you will trip up sooner or later.

The need for good governance is one of those self-evident truths that I have become more than a little evangelical about. Get the basics right and you can become as successful as your ambition or vision takes you. If you don't, you won't; it's as simple as that.

Further education is a big priority for this government. The prime minister, the education secretary and the chancellor of the exchequer have all made this clear. We've recently announced an extra £400 million for colleges and sixth forms next year - the single biggest annual

boost since 2010.

Good governance is absolutely crucial in ensuring that this investment is not wasted and that the FE sector grows and flourishes in the way that we all wish it to.

Despite some recent changes in the education department, I want to reassure you that it is still business as usual, with FE financial accountability falling under my remit.

## “Balancing the books is a challenge for any organisation”

I will be working alongside you to empower and strengthen the sector. One of the best ways to do that is to encourage you to look at everything through the prism of good governance so that all colleges become financially resilient.

There are plenty of fantastic governors and leaders who have a wealth of skills and experience. But this will not always be the case. We need to make sure that all colleges have the financial

management capabilities needed to keep their institutions running smoothly and efficiently. I will be working with the sector to ensure that this happens and that college leaders treat taxpayers' money with care and in a way that benefits their students.

Balancing the books is a challenge for any organisation. Many colleges are already working hard to do this and to curb excessive costs, especially senior staff salaries. However, in the rare circumstances when this does not happen, I will not hesitate to step in. For instance I will not be turning a blind eye to unjustified and disproportionate pay.

We already have a support network to help the sector lay sound foundations of good governance. The National Leaders of Further Education and National Leaders of Governance programmes draw on the expertise and experience of some of the best FE leaders, governors and clerks to help other colleges to improve.

These programmes have made a real difference but they could help many more colleges. We will shortly be launching an exercise to recruit more members, and I would encourage more principals

and chairs to consider the benefits that the programmes offer.

We want to help any college that is struggling with financial or quality issues to get themselves back on track. We want every student to be confident that the education they receive is of the highest standard and that the college they attend is well run.

Our recently updated College Oversight guidance is a one-stop document for FE and sixth form colleges, which sets out how we will work with colleges to identify issues early on, before they become serious. Its aim is to inform colleges about the range of support available, including from the Education and Skills Funding Agency and the FE Commissioner. Where problems persist, the guidance outlines how and when we will intervene. For extreme cases, it details how the insolvency regime will work.

Colleges quite rightly have many freedoms. But freedoms bring responsibility; not only to the students and staff, but to the taxpayers who fund them. I am here to help provide colleges with the support they need to deliver high quality education and training, and I am committed 100 per cent to doing that.

## News

# Could two sixth forms be coming to the rescue for a struggling college?

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

A three-way merger is on the cards to help secure the long-term future of City College Southampton, which has been surviving on government bailouts.

City College Southampton, Itchen Sixth Form College and Richard Taunton Sixth Form have all agreed that a merger would be a “positive” step following a local area review by the FE Commissioner’s team.

It comes six months after City College Southampton saw its second proposed merger collapse at the eleventh hour - on that occasion with Eastleigh College.

The situation threatened the solvency of City College, which received an unknown amount of exceptional financial support from the Department for Education (DfE) in 2018/19 to enable it to “continue in operation in the short term”.

In a joint statement, Sarah Stannard, principal at City College, Alex Scott, principal at Itchen, and Dr Liz Lee,

principal at Richard Taunton said they are at the “very early stages” of the merger even being an option and there is no timescale in place for this to happen.

“All three colleges are already working together to share best practice in areas such as student support and safeguarding, and we will obviously continue with this close working relationship going forward,” the statement said.

“It is widely agreed that a formal merger between the three colleges would be positive for students and the communities they serve.

“Nationally colleges have been encouraged to merge to be as financially efficient as possible and if this were to happen in Southampton it would be in line with the wider national agenda.”

A DfE spokesperson said that details of the potential merger and publication of the FE Commissioner’s local area review will be published “in due course”.

The merger with Eastleigh College was so close to completion that Stannard had already announced



plans to stand down as City College Southampton principal.

But the plug was pulled in March after the government refused a request for an unknown amount of funding from the Restructuring Facility – a £726 million pot that is used to support college mergers that closed in September.

City College Southampton’s accounts for 2017/18 warned that if this merger failed, it would “require a standalone

application to be approved to ensure it is able to continue operations into 2019/20” and it would have to “seek additional long-term funding from the ESFA in order to remain in existence in the long-term”.

The DfE has made clear there will be no more long-term bailouts available to colleges following the introduction of the insolvency regime on January 31, which will allow colleges to go bust for the first time.

City College Southampton owes Santander over £6 million. A spokesperson for the bank told FE Week in March that it would “remain supportive” despite the situation.

The college’s first merger attempt, with Southampton Solent University, fell through in 2017, after the move had been recommended in the Solent Area Review by the FE commissioner.

City College is rated ‘requires improvement’ by Ofsted and has seen its financial health deteriorate to ‘inadequate’ in recent years.

Its 2017/18 accounts show that its cash deficit deepened from £257,000 to £585,000. The college teaches around 5,000 students.

The joint statement from the principals at City College, Itchen and Richard Taunton said: “Whatever structure the colleges may take in the future, our number one focus remains to ensure that young people and adult learners in Southampton have the best possible further education provision and opportunities to learn the skills they need to be successful in their chosen careers.”

## Prioritise investment in level 2 qualifications, new report urges

**FRASER WHIELDON**  
**FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK**

The government should invest in upskilling people on to level 2 qualifications or apprenticeships as a priority, a new report has recommended.

*Close the Gap*, a wide-ranging report joint authored by awarding bodies NOCN and City & Guilds, says the investment is necessary to provide a stepping stone to the next level for learners at every stage and age.

It warns that over the next five to ten years, there will be a “major skills gap” in the growing number of associate professional, scientific and technical jobs, particularly at levels 4 and 5 – which the authors call the ‘Missing Middle’.

The report says the overall reduction in “operative skill” grade apprenticeships (level 2) is “making the problem worse, as the ability to progress up to and beyond level 3, 4 and 5 has become severely restricted”.

It calls on the government to launch a campaign to “recognise and encourage level 2 apprenticeships or qualifications in the economy”.

NOCN managing director Graham Hasting-Evans said that the government currently “does not seem to understand”

that people must be taken from level 1 to level 2.

“You are not going to be able to take them to levels 4 and 5 where there will be jobs. You have to move them up from level 1 to level 2 first.”

The recommendation builds on work from organisations such as the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) to encourage more starts at level 2; it has previously called on the government to fully fund apprenticeships at levels 2 and 3.

FE Week analysis in July of apprenticeships statistics revealed level 2 starts had dropped by more than 50 per cent since the apprenticeship reforms were introduced. Last December, the Department for Education (DfE) commissioned an investigation to understand what is behind the drop.

AELP chief executive Mark Dawe said: “AELP very much welcomes the call for a coherent strategy around getting more people skilled to at least level 2

and in our view, apprenticeships are the cornerstone on which the strategy should be built.”

Seeking to set the agenda for a “single, simple, integrated and economy-led technical and skills development scheme” – known as a ‘TVET system’ (technical and vocational education and training) internationally – *Close the Gap* includes a number of other recommendations for tackling skills shortages in England. This includes fully funding an adult’s first level 3 once they have achieved their level 2 qualification.

Another proposal is for recent reforms to TVET, such as apprenticeships, T-levels, and functional skills, to be brought under one system and managed by a single organisation – the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE).

By doing so, IfATE should be accountable for management of public investments and quality, while still being “owned” by stakeholders.

Other recommendations include the introduction of an “upskilling levy” to help continuously develop employees’ skills and a rebranding of all TVET qualifications, other than apprenticeships, as T-levels, or Higher T-Levels at level 4 or above.

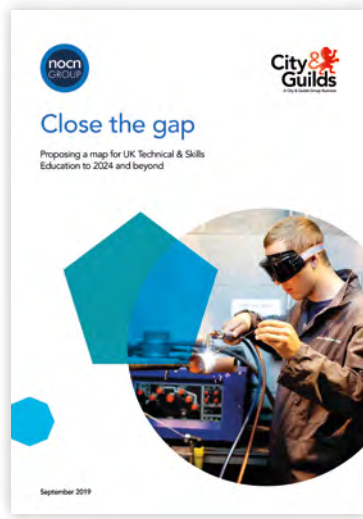
The report also recommends that

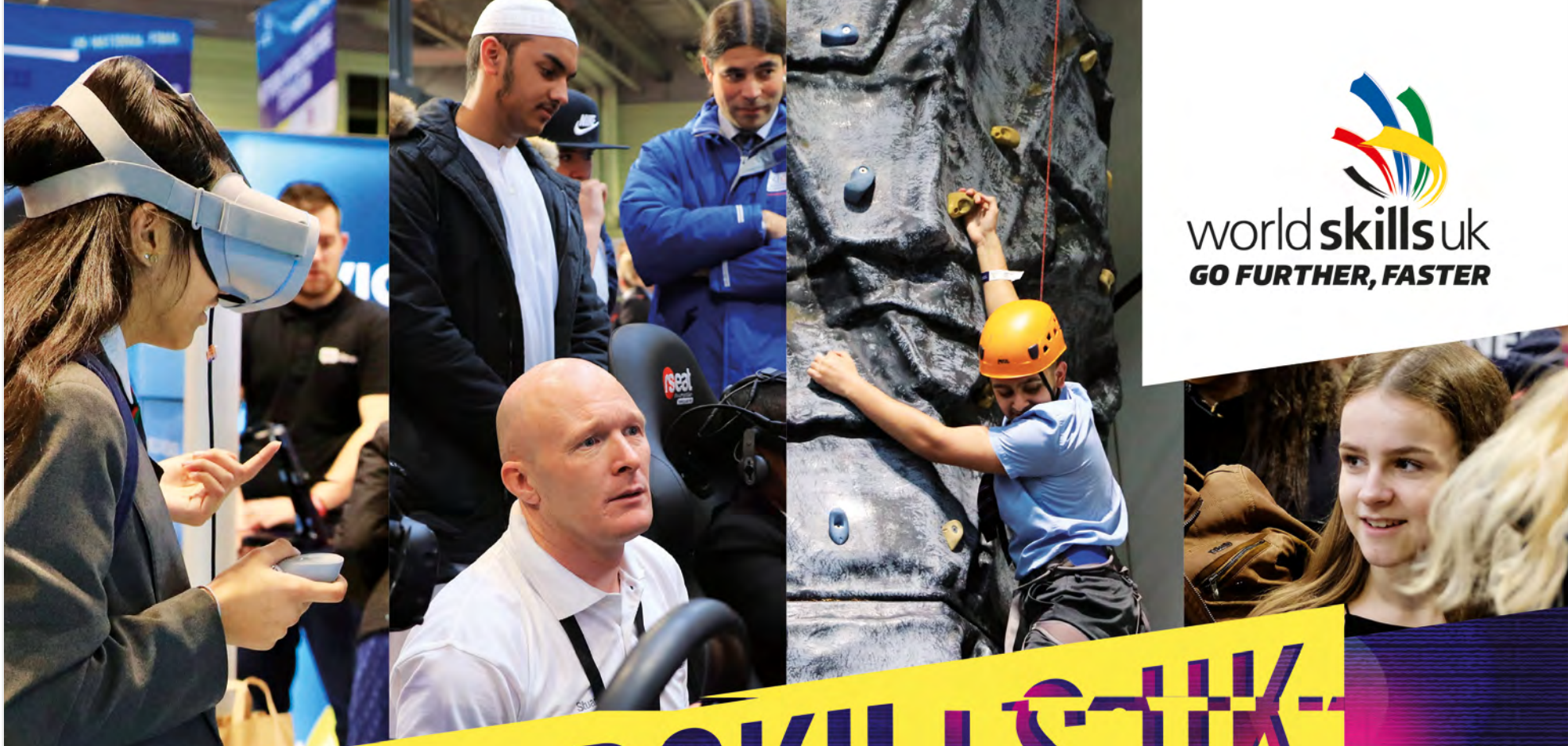


the government reduces the floor of the apprenticeship levy so that more companies pay the charge.

A DfE spokesperson said: “We are committed to ensuring that high quality apprenticeships are a prestigious option, accessible to everyone.

“Alongside this the government has just announced an additional £400 million of funding for 16 to 19 year olds in 2019-20 – this will benefit all students including those on level 2 programmes and is the biggest year-on-year increase in funding since 2010.”





  
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## News

# Colleges blame poor publicity and bad design for low traineeships take-up

YASEMIN CRAGGS MERSINOGLU  
YASEMIN@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Exclusive

Less than a third of colleges are currently offering traineeships to 16 to 18-year-olds, *FE Week* analysis of new government data shows.

A list of providers, put together for the first time to help young people and employers find out who offers the pre-employment programme, was recently published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

It shows that just 52 of the 170 general FE colleges

in England offer traineeships to those aged 16 to 18. Overall, 138 of all providers deliver them for that age group.

It comes three months after the former skills minister Anne Milton hailed the success of traineeships in light of research that revealed 75 per cent of learners move on to work or further study within a year of completing their programme.

Her comments were a boon for the pre-employment course, which has been plagued by falling learner numbers and a lack of investment that has frustrated sector bodies.

Julian Gravatt, deputy chief executive of the Association of Colleges, suggested that one reason for low take-up among colleges is that the government has failed to advertise traineeships well enough.

"Traineeships are a good way to provide education, training and work experience to help young people who are perhaps not quite ready for employment," Gravatt told *FE Week* after being shown the latest college figures.

"However, at a time of low unemployment publicity for the programmes needs to be reaching students and employers."

Gravatt added that the AoC is working with a new government-led Traineeship Advisory Group to "make sure the traineeship offer fits within the broader context of pre-apprenticeship and employment support to ensure people of all ages and backgrounds can get the skills they need to progress".

Traineeships, launched in 2013, are

designed to get 16 to 24-year-olds ready for an apprenticeship or job. They can last between six weeks and six months. The courses include work preparation training, a work placement and English and maths support if needed.

Many general FE colleges in England that have some of the largest numbers of 16 to 18-year-old students do not offer them. Staff have indicated there is a lack of awareness of the scheme and problems with the design.

A spokesperson for Harrow College and Uxbridge College (HCUC), which had 5,960 students aged 16 to 18 in 2018/19, said it does not deliver traineeships due to the unpaid work placement element of the programme.

Jo Withers, executive director employer services and partnerships at HCUC, told *FE Week*: "Our experience of supporting traineeships across a range of sectors indicates that eligibility criteria and issues relating to extended unpaid work placements mean other routes tend to be more accessible to learners and employers, as well as maximising integration with pre-existing college provision.

"Responsive provision is a core value at HCUC and continued provision of traineeships is an ongoing possibility should it prove helpful."

## "Traineeships are a good way to provide education, training and work experience"

Dan Shelley, the executive director of strategic partnerships and engagement at East Sussex College, explained that until 2019/20 the funding rules for traineeships made the "English and maths requirement contained in the condition of funding unworkable, as it meant the very students that this would be targeting would need to participate in GCSE programmes.

"This has now changed but we are focused on providing all our students

with meaningful industry placements so feel this is a change that has been too slow in coming," he added.

"We may reconsider this decision in the future."

And a spokesperson for Capital City College Group, which had over 9,500 students aged 16 to 18 last year - the second highest out of all colleges in England - said: "We have found that the traineeship programmes don't have enough flexibility to engage or meet the needs of pre-NEETS (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) and NEETs.

"We deliver similar programmes like pre-apprenticeships, which we have found better meet learners' expectations while still providing a trained and educated workforce for employers."

Traineeships saw their starts numbers fall from 24,100 to 17,700 (26 per cent) between 2015/16 - before reforms to the apprenticeship system came into force - and 2017/18.

The DfE's latest data, published in July, shows there were 12,500 reported traineeship starts during the first three quarters of the 2018/19 academic year, a decrease of 16.8 per cent from 15,000 starts at the same time in the previous year.

Previous *FE Week* analysis found that colleges delivered less than a quarter of traineeships in 2016/17, and nearly half across the country had no starts whatsoever.

Recognising that traineeships are in need of reinvigoration, the government recently announced it would introduce a new traineeships achievement rate measure for the academic year 2019/20 to help monitor the programme's effectiveness.

During her tenure as skills minister, Anne Milton told *FE Week* in June that she wanted to launch a new youth pre-employment programme as early as next January.

She revealed she was already in cross-departmental discussions with ministers about the programme, which would prepare 16- to 25-year-olds for employment, whether that be apprenticeships or another route.

Asked if officials were disappointed by the number of colleges that offer traineeships, and whether there has been any movement on this new pre-employment programme tabled by Milton, a spokesperson for the DfE said: "Traineeships are a demand-led programme.

"We are continually working to raise awareness of them and boost supply with providers to ensure young people are able to access opportunities."

### The 52 colleges out of 170 that offer 16-19 Traineeships

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BLACKBURN COLLEGE
BLACKPOOL AND THE FYLDE COLLEGE
BOSTON COLLEGE
BOURNEMOUTH AND POOLE COLLEGE, THE
BRADFORD COLLEGE
BRIDGWATER AND TAUNTON COLLEGE
BROMLEY COLLEGE OF FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION
BROOKLANDS COLLEGE
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FARNBOROUGH COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY
RIVERSIDE COLLEGE
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HOPWOOD HALL COLLEGE
HUGH BAIRD COLLEGE
ISLE OF WIGHT COLLEGE
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## News

# London college becomes first to win Careers and Enterprise Company award

**YASEMIN CRAGGS MERSINOGLU**  
**YASEMIN@FEWEEK.CO.UK**

Westminster Kingsway College has become the first ever college to win a gong at the Careers and Enterprise Company's annual awards.

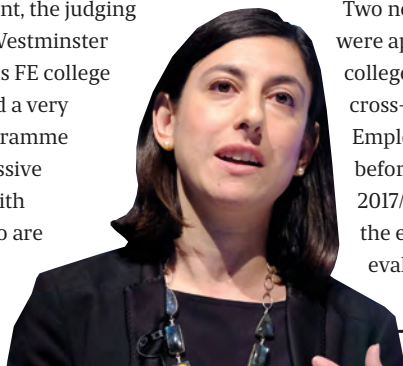
The London-based college was announced as the 2019 winner for 'Most Progress from a School or College' out of a shortlist of three finalists in a ceremony at The Royal Society of Chemistry in Piccadilly, London.

This new category received the largest subscription of any of the 12 award categories with over 30 entries, out of 200 submissions overall.

The judges praised the incorporation of employer partnerships and inclusive policies of Westminster Kingsway College's new careers strategy, which demonstrated "clear progress and strategic direction" towards achieving the Gatsby Benchmarks.

Now in their second year, the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) awards celebrated the work of colleges, schools, businesses and careers professionals.

In a statement, the judging panel said of Westminster Kingsway: "This FE college has established a very thorough programme with an impressive relationship with employers who are now involved in shaping the curriculum.



Claudia Harris

"Vulnerable learners and those with complex needs are at the forefront of planning."

The National Student Survey, an annual poll which asks learners about their training provider, found that 100 per cent of respondents from Westminster Kingsway College knew their next steps and 87 per cent knew where to get advice on what to do next.

**"Organisations and individuals recognised are setting the bar in careers provision"**

The London college said that it overcame barriers to embed careers learning into the curriculum to address the needs of students who wanted an alternative to university. It was a relatively new area for the college which, "with time and dedication", made structural changes to provide this support.

Two new careers leaders were appointed by the college within its centralised cross-college Careers and Employability Service before the start of the 2017/18 academic year: the employability lead evaluated and enhanced



Jasbir Sondhi - Westminister Kingsway College director curriculum and learner services, Charlotte Hoets - careers and progression lead, Carlo Liu - employability and progression lead

employer partnerships and developed a programme across curriculums, while the careers and progression lead focused on personal guidance and progression.

In addition, a tutorial scheme of learning was introduced from 2018/19 to support delivery of careers education in the classroom. Activities included a one-to-one service, employer visits, a university fair, and Q and A sessions.

Matthew Weatherby, regional community engagement manager at Willmott Dixon Construction, provided a testimonial about the college's work. He said: "We support the construction skills learners with an employability

programme, work placements, workplace and site visits, and the annual apprenticeship fair.

"With the employability lead we identified the key challenge of ensuring learners have the actual skills they need to get onto apprenticeship jobs and implemented the programme to address this. Last year we had 12 successful placements and next year we hope to double this number and continue expanding the employability programme."

Westminster Kingsway College's Careers Strategy 2018 - 2020 is based around the eight Gatsby Benchmarks. In its submission, the college singled out its development of the work

experience strand during 2018/19: "A key factor in this delivery was our use of the Navigate platform, so that pupils could create a record of their work experience and careers provision," it said. "Because of this, we will be able to measure distance travelled in employability skills development as a KPI [key performance indicator] of the careers programme."

CEC chief executive Claudia Harris said: "Congratulations to the winners and shortlist of the Careers Excellence Awards 2019. The organisations and individuals recognised are setting the bar in careers provision across England and changing the lives of the children they work with."

Award category	Winner	Highly commended	Shortlisted
Careers Hub of the Year	Lancashire Careers Hub	Worcestershire Careers Hub	Tees Valley Careers Hub
Careers Leader of the Year	Philippa Hartley: Careers Leader, Huntcliff School	Jake Armstrong: Careers Leader, Addey and Stanhope School	Dr Ina Goldberg, Oasis Academy Brislington
Careers Provider of the Year	The Wow Show	Derbyshire Education Business Partnership	Future First
Enterprise Adviser of the Year	Anna Smith, A Logical Ltd	Neil Conlon, Conlon Construction	Lucy Bramley, Microsoft and Paul Rutterford, Viking Crew
Innovation of the Year	The Education Alliance	National Careers Week	Didcot Girls School
Large Employer of the Year	Arm Ltd	Willmott Dixon	KPMG
Partnership of the Year	ZSL Whipsnade Zoo with The Avenue Centre for Education PRU	Jacobs with Carmel College, Darlington	West Midlands UTC Employer Group with West Midlands UTC
Progress from a School or College	College winner: Westminster Kingsway College School winner: St Damien's RC Science College		Huntcliff School
School or College of the Year	Bedford Academy	Shuttleworth College	The Misbourne
SEND Champion of the Year	Catcote Academy	The Westminster School, Sandwell	Brookfields Specialist School
Small or Medium Employer of the Year	Cloudy Group Ltd	Pendleside Hospice	Atlas Packaging

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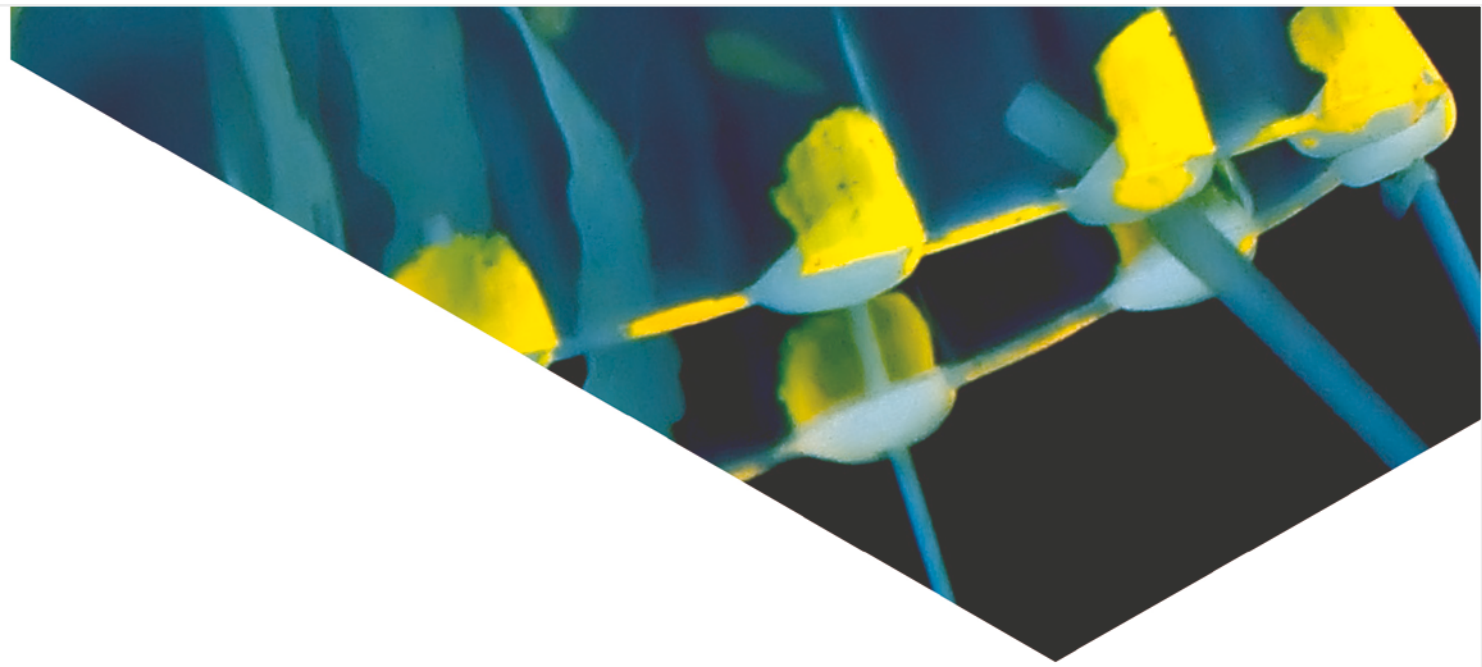
- Further study at Entry 2
- Independent living
- Supported employment



### **BTEC Entry Level 2 in Pre-vocational Study**

#### *Progression:*

- Further study at Entry 3
- Independent living
- Supported employment



# e|2

*" Retention was over 90% for all pathways and many achieved 100% "*

- MidKent College

## Entry Level 3

Graded vocational study

## Level 1

Graded sector-based study

## Level 1

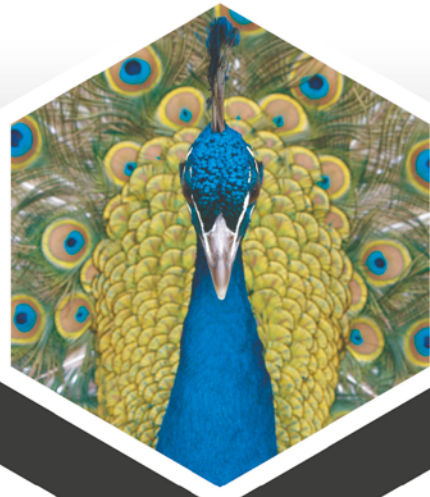
Graded industry tasters



### BTEC Level Entry 3 Entry to Vocational Study

*Progression:*

- Further study at Level 1
- Employment



### BTEC Level 1 Introductory (16 Industry sectors)

*Progression:*

- Level 2 study or continued Level 1 study of a different sector
- Apprenticeship
- Employment



### BTEC Level 1 Introductory in Vocational Studies

*Progression:*

- Level 2 study or continued Level 1 study of a specific sector
- Apprenticeship
- Employment

## News

# Advanced learner loan cap is deterring students, college warns

FRASER WHIELDON  
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Exclusive

A government-imposed cap on advanced learner loan (ALL) provision is having a “devastating impact”, a college in Oxford has claimed.

Despite a 40 per cent increase in demand for its adult learning courses, Ruskin College has been denied permission by the Department for Education (DfE) to increase its ALL facility.

This has led to at least 10 additional learners who wanted to enrol on courses, including potential nurses and carers, being denied a place, the college said.

The DfE said that to be eligible for advanced learner loan facility growth under its rules, the value of paid loans must be at least 75 per cent of the provider’s 2019/20 total budget.

“All providers must meet a funding threshold of committed learners before

they are awarded further funding to take on more learners,” a DfE spokesperson told *FE Week*.

She added that at their most recent review, Ruskin College “did not meet this threshold, but will be eligible for another review in November”.

A college spokesperson would not reveal how many loans learners it had already enrolled, but said: “Unsurprisingly, we are seeing increased demand year on year, so the cap on advanced learner loan allocation is having a devastating impact on those adults who may come to us a little later in the academic cycle and don’t yet have a loan in place.

“In a climate where there are severe shortages of nurses and carers, the cap is actively deterring the very students that the government says it is trying to attract.

“Although we have been advised that new allocation may be available after 1 November, this lack of certainty is forcing students to rethink their study options or defer to next year.”

She added: “As a college, we cannot



Ruskin College

enrol potential students without the loan, so this is extremely frustrating, especially given Ofsted’s focus on tackling disadvantage and our own Ofsted rating as exemplary for widening participation.”

In 2018/19, Ruskin College had an initial allocation of £1,240,914 for

advanced learner loans, according to ESFA data; but by July this reduced to £1,197,675.

This loans cap is not peculiar to Ruskin: the post-18 education report led by Philip Augar and published in May said: “Qualifications supported by advanced learner loans are not

demand led.

“Instead, institutions have a funding agreement with the ESFA that enables them to provide a loans facility.

“The size of this facility is based on what was delivered through loans in previous years. As such it is difficult to increase the size of the facility even if the demand is there.”

It added that this can be “particularly problematic for small institutions which may lack the capability and capacity to meet minimum delivery expectations, yet these institutions are often very close to the labour market and its changing skills needs and are potentially the key to filling local skills shortages”.

Advanced learner loans are available for people aged 19 and above, studying courses at levels three to six.

The number of learners using the loans dropped by nearly a fifth between 2015/16 and 2018/19.

Additionally, *FE Week* revealed towards the end of 2017 that 58 per cent of FE loans funding – amounting to almost £1 billion – had not been spent since the policy was introduced.

# Cash-strapped college appoints qualified accountant as principal

FRASER WHIELDON  
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

A financially troubled college being looked into by the FE Commissioner has appointed an experienced FE leader and chartered accountant as its interim principal.

Diane Dimond, who retired from the Ofsted grade two Petroc College last month after being at the helm since 2015, will take the reins at Richmond-upon-Thames College on October 1.

Her appointment comes after former principal Robin Ghurbhurun left in July for “personal reasons”, around the same time of a visit from the FE Commissioner amid financial concerns.

*FE Week* understands the commissioner’s routine diagnostic assessment of the college was elevated into a more comprehensive inquiry,

and a report on his findings is due to be published in the coming months.

A college spokesperson this week confirmed: “Richmond-upon-Thames College is working closely with the FE Commissioner’s office with a view to ensuring the future success of the college.”

Dimond led Petroc when it was named college of the year in *FE Week*’s NICDEX league table in 2018. Prior to joining Petroc in 2011, she was the director for finance at New College Swindon, a job she held for four years.

The Richmond-upon-Thames College spokesperson said Dimond is a qualified teacher as well as a chartered accountant, and has a “strong track record of driving and maintaining good and outstanding financial health in the colleges she has worked for”.

Dimond is undertaking the role through her new job as a management consultant for FE Associates.



Diane Dimond

The FE Commissioner’s inquiry into RuTC comes after it generated a £2.4 million deficit in 2017-18.

Between November 2016 and April 2017, the college had to make use of an overdraft facility of £750,000, which was fully paid back in May 2017.

On top of that, it has seen a 47

per cent decline in 16-to-18 learner numbers between 2014-15 and 2018-19, which equates to a 38 per cent decline in funding over that period, according to ESFA allocations.

But this did not stop work starting on a new £80 million campus building in June 2018.

The spokesperson said: “The first phase of the new campus development is on track for completion this academic year.”

RuTC has boasted this first phase of the project would include a TV studio, theatre, 3D prototyping fabrication laboratory, art gallery, 60-cover silver service chef’s academy with views over Twickenham, spa and wellness centre, sports centre and digital golf studio.

RuTC was previously in FE Commissioner-led financial intervention from November 2015 until July 2016.

Last week it was announced that Ghurbhurun will soon take up a role as managing director of further education and skills at education technology company Jisc.

After he left RuTC, he was replaced by deputy principal Jason Jones on an interim basis; Jones will return to his previous job once Dimond starts.



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## Feature

# The future of colleges: lessons f

JL DUTAUT  
 JL.DUTAUT@FEWEEK.CO.UK

In the first of a series of features exploring the themes raised by the College of the Future Commission, JL Dutaut looks at regionalisation, a Scottish government policy that transformed further education there, and is very much on the commission chair's mind.

It is five years since Scotland's policy of rationalising its further education sector came to an end. The three-year roll-out transformed Scotland's FE landscape, merging 26 colleges along regional lines into ten so-called "super-colleges".

**"In Edinburgh at least, regionalisation has not been straightforward"**

In remarks at the College of the Future Commission's first public event last week, chair and Scottish

educational grandee Ian Diamond said regionalisation and the merger of the four Edinburgh colleges was a "good thing".

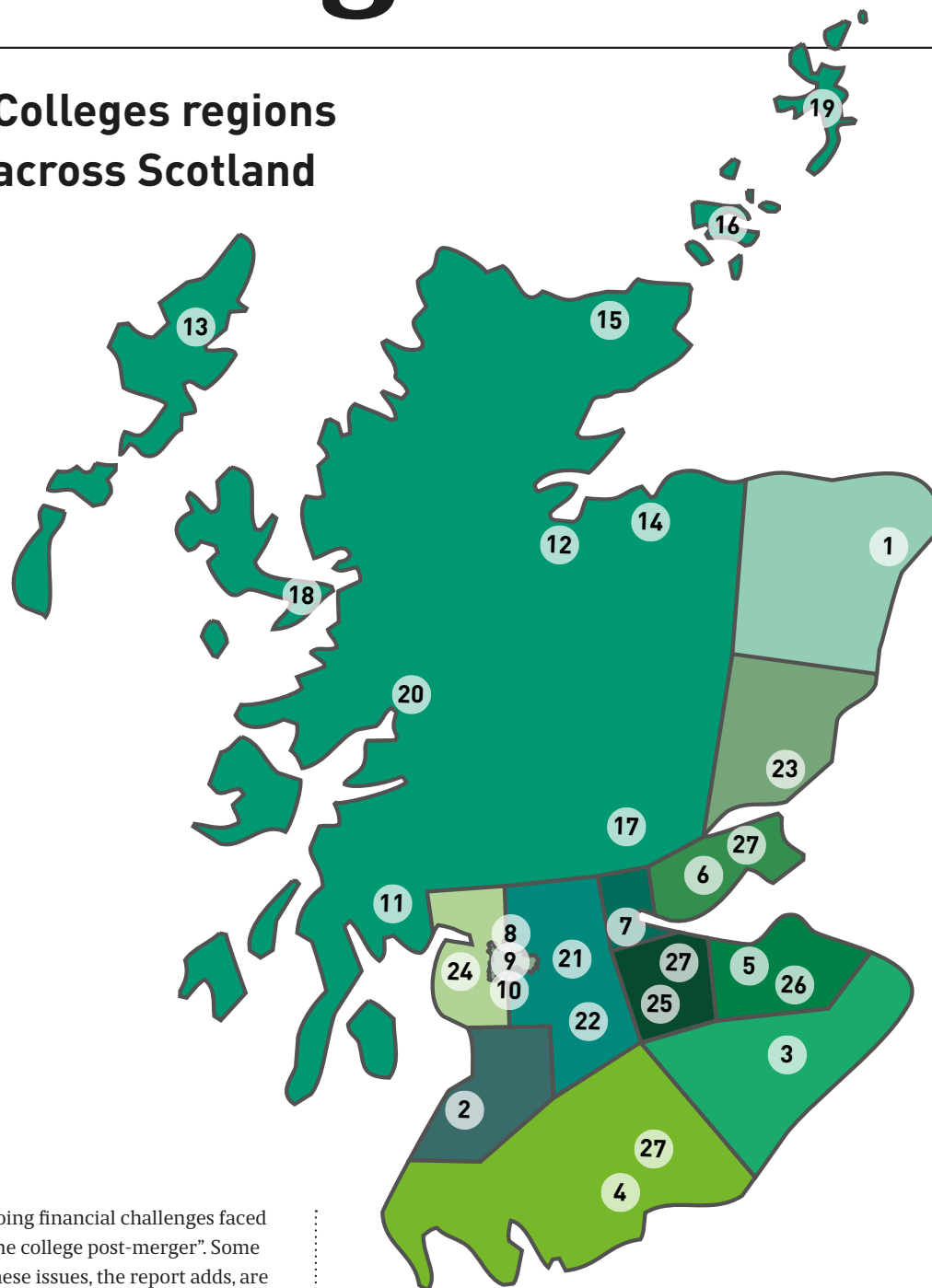
From March last year to this August, Diamond was chair of the Edinburgh College board of management. He has since stepped down in order to become the UK's chief statistician. His brief tenure at Edinburgh came six years after it was created from the conglomeration of Jewel & Esk, Stevenson and Telford Colleges, a process that saw the complete regionalisation of the city's further education offer.

### The Scottish experience

Edinburgh College was the last of ten super-colleges created as part of a dramatic realignment of FE provision across Scotland. As of 2018, it had approximately 19,000 students on roll across four campuses.

There is robust evidence on the benefits and drawbacks of the regionalisation agenda, but it includes no numbers for Edinburgh College. The Scottish Funding Council states that "although savings were realised through voluntary severance, the impact of the merger is difficult to separate from the

## Colleges regions across Scotland



ongoing financial challenges faced by the college post-merger". Some of these issues, the report adds, are directly related to the merger.

In Edinburgh at least, regionalisation has not been straightforward. Notwithstanding, two years later, the SFC were able to show that the cost of delivery had been £71.6 million over four years. It calculated that annual recurrent savings for the nine new super-colleges for which data was available added up to £52.2 million, or some £210 million over the same period.

**"The bulk of savings have come from reductions in staff costs"**

The bulk of these savings have come from reductions in staff

Region	College
Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire	1. North East Scotland College
Ayrshire	2. Ayrshire College
Borders	3. Borders College
Dumfries and Galloway	4. Dumfries & Galloway College
Edinburgh and Lothians	5. Edinburgh College
Fife	6. Fife College
Forth Valley	7. Forth Valley College
Glasgow	8. City of Glasgow College
	9. Glasgow Clyde College
	10. Glasgow Kelvin College
	11. Argyll College UHI
	12. Inverness College UHI
	13. Lews Castle College UHI
Highlands and Islands	14. Moray College UHI
	15. North Highland College UHI
	16. Orkney College UHI
	17. Perth College UHI
	18. Sabhal Mòr Ostaig UHI
	19. Shetland College UHI
	20. West Highland College UHI
Lanarkshire	21. New College Lanarkshire
Tayside	22. South Lanarkshire College
West	23. Dundee & Angus College
West Lothian	24. West College Scotland
n/a	25. West Lothian College
n/a	26. Newbattle Abbey College
n/a	27. Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)



Sir Ian Diamond



# From Scotland's regionalisation

## The College of the Future

costs delivered through voluntary severance schemes. Others have been achieved through back-office efficiencies, increased purchasing power and estates costs.

The benefits of the policy included more effective leadership and governance, clarity of vision, strategy and objectives, and increased focus on learner needs. Across the merged colleges, a culture of flexibility was seen to be developing, and a major barrier to progress was (and in places remains) the creation and implementation of new working practices that take into account the multi-campus nature of such super-colleges.

### “Regionalisation in Scotland was part of a broader package of reform”

#### Different models. Same challenges?

Of course, mergers and their consequences are not new in the English further education sector. Between 2015 and 2018, a period shaped by a DfE post-16 area review that encouraged colleges to countenance mergers, the Association of Colleges reports that 52 college-to-college mergers took place, peaking at 29 in 2017. Ten further such mergers have taken place this year, and more are planned for 2019-20.

In itself, this is simply an

acceleration of a process that has been ongoing since 1993, and many of the mergers do represent regional rationalisations. City College Norwich merged with Paston College in 2017, and is currently consulting on a desired merger with Easton College. In *FE Week's* last edition, principal Corrienne Peasgood made clear the process there was driven by the needs of the local community. Other mergers had in fact been declined on those grounds.

The slow growth of Cornwall College Group is another example. In 1993, St Austell College was formed from the merger of St Austell Sixth Form and Mid-Cornwall College. By 2015, Bicton College was the latest to join the group that arose from that initial merger. Such absorption of smaller providers accounts for 80 per cent of all mergers, suggesting a relatively predatory market, in which it doesn't pay to be small. Regionalisation is nothing new to Cornwall, nor to many other regions.

By contrast, those who have created Newcastle College Group have little regard for localism and appear far more driven by the savings described in the SFC report. If regional rationalisation was ostensibly the original intent, its continued growth is testament to something else entirely. Today, NCG stretches from Carlisle to Southwark, via Kidderminster.

#### Stronger together?

This month, the DfE published its report *The Impact of College Mergers in Further Education*. Its headline finding was that, “on average, the effect of merging is statistically

indistinguishable from zero”. That is to say, mergers led neither to improvement nor deterioration of college performance on average.

Averages easily disguise differences, and the researchers found that the differences in post-merger performance of colleges was large. Unfortunately, their analysis inexplicably lacked crucial information and as a result was not able to conclude which factors made mergers successful or not. Its conclusions are predictably asinine: the best that can be said so far from 26 years of mergers in England is that on average they have done no harm.

Meanwhile, like the DfE's researchers, the Auditor General for Scotland has also bemoaned a clarity of baseline data against which to judge the regionalisation reforms. Nevertheless, the sector as a whole exceeds its targets for learning.

But regionalisation in Scotland was part of a broader package of reform that also saw further education colleges reclassified as public bodies, brought back national collective bargaining and brought in a new funding model. Regionalisation was not an end in itself, but a means to realising a political vision. It isn't a silver bullet, and as far as evidence is concerned, it is at best neutral, and at worst entirely unknown.

#### What regions, exactly?

At the most basic level, Scotland's educational map has been re-drawn, and that is the kind of policy Karen Spencer might appreciate. In response to Ian Diamond's

comments, the Harlow College and Stansted Airport College executive gave the chair a taste of the English way of things.

### “At the most basic level, Scotland's educational map has been re-drawn”

“I have a 900-year-old boundary, 900 metres from both of my colleges. I have four LEPs, two devolved authorities, one unitary authority, and we also work across Kent and Sussex. My nearest neighbouring college is in Tottenham, north London, not Essex. So when people talk about regionalisation, it's complex.”

Regionalisation appeals to ideas of localism and community, bringing with it the benefits of a responsive and

adaptable curriculum offer to suit the needs of learners and employers alike. But when courses disappear from the college up the road, lecturing jobs are lost and support staff contracts reformed, while executive pay rises and better resources are further away, regionalisation doesn't carry the connotations Ian Diamond may have had in mind last week.

This is the central tension of a policy that has already shaped the FE landscape in England for three decades with its ebbs and flows. Like Scotland, any future of colleges that entails a full and final reckoning with regionalisation will do well to do so as part of a broader and bolder reform agenda, whichever political and economic persuasion determines the vision.

Either way, the policy's success will hinge on places like Harlow, and the legacy of borders, boundaries and botched policies that hamper its ability to collaborate meaningfully. Supra-regional entities like NCG will likely adapt, and redrawing the map might just be the rationalisation the sector really needs.



Karen Spencer

## News



# Sector bodies align with call for DfE to switch funding for 16-18s

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

Exclusive

Three leading associations from across the university, private provider and college sectors have united to call on the government to fund 16 to 18-year-old apprentices through general taxation.

The membership organisations, who often hold divergent views, agree that the apprenticeship levy should not be used to subsidise this age group.

They say that this cohort should instead be guaranteed government funding just like A-levels and the incoming T-levels.

The University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC) has pleaded the case in a recent letter to education secretary Gavin Williamson, while the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) made the call in a policy paper they published last week.

Leaders at the Association of Colleges (AoC) say they've also recently

been campaigning for this change.

"It is to say the least a little odd that the state pays through general taxation for A-level, T-level and applied general provision for 16 to 18-year-olds, but employers are expected to pay through the levy for apprenticeship provision for this cohort. Why?" UVAC chief executive Adrian Anderson told FE Week.

**"Employers shouldn't be forced to pay for this 'guarantee group'"**

"Secondly, employers, through a productivity tax, the apprenticeship levy, shouldn't be forced to pay for programmes for this 'guarantee group', tackle the NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) problem or indeed pay the price of the failure of schools system to ensure individuals after 11 years of compulsory education gain a full level 2 qualification."

He added that removing 16 to 18-year-old apprentices from the levy would allow employers to focus on using it to fund programmes "that are needed to raise productivity, as was the point of the levy when originally introduced".

AELP chief executive Mark Dawe said that the levy "should never have been used as an excuse to exempt 16 to 18 apprentices from the government's guarantee to fund all learners in this age group".

However, he warned that even if the right to full funding is restored, "it still won't relieve, by a long chalk, the pressures on the levy that the demand for higher and degree apprenticeships is exerting".

Previously, the AELP and UVAC clashed over what the levy should fund after the Institute for Apprenticeships warned in December 2018 that the apprenticeship budget could soon be overspent.

The National Audit Office later said there is a "clear risk" that the apprenticeship programme is not financially sustainable after finding levy-payers are "developing and

choosing more expensive standards at higher levels than was expected".

**"Something AoC have been campaigning on for a while"**

After this, in March, the AELP called for all level 6 and 7 apprenticeships, including those with integrated degrees, to be removed from the scope of levy funding to relieve pressure on the budget.

A month later, Anderson said it is "entirely unacceptable" to expect public sector employers to subsidise low-level apprenticeships for chefs and hairdressers, and called on government to better support levels 6 and 7 instead.

Dawe believes the higher education loans system should be used to fund these levels, which would free up an estimated "£600 million a year for level 2 to 5 apprenticeships based on the starts this year alone".

He added: "A decision not to tackle the pressures would ultimately lead

to few or no new starts for degree apprenticeships and the universities I'm talking to increasingly recognise this."

Deputy chief executive of the Association of Colleges, Julian Gravatt, said it was "great to see UVAC calling for a consistent form of 16 to 18 funding that is accessible to all young people regardless of the route they choose".

"It's something AoC have been campaigning on for a while," he added.

"The wider point to make clear however is that 16 to 18 apprentices should feel confident of guaranteed money through DfE ring-fencing of funds. AoC would support a shift from the government that placed consistent priority on the funding of training for young people, new to work."

A Department for Education spokesperson said: "The apprenticeship levy was introduced to tackle employer underinvestment in skills.

"We want to make sure that the levy continues to help develop the skilled workforce businesses need to grow and have sought views from a range of employers on the operation of the levy after 2020."

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**Closing date: 6th October 2019 (midnight)**

**Interview date: 14th October 2019**



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For further details and a candidate pack visit: [www.fea.co.uk/escg-ceo/](http://www.fea.co.uk/escg-ceo/)

Closing date for applications: **Noon on Friday 11th October 2019**

Interview dates: **Thursday 7th and Friday 8th November 2019**

# Learning Quality Manager, Tutors and Recruitment Consultants



Step Ahead is a progressive and successful company with an excellent reputation in Recruitment, Training and Employability.

Due to our superb track record and recent success in securing new contracts, Step Ahead is expanding and we are looking for:

An experienced Learning Quality Manager with knowledge and experience of ESFA/ ESF/ AEB funding and performance rules and of the OFSTED Common Inspection Framework. You will have overall responsibility for the development and delivery of regulated & non-regulated learning. If you have an innovative approach and are passionate about driving quality and compliance to ensure the best possible learner experience, we want to speak to you!

We are also looking for experienced Tutors/Assessors to delivery our regulated and non-regulate training across London.

Lastly, we are looking for Recruitment Consultants who will be responsible for recruiting, providing advice, guidance and support, and work-placements for learner caseload of unemployed adults that need help to secure employment.

## Your Next Step

Want to know more? In the first instance, please send your CV along with a paragraph explaining why you are the best candidate for this role to Christie Hoyte, Head of Training: [christie@stepahead.co.uk](mailto:christie@stepahead.co.uk)

**Closing Date: Friday 25th October**



## Management Information Officer

£26,552 to £32,359 p.a.

(Starting salary dependent on skills and previous experience)

Nescot College is set in an attractive green campus outside Epsom, next to a mainline station. The College has recently undergone extensive redevelopment and we are able to offer staff free car parking and other on campus benefits together with generous holiday, Christmas closure and substantial employer contributions to the Local Government Pension Scheme.

Do you enjoy working with data and presenting information in different formats for diverse audiences? An exciting opportunity has arisen within our Information Services team for the role of Management Information

Officer. This is a role, which will give the successful candidate an opportunity to develop as a management information professional creating business reports, reporting systems and dashboards to provide management information to support the College in meeting its strategic aims and facilitating the cycle of continuous improvement.

We are looking for a bright self-starter who is enthusiastic, proactive and solution focused. We seek an individual committed to self-improvement who has an interest in developing their skills in a supportive academic environment.

To apply, please visit <https://www.nescot.ac.uk/about-nescot/careers/>

Closing date for applications is **Monday 30 September 2019**

Interviews will be held on **Thursday 3 October 2019**

## Management Apprenticeship Specialist (Assessor/Tutor)



**Salary** - Up to £33,000 (FTE) plus car/allowance and mileage plus Veolia benefits \*listed below  
**Grade** - 5.2

**Location** - Home based, with national travel  
**Hours** - Full time, 40 hours per week, Monday to Friday

This role is being offered as a fixed term contract until May 2020.

### What you'll do

Our Management Apprenticeship Specialist (Assessor/Tutor) is required to deliver an outstanding learner experience on the Management apprenticeship through effective and engaging teaching - but it doesn't stop there! You will enable our learners to maximise their potential through delivering classroom/group based training, field based visits and learning through digital platforms. Using a variety of engaging and interesting teaching and learning strategies, you will give learners access to a full range of high quality resources.

### The experience you will need

You will already have apprenticeship delivery experience with a training provider/college or levy paying employer provider, with an A1 Assessing Qualification or equivalent.

You will also have an award in Education & Training (Level 3) or equivalent and the ability to deliver English and Maths functional skills.

You will also have proven experience of outstanding teaching, learning and assessment, with the ability to work flexibly to meet the needs of the business with your friendly and supportive attitude

Strong IT skills to include experience at using e-portfolio systems would also be advantageous.

### Benefits you will receive within this role are

- Eligible for Company Car or Company Car Allowance
- The option to join the Veolia Pension Scheme
- Access to Veolia Rewards, benefits and discounts

- Free eye testing and money towards glasses if required for work purposes
- 25 days annual leave + statutory bank holidays

### Where you'll work

People Development is a national function centred at our dedicated learning facility in the heart of the Midlands. You'll work with a network of creative people across the UK to are dedicated to partnering with the business and providing rewarding and stimulating development to all our employees.

This role is home based, but will require regular travel to key sites around the UK, including but not exhaustive to Wolverhampton, Warrington, Reading and London.

### Who is 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.

We live in a world that needs to take care of its resources, and our mission is to 'Resource the World'. Improving

communities and protecting the environment are right at the heart of our business.

It takes more than just words and ambition to achieve this, it takes the daily efforts of thousands of people across the UK to bring it to life. Together our employees make our communities better. They are the resourcers, behind the resources.

Veolia is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive environment and is proud to be an equal opportunity

employer. All applicants meeting the minimum criteria for the role will receive consideration for employment without regard to age, gender or gender expression, disability, race or ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation, or veteran status.

### How to apply

Please send a CV and supporting statement to [uki.veolia.resourcing.all.mailbox@veolia.com](mailto:uki.veolia.resourcing.all.mailbox@veolia.com)



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## UPCOMING EVENTS

ESSENTIAL UPDATE –  
APPRENTICESHIP FUNDING  
AND RULES FOR 2019/20

**MANCHESTER**

16 OCTOBER

AEB FUNDING RULES,  
RATES, PERFORMANCE  
AND PROFILING 2019/20

**YORK**

6 NOVEMBER

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# Readers' reply



EMAIL



TWITTER



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WEBSITE

## Principal's £150k expenses revealed... finally

Seems expenses were authorised... would love to see their scheme of financial delegation. Education sector does not have enough focus on importance of effective governance.

Raj Unsworth

## The government must take steps to reform the apprenticeship levy

Some interesting ideas in there from @CBItweets and it certainly echoes what we're hearing from many of the 400+ employers we work with.

Laura Burley

## Cash-strapped college appoints accountant as interim principal

All the very best @dianedimonduk you did a fantastic job at Petroc and I am sure you will do the same again in this new role. They are lucky to have you.

Chris Williams

My old college had an accountant as the principal - during his tenure he took the college out of the red, found the funding for lots of investment and left the college well in the black. Top man and a great leader who also improved morale.

Laurie Kenny

## Rayner refuses to rule out scrapping Ofsted under proposed National Education Service

Let's take Ms Rayner's hypothesis a little further forward: Labour becomes the new government, Ofsted is scrapped.

If it is a National Service, and all private, public and faith schools are done away with, then why should anyone need to be audited, as all teachers and tutors will be managed by a School Commissar, embedded in each place of learning, who will ensure that all aspects of learning to the State Curriculum are met by completing an audit report each month for submission to a centralised committee. So, the Utopian world that Ms Rayner paints where all children and adult learners are warmed

by the glow of righteous state education, the government saves millions of pounds per year on not paying fees to inspectors. Fantastic.

Ms Rayner does not have to carry out a 10 year PhD to tackle the 'fine minutae' ( a touch of tautology here), because the brave new world of education will be perfect.

Philip Gorst

## ESFA ignored whistleblower nearly two years before FE Week exposé

Members of the sector seem surprised at such revelations, especially when so many are public knowledge. One of the best ones I've ever seen was the Facebook ad for a one-day Traineeship. Spoke to a learner who said they went to enrol, had their passport copied, given £50 cash and told they would be contacted... and of course never were. I'm sure we all have such examples! More ESFA staff, perhaps from the delivery end of the sector, to police the issues that they are often more able to find...

David Armory

## REPLY OF THE WEEK

### First provider spills the beans on 'very different' Ofsted regime

Absolutely delighted to learn that Ofsted has stepped up yet another notch and that this provider was not found wanting. Too many institutions in FE have based their expectation in the past, seemingly not noticing downgraded outcomes, even closures. When all they had to do was to have someone take an impartial look inward at their practices and listen to the learners and their own staff as this inspection described. Rock on Woodspeen Training, Level 3 clearly in sight.

Colin Gallacher

## Experts

### LAURA BURLEY

Apprenticeships Ambassador,  
The Open University



### MARTIN VINCENT

Head of education at national law  
firm Weightmans LLP



## Access to apprenticeships: opening up opportunities for people with disabilities

Only diverse, flexible and highly skilled workforces will help businesses to overcome economic and political challenges, says Laura Burley. While there are encouraging signs, there is work to be done to realise our potential for a fully inclusive labour market

Our Access to Apprenticeships report published today explores access to, and availability of, apprenticeships for people with declared disabilities in England. It is based on the results of a survey of over 700 large and small employers across the country.

Employers have started to change their approaches to solving skills shortages and preparing themselves for the future. More than half are increasing investment in training and a third now employ apprentices, according to our recent UK-wide skills study, The Open University Business Barometer.

They have also recognised that building diverse workforces is a powerful way to unlock creativity and fresh thinking. At the heart of creating a diverse, skilled workforce is having an apprenticeship system that supports everybody's potential to thrive and develop no matter what background they come from or what barriers they face.

This growing consensus about the value of inclusion is reflected by the government, which set a goal of increasing the proportion of apprentices in England with a declared disability by 20 per cent by next year.

**“Many employers reported challenges in knowing where to turn for information and advice”**

To support this goal, the Department for Education has created the Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network (ADCN) to promote best practice in diversity recruitment among employers and encourage them to target under-represented groups. Yet a recent NAO report said that targets for widening participation among under-represented groups lacked ambition.

Department statistics show that in 2018-19, 12.3 per cent of individuals starting an apprenticeship in England declared a Learning Difficulty or Disability (LDD). Although the proportion has increased slightly each year from 7.7 per cent in 2011-12, this only represents just over half of the total proportion of people with disabilities in the UK – almost one in five (19.5 per cent) of the working age population. So, while progress has been made in supporting people with an LDD into work and long-term meaningful careers, a lot more can be done.

In some key respects, our report makes for encouraging reading. Over two thirds of employers said that hiring apprentices or graduates with a disability was a priority for them, and over a third had started to recruit individuals with a disability proactively over the past three years.

However, many employers reported challenges in knowing where to turn for information and advice, how to seek additional funding or resources required, or indeed securing the internal resource needed to support apprentices with declared disabilities. The report also found an increase in apprentices reporting mental health conditions.

With this in mind, the report makes four key recommendations to the government about apprenticeships in England, to provide employers with better opportunities to diversify and strengthen their workforce:

1. Enhance recruitment support.
2. Provide more transparent information, advice and guidance.
3. Simplify the funding and clarify the eligibility and assessment processes.
4. Improve education and training for employers.

The Open University's mission is to be open to people, places, methods and ideas. It means we want to be at the forefront of providing support to apprentices from all backgrounds, and we hope this report sparks further debate between the government, training providers, employers and charities.

But there is no need to wait for the government to act. Communication across the sector's agencies is key to better supporting apprentices with declared disabilities and action is possible now. Our report sheds an important light on where that action might be directed.

## Educational administration - the new normal for struggling colleges?

After a new report has revealed that government-backed mergers haven't been a silver bullet for colleges in financial distress, further education leaders need to focus on student attainment in order to avoid educational administration

For some time now, the perceived wisdom has been that a struggling college's financial performance can be improved if it merges with a more successful institution. Now, a new report from the Department for Education (DfE) looking at the impact of college mergers is challenging this assumption.

The study found that, on average, government-backed college mergers resulted in no significant change to financial performance and, perhaps more insidiously, can lead to lower levels of student attainment. The findings will undoubtedly inform the DfE's position, and further education leaders must realise that the option is less likely to be offered as a lifeline if they find themselves in financial difficulty.

Until the publication of this report, it's reasonable to say the DfE viewed mergers as a preferred rescue measure for colleges in precarious financial positions. Now, with clear evidence this isn't as effective as thought, the DfE is likely to be more willing to wind down struggling colleges, declaring them insolvent and placing them into educational administration.

Educational administration carries significant personal risk to the institution's leadership. In August, West Kent and Ashford College became the second college to fall under the DfE's insolvency regime. The Insolvency Service is now set to determine whether governors and members of the college's board are liable for financial mismanagement or guilty of additional statutory offences, which could lead to criminal charges. While this is an exceptional case, it highlights the stark reality of insolvency proceedings.

Another recent report from the DfE evaluating area reviews (a far-reaching programme that led to many colleges being consolidated to improve further education provision regionally) could compound a change in approach from the department. It found that £433 million had been made available to make bespoke and often protracted mergers work. It wouldn't be surprising if the DfE now judged this money better spent elsewhere with more

demonstrable effects.

However, if it becomes less common for the DfE to incentivise mergers, it doesn't mean further education leaders shouldn't consider the route as a viable way to improve their financial position. Mergers usually referred to as Type A (when a college merges with another, similar-sized institution) can have benefits, creating a leaner and generally more financially efficient operation.

**“Difficulties arise when problems at one college are transferred to another”**

Difficulties arise when problems unique to one institution are transferred to another, a reality underlined by the DfE's report. This means due diligence needs to be comprehensive – factoring in financials, but also placing greater importance on student attainment and experience. By giving each of these equal weight, colleges looking to pursue a merger to strengthen their financial position will cultivate an attractive environment for successful partnerships.

The shadow of the government's Augar Review also looms large in this context. It recommended that the Office for Students should become the national regulator for non-apprenticeship education provision at levels four and above. This means colleges could soon be subject to the same league tables as universities. If this happens, a college that ranks poorly in areas such as student satisfaction and attainment is not likely to be judged as an appealing proposition for a merger.

Colleges continue to operate amid challenging conditions. Last week, a report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies found further education spending per student remains lower than in 2010 in real terms. While this must be treated with the seriousness it deserves, there is a danger that sector leaders get distracted. As with any other sector, the important thing is to get the core business right. Following this will put colleges in a strong position and make mergers, if progressed, more likely to be successful.



Ofsted was right to chastise us for poor student retention, says Len Tildsley, but our learning journey since shows unlocking success requires more than resilience. So what do you need, and what happens when you apply that to young people?

Four years ago, we had a particular problem with retention of young students. We simply lost too many, including a significant drop-out during the first 42 days. Messages about 'early losses not counting in the stats' had been mis-interpreted as 'get the more challenging students out quickly'.

We were also losing too many during the year and this quite rightly helped to trigger an Ofsted inspection in September 2016. We deserved the 'requires improvement' grades, but we had already taken steps to change the culture, practice and processes that had led us into this position.

We hadn't been paying enough attention to the support of those at risk of early drop-out. We hadn't fully considered the reasoning that leads a young person to leave after only a short period, despite the fact that they had chosen to come to us in the first instance and had progressed through all of the challenges of application, interview and induction.

When we did look back at some of the withdrawal reasons recorded on our system, we had far too many stating simply 'course not suitable'. The only conclusion was that either their personal circumstances had changed or that we had failed to provide the quality of experience that we had promised. We had to do something to reverse this perpetual failure.

## LEN TILDSLEY

Principal, Buxton and Leek College



# High expectations are key to student retention and transforming opportunity

Our first change was to appoint a team of progress coaches, who form a core part of our learner journey team. They are advocates for the student, and keep an eye on attendance and progress. They look for warning signs and can mobilise a range of other staff and resources should an individual student need extra help and support. They are a proxy for their parent and the front line for intervention and safeguarding. They really are like a sports coach – keeping them motivated and on track, picking them up and helping them if they are struggling, and cheering them to the finish line of achievement and progression.

People and their relationships are vital, but processes are also important to bring focus on and remove the stigma from any doubts a student might be feeling, especially in the early weeks of a new programme.

We introduced the Swap Don't Drop initiative in September 2017, a cross-college approach to encourage students to consider alternative programmes if the one that they had chosen wasn't meeting their expectations, or they had simply decided that their future career needed to take a different direction. We had a poster campaign supported by teaching staff, progress coaches and the Student Union.

Although we promoted this from the outset, we also understood that students who were wobbling needed intensive guidance and support, and opportunities to act. We paired the campaign with what we called Right Choice Week. Scheduled for the fourth week of term, we set aside timetabled periods when students could try out other pathways. We threw in careers guidance sessions and drop-in opportunities for students to discuss their options with independent specialists and their progress coach.

**“Students who are wobbling need guidance, support, and opportunities to act”**

All of these initiatives and structures combined have paid off. There is still work to do, but our 42-day withdrawal rate has fallen steadily from 5.2 per cent in 2017, to 3.4 per cent in 2018. It currently sits at 1.5, and looks set to remain below two per cent.

It's all too easy to find reasons or factors to blame for young people not accessing or rejecting education, but if you keep your expectations high, and take responsibility for your part in their journey, you can transform opportunity. After all, they came this far, and they came to us. Offering them support and opportunities to change their minds seems the least we can do.

AELP | 2019



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FEWEEK

Tuesday, 29 October 2019

The Principal, Manchester

## SPEAKERS ANNOUNCED

The AELP Autumn Conference 2019 is taking place at a time of almost unprecedented political uncertainty. Whatever happens though over the next few weeks, the economy still needs young people to be trained and the skills of existing workforces to be improved.

The line-up so far includes expert speakers who will be delivering a series of 'on topic' plenary sessions covering Employer View on Apprenticeships, Devolution, Government updates and more.

[aelpautumnconference.org.uk](http://aelpautumnconference.org.uk)

0117 947 2097

[events@aelp.org.uk](mailto:events@aelp.org.uk)



**JENNIFER COUPLAND**  
Director, Professional & Technical Education, DfE



**JOHN COPE**  
Head of Education & Skills Policy, CBI



**ANNA MORRISON CBE**  
Director and Founder, Amazing Apprenticeships



**KEITH SMITH**  
Director of Apprenticeships, ESFA



**SHARON BLYFIELD**  
Head of Early Careers, The Coca-Cola Company



**JOSE LOPES**  
Head of Business Engagement, WMCA

FURTHER SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

NICK STONE, S&G RESPONSE / MICHELLE BURTON, WYCA / PATRICK CRAVEN, CITY & GUILDS UK / MARK DAWE, AELP

MORE TO BE CONFIRMED

# Bulletin



**Sheila Fraser Whyte**

Executive director of business development and innovation, Richmond-upon-Thames College

Start date September 2019

**Previous job**

Management consultant, FEA

**Interesting fact**

She was in the Territorial Army for 16 years, training recruits for the Royal Logistic Corps



**Simon Welch**

Principal, National Star College

Start date September 2019

**Previous Job**

Head of learning support, National Star College

**Interesting fact**

He is a trailbike trials champion

# Movers & Shakers

...

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



**Ben Owen**

Deputy principal, Barnsley College

Start date September 2019

**Previous job**

Executive director of learner services, Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education

**Interesting fact**

He was a Sheffield Eagles Rugby League junior team and toured Paris to promote the Super League in France



**Mark Bolton**

Principal, Yeovil College

Start date August 2019

**Previous Job**

Vice principal, Yeovil College

**Interesting fact**

He was a sponsored Category 1 pro elite cyclist (highest level of non-professional cyclist)

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

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★ Nominations close 18:00 on Friday 1 November

**NOMINATIONS NOW OPEN**

**FE WEEK & AELP AAC APPRENTICESHIP AWARDS 2020**

A celebration of excellence in apprenticeship delivery

FE Week & AELP are delighted to announce the launch of the 3rd AAC Apprenticeship Awards.

These awards are designed to celebrate the contribution made by apprenticeship employers and providers in delivering world class apprenticeships.

For more information visit [aacapprenticeshipawards.com](http://aacapprenticeshipawards.com)

**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

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

Difficulty: Easy

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

Difficulty: Medium

Solutions: See right

**Spot the difference To WIN an FE Week mug**



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



Last Edition's winner: Mo Dixon

**Solutions**

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

Difficulty: Easy

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

Difficulty: Medium

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