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EDITION 293

WHY DID HULL COLLEGE HIRE AN ORCHESTRA?

How the 'games designer' husband to the college CEO spent the marketing budget



NICK LINFORD NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

See exclusive on pages 8 & 9

OfS urged to 'get a move on'

- > Level 6 and 7 apprenticeships still to be inspected by Office for Students
- > Quality at dozens of providers with thousands of apprentices unchecked
- > 'Reviews' starting but only at the four training firms with the most starts

Exclusive

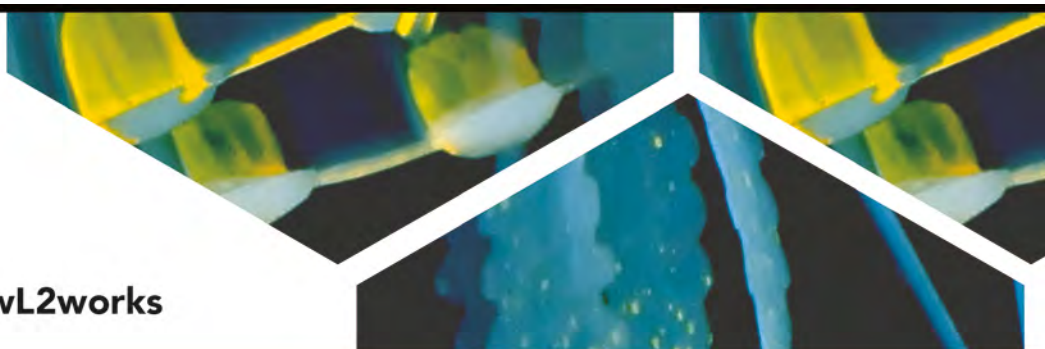
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Apprentices' concerns are still not being heard, admits DfE

FRASER WHIELDON
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Apprentices are struggling to raise concerns about poor training, the Department for Education has found, while their tool allowing learners to give feedback is stuck in development.

An internal 'Discovery' project is currently being run by the DfE, which has asked apprentices what they consider "most important for successful completion and what drives their satisfaction".

The "emerging findings" have flagged concern about "how to complain about poor training quality, and responsiveness from training providers more generally," and has led the DfE to tender for a supplier to deliver an Apprentice Experience Survey to validate these findings.

Such concerns come amid delays to a tool that would allow learners to

feedback on their training provider by text. It is being developed by the ESFA Digital Service and was originally meant to be rolled out by July-September 2018.

It was listed as in "final stages of development" as of last month.

This is despite a similar tool for employers, delivered through the Find Apprenticeship Training website, being launched late last year.

The DfE told *FE Week* that the tool for apprentices "has been developed" and it has collected initial feedback as part of a "trial phase".

A spokesperson said this will be "used in the development of future policy for this area", but could not say when or if it would be fully rolled out.

The National Society of Apprentices said an apprenticeship system that "values the views of employers over the views of apprentices is inherently unbalanced".

"It comes as no surprise that employers are able to provide feedback

on their perception of the quality of education and training that their apprentices receive, but that the views and experiences of apprentices can wait," a spokesperson added.

"When we speak to apprentices, and we speak to around 1,000 every year, the quality of their education, both on and off the job, consistently makes the top three issues.

"So we would welcome a platform that enables apprentices to report concerns about the quality of their education in a way that does not put their apprenticeships at risk."

As would the learners: a blog post by the ESFA last November reported it was testing the tool with a small group and apprentices had "consistently" told them they are happy to give feedback regularly by text message.

Former skills minister Anne Milton spoke in favour of a feedback tool for apprentices and employers in October last year, saying

formal Ofsted inspections "often miss the point".

Speaking this week, she told *FE Week* that she believes the feedback tool should go further, and allow apprentices to also report on their employers.

"I always have thought an apprentice feedback tool was a good idea," she said.

"Ideally you would have all three bits of the puzzle on the feedback tool: employers commenting on providers; providers commenting on employers; and apprentices, the most important,

commenting on both.

"If you have a really simple feedback tool, it can be very useful in highlighting where there might be problems ahead of inspection.

"If the department is seeing a consistent

problem with one provider, it can look into it ahead of time.

"What matters above all else is that apprentices are getting the training they need and deserve and they are getting a good experience in work."

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's panel of apprentices also thinks it is "important apprentices are able to feed back on their experience", and they "support efforts being made to improve opportunities available to do this".

A Department for Education spokesperson said: "We want all apprentices to be able to provide feedback so we can make sure apprenticeships are high-quality and know what more we can do in this important sector.

"The feedback tool has been developed and we have gathered responses from apprentices as part of our trial phase, which will be used in the development of future policy for this area."



Anne Milton

Apprenticeship starts show scant year-on-year rise despite DfE claims

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Apprenticeship starts for the month of July 2019 are up just 2 per cent on the previous year and 5 per cent higher for the full academic year.

The figures, published by the Department for Education on Thursday, show 25,700 starts in July compared to 25,200 in the same month in 2018.

Provisional starts for the full 2018/19 year are 21 per cent down on 2016/17, nine months of which were prior to the levy being introduced.

According to the data, there have been 389,200 apprenticeship starts reported to date from August 2018 to July 2019.

This compares to 369,700 reported in the equivalent period in 2017/18, 491,300 in 2016/17 and 503,700 in 2015/16.

The data also shows that starts on higher level apprenticeships (level 4 and above) have increased 58 per cent, from 46,900 in the provisional 2017/18 year to 74,200 in the latest

2018/19 figures.

Instead of addressing whether the overall starts are up or down, the government was keen to celebrate the numbers of starts on apprenticeship standards.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said: "I have been clear of my ambition to raise standards across technical and vocational education and it is encouraging to see a huge rise in people so far in the 2018/19 academic year starting our new higher-quality apprenticeship standards – up 52 per cent from the previous year."

He added: "The apprenticeship levy is supporting businesses of all sizes to fund training and 56 per cent of all apprenticeship starts this year have been supported by levy paying employers.

"We want to see more people accessing apprenticeships to gain the skills they need to form a strong workforce for the future. Our 500th apprenticeship standard was recently approved, meaning that there are now more high-quality routes available than ever."

The "huge rise" Williamson



Gavin Williamson

referred to is specifically for starts on "standards", which *FE Week* readers will know are the new type of apprenticeships that will replace all previous apprenticeships, called "frameworks", by next year.

What he does not say is that the DfE has already made many frameworks unavailable over the last two years, and many sectors simply no longer have funded frameworks.

Far from choosing 52 per cent more of these "standards" in the last year, employers and their training providers have had no alternative.

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News

OfS urged to 'get a move on' and inspect apprenticeship quality

BILLY CAMDEN
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Exclusive

A former adviser to the minister for higher education has expressed "concern" that dozens of providers delivering level 6 and 7 apprenticeships are still going without inspection, more than four years after the courses began.

In June the Office for Students was given responsibility for overseeing this provision at all training firms, even if they are not on its register of higher education providers.

Prior to this, nobody was responsible for checking the quality of delivery at these unregistered providers, as Ofsted's remit only stretches up to level 5.

Analysis by *FE Week* of the latest individual provider data shows there were 6,140 apprenticeship starts at levels 6 and 7 between 58 training organisations, which are not on the OfS' register, from 2014/15 to 2017/18.

This number is likely to have rocketed in 2018/19, as national data shows starts for the first three quarters of that year



Amanda Spielman

were almost twice those recorded in the whole of 2017/18.

One unregistered HE provider that will be of particular concern is Prospects Training International, which started delivering apprenticeships around three years ago.

"No reviews have been completed but a number are underway"

It managed to recruit over 1,000 apprentices until Ofsted inspected its level 5 and below provision in April 2019. It was found to be making 'insufficient progress' and was banned from recruiting at those levels as a result.

Ofsted was, however, unable to assess the quality of Prospects' level 6 and 7 provision, of which it has had at least 270 starts since 2016/17.

The unregistered provider with the highest number of starts at these levels, according to the latest government data, is Kaplan Financial.

It is a major financial services provider to high-profile employers including British Airways, Eurostar and Morrisons Supermarkets. It was rated as 'requires improvement' by Ofsted in September 2018 for its level 5 and below provision.

Despite the pressing urgency, the OfS appears to be dragging its heels on inspecting this provision.

A spokesperson for the regulator admitted that "no reviews have been

completed".

He did however say that four reviews are "currently underway", which will typically involve a three-day, on-site visit. Providers will not be graded, like in Ofsted reports, but their review will be published publicly.

The spokesperson claimed that visits to providers have commenced, but did not say when the first took place.

He added that more reviews will "take place in the coming months".

Once all of the planned reviews are completed, the OfS will sit down with the Department for Education to evaluate the process and decide how best to conduct future reviews. This "lessons learned" exercise will begin in the new year.

The OfS is prioritising the providers that have the highest number of starts in its initial reviews.

Based on the latest provider data, for up to 2017/18, the providers with the most starts at level 6 and 7 are: Kaplan Financial with 1,990; BPP Professional Education with 610 starts; Ernst & Young with 410; and QA with 410.

Nick Hillman, director of the Higher Education Policy Institute and a former adviser to HE minister David Willetts, said it was "concerning" that thousands of level 6 and 7 apprenticeships are still going unregulated five years after they launched, and urged the OfS to "get a move on".

He told *FE Week* this is a "very important issue" but admitted to having some sympathy for the higher education regulator.

"I do not blame the individual staff at the Office for Students. The organisation only got its full legal powers in August and they have had a huge job to do in



Nick Hillman

getting to grips with the providers on their register, let alone keeping an eye on others.

"It is hard to prioritise when you have a huge list of priorities"

"It is hard to prioritise when you have a huge list of priorities."

Ofsted chief inspector Amanda Spielman expressed her deep concern at the issue of unregulated level 6 and 7 apprenticeships during an interview with *FE Week* in March, when she said: "I very much hope people will see the logic in us doing it."

All new providers that fall under Ofsted's remit have a monitoring visit from inspectors within two years of the firm starting delivery.

They then have a full inspection within another 24 months, unless they're found to be making 'insufficient progress' in their monitoring report, in which case they'll be fully inspected within a year.

The OfS explained to *FE Week* it was directed by the DfE to "look at both on and off-the-job training and to visit a number of providers that currently offer

substantial apprenticeship provision at levels 6 and 7 that does not lead to either a full bachelor's or a master's degree" in its reviews.

"The purpose of the review exercise is to evaluate the quality of the apprenticeships," a spokesperson said.

"At the end of each review, we will report to the DfE so that it can identify where high quality apprenticeships are being delivered.

"Whilst we recognise that the providers that are participating in these reviews have not applied for OfS registration, we will review their apprenticeships against criteria that have been adapted from the OfS' quality-related Conditions of Registration.

"This will provide some comparability with OfS-registered providers of apprenticeships at levels 6 and 7."

The spokesperson added that once the review activity has concluded, the OfS will undertake the "lessons learned" exercise. This will "give reviewers, providers, apprentices and other participants an opportunity to input to an evaluation of the new review method".

A DfE spokesperson confirmed the OfS' approach, and said it has given the regulator this responsibility "to ensure that all apprenticeship training is high quality regardless of whether or not the provider is registered with the OfS".

Level 6 and 7 apprenticeship starts at ALL providers from 2014/15 to Q3 of 2018/19

Year and starts	Providers	Level 6	Level 7	Total
2018/19 to Q3	Not yet published	9,480	9,680	19,160
2017/18	182	6,060	4,020	10,080
2016/17	78	1,730	40	1,770
2015/16	37	730	30	760
2014/15	12	160	0	160
Total in 4 years	198	18,160	13,770	12,770



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News

DfE raps company claiming to be approved apprenticeship provider

BILLY CAMDEN
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Exclusive

The government has written to a new training firm demanding it stops claiming to high-profile employers it can deliver apprenticeships.

Thomas Cook Airlines and a McDonald's franchise are among those to have had approaches from Apprenticeship Partners, which was set up by David Montague and Jane Simpson in August.

“We have not, nor would we mislead any of our customers”

Emails from Montague to learners and their employers, seen by this newspaper, claim that his new firm is “able and ready” to provide apprenticeships. “I can assure you, that we would not be offering any services that we are not able to fulfil,” he said in one message.

The company's website also states that “we offer a number of apprenticeship courses” and lists over 20 standards it can supposedly deliver, which include business management, customer service, human resources, recruitment and sales sectors.

Apprenticeship Partners is, however, not on the register of apprenticeship training providers (RoATP).

In a further attempt to lure apprentices and their employers to train with Apprenticeship Partners, the owners said they had been “approved by Skills First Awards” for the delivery of a number of qualifications, when they hadn't.

They were even using Skills First's logo on their website, but when the awarding organisation became aware of this they ordered Apprenticeship Partners to immediately take it down.

Montague told FE Week that Apprenticeship Partners has “not, nor would we mislead any of our

customers and furthermore, would not act in an unethical manner”.

But a spokesperson for the Department for Education confirmed that Apprenticeship Partners is “not eligible to deliver apprenticeship provision or receive apprenticeship funding”.

“We have written to this company and instructed them to remove any information from their website and other media which suggests they are approved to deliver apprenticeships,” she added.

Montague and Simpson formerly worked at another provider called BIOR Business School before setting up Apprenticeship Partners.

Brian Leslie-Willetts is the apprentice manager at Thomas Cook, which collapsed earlier this month. He told FE Week that prior to this, Montague contacted two of his apprentices directly to say he had left BIOR but could “pick up your learning” at Apprenticeship Partners.

And “when the news came out about our insolvency, we got a further message to say ‘we're really sorry to hear this’ and ‘I can help support you with continuing apprenticeships”.

Leslie-Willetts said he was concerned that his apprentices were being “contacted directly and provided information that we have since found out is false”.

Roger Khoryati, the managing director at MCD Manchester, which operates 10 McDonald's franchise restaurants, also said his apprentices were contacted via “private” email addresses by Montague informing them that his new training provider could deliver their training.

One apprentice challenged Montague after he claimed that his new company only needed to partner with a provider



David Montague



Jane Simpson

that is on the RoATP to deliver apprenticeships, asking which provider it had linked up with.

Montague claimed this was New Trent College, which is also not on the RoATP. Its parent company, Trent Education Centre, is however on the register as a main provider.

A spokesperson for Trent Education Centre explained it had been approached by Apprenticeship Partners some weeks ago claiming to know of a number of apprentices who wanted to transfer to a new provider.

Apprenticeship Partners was looking to deliver the provision itself via a subcontract relationship, according to the spokesperson.

After Trent Education Centre advised that they couldn't do this, as Apprenticeship Partners is not on the RoATP, they began negotiating a role in which Montague and Simpson could join the provider as assessors.

The director general of BIOR, Azmat Mohammed, told FE Week that his provider has “evidence that

Apprenticeship Partners are soliciting BIOR Business School learners using email data that could only have been obtained by criminal means, not in the public” domain.

“Apprenticeship Partners are not eligible to deliver apprenticeship provision”

“We have reported the theft of this data to the Information Commissioner's Office and have emailed Apprenticeship Partners informing them that they have committed a criminal offence by using this stolen data and requested they destroy the data with immediate effect,” he added.

“We also stated that any further use

of this stolen data will result in criminal prosecution.”

Montague said no information has been used as a “direct result of ‘stolen’ documents”, adding that the details of individuals he's contacted “are in the public arena”. However, FE Week has spoken to multiple employers who say their contact information is not in the public domain.

One prime provider that BIOR works with is East Sussex College Group. After they became aware of the practice at Apprenticeship Partners, they reported it to the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

The college's executive director for strategic partnerships and engagement, Dan Shelley, told FE Week: “ESCG takes any issue or concern about subcontracting very seriously, especially in instances like this. I can confirm that ESCG has shared concerns with the ESFA.”

Montague said any employer or learner that has decided to work with his new firm has “made that decision based on evidence of provision of the services and without coercion from any individual from this organisation”.

When FE Week pointed out that all subcontractors must now be on the RoATP to deliver apprenticeships, Montague said they had applied to the register. He did not say when this application was submitted, nor did he explain why he had been telling apprentices and employers they were already approved.

He also claimed that the emails seen by FE Week are “at best fabricated and at worse, absolute lies”. This newspaper has spoken to the people who received the emails who confirmed they were sent by Montague.



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*Emily Fussey -
Hartpury College*



News

Computer game and '80 piece' orches

NICK LINFORD
NICK@FEWEEK.CO.UK

From front Exclusive

The husband of the chief executive at a college surviving on bailout funding used the marketing budget to hire the 80-piece Hull Philharmonic Orchestra to play computer-game music, *FE Week* can reveal.

As previously reported, Hull College Group has launched an independent investigation into allegations of nepotism and misuse of funding and its boss, Michelle Swithenbank, has since gone on leave.

The investigation is understood to also include over £100,000 spent on a computer game app, computer game-style cinema advertising and a PR agency that promoted the music event and computer game.

The spending has been described as "concerning" by the college's local MP, Emma Hardy, who is also a member of the education select committee.

The college funds now under scrutiny were spent or committed to by Graham Raddings when in charge of the college marketing budget between January and August 2018.

Raddings, partner and now husband to Swithenbank, claims on his LinkedIn profile to be a "games designer" and an "8 bit [computer game music] enthusiast with entrepreneurial spirit".

He was appointed to the college as executive director of marketing and innovation in January 2018, around the time the college had received a £42 million bailout from the government as part of a Fresh Start process.

Before Raddings left the college in August 2018, the college partnered with 8-Bit Symphony to run their first ever music event on June 15, 2019.

The college spent more than £10,000



@C64Audio Incredible gig, the music, meeting the legends, the fans, everything! Great to see the scene so vibrant and alive and continually evolving, thanx to all who made this possible! 🙌❤️ #C64Audio #8BitSymphony #C64 #Commodore64 #RetroGaming #GameMusic



Tweet from an attendee of the concert, funded by the college, on 15 June 2019

to hire the Hull Philharmonic Orchestra and Hull City Hall, according to the contract, with Hull Culture and Leisure Ltd acting as an agent for Hull City Council.

Described as "8-bits, 80 piece orchestra, 90+ minutes" the musicians played retro computer game music by composer Dr Rob Hubbard.

8-Bit Symphony was founded by Chris Abbott, who runs a business called C64Audio. According to Abbott's website the two other founders were Damian

Manning and Graham Raddings.

Supporting the claim that Raddings was Abbott's business partner, *FE Week* has also obtained emails from Raddings sent to college staff many months after he had left, leading the event arrangements on behalf of 8-Bit Symphony.

Despite this, Abbott told *FE Week* that he "approached the college to see if they wanted to support the

very first event" and that Raddings was only "a point of contact at the college" and "Graham's name is an error on the website, and this is currently being corrected".

A spokesperson for Hull College Group said: "The board were made aware of the event happening in June 2017, and considered there was no conflict of interest.

"As with any business the event had clear objectives and budget allocation. Michelle Swithenbank's involvement with the event was to support and promote where appropriate."

An email from Raddings' personal Hotmail account to a college employee on February 20, 2019 concerning the "8 bit VIP event", with Abbott copied in, asks "what do you need from us to ensure we can get things sorted?"

The following day, Swithenbank responds to the "8 bit VIP event" email by sending it to the vice principal, marketing staff, the PR agency Pace Communications and copying in Raddings, to say: "Hi all. We don't need the theatre we need the restaurant and the main building. This has been going on since August, how are we not up to speed with things? This is a Very important event on 15th June which

From: Graham Raddings <[redacted]>
Sent: 20 February 2019 09:18
To: Sophie White <[redacted]>
Cc: [redacted]
Subject: 8 bit VIP event

Hi,

We are definitely going to need to book the Horncastle building for 15th June as per the original discussion with the college (albeit some time ago now). Though Michelle Swithenbank is aware, we were all under the impression that PACE had booked the building for the event since they knew about it over 6 months ago.

What do you need from us to ensure we can get things sorted?

Thanks in advance
Graham

Email from Graham Raddings organising the event several months after leaving the college

From: Michelle Swithenbank <[redacted]>
Sent: 21 February 2019 11:36
To: Sophie White <[redacted]>; Matthew Smith <[redacted]>; Natalie Murphy <[redacted]>; Saskia Blacker <[redacted]>
Cc: Graham Raddings <[redacted]>; David Mullaney <[redacted]>
Subject: Re: 8 bit VIP event

Hi all

We don't need the theatre we need the HU1 riverside Restaurant and the main building.

This has been going on since August, how are we not up to speed with things?

This is for an Very important event on 15th June which is a Saturday. I thought it had all been coordinated and sorted?

Has anyone also confirmed car parking with David and food with Tan ?

M

Graham's wife, the college chief executive, emails staff the following day to get "up to speed"



Fabulous canapés tonight served by @iansnedden and the team ...and of course our students ! Absolutely scrumptious! @hullcollegegrp



9:33 PM · Jun 15, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone

College chief executive tweet from VIP event at the college, on the night of the 8-bit concert

is a Saturday. I thought it had all been coordinated and sorted?"

Abbott said C64Audio "paid for the food and drink and also paid for all of our VIP tickets"... "received no payments from the college" and is still in the process of registering 8-Bit Symphony as a charity.

According to tweets from college staff at the time, the VIP event held on the college premises included 38 bottles of champagne, 46 bottles of wine and more

than 1,000 canapés.

Of the VIP event, a spokesperson for Hull College Group said: "The event was not for guests of the principal's husband. Prosecco and canapés were served as agreed in the hospitality brief to the client, C64Audio."

They added that the students "gained valuable voluntary work experience which has enhanced their skills for their study programme".

In the meantime, Abbott has used



Graham Raddings in December 2018

Extra spend investigated at Hull College

the publicity from the 8-Bit Symphony event to raise close to £70,000 for a Kickstarter campaign to produce a CD and told *FE Week* he plans to run similar events "with other organisations across the globe".

During his time at the college, Raddings also used the marketing budget to pay for the development of a free computer game called Go Go Dash, which remains available on the iTunes store.

The college has refused to reveal how much was spent, but *FE Week* understands it was in excess of £30,000. The developer chosen was a former colleague of Raddings, Adam Carmichael, a lecturer at Grimsby Institute and the sole director of Microwave Games Ltd.

The college confirmed it also paid Rob Hubbard, the composer behind the 8-Bit Symphony, to compose the music for the game.

According to the press release written by the PR agency Pace Communications:

"Hull College principal and CEO, Michelle Swithenbank, said: 'The game is a lot of fun and is an innovative way to showcase the opportunities we offer for learners who are interested in working in the city's growing digital sector. By involving Rob Hubbard, we also hope to inspire our learners to also go on and achieve great things'".

In addition to the cost of creating the free game and use of the PR firm, the marketing budget was also used to create a "gaming zone" at the college to launch the app, as well as advertising the game around Hull on a digital screen on the side of a van.

College minutes for May 2019 describe another app in which "the finance director confirmed that the app is being developed and progress would be reported at the next meeting".

When *FE Week* first asked the college about this app a spokesperson said: "The smartphone app is a new proposal and still under consideration and planning. It is not linked to Go-Go-Dash".

The college has refused to provide any details about this app, understood to have a £50,000 budget, and has since said: "After initial consideration of an app, the college decided not to pursue the idea."

Another new area of spending that is being looked into as part of the investigation is an animated video adverts based on computer game

graphics that were screened at cinemas.

Before leaving the college, Raddings employed a sole trader, Dave Shepherd, trading as 3D Facility, to undertake what he describes on his website as the "concept development, design and production".

Shepherd confirmed to *FE Week* that he is a sole trader working from his home in Hull and with other freelance game designers, but did not respond to further requests for comment.

Raddings was also behind a tender for a PR Agency, understood to have initially been for £90,000 to support the college with internal communications and reputation management as part of the Fresh Start.

The tender process was won by Pace Communications, and the company founder and owner, Anita Pace, has confirmed the contract included her attendance at staff and board meetings at a rate of £85 per hour.

It is understood that before the contract was terminated in early 2019, the budget had been significantly overspent.

In August 2018, Steven Yardley, at the time the college's vice principal corporate and commercial, spent the afternoon on a 43-foot luxury yacht as a client of Pace Communications.

When asked if Pace knew Raddings from the time when they both worked for KCOM, a spokesperson for Pace Communications said: "We would not comment on our work with any of our clients, past or present."

Raddings did not respond to the question of whether he knew Pace prior to the tender process.

When asked about the details of the spending, Raddings told *FE Week*: "I categorically and strongly deny any and all allegations of implied or actual

pace Pace Communications
@PaceComms

It was great to spend yesterday afternoon out on the River Humber on @LaDoradacharter in the sunshine with a few of our clients 🍹

It's a hard life!



8:51 AM · Aug 8, 2018 · Twitter Web Client

Steven Yardley (second to the left), at the time the college's vice principal corporate and commercial

financial wrongdoing, budgetary impropriety and any and all inference, direct or otherwise, that my involvement with any of the projects, contractors and suppliers that fell under the remit of my role as executive director of marketing and innovation or my time working at Hull College Group were in any way improper, or have brought the financial position or public perception of Hull College Group into any kind of disrepute."

The college's local MP, Emma Hardy said: "I am pleased that the investigation is looking into this. I am concerned by

the evidence that has been presented so far, especially as we know FE colleges are in a dire financial situation and every penny should be used to improve the education for learners.

"It is important to recognise the difficult journey the college has been on and there have been huge improvements. So I welcome this investigation and look forward to a speedy resolution so the college can continue to move forward."

Michelle Swithenbank told *FE Week*: "I welcome the investigation and look forward to the outcome."

pace Pace Communications
@PaceComms

We supported our friends at @hullcollegegrp this morning as they spoke to @RadioHumberSide's @DaveHarrisonBBC about the launch of their new game #GoGoDash 🎮

You can find it in the app store now!

Hull College and David Harrison

3:21 PM · Oct 24, 2018 · Twitter Web Client

Go Go Dash (4+)
Go go, jump and slide!
Hull College
Free

Screenshots iPhone iPad

College ceo and games music composer Rob Hubbard

The free computer game app, Go Go Dash, commissioned from a former colleague of Graham Raddings

College switches law firm conducting the 'independent' investigation

FE Week reported the Stone King lawyer appointed to the 'independent' investigation had for many years been the college's lawyer, which raised questions over potential conflict of interest.

Since then, the college has moved the work to the law firm Eversheds. A spokesperson for Hull College Group said: "It is in the interests of all parties for the investigation into these whistleblowing allegations to be carried out swiftly and thoroughly.

"As soon as the allegations came to light, Hull College instructed its lawyers Stone King - who are

highly regarded in the sector and by the ESFA - to investigate the matter using its HR investigatory team.

"As things stand, however, the whistleblower has declined to participate in the investigation. Since their participation is clearly integral to the whole process, the corporation has decided to instruct a separate law firm, Eversheds, to conduct the investigation in the hope the whistleblower will now choose to engage with the process.

"The corporation will then be in a position to fully consider and address any issues which may arise from it."

News

Sign language qualifications recognised at FAB awards

FRASER WHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

A provider of British Sign Language qualifications and an engineering awarding organisation are among the winners of this year's Federation of Awarding Bodies awards.

FAB's fifth celebration of the awarding and assessment sector was a glitzy ceremony in Leicester, attended by over 230 experts in awarding and assessment.

Chief executive of FAB Tom Bewick said the membership organisation received a "record number" of entries to the awards this year and the standard was "exceptionally high".

"The FAB Awards is an opportunity for the industry to come together to celebrate success and share good practice and all of the winners were deserving of their award," he added.

The panel of judges included UCL Institute of Education professor and former Association of Colleges



chief executive Martin Doel, head of apprenticeships and HR business partner for Coca-Cola European Partners Sharon Blyfield, and innovation and human potential consultant and transformation coach Nicola Darke.

The winner of Awarding Organisation of the Year was Signature, a provider of British Sign Language and deaf and deafblind qualifications.

The judges said this was for providing "highly valuable and socially-connective qualifications with an

innovative approach and a distinctive assessment methodology", which made a "real difference not only to a defined community, but to help integrate different communities".

The award for Qualification of the Year has gone to Excellence, Achievement & Learning (EAL), which last week also won its bid to develop, deliver and award the second wave of T-levels.

EAL won for its level 3 award in the Requirements of Fire Detection and Fire

Alarm Systems for Buildings. The judges said this qualification "goes towards saving lives" and is "designed to remove the barriers to take-up".

The engineering and advanced manufacturing awarding organisation also won Innovation of the Year for Engineering Talent, a means of accessing training resources online.

"It enables learners to navigate their way through the industry end-to-end, making it a more effective way to engage, educate and get employed," judges said.

The winners of the Collaboration of the Year award were Association of Business Executives and United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

The judging panel picked them for "assisting learners to gain confidence and contribute to the economy".

Helen Bull won Learner of the Year with her IQL UK qualification for her "outstanding achievement as a learner and for demonstrating strength and determination to continue with her

qualification while paying it forward to support others".

After being nominated by the Chartered Institute of Housing, Marie Porter from Phoenix Community Housing was awarded Outstanding Contribution of the Year.

She impressed judges "by changing lives and empowering others to do the same".

And exporter of the year was awarded to NCC Education after it adapted its programmes to the relevant markets "while still maintaining quality and removing the stigma around online learning".

These seven winners were selected from 34 finalists across all categories.

The ceremony was held on the first day of the federation's annual conference on Thursday, where delegates heard from Ofqual chief regulator Sally Collier, chair of the Independent Commission on Examination Malpractice in 2018-19 Sir John Dunford, and FAB chair Paul Eeles among others.

Ofqual chief sets questions for awarding organisations

FRASER WHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Ofqual's chief regulator has tasked awarding organisations with answering three questions as part of the watchdog's work on ensuring "public confidence" in qualifications.

Addressing the first day of the Federation of Awarding Bodies' annual conference, Sally Collier said she wanted AOs to "be in the best shape you can be" and it was "the time for you to take stock of your capacity and capability".

In order to ensure this, she posed three questions that she said were at the top of the watchdog's mind:

1. Do you have enough assessment expertise in your organisation – people who really know how to design, develop, deliver and review qualifications? And if you don't

employ such people, how can you access them on a sustainable basis?

2. Is your technology, and your technology expertise, up to the challenge of facing the increased risk posed by cyber threats and keeping your data safe?

3. If you are a responsible officer, do you know what is expected of you, in terms of fulfilling your obligations as the key accountable person?

Reaction at the conference on whether Collier's questions were helpful was mixed.

Louise Bangham, the quality assurance manager from Safety Training Awards, told *FE Week* she was "on the fence", saying the expertise question was important as "we all have to have the competence for the assessments to make sure they are all fit for purpose".

But the technology expertise "depended on the organisation," as

some will bring in contractors to get their systems into place.

"It is an important question, but I don't know if it's fitting for AOs."

Sarah Edmonds, a former FAB board member who has just stepped down from being a responsible officer at Active IQ, said she "absolutely" thought the questions were helpful.

This was because the questions responsible officers have to answer are much more "focused" and "clearly articulated" than in the past, when AOs had to discern what regulators meant by their questions and whether there were any "hidden messages".

She also agreed the technology question would be helpful, as "we're all mindful of technology, its advances and what's possible and what is not".

However, she added: "You have such a wide variety of awarding organisations where many people wear many hats and it is sometimes a challenge to them with the sheer heft

of the role."

Collier also used her speech to criticise the "rather superficial media coverage" of a recommendation by the independent commission on exam malpractice around banning watches in exams.

She said many of the commission's proposals were "far more important" and will have implications for qualifications.

What Collier didn't mention, however, was that the independent commission only gave media outlets a few hours of the working day to dissect a hard copy of the 177-page report before it was published.

The press release issued to journalists, from the Joint Council for Qualifications, also pulled out the recommendation to ban all watches in exam rooms as one of the report's key findings.

Much of her speech was focused on Ofqual's attempts to crack down on



Sally Collier

qualification malpractice.

Just this week, Ofqual launched a consultation on introducing fixed penalty notices and rebukes for organisations found to be flouting official regulations.

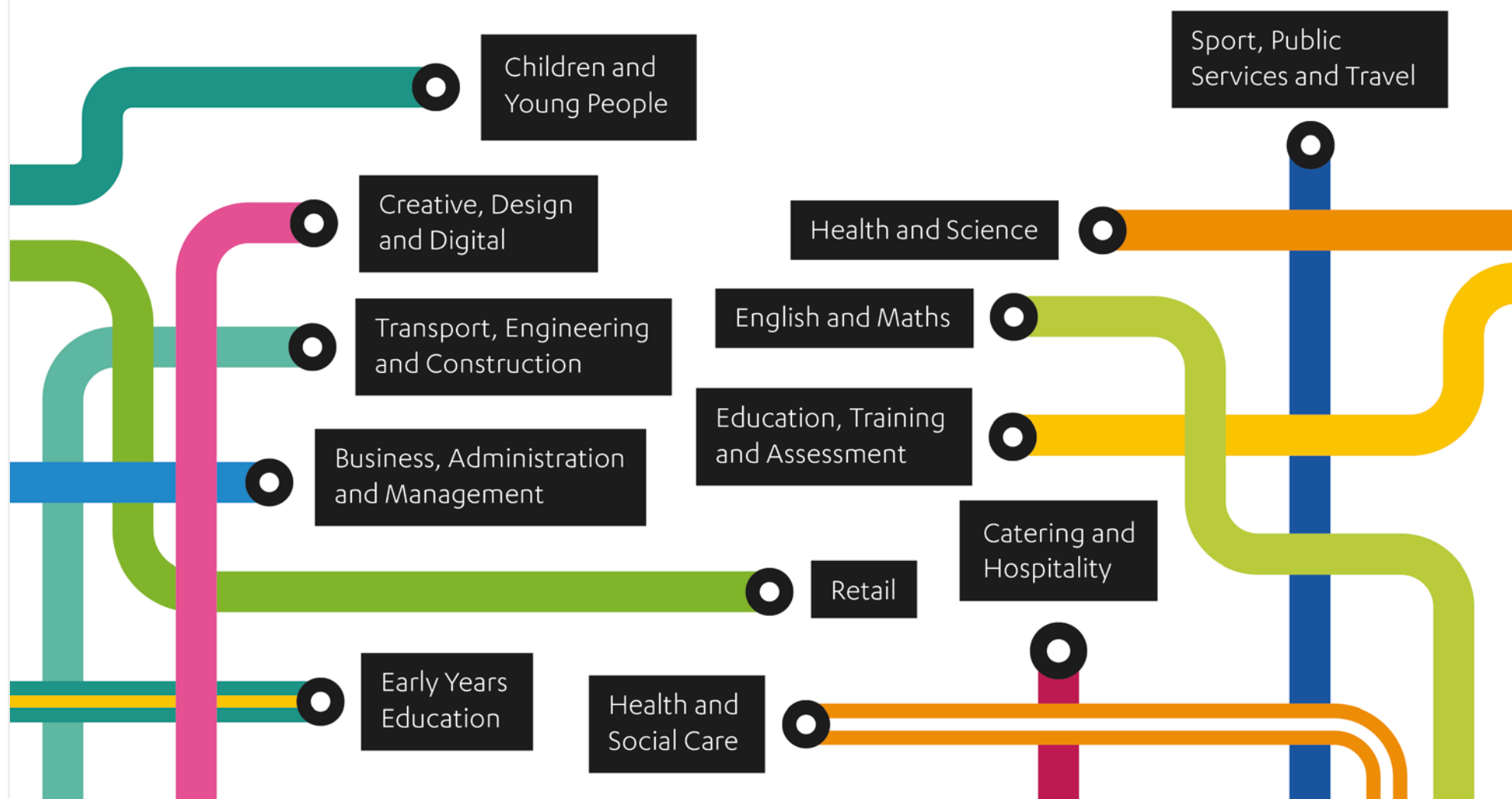
And in February, Ofqual announced it would start auditing awarding organisations' on the "control" they have over their individual providers after concerns were raised over AOs only moderating assessments after results had been issued – what is known as a direct claims status.

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Feature

Vision express: learning le

JL DUTAUT

JL.DUTAUT@FEWEEK.CO.UK

As Gavin Williamson promises to match Germany in the delivery of vocational and technical education in ten years, JL Dutaut looks back at the mismatch between vision and reality over the past twenty

It was an education policy announcement that grabbed the headlines. Fifty per cent of young people would access higher education. A policy announced not by a secretary of state for education, but by Tony Blair, a prime minister two years into his first administration. A vision, attached to a target.

Yet, a third element was missing: strategy. It has taken 20 years, three education department rebrandings, six prime ministers and 11 secretaries of state, but finally this month, the target has been met. In the end, it passed with little fanfare and a strong chorus of criticism.

From Aimhigher to higher-level apprenticeships, and from widening participation to broadening curriculum, it is a target that has transformed not only universities but, perhaps just as profoundly,

further education.

Was it worth it? It depends where you stand on the balance between student debt and incalculable economic benefit, or between grade inflation and unknowable social capital growth.

“It’s the policy equivalent of an iPhone with obsolescence built in”

Would any politician wish to repeat it? Under one condition: if public support could be so fixed behind the objective that to abandon it would be unthinkable.

Last week the new education secretary, Gavin Williamson, announced a policy for “the other 50 per cent”.

Set against the backdrop of a Blair success finally delivered under Boris Johnson, and a public discourse shaped by the pernicious notion of “liberal elitism”, it has the virtue, from the outset, of expressing a vision,



something none of Williamson’s predecessors have done with any impact since Michael Gove.

The vision is that by 2029 England will match or better Germany in the delivery of vocational and technical education (VTE).

For now, at least, there is little flesh on the bone. It’s a vision with a backstop, the policy equivalent of an iPhone with obsolescence built in, intended to fizzle out behind the pomp of another product launch.

How will it be delivered? Apart from eight new institutes of technology and some specialist maths colleges, there is little strategy.

How will it be measured? The Department for Education can’t tell us.

The Learning Age

To understand what shape it might take, one has to look back again to the Blair years.

In a 1998 green paper, *The Learning Age*, David Blunkett, then-secretary of state, set out two priorities to make education more responsive to a changing economy: individual learning accounts (ILAs) to subsidise people to take responsibility for their own learning, and a University for Industry (Ufi), a network of providers to support people to do just that.

That green paper became the *Learning to Succeed* white paper, and

then the Learning and Skills Act (2000).

By 2002, the ILA scheme, run in partnership with Capita, was wound up amid a fraud scandal that left the public purse lighter by £268 million.

By 2004, Ufi, which ran learndirect – an online learning scheme to attract young people and adults to upskill through education and training – had cost £1 billion and was subject to a value-for-money review by the National Audit Office (NAO).

“The ILA fraud left the public purse lighter by £268 million”

Of the 1.4 million learners the initiative was said to have supported, only 65 per cent had completed their courses and it found itself hobbled by the collapse of ILAs, its main income source.

Its journey after that has been eventful. It has eked out an existence on Home Office contracts to run workfare programmes, faced financial collapse, was earmarked for a “bonfire of the quangos”, and was finally sold to Lloyds Bank’s private equity arm

LDC in 2011. It has since undergone an Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) investigation, an Ofsted mauling and a public inquiry that left the provider, ESFA, government and Ofsted with egg on their faces.

It continues to operate as LearnDirect Apprenticeships Ltd, funded mostly through the apprenticeship levy, a far cry from Blunkett’s vision of 20 years ago, and a testament to the fact that even with a vision, a strategy and targets, the best-laid plans of politicians often go awry.

The economic turn

The transformation of Ufi from publicly funded quango to publicly funded for-profit provider shouldn’t mask another development in government policy, before even the NAO investigation. It started with education secretary Charles Clarke, continued under Ruth Kelly, and found support in Gordon Brown’s Treasury.

A 2003 policy paper by Charles Clarke entitled *21st Century Skills, Realising Our Potential* represented a subtle, yet major change in the political philosophy underpinning FE policy.

It was a shift from Blunkett’s notion of lifelong learning – an individual entitlement and an end in itself, with associated economic and social benefits – to a strongly economic conception founded on



Tony Blair in 1997

Lessons from wasted billions

international competitiveness.

Perhaps coincidentally, this was also the year of the second round of PISA tests, the dawn of the age of international comparison of education systems.

Earlier in the year, Clarke had set out his vision in a paper called *14-19: opportunity and excellence*, which included the notion of expanding the entitlement to literacy, numeracy and computer skills to level 2 standard to age 19.

By the time Kelly took over, all that remained of substance to the FE sector was a commitment to “give employers greater choice and control over the publicly funded training they receive” and to “create a new guarantee of free tuition for any adult without [...] a ‘level 2’ qualification”.

Translated into policy and announced at that year’s spending review, “choice” and “guarantees” became a public service agreement (PSA) target to “increase the proportion of 19-year-olds who

achieve at least level 2 by three percentage points between 2004 and 2006”.

But it was another PSA target, aimed at over-25s, which took precedence in the funding decisions. It read: “reducing by at least 40 per cent the number of adults in the workforce who lack NVQ2 or equivalent qualifications by 2010”.

“Train to Gain was sacrificed to the demands of austerity”

A third PSA target went barely noticed, because no baseline data was available against which to measure progress: to increase the proportion of young people who achieve level 3.

A year later, the government had made £1 billion of new money

available through the Train to Gain scheme. Under-25s were only eligible if an apprenticeship had not been appropriate, and under-19s were not eligible under any circumstance.

In 2010, *Train to Gain* funding was cut by £200 million. It was then sacrificed to the demands of austerity.

From PSA to PSB

If FE policy under the Conservative or Conservative-led governments since 2010 has been mostly characterised by reform of apprenticeships and compulsory GCSE resits, even this reduced ambition hasn’t been straightforward.

When it comes to apprenticeships, the DfE is investigating a 51 per cent drop in level 2 starts, and a drop of 23 per cent in uptake from 16- to 18-year-olds since May 2017, while apprenticeships for the over-25s continue to grow.

As to GCSE resits, evidence shows that the policy has contributed to a rise

from 9 to 21 per cent (an extra 25,000 students) achieving a strong pass in English and maths, but even Ofsted chief Amanda Spielman is critical of the impact of repeated failure on the other 79 per cent.

Into this tableau of dysfunctional policy steps Williamson, committing himself to “the other 50 per cent” let down by Blair, rather than the other 79 per cent, let down by long-term failure to grab the bull by the horns.

As well as new institutes of technology and specialist maths colleges, the secretary of state has announced that he is setting up a new skills and productivity board (PSB) to advise him on “what the economy needs”. The DfE says Mr Williamson has yet to invite a “suitable leader from the business community” to chair the board, which will be “set up as a DfE expert committee” without “a specified timeframe at inception.” In time, an open competition will be used to recruit a panel of “expert labour market economists”.

Perhaps a comprehensive spending review is awaited to nail down the specifics. For all the talk of vision, it appears New Labour’s economic turn is yet to be undone. Perhaps that forgotten target will be revived from inside the bowels of the Treasury – to increase the proportion of (young) people qualified to level 3.

Hindsight has the power to make any vision appear naive, yet without it policy is a firefight in which targets take the place of water buckets and strategy rises little above survival. Our college leaders know this, and they know too that vision without strategy or targets is worse.

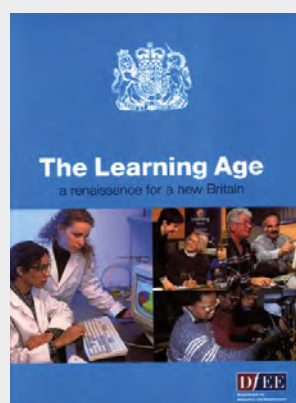
For as long as government policy, hemmed in by international comparison, is determined primarily by Treasury memories of wasted billions, education will continue to vacillate between these two poles. The sector must surely hope Gavin Williamson has convinced them he is worth an investment of faith as well as pounds.

COMPETING VISIONS OF THE FUTURE



DAVID BLUNKETT

Secretary of State for Education and Employment 1997 - 2001

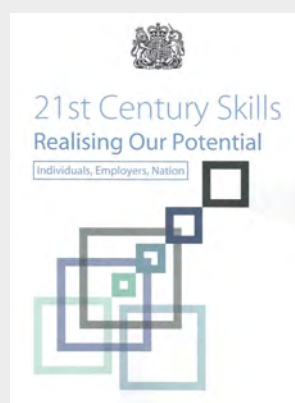


“The Learning Age: A Renaissance For A New Britain”



CHARLES CLARKE

Secretary of State for Education and Skills 2002 - 2004

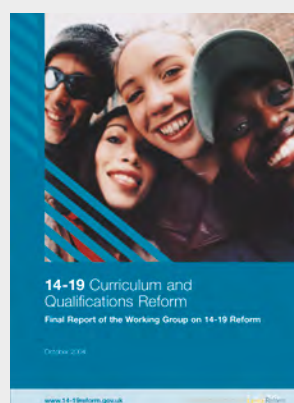


“21st Century Skills: Realising Our Potential”



RUTH KELLY

Secretary of State for Education and Skills 2004 - 2006

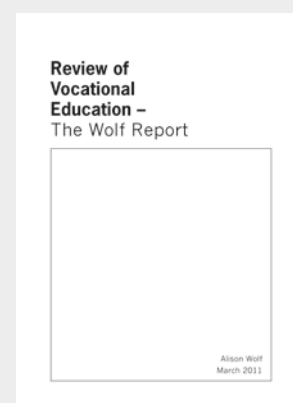


“14-19: Curriculum and Qualifications Reform”



MICHAEL GOVE

Secretary of State for Education 2010 - 2014



“Review of Vocational Education - The Wolf Report”



GAVIN WILLIAMSON

Secretary of State for Education 2019 -



News

A couple of hours to read a 64,600 word report is no excuse for superficial media coverage

Sally Collier

Chief Regulator
Ofqual



awarding.org.uk

CR
together

Brooklands may be forced to sell historic building

BILLY CAMDEN
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Exclusive

A college fighting for survival is considering selling a historic building, FE Week understands.

Brooklands College is in severe financial trouble after getting caught up in an apprenticeship subcontracting scandal which has resulted in the government demanding it returns £20 million.

In an effort to save itself from going insolvent, the college is trying to negotiate a deal by which it repays the funding over a number of years.

This newspaper also understands that discussions have started regarding the sale of Brooklands House, at the college's Weybridge campus.

It is a three-storey, Grade II listed red brick Victorian mansion that was built in the late 1890s. It used to house the family of Dame Ethel Locke King, who was behind the famous Brooklands

racing circuit, dubbed the 'Ascot of Motorsport' in its heyday.

The cost of the building is unknown but it is likely to go for a substantial price considering it's within walking distance of Weybridge Station and located inside the M25.

Brooklands College describes the Weybridge campus as being set on "spectacular grounds" on its website.

The campus has another, more modern building, with facilities split between the two including a learning resource centre, hair and beauty salon, a restaurant, training kitchens, media centre and refectory.

Brooklands College said it was unable to comment on the ongoing Education and Skills Funding Agency investigation, including the potential sale of Brooklands House.

FE Week revealed last week that the college is now being run by a Department for Education consultant after its chair, Terry Lazenby, stood down.

His replacement on an interim basis is Andrew Baird, one of the DfE's National



Brooklands House

Leaders of Governance, who is on their payroll and takes home £300 a day for his services.

He told FE Week this week that Brooklands College is "not trading whilst insolvent", as was previously reported, as it has "adequate cash to meet its current liabilities as they fall due".

"The college continues to work closely with the ESFA on an ongoing investigation," Baird added.

were exposed.

He stopped being chair of Hadlow when it went into administration in May – making it the first to go through the new college insolvency regime.

He will be paid for up to 15 days work between now and the end of the year at Brooklands College, according to the DfE.

As revealed by FE Week last month, a whistleblower reported the Brooklands College subcontracting scandal to the Education and Skills Funding Agency in 2017 but no action was taken until this newspaper exposed it nearly two years later.

Former chancellor Philip Hammond, who is the MP for the constituency the college is based in, said the revelation was "very concerning" while shadow skills minister Gordon Marsden demanded an "urgent" independent investigation into this lack of oversight.

Hammond, who resigned as chancellor to the Treasury in July, was scheduled to meet the college's leaders at the end of September. He has since been unavailable for comment.

"I am looking forward to working with governors and staff at the college to continue to meet the needs of local communities in Surrey.

"The staff of the college provide fantastic support and a great student experience for all our students."

Baird, who is also the chair of governors at Orbital South Colleges, was parachuted into Hadlow College earlier this year after financial irregularities



**Bishop
Auckland
College**

Vice Principal - Curriculum and Quality

Bishop Auckland College is a great place to study and work and we are proud of our distinctive internal culture. Our staff work together as a tight-knit team, totally dedicated to our students, the College and the communities we serve.

As an outward-facing organisation we recognise the critical importance of collaboration in order to lead change and influence local agendas. Through our many partnerships with employers and other stakeholders, the College has established its place at the heart of the community and as a key partner in the regeneration of Bishop Auckland and South Durham.

We have worked hard to simultaneously manage costs and develop strategic opportunities, and our financial health is good.

Recent developments include our partnership with the specialist engineering and manufacturing centre, South West Durham Training, and the launch of our first full degree level programme, in partnership with the Open University. We also recently introduced alternative provision for 14-16 year olds who are not thriving in mainstream education.

Our most recent Ofsted inspection challenged us to think differently about some aspects of our work and to embrace opportunities; are you a leader who could help to steer our College community with agility and vigour as we navigate through our exciting journey of transformational change?

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Closing date: Wednesday 13 November 2019

Interviews: Up to two days
28 and 29 November 2019

Reference: RS19/20/VP01

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Head of Motor Vehicle and Engineering

Competitive Salary

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multi-trades bungalow.

You will be a people-focused, ambitious leader with a strong track record of building high performing teams, high expectations of students, and a passionate commitment to the power of teaching and learning. With an appropriate teaching commitment, you will still be able to demonstrate and continually up-date your own teaching skills on a choice of full-time programmes, evening courses and apprenticeships ranging Levels 1 to 3, practical and theory.

Curriculum Manager Construction and Building Services

Curriculum Manager Motor Vehicle and Engineering

Competitive Salary

If you are looking for your first step into a management role or to expand your experience, then these Curriculum Manager roles could be the opportunity

for you. Reporting to the Head of Department, Curriculum Managers must be great teachers who will bring their trade experience supported by professional qualifications, delivering full-time programmes, evening courses and apprenticeships ranging from Levels 1 to 3, practical and theory. You will also have the ambition and ability to manage a team to ensure that our students have the best experience. With a reduced teaching commitment these roles will give you the space to develop your management skills.

Closing date: 25th October 2019 (midday) | **Selection process:** week commencing 4th November 2019

Please apply at: <http://www.windsor-forest.ac.uk/jobs-a-careers.html> and complete an online application form.

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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

Closing Date: Friday 25th October

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deliver prosperity,
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Vice Principal - Group Operations

We are looking for an inspirational individual to join our College. Working closely with our new Principal and Chief Executive, John Evans, this Senior Post Holder will be responsible for all Group Services including Finance & Resource, Marketing and Human Resources.

The ideal candidate will have managed Finance & Resource along with other service departments in a multi-site FE College. We want to hear from experienced FE leaders who have worked successfully at a strategic level. If you want to know more about living and working in Cornwall, then get in touch.

For an informal conversation about the post, please call Jayne Ninnnes, HR Director on 07795 645637 who will arrange a phone call with the Principal.

For more information and to apply for the position, please visit www.cornwall.ac.uk

Interview date: 28th October 2019

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You will join a dynamic team of dedicated staff to enhance a high quality apprenticeship journey by working with academic experts and professional staff at the University and a diverse employer client base.

Possessing excellent communication skills and the ability to work with people from a variety of business and organisation situations you will have recent demonstrable experience of supporting learning using coaching and mentoring skills. You will also have experience of engaging with employers as customers and active partners in the training and development of post 16 learning.

You will be required to undertake frequent and regular progress reviews with apprentices and their employers, conducted

digitally, via telephone and often in the Apprentice's workplace to support the apprenticeship journey and the University's compliance with funding rules and good practice in vocational learning at higher levels. You will engage with the course teams to enhance your discipline knowledge and use your organisational strengths to support the delivery of work-based learning modules on campus.

A strong customer focus, attention to detail and accuracy are essential for this role. Experience of working unsupervised including planning and prioritising own workload, dealing with conflicting deadlines and ensuring deadlines are met, is a must.

You must be able to drive and have a full UK valid driving license. This role requires you to be able to plan and undertake substantial travel to visit employer client sites.

If you are offered this post you will be subject to an enhanced check by the Disclosure and Barring Service. A criminal record will not necessarily prevent you from working at Sheffield Hallam University but its relevance to the duties of the post will need to be assessed before the appointment is confirmed.

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Subcontracting warning from government after £20m Brooklands College scandal

The ESFA really is a poorly run show. These letters warning the sector are coming thick and fast. How about they get their own act together and start policing this properly?

David Shaw

Introducing... Lord Agnew

An insightful view of the new minister for the further education provider market. Worth watching to see if he can indeed turn the tide on college principals' big pay packets and make the savings he says colleges need to be looking at.

pbLearning LLP

DfE looking to appoint extra principals and consultants to 'enable more colleges to be supported'

The best sources of improvement for FE colleges lie within the sector. NLFs and NLGs have demonstrated that many times.

Richard Atkins

Principal goes on 'leave of absence' at college under investigation for nepotism and 'financial wrongdoing'

Where was the oversight, when it was already in an intervention after a period where oversight had failed? This is not good enough - public funds, let-down students, let-down city.

Keely Lead

DfE reveals who will be allowed to deliver T-levels in 2022 - but there is a catch

Confusing for us not fully conversant with education, but looking to support with sector experiences and knowledge.

Loo Blackburn

AELP accuses DfE of 'sidestepping' with £515k tender to engage SMEs in apprenticeships

Thank you, Mark, local networks put a huge amount of energy into improving the system for all, they could really help in this situation, their members work with thousands of SMEs.

Western Training Provider Network

REPLY OF THE WEEK

London to clamp down on funding for out-of-area colleges



I find it amusing that London's mayor trumpets the capital's inclusivity and openness, yet behaves like something from The League of Gentlemen when it comes to AEB: "Only local providers for local people." Thought closed shops went out 40 years ago.

Ian Pryce

Experts

RUTH GILBERT

Group Education Director, Manor Property Group, Honorary Fellow, UCL Institute of Education



Mind the gap: Gavin Williamson should look at education in the round

The FE sector will be pleased to have a champion in the new secretary of state, writes Ruth Gilbert, but as long as this false separation of schools and colleges continues we're unlikely to "beat Germany by 2029"

Gavin Williamson's announcement of the government's ambition to make English technical education rival Germany's within a decade makes it clear that there is now a political will to improve the fortunes of further education. But improving and expanding technical education will not have the desired effects unless the same happens for careers education – and that means reform of admission policies.

The education secretary's well-publicised support for FE is welcome, as are the raft of policy measures he has announced, including eight more institutes of technology and a commitment to £400 million extra funding for 16 to 19 provision.

But continuing to treat schooling and further education as separate silos is a big part of the problem. Investing in technical pathways will be of limited value if schools aren't supported to promote educational options. The recruitment struggles of UTCs and the national colleges are testament to that.

"It's frustrating to see so much positive reform developed in a silo"

Our education system is, at heart, set up around the needs of secondary schools, which are incentivised to achieve good academic results – for the past decade they have done this while managing ever-shrinking budgets. As a result many schools have had no choice but to reduce their curriculum offer, slashing creative options to focus on subjects favoured by accountability measures.

This is a tragedy for young people who shine in the arts and other "non-academic" areas. Not only do they miss out on developing a wide range of talents, but they are given the wrong message that only "academic" routes can lead to future career success. Indeed, many only

access FE after having gone through unhappy years learning subjects they can't or don't want to engage in, culminating in failure, and leaving colleges with the job of picking up the pieces – most easily done by accentuating and reinforcing their difference from schools.

The irony is that while the government is reforming the qualifications system and talking up the importance of skills education, the funding and admissions frameworks haven't changed. Schools need to fill places, ideally with children who will achieve good grades at GCSE and A-level. As a result, those that inform young people fairly about alternative pathways do so despite every incentive not to.

Young people and their parents put trust in the school they attend, yet advice is rarely impartial. It makes a mockery of the government's careers strategy. This well-intentioned document includes eight "Gatsby benchmarks" to ensure careers education reaches certain standards. Yet, somewhat predictably, few regions achieve them.

We should capitalise on the lessons we can learn from some of our international counterparts, including Norway, Finland and Canada, and their efforts to ensure long-term sustainability to their education systems with reformed school admissions and funding policies. Many give regional authorities autonomy over careers services to meet local need. Canada actively uses industry investment to bolster careers education in skills shortages and new growth areas.

There are great examples here already. In the East Riding of Yorkshire for example, a regional careers hub is being built by a partnership between a property developer, the local enterprise partnership (LEP), four local councils and employers. The Qdos Careers Hub will bring students, employers and others together to provide impartial careers advice. This collaborative approach could easily be replicated elsewhere in the country.

It's frustrating to see so much positive reform on technical education developed in a silo. The government needs to take a much more holistic approach, empowering schools to offer real choice and to support students' individual career ambitions. Without that, it's hard to see how we will deliver Mr Williamson's ambition of matching Germany's technical and vocational education by 2029, let alone truly tackle the skills needs of our economy.

SAMANTHA WINDETT

Director of policy, Impetus



Can the secretary of state avoid falling into the ongoing NEET trap?

Looking to the national future is a nightmare at the best of times for politicians, let alone in this troubled period, but Gavin Williamson has done just that. Samantha Windett wonders whether he walked into a trap

This year's party conference season has been somewhat overshadowed by the Supreme Court, a potential autumn election and certain issues beginning with B. With everything that's going on politically it can be hard to imagine where we'll be in 2020, let alone 2029, but this is exactly what Gavin Williamson did in his speech at Conservative party conference. His remarks were important for three reasons.

First, the fact he got to make them at all – most cabinet ministers took part in Graham Norton-style sofa chats rather than set-piece speeches. The Conservative party is still trying to push the message that education is a priority.

Second, regardless of whether you see him taking personal charge of further education – with help and support, it seems, from everyone other than Nick Gibb – as good or bad, he and the government are keen to show FE some love.

And third, because what he said was potentially one of the most consequential comments of the conference season. If we "overtake Germany in the opportunities we offer to those studying technical routes by 2029", Britain, and the FE sector, will be in a very different place.

But what would achieving that aim actually look like?

A crucial place to start is by focussing on NEET young people aged 18-24 – those not in education, employment or training. Impetus has been exploring these issues through our Youth Jobs Gap research. We've found that young people with low levels of qualification are disproportionately likely to be NEET, perhaps to nobody's surprise.

Indeed, around half of all NEET young people did not have level qualifications by age 18. This is important, because they are not ready for T-levels, let alone higher and degree apprenticeships. So there will need to be a renewed focus on level 2 and below technical qualifications, something the FE sector will undoubtedly play a large part in delivering

Moreover, the number of NEET young people has not fallen by as much as you might guess. While youth unemployment has fallen by around half since its post-financial crisis peak, NEET includes young people who are "economically inactive" – not actively looking for work. This group, which makes up the majority of NEET young people, often faces additional challenges to completing a course or getting a job, which FE colleges should not be expected to solve alone.

"Williamson's aim might end up causing real issues"

The most recent Impetus research, released this month, found that around 75% of NEET young people have been NEET for at least 12 months. The reasons will vary, but it will often come back to the same solution: additional, tailored support is needed. From special educational needs to mental health issues, from caring responsibilities to criminal convictions, some young people will need help becoming ready to be moulded into Germany-beating technical wunderkinder.

The risk is that the job of providing this extra support is left to FE, or to nobody, without any funding to bring in the external expertise needed for success. In this sense Williamson's aim might end up causing real issues, as thousands of young people with additional needs turn up at colleges and are left to flounder by a government that assumes the sector knows what to do and has the resources to do it.

How can we avoid this fate?

It's quite simple. Colleges need to work with external partners who have rich and specialist expertise in tackling the barriers young people face in an area. Impetus supports charities like Resurgo in London and TwentyTwenty in the Midlands, who have knowledge of "what works" in supporting young people in their specific circumstances.

What that model looks like, and how to fund it, is a complicated policy question that we need to work on together. Otherwise, Williamson's ambition could become the FE sector's problem long before 2029.

An FE-led trust has benefited her alternative and special provision schools, says Jo Southby. They have contributed great things to the college too, but, most of all, the move has influenced positive changes for young people at all stages of their education

JO SOUTHBY

Executive head, London South East Academies Trust



Joining an FE-led MAT can support outstanding alternative provision

stakeholders.

Alternative provision (AP) in particular has a tendency to be viewed as an extended LA service rather than as a school sector in its own right. Becoming part of a successful educational trust has, however, helped to change this – enabling us to reposition ourselves and ultimately shift the mindset of the people we work with.

It hasn't been without its challenges. Joining up back office support has been a learning experience for college and schools alike. With AP and special schools, you cannot predict numbers or set targets in the same way a college does with its recruitment. Basically, you don't know who is

coming through the door! But having back-end support from the trust has been of real benefit, enabling our staff to concentrate on the main task of looking after students.

Staff recruitment and development across the trust have also been enhanced, as part of a larger organisation, we are able to develop more attractive packages in terms of accredited external training and progression opportunities.

At first glance, AP deals with very different cohorts to a general FE college: children who are at risk of or have been excluded from school, with little interest in learning or partaking of a school community, and who are likely to

be facing many challenges. And our special provision (SP) schools cater for pupils with increasingly complex social, emotional and mental health needs that require significantly higher levels of intervention and support.

“We advise students without schools’ accountability-led in-house bias”

Ultimately though, these are the young people who we are preparing to enter college or workplace. College can be a great progression route when young people leave us – and with a possible renewed focus on young people achieving level 2 qualifications, that is increasingly where they are likely to go.

Not only are we now in a prime position to identify suitable FE routes for our students, but our expertise is of great value to our partner colleges who are going to be receiving these young people. We advise students on their next steps, in line with what is appropriate for them and their individual needs and without schools’ accountability-led in-house bias, and my staff are experts well beyond their school gates on safeguarding, knife crime, mental ill health and many other issues facing the trust’s students.

At the same time, we are benefiting from a louder voice, economies of scale and increased opportunities for students and staff – so it has most definitely been a win-win for us all.

“Joining up back office support has been a learning experience”

London South East Academies Trust is led by a large FE college, with campuses in our own and two surrounding boroughs. This brought immediate benefits, opening up partnership opportunities inside and outside our home turf and a different overview of how different local authorities (LAs) work. This alone improved our negotiation powers.

We decided to become part of a trust for several reasons, but primarily to be part of an organisation that gave us a louder voice and more influence with the LA and other

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- what employers want in terms of skills training
- the future strategies of the Mayoral Combined Authorities
- the aims of the new National Retraining Scheme
- careers initiatives that actually work in our schools
- delivering quality provision in tough circumstances

With both the incoming chief executive of the Institute for Apprenticeships and the ESFA’s director of apprenticeships speaking at the event, AELP members are hoping for some good news which delivers on Boris Johnson’s promise that apprenticeships and technical education should be “properly funded”. Throughout 2019, providers have been reporting that their non-levy funding allocations are woefully short for meeting employer demand for apprenticeships and in the meantime the ESFA is pressing ahead with its plans to move the non-levy paying employers on to the Apprenticeship Service. How the latter can be achieved successfully without certainty over a sustainable programme budget could be the key question at the conference.

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AELP Autumn Conference 2019

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Emily Giles

Trustee, Prisoners' Education Trust

Start date September 2019

Concurrent job

Policy and communications coordinator, Adfam UK

Interesting fact

She is currently researching the impact of austerity on reoffending for her Cambridge MSt in Criminology and Penology



Vicki Morris

Trustee, Prisoners' Education Trust

Start date September 2019

Concurrent job

Deputy director, Centre for Justice Innovation

Interesting fact

She started her career as an English teacher in mainstream secondary education



Dr Paul Phillips CBE

Trustee, Prisoners' Education Trust

Start date September 2019

Concurrent job

Principal, Weston College Group

Interesting fact

He was awarded a CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours for services to Further and Higher Education



Richard Ward OBE

Trustee, Prisoners' Education Trust

Start date September 2019

Concurrent job

Chief executive, The Faith in Queen's Park

Interesting fact

He is a school governor

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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

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

Difficulty: Easy

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

Difficulty: Medium

Solutions: See right

Spot the difference To WIN an FE Week mug



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



Solutions

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

Difficulty: Easy

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

Difficulty: Medium

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