

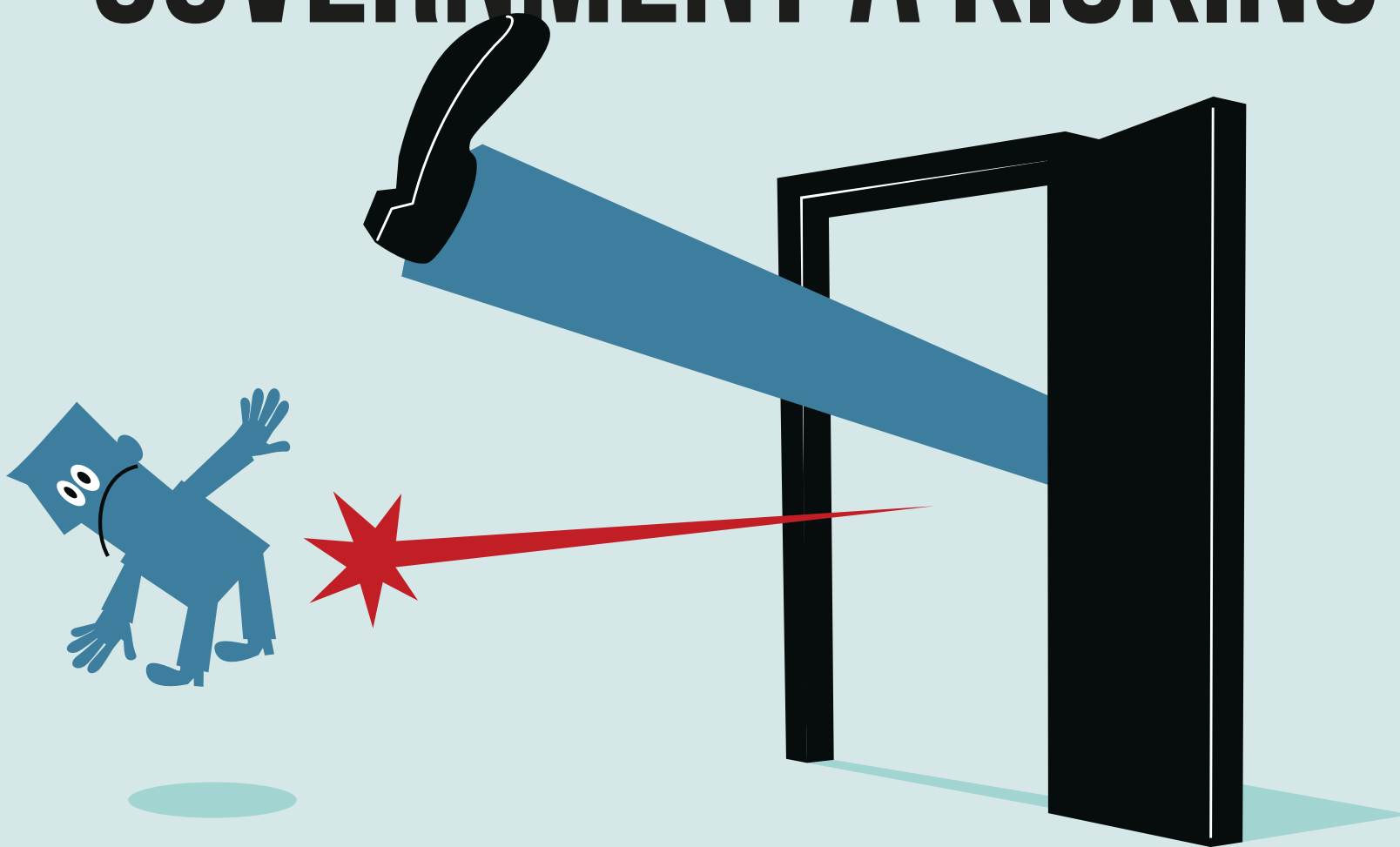


FEWEEK

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DAME MARY NEY SET TO GIVE GOVERNMENT A KICKING



INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF COLLEGE FINANCIAL OVERSIGHT FOUND MAJOR FAILINGS AT THE ESFA

Exclusive

BILLY CAMDEN BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

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FE WEEK IS PROUD TO BE A MEMBER OF



College finance review to slam ESFA

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From front

Exclusive

A government commissioned review is set to heavily criticise the Education and Skills Funding Agency and their intervention regime for failing to spot when colleges get into finance trouble, *FE Week* understands.

Dame Mary Ney, who had a 40-year career in local government, was commissioned to undertake the review in August after the FE Commissioner's team found Hadlow College, now in administration, had an ESFA financial health score of 'good'.

It is expected that Ney will be particularly critical of the calculations the ESFA uses to determine the financial health scoring and grading.

She will argue that had the agency's formula been more robust, it could have intervened in college failures, such as that of Hadlow, much sooner.

The Ofsted grade one college has been subject to government investigations after financial irregularities were uncovered. These included submitting partial information

to the ESFA in order to secure a 'good' financial health rating. However, according to the FE Commissioner, had the ESFA looked at their published accounts they would have rated them as 'inadequate'.

The agency's scoring system allows colleges to self-grade themselves by inputting three measures: one based on cash, another on debt and then margin.

This set of metrics then formulates an overall financial health grade of 'outstanding', 'good', 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate'.

Julian Gravatt, deputy chief executive for the Association of Colleges, said this "broadly balanced" system has been around since 1994 but is in need of change.

"A college that is reporting a big loss or got low points on their current assets, or high debt, that is all a flag. But the big issue is you have got to be certain the figures are correct, which was clearly a bit of a Hadlow issue," he told *FE Week*.

"What I think is a problem is that we are not a sector full of financial analysts. There is a slight danger that a college thinks their rating is fine, so nothing more needs to be done.

"We need to know more than just what the single score is – you need

to understand what contributes to it. It is useful as one of the things in the picture, but it is not enough."

The ESFA appears to be aware of its trouble in overseeing college finances, and has already started to make changes ahead of Ney's report.

It was announced in September that college financial returns, which historically have been submitted at least twice a year, will from this month be consolidated into a single annual return.

The ESFA claimed this would help college governors – and the agency – "spot signs of declining financial health and ensure preventative action can be taken at an earlier stage".

But principals were critical of the move, with Bedford Colleges Group boss Ian Pryce commenting: "You don't wait until you hear the football results and learn your team lost 10-0 as a basis for preventing problems and poor performance. You spot things early by developing strong human relationships."

On December 23 the ESFA published a new integrated financial model for colleges (IFMC), which replaced the agency's modelling for financial plans, financial record, and cash flow forecast.



Dame Mary Ney

Gravatt said the new spreadsheet, which all 248 colleges must have completed by February 28, will collect more cash data and thus give the ESFA a wider overview of a college's financial health.

"This is a spreadsheet that those colleges applying for restructuring funding – about 10 per cent of the sector – had to fill in," he explained. "But it is now being extended to 100 per cent of colleges, asking them to predict their funding for up until July 2022."

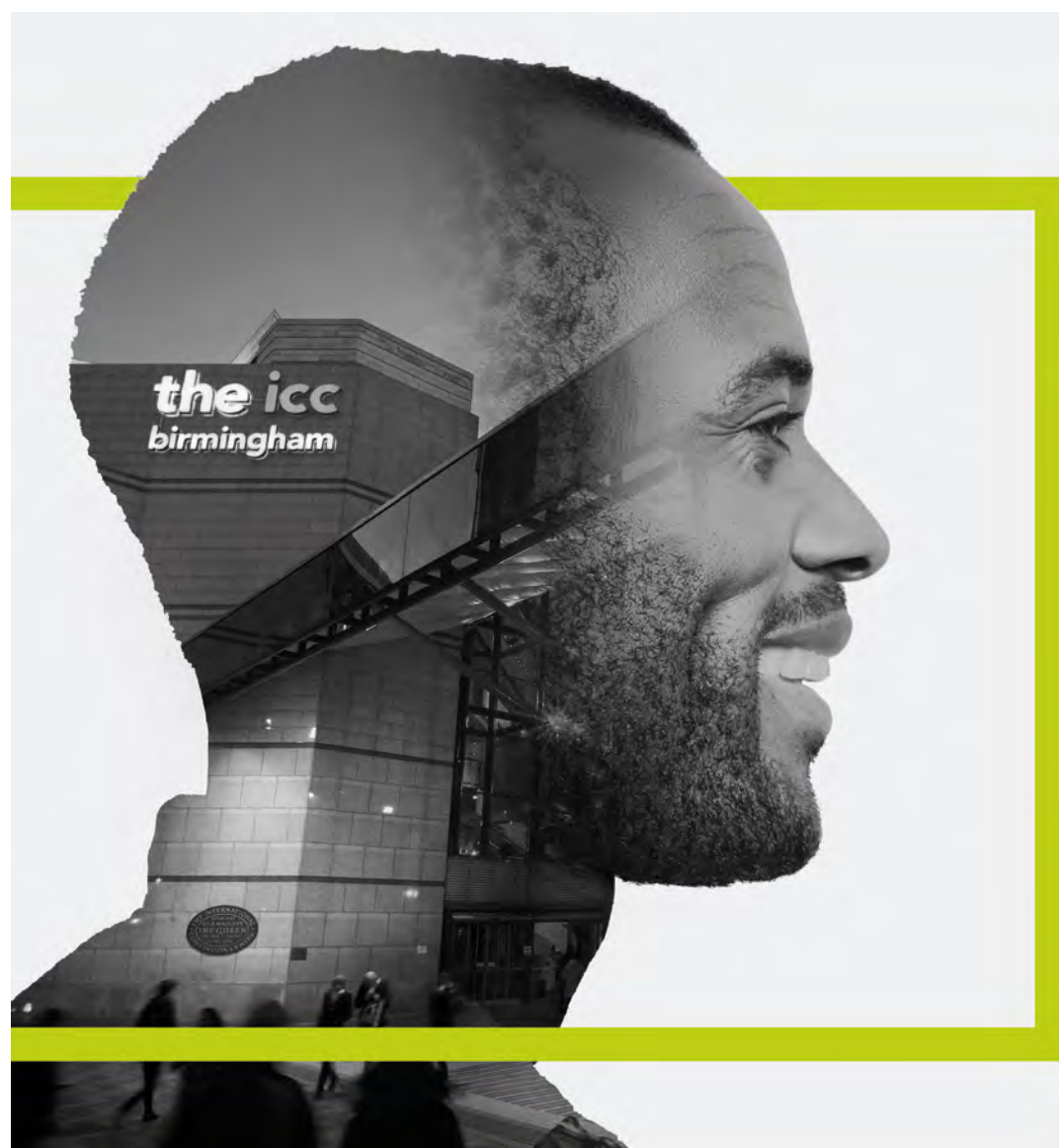
He added that while the financial

health scoring and grading hasn't changed, the ESFA has "promised that they are going to look at changing the system".

Ney's report will be published ahead of a National Audit Office's value for money review on the management of colleges' financial sustainability, which launched in August.

FE Week understands the government's audit watchdog will release their verdict in the summer.

The DfE declined to comment on the upcoming Ney report.



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News

DfE plans for all 'outstanding' providers to be inspected over the next five years

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Gavin Williamson has vowed to send Ofsted inspectors into every 'outstanding' training provider in England within five years, as he confirmed an earlier pledge to lift their inspection exemption.

The education secretary announced last September that the exemption, introduced by Michael Gove in 2012, would finally be abandoned. It followed repeated warnings from Ofsted that it was masking poor performance in colleges and providers that are currently protected from scrutiny.

Williamson has now confirmed he wants Ofsted to begin regularly inspecting grade one providers within five years of September 2020 – the normal timescale for inspections of those rated 'good'.

A consultation on the move, which is subject to parliamentary approval, is

being launched today.

If the exemption is lifted, grade one providers that have recently been given the once over can expect a short inspection, while those visited prior to September 2015 will be treated at length.

FE Week analysis has found 155 FE and skills providers are currently rated as grade one – although almost half of them (47 per cent) have not had a full inspection in over five years.

The five year timeframe may mean providers that have not been checked up on for as long as 13 years – for example, independent provider SAKS (Education) Limited – could have gone almost two decades without inspection.

But the Department for Education said Ofsted will prioritise visiting those providers that have gone longest without inspections.

Williamson said the exemption has meant "there is often not an up-to-date picture" of a provider's standards.

And although the government



Gavin Williamson

"continues to trust our best schools and colleges to get on with the job of education", making sure all providers are regularly reviewed "means parents will benefit from the expert insight Ofsted provides".

FE Week understands lifting the outstanding exemption will cost Ofsted between £5 million and £10 million.

The Department for Education this week said it was not in a position to reveal how much additional money would be sent to the watchdog. That was a matter for the upcoming spending review.

The move has been welcomed by the Association of School and College Leaders, with its deputy director

of policy Duncan Baldwin saying that while the exemption policy was "well-intentioned", it is "time to reverse it" – especially because a new inspection framework was introduced in September.

The current exemption policy already permits Ofsted to revisit up to 10 per cent of grade one providers each year, so it has not stopped some colleges from losing their grade one: Swindon College, which was rated 'outstanding' in 2013, fell to grade three after an inspection in December 2018 found that leaders "had failed to maintain standards" after a large number of teachers and managers left the college.

Bury College dropped to grade three in 2017, ten years after a grade one in 2007, because of ineffective self-assessment, inconsistent teaching and low achievement rates.

Kendal College suffered a shorter drop from its grade one in 2010, to a grade two in 2017.

WORLD SKILLS UK UPDATE

2021 UK squad announced

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WorldSkills UK has named 137 young people in their official squad, marking them as candidates for the team that will head to WorldSkills 2021 in Shanghai.

They will now undertake an intensive 18-month training process, fitted around their study and employment commitments, to bring them up to world-class standard before the final team for China is picked.

Education secretary Gavin Williamson offered his congratulations to the competitors, and said he is "excited to see another talented group of young people preparing to showcase their skills on the global stage".

One of those looking forward to competing is squad member Finlay Champion, 18, from Chichester College Group.

He secured his place after winning silver in the furniture- and cabinet-making at the national finals.

"One of my favourite things is competing," he told FE Week. "Having to do it in a short space of time with competitors and people watching you – it's just a fun atmosphere."

Jack Bateson, 19, from BAE, is representing mechanical engineering CAD on the squad and said it was his "dedication" that earned him a spot.

He previously competed in the national finals in 2018 where he won gold and was invited back to compete in 2019 to be in with a chance of making the squad.

"I'm honoured to represent the UK and represent my company," he said.

City of Glasgow College is contributing the most squad members of any provider – seven; while both Toyota Manufacturing and Southern Regional College are sending six each; and New College Lanarkshire and Gower College Swansea are each sending five.

WorldSkills UK chief executive Neil Bentley-Gockmann said he was "very excited that we are on the road to Shanghai".

He added that they are "gunning to regain our position in the top 10" after the UK slipped to 12th place at WorldSkills Kazan 2019, having coming 10th at the previous competition in Abu Dhabi in 2017.

WorldSkills Shanghai will run from September 22 to 27 2021.

The full list of Squad UK members can be found by visiting <https://bit.ly/2FtHwmy>.

UK takes first steps towards hosting WorldSkills

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The UK is to take its first steps towards hosting the international WorldSkills competition by gauging interest from the sector.

WorldSkills UK chief executive Neil Bentley-Gockmann announced that his organisation is "interested in exploring" a bid to host the competition in an interview with FE Week.

However, they cannot do it alone: Bentley-Gockmann said they "need to hear from our partners whether there is broad support to consider doing it".

The UK last hosted the WorldSkills tournament, which brings young people from all around the world to compete in skills-based competitions, in London in 2011.

The most recent finals took places last summer in Kazan, Russia, where the UK won a haul of two gold medals, one silver medal and one bronze.

"It has been a decade since it was last in the UK, so we're certainly interested in exploring, with our partners, the feasibility of hosting," Bentley-Gockmann said.

"It is actually a means to a bigger end:

helping drive excellence into the UK's skills sector and helping meet the ambition of governments across the UK to have a world-class skills system."

If there is enough interest, he said the UK would perhaps look at the 2027, 2029 or 2031 competition, but could not say which year the UK would bid for, or which city it would be held in.

He explained that the next step would be a feasibility study, which would look at the return the country would get on its investment in the competition and how it aligns with their public policy and skills policy objectives.

Someone with an intimate knowledge of putting on these competitions is former WorldSkills International president Simon Bartley, who was instrumental in running London 2011.

He thinks it would be "brilliant" if the UK got to host and added that other WorldSkills member states would welcome coming back to the UK.

"The government would really have to step up to the plate with regards to keeping their word about the importance of technical education. The British government has not really done this since five or six years before we hosted London," Bartley said.

Debt to be written off for 300 loans learners

YASEMIN CRAGGS MERSINOGLU
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Exclusive

Loans for nearly 300 learners worth more than half a million pounds will be written off by the Student Loans Company, *FE Week* can reveal.

A further 423 students could also be in scope for a loan cancellation, which would bring the total value of the debt write-off to more than £1.3 million, according to a Department for Education response to a freedom of information request.

The education secretary has been able to write-off advanced learner loans for learners left in debt when their provider goes bust since 1 July 2019, following a change in legislation prompted by *FE Week's* Save Our Adult Education campaign.

The Student Loans Company (SLC) started writing to the 268 students

identified by the Department for Education as being in scope for loan cancellation after this newspaper reported last month that no learners had been contacted or had their loans cancelled since the policy was introduced.

Asim Shaheen, who was studying for a QCF in hospitality at John Frank Training and could not complete his training after the firm went into liquidation in 2016, is one of the learners who received a letter.

The correspondence, which was shared with *FE Week*, said: "The Department for Education has considered the specific circumstances relating to your loan liability.

"They've come to the decision that we can now confirm the loan you received for the course you were unable to finish is eligible to be cancelled."

Shaheen will have £7,867.75 written-off by the government. All added interest is also eligible for cancellation.

According to the letter, recipients



Mussarrat Bashir (left) with Asim Shaheen, both former learners with collapsed training provider John Frank Training

need to complete and return a signed form to process the cancellation otherwise their loans will be eligible to be repaid from 6 April 2020.

"It's a relief, I think justice has been done," said Shaheen, who travelled to Westminster to help launch *FE Week's* Save Our Adult Education campaign in February 2017.

He continued: "With me going all the way to the Parliament, it is a great achievement and a great win against the system.

"Thanks to *FE Week* and thanks to the government and government bodies for taking note. For once the public has actually won instead of lost."

Mussarrat Bashir, another former

hospitality student at John Frank Training, is also in scope of the policy.

She was forced to make loan repayments despite a policy of deferment being introduced for students left with no qualifications when their providers went bust.

The government first asked the SLC to defer loan repayments for affected learners during the April 2017 to March 2018 tax year, and extended deferrals in subsequent tax years.

Bashir had previously called the loan a "restriction" and said it was "stressful when you've got other pressures like family".

She added it had been "dragging on for a very long time now. We should have the assurance it is done and dusted".

A spokesperson for SLC confirmed Bashir "was placed in deferment in 2017" and said "we apologise that repayments were taken from the customer during the tax year 18/19 and we will ensure that these are refunded".

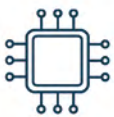
Bashir described the update as "great news" and thanked *FE Week* for the help in her case.

Last year West London College agreed to pay off almost £250,000 in loans debt for 59 victims of a subcontracting scandal after *FE Week* revealed learners were being forced to repay thousands of pounds each for courses they did not complete through private provider Eduo, which went into voluntary liquidation in 2017.



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FE commissioner reveals extent



"Employing close family members"... "risks perceptions of conflict of interest and lack of independence from the executive"

"Staff feel uncomfortable about raising concerns or speaking out for fear of being exited from the college at short notice"

"Extensive and ongoing use of settlement agreements and confidentiality clauses has eroded the trust and confidence"

"Twenty of these [settlement] agreements have been implemented between March and August 2019"

NICK LINFORD
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Exclusive

A leaked government assessment report reveals how leaders at Hull College employed "close family members" and created a culture where staff would not speak out for "fear of being exited at short notice".

FE Week reported last month that the chief executive, Michelle Swithenbank, and vice principal for HR, Julie Milad, had been suspended and then quit.

But the chair of governors, Dafydd Williams, emailed staff on the last day of term claiming the lawyers from Eversheds, commissioned to undertake an independent investigation, had found "no impropriety" on the part of Swithenbank (see box-out).

The government has declined to officially comment on the outcome of the investigation.

Despite this, an FE Commissioner 'intervention assessment report', seen

by this newspaper, is highly critical of employment practices.

The report, dated November 2019, says: "A governance manager was appointed at the end of August 2019 following an external recruitment process. The successful post holder is the daughter of the vice principal human resources [Julie Milad], who is a member of the senior leadership team.

"A number of staff and managers in the college perceive there is a conflict of interest in these two roles being performed by close family members."

Governors had "insufficient involvement in establishing governance arrangements" and the FE Commissioner concludes: "Clerking arrangements have not been sufficiently independent from the executive and have fallen below acceptable standards."

The report also found "many staff felt reluctant to voice their concerns to senior leaders because of a lack of trust".

And after the sudden departure of a senior employee in the summer of

2019 "who lodged grievances against the college and the principal"... "the spirit of openness that had begun was no longer evident and too many managers now comment about a culture that does not tolerate 'non-compliance'".

"Significant shortcomings in the operation and effectiveness of governance"

FE Week reported last month how staff felt bullied and were quietly paid to leave after agreeing to sign non-disclosure agreements.

The FE Commissioner, Richard Atkins, along with his deputy, Andrew Tyley and two advisors, heard similar stories during their interviews with staff on 30 and 31 October.

"It would appear that the extensive and ongoing use of settlement

agreements and confidentiality clauses at the college has eroded the trust and confidence of a number of staff and managers in the employment practices of the college (twenty of these agreements have been implemented between March and August 2019)," the report states.

"Several key staff have left the college and significant concerns have been raised from a cross section of staff and managers who feel uncomfortable about raising concerns or speaking out for fear of being exited from the organisation at short notice."

FE Week approached the college and government for comment, but they declined the opportunity, other than to say the report is due for publication next month.

Emma Hardy, the local MP and recently appointed shadow secretary for FE by Labour, said: "I am very concerned about the reputational damage to the college along with the way the leadership treated staff in recent months.

"I have asked the chair of the college to share with me the

investigation report written by the lawyers at Eversheds."

The purpose of the FE Commissioner assessment, it says, "is to report on the progress the college has made since it was first placed in formal intervention [in 2016]".

Since then "the fresh start/recovery plan commenced in March 2018 with a substantial package of restructuring funds totalling £51.7 million" and much of the report is to "assess the capacity and capability of leadership and governance at the college".

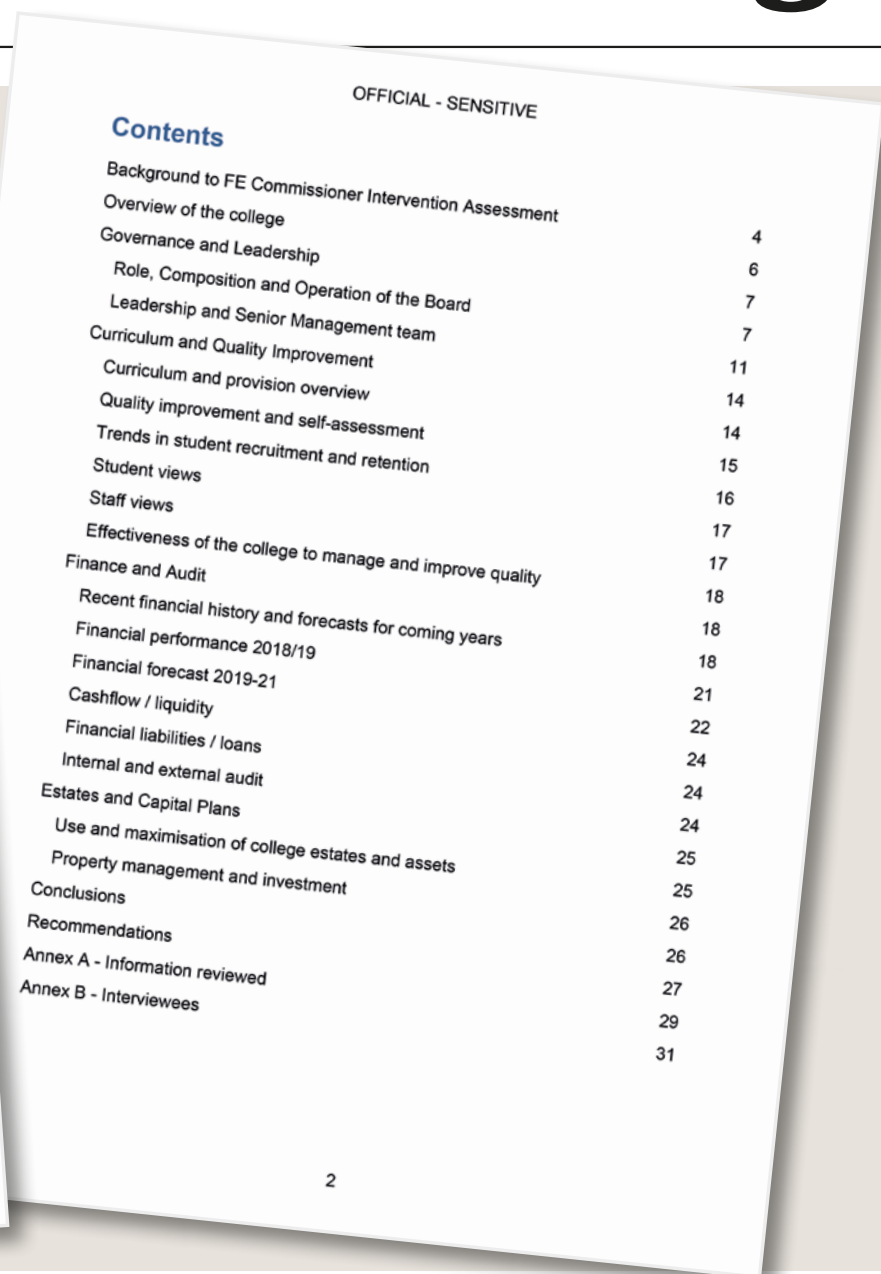
The broader findings from the assessment reveal governors "not exercising effective oversight", and "minutes have not been published on the college website for over a year".

Minutes remain unpublished and the college did not respond over several days to requests from FE Week for copies of board minutes.

And despite the record bailout, there remain serious concerns over declining income levels, particularly from the 16 to 18 year-old courses.

The FE Commissioner's report said that "16 to 18 student recruitment

Leak of HR scandal at Hull College



in 2018/19 fell significantly below the allocated number and this has resulted in a £3.436 million (27 per cent) reduction in lagged programme funding in 2019/20”.

They have fallen again this year which, the report adds, “is deeply disappointing given the apparent strong start to enrolments reported at the start of term”.

The assessment document says this is “particularly disappointing when taking into account the college’s substantial expenditure on marketing of over £1 million.”

FE Week reported last October concerns over the use of the marketing budget by Graham Raddings, who at the time was the budget holder.

Raddings quit last year, shortly after marrying then chief executive, Swithenbank.

The report concludes that “overall leadership at the college at this point in time does not demonstrate the necessary capacity and capability to lead the college forward positively” and “good financial health is not yet secure”.

Suspended principal and vice principal quit but college chair claims lawyers found ‘no impropriety’

As first reported by FE Week, the chair of governors, Dafydd Williams, commissioned an “independent” investigation into allegation of nepotism and inappropriate use of funds in September 2019.

Williams, head of communications and corporate affairs at Associated British Ports and former leader of City of York Council, joined the board as chair in January 2019.

At the time the education minister, Lord Agnew, told this newspaper that “any financial wrongdoing, if it has occurred, is treated extremely seriously and we will be carefully monitoring events as the information

becomes available”.

The investigation got off to a shaky start, after FE Week revealed the college lawyer was doing the work and Williams subsequently switched law firms.

The leaked government assessment confirmed the “chief executive [Michelle Swithebank] was suspended by the board in October 2019 pending the outcome of an independent investigation undertaken by Eversheds”.

And “following consideration of the interim findings from the Eversheds reports at the

November board meeting, the vice principal human resources [Julie Milad] was also suspended”.

On the last day of term, Friday 20 December, the chair emailed all staff to say: “As you know, Eversheds has been conducting a thorough review of our operational arrangements,

and I must stress it has found that there has been no impropriety on the part of Michelle. Nevertheless, Michelle has informed us that she wishes to move on.”

Williams added: “Our VP HR and Professional Services Julie Milad has also informed us that she wishes to move on...due to family responsibilities.”



News

Investigation underway as top college finds shock £6m deficit

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Exclusive

A high-profile college that uncovered a shock £6 million deficit when the finance director went on sick leave has put 26 jobs at risk and says it is considering an application for emergency funding.

Gateshead College has remained tight-lipped on how the shortfall came about. However, it has confirmed that a new interim finance director was appointed last month and the principal Judith Doyle CBE retired with immediate effect.

Deputy principal Chris Toon has taken over as acting principal of the grade one college.

He announced a redundancy consultation is underway on Wednesday.

"Currently 26 posts are at risk, mainly from business support areas, however no final decisions will be made until consultation concludes," Toon said. "We have

opened a voluntary severance scheme to mitigate as far as possible the number of compulsory redundancies.

"These proposals will help us address some short-term financial pressures the college is facing at the moment."

A team of independent forensic accountants was drafted in after the unexpected deficit was found "to establish the explanation" and its investigation will be completed by the end of January.

A spokesperson for Gateshead College said: "We appointed a highly experienced interim financial director just before the Christmas break and he and the executive team, supported by governors, are working on the college's recovery plan.

"This includes options for short-term funding loans and we are in close dialogue with the ESFA while we assess what is required.

"Our absolute focus is on retaining the highest standards of teaching and learning

Judith Doyle



while addressing the current financial situation."

It was previously confirmed that a new three-year financial plan, which is hoped to return the college to a surplus by 2020-2021, is to be delivered with the support of the ESFA and FE Commissioner.

The college declined to comment on the details of the deficit until the investigation is concluded. Governing board minutes do not offer any mention or explanation of the shortfall.

Gateshead recorded a surplus of £748,000 in 2017-18, according to its latest accounts. They add that the financial objectives for 2018-19 had included achieving a surplus of £535,000 and continuing to improve the college's financial health score to reach

'outstanding'.

In the latest minutes from the college's audit committee, which met on June 19, 2019, a number of items, including the risk-management plan presented by the finance director, were withheld as confidential.

There were also confidential items in the most recent meetings of the board of governors on July 4, 2019, such as the draft budget for 2019-20 presented by the finance director, and on October 10, 2019, including the principal's strategic update.

Judith Doyle retired with immediate effect on December 31.

The college said she had previously informed the board of her intention to retire at the end of this academic year.

A spokesperson for Gateshead said

the decision to bring this forward was "hers, in the belief that it was in the college's best interests to step aside now, enabling the new three-year plan to be delivered by the team with the support of the ESFA and FE Commissioner".

Prior to this, Doyle was the highest-paid principal in the country, receiving a salary of between £340,001 and £350,000 in 2017-18.

The college previously told FE Week that "the published accounts take into account an accrual for a remuneration scheme payable in respect of a three-year period". Her salary for 2019-20 was set at £252,000.

The college's financial statements for the year ended July 31, 2018 also showed six other key management staff were paid between £110,001 and £190,000.

Doyle has spent 33 years in the FE sector and was appointed principal of Gateshead in 2013, having previously held the position of deputy principal. She was one of seven principals to be chosen by the FE Commissioner to advise government officials on skills policy in 2018.

She was made a CBE in the Queen's New Year Honours in 2018.

Gateshead received an 'outstanding' grade from Ofsted following a full inspection in July 2015.

Labour's new shadow minister says she'll 'fight' for FE

BILLY CAMDEN
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Emma Hardy is to be Labour's new shadow FE and HE minister, with a pledge to continue "fighting" government for greater investment in the sector.

The MP for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle and education select committee member snapped up the position after it was offered to her by shadow education secretary Angela Rayner on Tuesday.

She takes on the role from Gordon Marsden, who was shadow HE and FE minister until he lost his Blackpool South seat in last month's General Election.

Speaking to FE Week, Hardy said it is vital that she and Labour continue to not let government "get away with anything" while the party undergoes its current leadership election.

"The majority they [the Conservatives] have got means they can push through pretty much anything, and the role of the opposition becomes even more important."

She joined parliament following the 2017 general election and is a former primary school teacher and union activist.

Hardy said her experience on the education select committee has been "absolutely vital in my learning for the other areas of education".

"I want to continue what I've been talking about with apprenticeships, how do you take people from being 16 years old all the way through a clear pathway to become fully qualified in a profession if you are not going to go down the A-level route.

"At the moment it doesn't feel like it is a very joined-up system and I think as shadow minister for both FE and HE allows me to bridge that gap to look at

how they work together."

But her main priority for FE will be funding. "It is no surprise I want to talk about funding - I've lobbied on the Raise the Rate and Love Our Colleges campaigns and that is something I will keep fighting for," she told FE Week.

"My concern with this government, however, is with the rhetoric that is coming out, that they might be looking at increasing the FE budget by decreasing HE. I am a bit concerned as they both play a vital role and are both equally important.

"FE has to have its status raised and valued way more than it has in the past but not at the expense of HE."

Hardy also touched on T-levels, stating that she has "many reservations" and she will continue to challenge government on their development.

"The feedback I'm getting from colleges is that they are not keen on them so it might be one of those

policies that falls at the first hurdle," she said.

On her party's idea for a National Education Service, Hardy said it is a "fantastic" idea, with principles behind it that she "buys into" - but it will be for Labour's new leader to decide if they want to continue developing the policy.

Hardy's first appearance at the dispatch box will be on January 20, which "of course I am looking forward to.

Since joining parliament, Hardy has contributed to multiple Westminster Hall debates on college funding. In May 2018 she joined Hull College staff on the picket line during strike action, and she has commented in FE Week on the ongoing government investigation at the college.

Earlier this week shadow education secretary Angela Rayner announced she would run to be Labour's deputy leader.



It is not yet known whether she will seek to keep her education brief if she wins the deputy race. Tom Watson, who stood down as deputy leader and as an MP last month, was also shadow culture secretary alongside his leadership role.

Break-up of first college in administration begins

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Hadlow College has begun transferring campuses to other providers after it became the first to enter education administration last year.

The Mottingham campus, which has 186 learners and 23 staff, was taken over by Capel Manor on January 1.

Hadlow's interim principal, Graham Morley, called it an "important step" towards resolving the financial issues facing the college. "It removes," he said, "some of the uncertainty for both the staff and students with regards to the future direction of the campus".

He gave his thanks to the staff for their help in making the transfer possible: "It is sad to have to say goodbye to valued colleagues, all of whom have displayed the highest levels of professionalism in

exceptionally challenging times."

Hadlow went into administration in May 2019 with £40 million in debts. Its former leadership team have been accused of wrongdoing.

The transfer to Capel Manor is part of a three-way split the FE Commissioner recommended for Hadlow and its sister college – West Kent and Ashford College (WKAC) – which went into administration in August.

A report by administrators BDO released on Monday revealed that by the end of March, East Kent College Group is expected to have taken control of both Hadlow's Canterbury campus and WKAC's in Ashford.

Meanwhile, North Kent College will run the Hadlow campus and its Greenwich facilities, as well as WKAC's Tonbridge provision and its Princess Christian Farm – a facility in Kent for people with learning disabilities.



North Kent College said the process "remains on track", while East Kent is expected to be in line with them.

Like Hadlow, Capel Manor is a land-based college, with 3,000 students and 300 learners spread across five campuses in London.

It is rated as 'good' by Ofsted, most

recently at a short inspection in 2016. Its 2017/18 accounts show it had 261 employees. It generated a surplus of £357,000, and its financial health rating was 'outstanding'.

It is envisioned that Mottingham will be fully-integrated into its new parent college, and new courses will

be put on at the campus, including in horticulture, garden design, turf management, environmental conservation and arboriculture.

Capel Manor principal Malcolm Goodwin said they are "truly excited" about including Mottingham in their existing family of campuses.

Hadlow has already had to sell off its Betteshanger country and business parks to developers. According to the BDO report, this brought in £1.47 million for the college.

An earlier administrators' report showed that the college owed money to 300 creditors, many of them small businesses.

During an intervention by FE Commissioner Richard Atkins, it was found that both boards failed in their fiduciary duty and put the "sustainability of both colleges and learners at risk".

The principal and deputy principal of both colleges, Paul Hannan and Mark Lumsdon-Taylor, and Hadlow chair Theresa Bruton all resigned from their roles after the commissioner visited.

All three are currently being investigated by the Insolvency Service. If there is evidence of misconduct, measures such as director disqualification could, if deemed in the public interest, be enforced.



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News

Police probe into 3aaa abandoned as ESFA pledges 'tighter monitoring'

BILLY CAMDEN
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Exclusive

The police have dropped their criminal investigation against Aspire Achieve Advance (3aaa) – although the Insolvency Service continues its enquiries into the former apprenticeship giant.

Derbyshire Constabulary said it had run into “evidential difficulties”. Following a meeting with the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on November 29, 2019, it decided to not pursue the case.

Neither the police nor the ESFA would provide further detail, but a spokesperson for the Department for Education said it would “not hesitate to take swift and decisive action against those who attempt to break, or manipulate the rules, regardless of whether the relevant authorities take forward criminal proceedings”.

“Since the investigation into 3aaa, the

ESFA has toughened up on oversight of providers,” he added, “and we have established tighter monitoring controls.”

A spokesperson for Derbyshire Constabulary said a “formal criminal investigation” into 3aaa began in March 2019, following a “number of fraud allegations made by the DfE”.

The government terminated its multi-million pound skills funding contracts with the provider in October 2018, following a five month investigation. The case was then passed to the police through Action Fraud. This was the DfE’s second investigation into the provider in two years.

The provider went bust and the High Court placed 3aaa into compulsory liquidation in late October 2018. Anthony Hannon was then made the official receiver handling the insolvency.

His investigation into the collapse is still ongoing.

Although Derbyshire Constabulary has dropped its case against the defunct provider, the insolvency service told FE Week that if Hannon does find evidence



of criminality he can refer the findings to another prosecuting authority, such as the Serious Fraud Office.

The Insolvency Service has three years from the date of the company winding-up order to launch enforcement action “if it was to determine doing so was in the public interest in the light of any investigation findings”.

Sanctions imposed by the official receiver, if he uncovers unfit director conduct, include director disqualification of between two and 15 years.

3aaa had 4,200 learners and 500 staff on its books when it went bust.

The firm was holding £16.5 million in ESFA contracts, and received more than £31 million in government funding the year before its collapse.

Whistleblower evidence obtained by FE Week, showed how the provider inflated achievement rates by more than 20 percentage points.

Sales documents for 3aaa showed a potential £700,000 ESFA clawback.

It is understood that this related to a range of apprenticeship and traineeship funding overclaims made

through individualised learner record submissions.

The ESFA also investigated the alleged misuse of grants from an apprenticeship incentive scheme.

Nor was this the first ESFA investigation into 3aaa: in 2016 the auditing firm KPMG was asked to carry out an investigation and found dozens of funding and success rate “overclaims”.

It is understood this resulted in the provider paying back a substantial six-figure sum.

After launching its second investigation into 3aaa in June 2018, the DfE called in an independent auditor, Alyson Gerner, to investigate the ESFA over its contract management of the former apprenticeships giant.

3aaa was co-founded by former Derby County Football Club owner Peter Marples and Di McEvoy-Robinson in 2008. They both stepped down in September 2018.

Neither Marples nor McEvoy had responded to requests for comment at the time of our going to press.

Notts 'college' funding terminated

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Exclusive

A multi-site “college” is to have its funding contracts terminated, after serious safeguarding failures were exposed in a damning Ofsted report.

City College Nottingham, a private training provider with eight campuses across the Midlands, laid off staff and stopped taking on new enrolments ahead of the publication of a grade four inspection report on December 20.

FE Week exclusively revealed the safeguarding concerns in November. They were later laid bare in Ofsted’s report: learners can “easily access inappropriate materials on college computers, including pornography” and staff and students do not feel “safe” because they “cannot be sure whether anyone on site is supposed to be there or not”.

A Department for Education spokesperson this week told this newspaper that “termination letters

were issued to City College Nottingham on 24 December. We are meeting with the provider later this week to go through the next steps of our contract termination process, in line with our published intervention guidance”.

The spokesperson would not reveal the contract termination date, but the Education and Skills Funding Agency typically gives providers three months to wrap up.

At the time of the inspection, 191 learners were on adult learning programmes and there were 110 apprentices.

Nottingham College had a £1 million subcontracting agreement with City College Nottingham to train 300 of its learners, but terminated it in November when the safeguarding concerns first came to light. The majority of students have since been transferred to courses within Nottingham College.

Ofsted was drafted in after a whistleblower brought concerns to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

The watchdog’s report said that not all learners had been issued with identity

badges, but that a few “are particularly concerned for their safety while on college sites, and inspectors agreed with them”.

Inspectors reported that a staff member also “expressed concerns about their own safety at community venues”, as “access to learning areas is open to the public without challenge”.

They found that while staff raised these “significant concerns” before the start of term, managers had “failed to resolve them”.

The report added that “In practical workshops, poor practice and safety concerns identified before the beginning of term remain unresolved”.

While City College Nottingham was rated ‘inadequate’ for leadership and management and overall, Ofsted judged that it ‘requires improvement’ in all other assessed themes.

The private provider operates from sites across Nottingham, Derby, Leicester, Burton-on-Trent and Stoke-on-Trent.

Courses on offer include English for speakers of other languages, English, mathematics, fashion and textiles,



construction trades, health and social care, and beauty therapy.

Twelve days after the inspection, which ended on November 8, 2019, City College Nottingham advertised on Twitter that all their places were “now full for the academic year 2019/20”.

Nottingham College previously told FE Week it took quick and decisive action after being made aware of the safeguarding situation, including having “immediately” provided reception and security staff at City College Nottingham’s Carlton Road campus to “ensure secure access”.

The College is “strictly enforcing the use of lanyards for staff and students

in order to ensure only people with a legitimate reason to be in the building are in the building”.

It has also “suspended IT access to control safeguarding risk online until such time as adequate software monitoring can be introduced”.

City College Nottingham last year had a subcontract with Burton and South Derbyshire College worth £220,000. The college said this ended in 2018/19 and it had not entered into any new contracts in 2019/20.

The private provider’s direct ESFA contracts for 2019/20 totalled £1.3 million.

City College Nottingham declined to comment.

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Profile

Introducing...

ANNA MORRISON

Director, Amazing Apprenticeships

JESS STAUFENBERG
NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Jess Staufenberg meets an unconventional leader on a mission to unpick the apprenticeships system

Many education leadership success stories begin with somebody being the first in their family to go to university, beating all odds and rising through the ranks from there. Anna Morrison is different.

The director of Amazing Apprenticeships – daughter of a headteacher and a social care chief – was entirely expected to go to university but resolutely did not want to. She already felt frustrated with her sixth-form teachers refusing to let her out for work experience during her free periods. “One day a week I had no lessons at all, and I was saying, ‘This is crazy – why are you making me come and sit in here all day when I could be going out seeing business?’”

Her itch to learn in an active, practical way is evident. “When I was doing A levels, I realised I didn’t enjoy learning in that way. With music A level, I loved the performance but not the theory. With theology, I thought

we’d be doing lots of debates together, but we had to sit and learn texts. If you knew me, you’d wonder how I ever ended up doing that.”

A few trips to university campuses made up her mind. The social scene was right up her street, but sitting in lectures? Not a bit of it. “I was academically capable of going. My family, my siblings and cousins all had a high level of education – and this was the 1990s, university was free, so why wouldn’t you?”

“If someone tells me I can’t do something, it ignites something in me”

One teacher told her she would never achieve a senior management role without a degree. But Morrison was determined and so she saved up some money and, having never got on a plane before, flew to New Zealand. Within a day she had a waitressing job, working hand-to-mouth paying for her explorations around the country.

Morrison puts her 18-year-old determination to do things her own way down to a family trait. “Usually if someone tells me I can’t do something, it ignites something in me where I say, ‘Right, I’ll show you.’” Her grandmother was similar. “I’ve always been surrounded by a lot of strong female influences. I saw my nan as quite a trailblazer. Once, she identified the need for a homeless shelter in our community – and she actually set it up. I was really close to her, so she inspired me.”

It could all have gone wrong. Aged 19, Morrison was back at home and casting around for work. She landed a job temping for North Hertfordshire College as a receptionist over the summer. “Most days it was just me, the cleaner, the postman and the security man.” Some people might have felt



Receiving her CBE from Prince William in 2019

defeated sat at a desk somewhere near Luton, but Morrison, who is clearly a rampant organiser, spent her time devising a proper system for taking messages at reception. Soon she was made permanent, and after that oversaw all reception desks across the college. “And that’s when I got sucked into FE.”

The sector seems to have encouraged Morrison’s innermost talents and skills in a way school simply had not. “One of the things I really need to thank FE for is not letting my age be a barrier. I was regularly the youngest person in the meeting, but they would always listen and not patronise me.” She spent seven years at North Hertfordshire College in various departments, moving across marketing, budgeting and other briefs. “It was like the best rotational apprenticeship!”

Finally, actual apprenticeships landed on her desk. Morrison was asked to sort out the college’s low success

rate. “It really was the best job to unpick what was happening.”

At the same time she joined the Hertfordshire provider network to make contacts in the region. The Learning and Skills Council, later replaced by the Skills Funding Agency, wanted to appoint a manager for the network and Morrison decided to go for it. Her remit was, in her own words, “to build partnerships and make stuff happen” between training providers, colleges, local authorities and funding bodies. She was just 27 years old.

Her experience leading on apprenticeships at the college, combined with her new role, brought Morrison a revelation. “I was going into schools and talking about apprenticeships – and that’s when I realised just how much people didn’t understand. They didn’t know where to begin.”

It’s a problem Morrison has spent her life unpicking. The opportunity to



Hosting business breakfast for local business women with MP Bim Afolami



“I don’t want young people saying ‘a company like Google don’t want someone like me’”



Anna with her team at Skills Show 2018

make this her full-time mission came when the Learning and Skills Council closed and her manager position disappeared with it. “I got to one of those exciting T-junctions where you either go left or right. Should I go back to a provider, or is there an opportunity to do it alone?”

She set up her own business, Anna Morrison Consultancy Services, in 2010 and then Amazing Apprenticeships in 2015. In the same year the organisation won the contract from the government’s National Apprenticeship Service as the approved communication channel for the Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge for Schools and Colleges (ASK) project, which gives staff free support and resources to help students understand apprenticeships.

With her team of seven staff, Morrison has built a website that “demystifies” the apprenticeship world, packed with resources, case studies and information. She is particularly proud

of the “vacancy snapshot” section in which the recruitment processes of 65 big UK employers are made clear.

“I just don’t think we need a separate apprentice wage”

“I’ve spent loads of time understanding what it is schools didn’t understand. Teachers were saying the recruitment processes have become so complicated, and young people were saying they don’t know what steps to take. So we’ve worked it all out.” Morrison has huge names signed up: Google, Coca-Cola, the UK Parliament, Jaguar, Amazon and more. “I would say we’ve got another brand coming to us every week.”

Whether sorting out a receptionist

message system, or the way people understand recruitment processes, Morrison clearly doesn’t like a mess. But there is more to it than that – she feels strongly that no one should think a job is out of their reach. “There are a few things that make me tick. Helping people make sense of it is one. But it’s really important we show all young people they’re welcome to these employers. I don’t want young people saying ‘a company like Google don’t want someone like me.’”

Morrison visited Brixton prison last year and is particularly keen to extend apprenticeships to ex-offenders, care leavers, home-educated students and others not in the mainstream. “We’ve got so much more work to do in that space.” As she herself says, she may not have followed her parents into teaching or social care like her three siblings, but “you can probably see those values are

with me”.

It hasn’t gone unnoticed. In June, Morrison was awarded a CBE, even managing a chat with Prince William about the importance of apprenticeships for mental health. If her aim was to prove the teacher wrong who told her she’d never get far, she has done it with considerable style and class. Her parents, in particular, are proud. “I think they always knew I would be fine – they were just nervous about me not going to university. They had to trust and support me.”

But the field is not clear yet. Since Morrison is focused on vulnerable groups, she is particularly frustrated by apprenticeship pay. It is one of the rare

times she fumes. “My big policy thing, that I really didn’t think was helpful, is the apprentice minimum wage – £3.90!”

It may be her influential voice alongside others in the sector that has helped get the issue to Number 10. On January 2, Boris Johnson announced the apprentice minimum wage will rise to £4.15. But it’s still less than the National Living Wage available in many jobs, now set at £8.72. “I just don’t think we need a separate apprentice wage!” she says.

So, more remains to be done. But with a CBE to her name now, this non-graduate looks set to keep breaking down doors.

News

Mayor seeks to reassure private providers over extra £77 for English and math quals

BILLY CAMDEN
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Exclusive

The mayor of London has attempted to reassure private providers they won't miss out on extra English and maths funding for adult learners.

Sadiq Khan announced last month that the Greater London Authority would increase funding by £77 for every English and maths qualification at level 1 and 2 – at a cost of £2.7 million. The money will come from the adult education budget for 2020/21.

But *FE Week* subsequently spotted in the draft funding rules that this increase would only be given to “grant funded” providers – typically colleges and not private training providers.

The move would mean that private providers, which win AEB funding through a tender process with the GLA, would be paid less to deliver the same qualification as colleges.

Board papers for a meeting in November stated: “Further work is needed to determine whether these

changes [to English and Maths funding] can be made to procured provision or whether they would undermine the integrity of the procurement process, which would open the GLA up to the risk of facing substantial financial sanctions from auditors.”

However, the GLA has told *FE Week*, following legal advice, they “expect” to be able to amend the funding rules so private providers can also claim the extra £77.

A spokesperson added that the authority expects private providers, like colleges, will be able to access greater support also promised by Khan to train staff to support learners with special educational needs and disabilities.

The decision as to whether to pay private providers the same as colleges will be taken at a board meeting in February.

The GLA will increase college allocations to include the £2.7 million based on the volume of delivery for these qualifications in 2018/19, funded from “unallocated money in 2020/21 budget”.

Mark Dawe, the chief executive of the Association of Employment and

Learning Providers, said he expects the GLA to “reflect on the different treatment of grant funded and procured providers before the rules are finalised”.

But, he added, AELP's concern with the proposals “is that even if independent training providers are entitled to use the uplift, the fact that the funding may come out of their existing contract means that the volume of their delivered AEB provision will go down. “Additional funding should therefore be made available.”

Funding rates for English and maths qualifications more than doubled in 2012, but have not increased since 2013.

Announcing the funding uplift, Khan said in December: “We're determined to use all the power and resources at our disposal to help create the workforce of the future – and that means making sure all Londoners have the opportunity to gain skills and make the most of their potential.”

“A good level of English and maths is critical to improving someone's life chances – but for too long funding levels haven't matched what's needed to help Londoners improve their basic skills. By increasing funding, providers across



Sadiq Khan

the capital can boost participation and achievement.”

More than a quarter of working-aged adults in England have numeracy and/or literacy skills below the level expected of an 11-year old, according to the GLA.

London area director for the Association of Colleges, Mary Vine-Morris, said it is “incredibly helpful

that the mayor “is willing to use the flexibilities afforded him through devolution to begin to address some of the long term problems colleges face”.

The GLA and six mayoral combined authorities were devolved AEB funding for their area from the central government in August.

Khan's budget is £306 million annually.

Want to offer T-levels? DfE seeks 2022 providers

YASEMIN CRAGGS MERSINOGLU
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FE providers can now bid to deliver T-levels for the third year of their rollout, the Department for Education (DfE) announced on Thursday.

Expressions of interest have been invited from “high performing” providers who want to deliver the new technical qualifications in 2022/23.

Eight new T-levels, in sectors such as legal, accounting and manufacturing, will be available, in addition to the ten T-levels that will already be on offer from 2020 and 2021.

The T-level Action Plan 2019, published by the DfE in October, said the selection criteria had been developed “to expand the number of providers delivering T-levels, so the momentum behind the programme continues to build and to ensure good quality providers are delivering in 2022”.

This marked a change from

previous years when the DfE said it aimed to select a “relatively small number” of providers so it could “continue providing the right level of support in the early stages of rollout”.

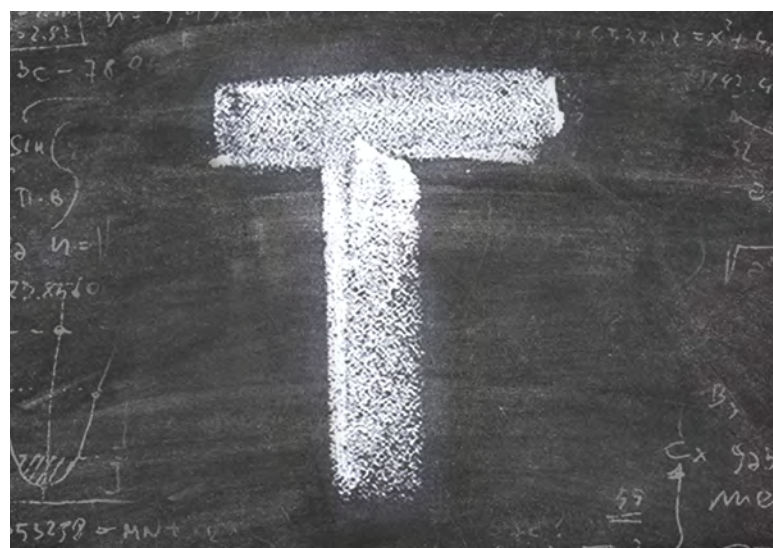
For 2022, all colleges, independent training providers, and university technical colleges or schools that are currently delivering to at least ten “qualifying students” per T-level subject area level at route level, can apply.

Qualifying students include those aged 16 to 18, those on level 3 technical or vocational qualifications, and those with at least 360 guided learning hours, from within the sector subject areas for the relevant T-level.

All providers must be rated ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted and must have at least “satisfactory” financial health.

Providers who do not yet have an Ofsted rating but would like to express an interest in delivering T-levels need to be able to demonstrate that they have an “equivalent standard of quality”.

DfE guidance states that officials “reserve the right to exclude any



provider where a notice to improve is in place, where a provider is at risk of financial difficulty, or where there are any other known issues that could prevent or affect quality delivery”.

Education secretary Gavin Williamson said this is a “brilliant opportunity for further education providers to be at the forefront” of delivering T-levels, which will “radically shake up technical education

as we know it.

“From the very start, we've worked hand in hand with further education providers and leading employers to ensure these courses will give young people the skills and experience to land them great jobs and provide employers with the workforce they need to make sure this country continues to thrive on the global stage”.

The two-year courses will be equivalent to three A-levels and include classroom learning as well as a mandatory industry placement of at least 315 hours – approximately 45 days.

More than 100 further education providers are already preparing to deliver T-levels.

The first three new qualifications, in the digital sector, construction, and education and childcare, will be introduced in September 2020.

A further seven T-levels will be available from September 2021.

The T-level routes to be taught from 2022 include finance, maintenance, installation and repair, design and development, management and administration and human resources.

A remaining seven, including courses in agriculture, environment and animal care, catering and hospitality, creative and media, and hair and beauty, will be rolled out from 2023 to bring the total to 25.

The closing date for applications for 2022/23 is midnight on February 28, 2020.

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Closing date: 12 noon Friday, 31 January 2020

Interviews: Week commencing Monday, 10 February 2020.
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Location: West London College **Salary:** Up to £110k **Reporting to:** CEO / Principal

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ABOUT THE ORGANISATION:

West London College is committed to meeting the needs of its students and stakeholders, through collaboration and innovation across its curriculum and student services. Ealing, Hammersmith & West London College – known as West London College - is a large general and further education college with five main campuses at Hammersmith, Ealing, Southall, Park Royal and the west London Construction Academy. The College covers 12 miles across west London and enjoys a positive relationship with both of its respective local authorities; Ealing and Hammersmith & Fulham.

In 2017 the College was graded 'Good' by Ofsted and the latest self-assessment aligns the judgements to the new EIF, with a significant focus on the quality of education and the actions being taken to continuously improve teaching, learning and assessment. Courses are offered in most subject areas, with the significant majority being those up to, and including, level two. Around three quarters of all enrolments are for adult learners, mostly studying part-time with the College. The College has a small cohort of apprentices and is looking to grow this provision aligned to the skills needs of west London. The College also has a small cohort of higher education students, which it is intending to grow. Commercial programmes are large and important part of the offer, and the College is seeing success in growing this income strand further.

The College intends to build on its emerging specialisms, particularly around construction and the built environment – a unique partnership between Berkeley and the West London Construction Academy has been awarded the Mayors' Construction Academy kite-mark for the quality of provision. Through the positive relationships with the two major London boroughs, increased 14-16 and high needs student numbers are highly likely due to exceptional student experience provided at the College.

ABOUT THE ROLE:

As Deputy Principal you'll take the strategic lead on curriculum, quality, student services and MIS across all five campuses. With your team of Assistant Principals, your skills and experience of FE leadership will enable you to effectively contribute towards moving things forward, whilst working closely with the CEO & Principal and a collaborative Executive Team to implement the new vision, mission and strategic objectives of the College.

WHO WE'RE LOOKING FOR:

It is expected you will be people-focused strategic leader with experience of leading improvements of a similar scale and complexity to those required at West London College. You will have significant experience of operating strategically across curriculum and quality functions.

Through adopting an holistic approach to developing the College's specialisms of the future, through corporate partnerships and stakeholder engagement, your focus on providing an outstanding student experience will be at the forefront of your planning and everything you do.

For further information about the role, or to arrange a confidential chat, please contact our executive search advisers at Peridot Partners:

Drew Richardson-Walsh
drew@peridotpartners.co.uk
07739 364 033

Sarah Szulczewski
sarahs@peridotpartners.co.uk
07841 017 043

Peridot

Closing date: 12pm Monday 3rd February 2020

<http://bit.ly/36r68rL>





Head of Management Information Services

£46,731 - £54,181 Per Annum

Walsall College is rated Ofsted 'Outstanding' with a number of campuses in around the borough of Walsall with modern facilities and environment for excellent learning and working. We have an annual turnover of circa £40 million, over 850 staff, nearly 15,000 students and a successful learning culture.

We are now looking for an experienced dynamic leader to join our college as Head of Management Information Services to continue our journey of success, who will be responsible for the data, information & funding integrity of the organisation through the management of appropriate information systems.

You will be an integral part of the Senior Management Team and a key operational lead, acting as an advisor and funding expert in funding decision-making and supporting the strategy to achieve further growth, with proactive analysis and recommendations.

Who we are looking for:

- An outstanding leader, who is well organised, can work under pressure, and has experience of managing MIS services.
- Someone who has extensive technical experience and experience of sector data management, analysis,

reporting and compliance.

- A person who has experience of working within a regulated environment and the ability to demonstrate an understanding of the challenges facing the FE sector.

What we are looking for:

- Experience of organisational review and change management in a large organisation.
- Strong analytical and planning skills with the ability to interpret, evaluate and communicate complex information accurately and effectively.
- Extensive technical experience and experience of sector data management, analysis, reporting and compliance.

Walsall College is uniquely and proudly vocational. Offering a wide range of courses from Further Education and Apprenticeships through to Higher Education. Our greatest passion is unleashing the potential of individuals, communities and businesses and our greatest legacy is the talent of our students: skilled, professional and enterprising.

This is an exciting time for Walsall College and an excellent

opportunity for the right individual to play a key role in our future success. Come and join us if you have what we are looking for.

Closing date for applications is Monday 20 January 2020 at 12 noon.

Interviews are planned for Thursday 30 January 2020.

Should you want to talk through any of the details please contact Matthew Brown, Director of Finance & MIS. To arrange this, please contact his PA, Melanie Smith on 01922 651137.

We are passionate about promoting equality of opportunity and creating a working environment where diversity is recognised and celebrated and everyone has the chance to reach their full potential. Our environment is diverse in character and student population. We particularly welcome applications from candidates from Black Minority Ethnic origin and those with a disability.

Walsall College is committed to safeguarding our children and young people/adults at risk of harm. We uphold fundamental British Values and expect all our employees to do the same. All appointments are subject to safer recruitment checks, including previous employment checks and an enhanced DBS Check.

To apply, please visit: <https://www.walsallcollege.ac.uk/jobs/>



Principal and Chief Executive

We are a highly successful, inclusive and ambitious general college of further education with specialist land-based status, and we are proud winners of multiple recent national and local awards for our work. Our campuses are in Oxfordshire, with its vibrant communities, rural setting, and rapidly growing cutting edge technical and scientific economy. Could you be the leader to take this college on to even greater success?

After overseeing the delivery of consistently excellent student outcomes, steady growth,

and securing significant inward investment, the current postholder is retiring in the summer of 2020. We wish to appoint a Principal and Chief Executive who will quickly gain the confidence of our fantastic staff and students, and work credibly with our established partners and stakeholders, opening up new opportunities for development.

If you share our passion about changing lives and communities, please email Kelly.Haddrell@abingdon-witney.ac.uk to request an information pack.

Closing date:

16th January 2020 9am

Interview dates:

11th and 12th February 2020

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Small employers finally given access to all registered providers – but for just 3 apprentices

BILLY CAMDEN

BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Small employers can finally use the digital apprenticeship service – but they will be initially capped at just three starts each owing to ongoing affordability issues.

Updated Education and Skills Funding Agency rules, published on Thursday, revealed that the long-awaited transition to the system has begun for non-levy payers.

The move will more than double the number of providers with direct access to funding for non-levy payers, including most universities.

A dual running system will be in place until Autumn 2020, which means employers who do not pay the apprenticeship levy will be able to access training either through a provider with an existing government contract or via the apprenticeship service.

Non-levy payers are able to reserve

funding for an apprenticeship in advance of recruitment or an offer of an apprenticeship being made to an existing employee, through a new mechanism called “reserve my funding”.

“This reservation ensures that employers can plan, and that funds will be available to pay for the training from the point the apprenticeship starts,” the agency’s guidance states.

“The employer must then turn this ‘reservation’ into a ‘commitment’ once the training provider and an apprentice are confirmed. At this point funding can be released to the training provider in the usual way.”

But to allow the ESFA to manage this transition, and to ensure the programme overall remains affordable, it will initially only allow employers to make reservations for up to three apprenticeship starts.

Employers can also reserve funding for apprenticeship standards only, not frameworks.

Association of Employment and

Learning Providers’ chief policy officer, Simon Ashworth, welcomed the move.

“Given the current funding challenges within the levy system, this is a sensible approach,” he said.

“The good news is that providers without a contract will finally be able to access the market which means that more SMEs, especially in niche sectors and rural areas, should be able to start offering apprenticeships again.

“The chancellor in his budget now needs to back the ESFA’s efforts to move us towards a proper demand-led system for apprenticeships.”

The ESFA’s announcement came a day before the AELP released a survey which found training providers were “having to turn their backs” on up to 40,000 small businesses due to the shortfall in apprenticeship levy funds.

Two-fifths of 135 apprenticeship providers said they were having to reject small-to-medium sized enterprises looking to recruit apprentices.

According to the AELP, the



Mark Dawe

proportion of training providers with a non-levy contract which have actually stopped recruitment of apprentices for smaller employers has reached 31 per cent.

Another 29 per cent have “significantly reduced” recruitment.

Chief executive Mark Dawe called it “totally unacceptable” for both small businesses and young people that so many of them can’t start apprenticeships “because of failures

in how the levy funding system works”.

In December 2018 projections from the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education predicted the levy could be overspent by up to £1.5 billion in 2021/22.

The National Audit Office then expressed concern about the financial sustainability of the apprenticeship system, before the DfE’s top civil servant warned of “hard choices” that needed to be made.

Readers’ reply



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Over £1bn already wasted on ‘fake apprenticeships’, claims former adviser to skills ministers

This is, again, people who have no knowledge of the compliance placed on the employers, training providers and the apprentices.

Steve Lawrence

The purpose of the levy was to build skills for the UK economy. If businesses are helping people at all ages and all levels, to develop skills and careers using the national education system, how are these deemed “fake”?

Sophie Gray

Has there ever been a government-funded education/training/lifelong learning scheme

that has NOT been “gamed” by providers?

John Reilly

L2 apprenticeships are an essential alternative to academic studies. The problem is they are inadequately funded, both in terms of the source of funding (the levy), and some of the rates. 16- to 18-year-old L2s should be funded from mainstream funds.

Tony Allen

Adult learning ‘real cause for concern’ as participation hits record low

A dreadful indictment of the UK’s approach to lifelong learning. So short-sighted.

Dewi Jones

Partly due to adults not

wanting to undertake L2 functional skills as part of an apprenticeship.

Saranne Bailey

FE lecturers have lowest levels of wellbeing among educators, new analysis suggests

Education policymakers with an enthusiasm for encouraging a “positive mindset” to help non-privileged students overcome disadvantage might want to reflect on the effect of anxiety on the mindset of those who influence them

Duncan Exley

I’m guessing most of this is related to funding requirements. Less funding but more hoops to jump through.

Neil Milne

REPLY OF THE WEEK

Adult learning ‘real cause for concern’ as participation hits record low



I recently worked on Labour’s Independent Commission and welcome the much-needed focus on creating a lifelong learning movement. This is going to be one of the defining issues of our generation, and those to come.

Kirstie Donnelly MBE

Experts

KIRSTI LORD

Deputy Chief Executive,
Association of Colleges

Improving teacher wellbeing requires commitment at all levels

A range of factors have made FE a less happy place over the past decade. There are strategies we need to adopt to change that, says Kirsti Lord

Staff are the backbone of further education colleges and this week's EPI report on the wellbeing of the school workforce made for sobering reading. Despite the average teacher being happier and more satisfied with life than the average graduate, within education as a whole FE lecturers are the lowest-scoring group on the happiness scale and the second highest-scoring group on the anxiety scale. This deserves our attention. The health and wellbeing of staff in colleges is a critical issue.

We know from previous surveys and research that many seasoned lecturers have considered walking away from the profession, with many citing heavy workloads, stress and low pay as factors. Teachers still overwhelmingly enjoy teaching but the decline in wellbeing and rising anxiety must be understood within the broader context of what has happened to the sector over the past decade.

In many colleges, budget cuts have resulted in efficiencies in management structures and less opportunity to progress. Reduced professional development budgets have also resulted in staff feeling less able to build their CV.

“We need a culture that builds optimism”

Whereas ten years ago it was common for each department to have a pot of hours to use to reduce timetables to enable staff to undertake projects, develop new provision, take on departmental responsibilities or carry out internal verification, such remission is now a thing of the past in most colleges. Yet these duties are still expected on top of a full timetable, which both increases the pressure and devalues the work.

Regulation and scrutiny have increased too, and staff can feel caught in a cycle that requires them to constantly prepare for the next observation, inspection or audit. Naturally, it

makes them cautious, over-constrained and risk-averse, which in turn limits opportunities to innovate.

With rising costs, ten years of cuts, pay freezes and losing staff, the capital and resourcing of FE has taken the biggest hit in the education sector. While the EPI report does not have enough data to make causal links between the two (it didn't set out to find one), the neglect of colleges has certainly played a role in lowering wellbeing levels among staff.

Nevertheless, we know colleges must model positive behaviours, be safe and secure places of work and study for all who work, study and train in them. That's why during last year's Mental Health Awareness Week, the Association of Colleges officially launched the Mental Health & Wellbeing Charter.

Colleges need to be bold about their commitment to staff and student wellbeing. The charter gives them the chance to publicly state their commitment to that, to provide relevant information and training, and to create an inclusive college ethos which is respectful of those with mental ill health.

Staff in colleges across the country are called on daily to be motivators, leaders and experts in their field. A culture that builds optimism, talks more about the issues staff are facing and seeks to understand them will ensure leaders are able to support their needs in a more effective way.

As we start the new decade, it seems timely to remind those colleges who have not yet signed up to the Mental Health Charter that it stands as a positive affirmation of their commitment to staff welfare.

So much of the “happy balance” college leaders strive to create happens on an individual, team and organisational level, and almost all successful wellbeing initiatives are results of cultural shifts, rather than management tweaks or movement.

One thing is clear, staff wellbeing in further education must improve. A political and financial reversal of the decade of neglect offers hope of alleviating the organisational factors aggravating the situation, but work must begin closer to home to ensure staff and lecturers feel valued, supported and motivated. Anything else is a disservice to their dedication and commitment to making colleges the amazing places they truly are.

RICHARD ALBERG

CEO,
MWS Technology

Johnson's landslide: a new start for apprenticeships or business as usual?

The general election delivered a landslide for the Conservatives. But what does it all mean for apprenticeships and training, asks Richard Alberg

The Conservative Party won an 80-seat majority, their largest since 1987. Among other outcomes, uncertainty around Brexit has temporarily abated. The Withdrawal Agreement has passed, and we will transition out of the European Union with just short of a year to negotiate a new trade agreement with the EU and other key trading blocks.

The broader impact of Brexit on our society and economy is, as yet, unknown. But what are the implications for the core business of apprenticeships and training?

The Conservative manifesto has promised “significant numbers of new UK apprentices” for all new infrastructure projects. So we can expect new apprenticeships for those 40 new hospitals, new police officers and new nurses much discussed during the election. The manifesto also says the government will deliver a new National Skills Fund worth £3 billion throughout the next parliament, a £500 million UK Shared Prosperity Fund to “replace” the EU structural fund, and £2 billion for the FE college estate.

The manifesto's promises, however, create three thorny dilemmas for government, and it's not clear how they will get around them.

First, as the editor of these pages rightly pointed out last year, there is little detail on how the apprenticeship levy overspend will be dealt with and whether the funding offered will be enough to plug the gaps in the FE sector after a decade of underfunding. I also note a report by the Office for Budget Responsibility, reported in the Guardian, which refers to a weakening of the economy and higher-than-anticipated government borrowing (not taking account of new spending promises in the manifesto). Does this mean that the manifesto is economically undeliverable?

Second, how does the need for investment in skills sit with the Conservatives' traditional ideological reluctance towards investing to grow?

In a talk at his eponymous institute on December 18, Tony Blair stated that he had not yet convinced anyone of the importance of the fourth industrial revolution. His comment was surprising, given the way that technology will irreversibly transform our economy and society,

changing work, learning, our environment and the way we live.

The UK is in a precarious position when it comes to the skills we need to excel both economically and socially to meet these immense social and cultural changes. It remains an open question as to whether the skill-based points system for immigration planned by the government, along with the degree of funding devoted to re-skilling, will fill the yawning skills gaps threatening to undo our economy as we exit the EU. Radical action is needed, and the manifesto talks the talk around innovation. But can the Conservatives get past their 40-year commitment to free-market belt-tightening?

“Can the Tories get past their 40-year commitment to free-market belt-tightening?”

Lastly, no one could have failed to notice that the Conservatives won by pulling voters away from Labour in the north of England, reassured by the promises of Brexit and change. So the analysis goes.

But it is not enough to make promises to this new voter base, comprising the populations of declining small towns with shrinking numbers of young people. They also have to deliver, on skills training and much else besides. Might we then expect the government to start making noises about social mobility as well as productivity in its apprenticeship policy, balancing Level 2 and 3 against Level 6 and 7 (still popular with employers) or even tilting public spending to lower-level apprenticeships? Again, it is hard to see how the Conservative Party will square its interest in productivity gains with claims of improving social mobility and social justice.

So much remains uncertain. But what is undeniable is that the governing party will have to make critical pivots in its thinking to stave off economic decline and to hold on to its electoral gains. 2020 promises to be another interesting year in politics, with our sector grabbing an increasing number of its headlines.

There is broad agreement that the FE sector needs radical reform, yet little consensus on the detail. But what if that was all the agreement we really needed, asks Ann Limb

There's nothing like "yesterday's men" (or women) appearing in the media to offer comment on the issues of the day from their own retrospective leadership positions. Politics has no shortage of them, and their interventions tend at best to be informative but ineffectual, and at worst ignored or ridiculed.

For my part, it is now almost 20 years since I served as a college principal. I have never been far from the sector and have remained an ardent advocate for colleges and their critical role in local communities throughout, but I have no intention of becoming a retrospective leader myself. It seems to me that there are plenty of fresh thinkers and ideas out there, and the biggest risk the sector faces is in failing to listen to them.

As the Independent Commission on the College of the Future rightly states in its interim report, there are "seismic shifts happening across the UK". Keeping up is a challenge and the reality is that change in the FE sector must be equally volcanic in response.

Commissions and enquiries are all well and good, but in the end they often reflect the biases of their members, who tend to be more experienced, and can be more resistant to change. The FE sector needs to be less introspective in its current deliberations and truly embrace the widespread societal and political changes that are sweeping the country if it is going to be adaptable enough to meet the challenges they present.

DR ANN LIMB

Vice chair,
City & Guilds group



Radical college reform is inevitable. The sector should embrace it

I imagine that Dominic Cummings and his new crop of fresh-thinking "weirdos" could instinctively offer a bolder reforming vision than any sector-led crystal-ball gazing. The time is right, the mood music resonates, and history teaches us that the Tories "get" FE. Compare the incorporation of colleges under John Major with the Blair administration's failure to implement one iota of David Blunkett's *Learning Age* green paper or Helena Kennedy's *Learning Works* report.

It is under Conservative governments that FE has been reformed and for the next five years we have a majority government that is prepared to

turn things on their heads. Now is the opportunity for the FE sector to be on the front foot to shape an alternative future.

However, the alternative is not that FE continues to try to be all things to all people, or worse – as the commission's interim report suggests – spends time searching for its place in the "skills ecosystem". Colleges of the future should build on their contemporary uniqueness. FE colleges are the local route to life changing transformation for significant numbers of people and organisations.

Five themes have emerged from the Commission's consultations so far, and as I

filled in their online survey I began to lose the will to live after the third. Consistency and comprehensiveness give way to repetition and humdrum. In the end, what else needs consideration beyond purpose, practices and people?

"Change in the FE sector must be volcanic"

Sir Christopher Ball coined the phrase "resources follow coherent purpose". If exciting and imaginative but workable solutions for the future of FE are unearthed, the matters covered in the other themes – funding and a coherent skills ecosystem – will naturally follow.

In summary, this means ensuring that the college of the future is acknowledged as the provider of essential services to people and employers in every local community. The focus has to be local and the services must be integrated with all the other local services needed and used by local people.

Governments and opposition parties who want to demonstrate their "staying in touch with the people" credentials need to remember that voters experience policy locally. The most reforming idea that could come from Boris Johnson's radical entourage is that Westminster doesn't have all the answers. Can the commission possibly come to such a conclusion? And will the college of the future be ready for such freedom?

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Lindsey Johnson

**Principal,
Craven College**

Start date February 2020

Previous job

Vice principal, The Manchester College

Interesting fact

Lindsey sings tenor in a choir, and has sung with pop stars including Lulu and Alexandra Burke



Emma Hardy

**Shadow HE and FE
minister, Labour**

Start date January 2020

Concurrent job

MP for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle

Interesting fact

She jointly established the northern education conference Northern Rocks and did a blog review in the first edition of *FE Week's* sister paper *Schools Week*



Debra Gray

**Trustee,
Jisc**

Start date November 2019

Concurrent job

Principal, Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education

Interesting fact

She owns her own Jedi costume and Star Trek uniform and is not afraid to wear them at formal events

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FE Week Sudoku challenge

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

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

Difficulty: Easy

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

Difficulty: Medium

Solutions: See right

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Last Edition's winner: Paula Flaherty

Solutions

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

Difficulty: Easy

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

Difficulty: Medium

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