

**OFSTED VISITS
TOO EARLY IN
ACADEMIC YEAR?**

Page 12



**APPRENTICE
STARTS
NOSEDIVE**

Page 10



**EIGHT T-LEVEL
QUALIFICATIONS
GO TO TENDER**

Page 10



FEWEEK

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FRIDAY, JANUARY 31, 2020
EDITION 305

£11M DEFICIT & 'SIGNIFICANT DATA ANOMALIES'

NCG spent millions more than planned on 'project apple' closures



EXCLUSIVE

BILLY CAMDEN

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See pages 4 & 5

WOLF JOINS NUMBER 10 POLICY UNIT

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Profile: Kevin Orr: Professor of work and learning and associate dean, University of Huddersfield

Page 18



Hosting WorldSkills 2027 would have far-reaching benefits for the whole UK
Page 22



To be critical of colleges for running the courses learners want is bizarre
Page 22



On immigration and skills both No 10 and employers are missing the point
Page 23

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ESFA demands final off-the-job hour data to 'support audit'

BILLY CAMDEN

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A new field is set to be introduced to individual learner records (ILR) to support government audits of apprenticeship training.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency confirmed on Wednesday that from August 2020 all FE providers will need to log "actual" off-the-job (OTJ) hours.

It will apply to apprentices who started new programmes from August 1, 2019.

Plans for the new field were consulted on towards the end of last year, with many in the sector concerned that the agency would demand monthly updates.

But this week's announcement confirmed that providers will only need to enter the data once, at the end of each apprenticeship programme.

The move follows high-profile concern from the National Audit Office and Public Accounts

Committee about non-compliance with the unpopular rule going unchallenged.

The NAO's apprenticeships progress report, published last March, said that in summer 2018 the ESFA had just one "red risk" associated with delivery of the programme – that apprentices do not spend at least 20 per cent of their time doing off-the-job training.

The government's spending watchdog warned that the agency has "limited assurance" in knowing whether the policy is being abided by, as even though audits may identify problems, there is "scope for providers to under-deliver for some time without this being picked up".

"This is an important gap in oversight, because the provider continues to be paid as long as the apprentice remains on the programme," the NAO report said.

Meg Hillier, the chair of the influential Public Accounts Committee, added

that it was "concerning that the ESFA can't be sure that apprentices are spending enough time on off-the-job training".

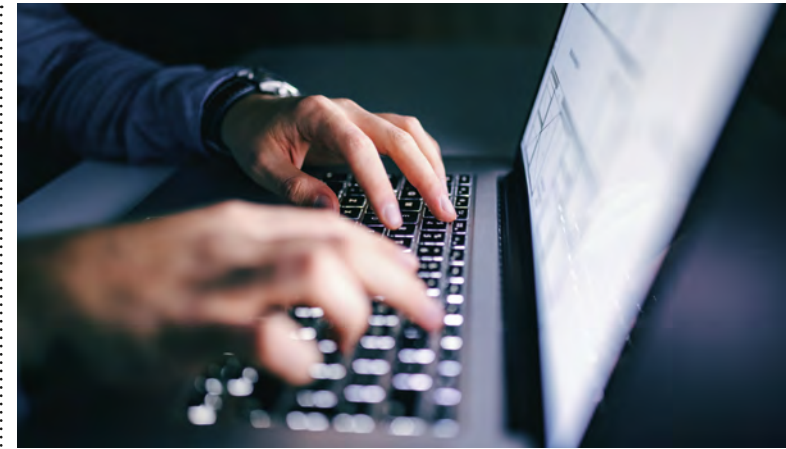
In response, last May, the ESFA said that from the 2019/20 academic year, a new mandatory field in the ILR would be added that requires providers to record "planned" off-the-job hours.

This replaced the "optional" field for recording how many OTJ training hours had been completed on a monthly basis, which was introduced to the ILR in 2018/19.

This week's announcement said: "We are committed to ensuring that apprentices receive the minimum of 20 per cent off-the-job training that legislation requires.

"To ensure learning plans reflect this, from August 1, 2019, we started collecting planned hours data. To provide further assurance on delivery we are now introducing a field capturing the actual hours delivered.

"From August 1, 2020, providers must input the total hours of off-the-job training that have been delivered to apprentices who started new apprenticeships from August 1, 2019 into the ILR.



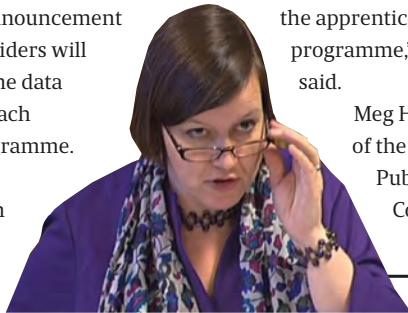
"The actual hours field should be populated with the amount of off-the-job training delivered over the apprenticeship (up until the apprentice reaches gateway) and must be entered once, at the end of the programme.

"The actual hours ILR field will be used by ESFA in conjunction with the planned hours field to monitor delivery of the off-the-job training. It is our intention that the new field will support the work of audit, as providers must be able to supply evidence to support the figure entered during the audit process."

The ESFA added that it will release more detailed information on this change in the next version of the ILR specification, and the 2020 to 2021 apprenticeship funding rules.

The off-the-job policy, which requires apprentices to spend a fifth of their week on activities related to their course but that are different to their normal working duties, has split the FE sector since its introduction in 2015.

Many have complained that the rule is the single biggest barrier to apprenticeship recruitment, but others view it as a vital part of apprentices' development.



Meg Hillier, the chair of the influential Public Accounts Committee, added

Meg Hillier

SUPPORTING LINE MANAGERS TO TRANSFORM APPRENTICESHIP DELIVERY

Line managers are crucial to successful learning and development. It doesn't matter how much an organisation invests in giving employees opportunities to increase their knowledge and improve their skills, if line managers don't then give employees the opportunity to use those new capabilities in their day-to-day work, it's money and time wasted.

Learning doesn't stop when people leave the classroom. In fact, the real learning begins once they get back to their desks and start to explore how their new knowledge and skills enable them to do a better job. And their line manager is the key to this learning transfer – they're the ones who can encourage them to either take risks and make mistakes, and learn from them, or just fall back into old, comfortable routines as though the learning opportunity never even happened.

LINE MANAGERS' CRUCIAL ROLE IN APPRENTICESHIPS

An apprentice's line manager ensures that they're learning what they need to learn, that they're free to do off-the-job learning, and that their learning stays on track throughout the programme. In short, the line manager is instrumental, along with HR and the apprentice themselves, in setting the right tone and making sure the apprenticeship runs smoothly.

To do this successfully – and to encourage apprentices to squeeze every drop of value from their programme – line managers must commit to the principle of learning at work and want to support employees as they learn new skills

and develop their careers. There's no point in organisations talking about the importance of learning if their line managers don't believe in it too.

They have to be ambassadors for apprenticeship programmes and believe in them wholeheartedly, ensuring learners are engaged, motivated and supported in completing their programmes.

They may need some support themselves to be strong, effective advocates for apprenticeships. Some may want extra coaching, and they will all need to have strong performance management, leadership and time management skills, to be able to support their apprentices effectively. Some may even want to undertake a management or leadership apprenticeship programme themselves, so it's good practice to offer line managers all the training they need before an apprenticeship programme starts so that they can help to turn a good apprenticeship experience into a great one.

APPRENTICESHIPS' CRUCIAL ROLE IN THE FUTURE OF WORK

Apprenticeships are all about learning on the job, learning from and with others, and discovering different approaches to achieving goals. This is one of the reasons why they're growing in popularity and why more than half (54%) of the L&D leaders we've talked to expect to see their numbers increase further.

In fact, according to the L&D leaders who took part in our research, apprenticeships are one of the top four activities that are most likely to have a significant impact on learning



Advertorial

culture and learnability over the next five years.

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News

NCG deficit hits £11m after axing pai

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Exclusive

One of England's largest college groups spent close to £4 million on 'Project Apple' to shut two training arms which contributed to an £11 million deficit last year.

The shortfall at NCG isn't the group's only financial concern: it is also expecting the Education and Skills Funding Agency to recoup funding that goes back "a number of years" following an investigation that found "significant data anomalies" relating to achievement rates.

"We could not see a credible way of rebuilding a successful operation"

Its chair Peter Lauener, a former chief executive of the ESFA, was tight-lipped on the potential clawback, but insisted the closure exercise, code named Project Apple, "will contribute to a material improvement in the group's operating performance and cash position in 2019/20 and beyond".

NCG, which runs seven colleges across the country, shut its two training providers Rathbone and Intraining in 2019. Lauener said the decision was made because their quality was "poor", and they were making losses of around £250,000 per month.

"We could not see a credible way of rebuilding a successful operation",

he added. The group began a managed wind-down at the start of last year. Around 300 jobs were lost by the end of October.

The group hired former North Hertfordshire College principal and now consultant Matt Hamnett following a competitive tender to lead on Project Apple.

He presented a report to NCG in March which stated that the total cost of the closure project, including redundancy payments, consultancy fees and dilapidations, would come to £1.7 million.

Minutes from a meeting that month show that a governor had questioned the robustness of the prediction. He was "assured" that the numbers were based on "detailed planning and as a result were felt to be reliable".

But minutes from a meeting in October 2019 show costs "have been £2.5 million higher than budgeted".

This was "largely due to higher than budgeted costs in dilapidations, consultancy fees, redundancy costs and ongoing training".

Lauener told *FE Week* the cost of closure hit £3.8 million in total – including the costs of withdrawing from training centres around the country, staff, legal and other one-off costs.

He noted that this is more than the first projection – but claimed it was "materially less than the estimate prepared by the closure project team once work had been fully scoped".

The chair would not say how much Matt Hamnett and Associate's consultancy fees were, but did say that Project Apple was "an incredibly complex programme of work" which they did "with great diligence – providing leadership, commercial, communications, people, property and MIS support".



Hamnett said: "Our clients are best placed to comment on the work we do with them."

"Figures would have been much stronger without Intraining and Rathbone operating losses"

Project Apple has had a significant impact on the group's finances.

Its deficit has risen from £7.1 million in 2017/18 to £10.9 million in 2018/19, according to unpublished new accounts seen by *FE Week*.

They fail to mention Project Apple, but do state that financial performance has "been extremely challenging". They also cited the freeze on funding rates within the sector, despite inflationary cost pressures (see box out).

Lauener would not go into more detail about the deficit when asked by *FE Week*.

He did add, however, that the group's 2018/19 EBITDA (earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortization) – which they consider to be the most telling measure of NCG's financial performance – was £0.8 million.

"That figure would have been much stronger without Intraining and Rathbone operating losses and closure costs, and that is why we are confident that our finances will be much better from our new basis," Lauener said.

NCG's 2017/18 EBITDA came close to £3.5 million.

As revealed by *FE Week* in March 2019, NCG's two training providers were subject to an ESFA audit before their closure was announced.

Board minutes from a meeting in May make reference to a PwC investigation on behalf of the

agency, the "preliminary results" of which suggested "significant data anomalies".

Minutes for June 2019 state that action was subsequently taken against Intraining and Rathbone staff, including suspensions: "The chair noted that following the passing of a special resolution any members of staff who were suspended from their role (whilst holding a director role within Rathbone or Intraining) would no longer be able to attend board meetings or participate in the running of the company."

NCG would not reveal how many staff were suspended.

July 2019 minutes stated that there "is risk in relation to any potential clawback from the ESFA", however, the issues "originally highlighted were not materially financial as they mostly relate to achievement rates."

"When the data is being cleansed, a robust and documented process will take place to assure ESFA that the process is credible, and the issues have been investigated effectively."

Minutes for October said ESFA clawback "could go back a number of years".

Lauener would not disclose whether the agency had since demanded the group repay any funding, but said: "Through the process, we did identify some issues



NCG chair Peter Lauener



New NCG chief executive Liz Bromley

r of 'poor-quality' training providers

which required formal investigation. We conducted that work in close consultation with the ESFA and took action as appropriate.

“We have learnt important lessons from the work we have done to close the businesses”

“We have learnt important lessons from the work we have done to close the businesses – and will apply these in our future work to fulfil our vision to support all our colleges in their communities and to get the best out of the synergy of seven colleges working in partnership and learning from each other.”

A spokesperson for the ESFA said: “We do not routinely comment on investigations, ongoing or otherwise.”

Former CEO received a £57k lump sum

NCG's former chief executive was paid £57,000 when he quit in October 2018 after five years at the helm.

Joe Docherty's "payment in lieu of notice" is listed in the college group's latest set of accounts, which also show £1,800 was paid "towards legal fees".

NCG would not reveal any more details about this case when approached by *FE Week*.

Docherty's salary in his last full academic year as the group's boss, in 2017/18, was £232,000. He received £109,000 for working between August and October 2018, but £57,000 of this was his "contractual entitlement" after leaving after the start of a new academic year.

Liz Bromley became NCG's permanent chief executive in August 2019.

NCG's £11 million deficit for 2018/19 sounds concerning,

Joe Docherty



but their accounts hint to a stable financial position even though performance has "been extremely challenging".

"In recent years, the main impact on income from the group's core activities has been as a result of the freeze on funding rates within the sector despite inflationary cost pressures," the accounts said.

"This has been exacerbated by falling numbers of apprenticeships starts across the sector following the introduction of the apprenticeship levy."

Learner numbers have decreased slightly across the group, but only by 4 per cent, from 32,698 in 2017/18 to 31,354 in 2018/19.

NCG's turnover has dropped from £158.2 million to £148.5 million, which the accounts say is "largely due to the initiation of the training provider wind-down".

They add, however, that NCG ended 2019 in a "stable cash position with cash equivalent balances of £13,413,000 with a £5 million revolving credit facility also available".

This year's accounts state that the group

has "cash forecasts that demonstrate cash reserves and facilities are in place and are sufficient to meet the immediate cash requirements of the business".

NCG also has a "strong" asset backed balance sheet, which prior to pension liability stand at £175,241,000.

The accounts state that confirmation has been received from the ESFA that they agree with NCG's assessment of financial health equal to 'requires improvement' for the expected outturn of 2018/19.

"They are also agreeing that the budget for 2019/20 is graded 'good'. This is based on balance sheet strength, maintenance of low gearing and improved operational performance following the close down of the loss-making training provider businesses."

Cash flow from operating activities amounted to a net outflow of £2,916,000 (2018: net inflow of £4,306,000). The outflow in 2018/19 was "linked to the closure of the training provider businesses".

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Highfield

News

Crackdown on 16-18 residential data in wake of cladding concerns

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The government will write to all colleges and universities with residential learners aged 16 to 18 after officials found “data inaccuracies” which have prevented Ofsted from conducting inspections.

It follows an FE Week investigation that revealed how a tower block with Grenfell-style cladding that houses students at Highbury College and failed a fire safety test had gone 18 years without oversight from the education watchdog.

The college started moving classes and residents out of the building with “non-compliant” panelling earlier this week as it prepares for a multi-million-pound renovation to remove the material.

Highbury had previously advertised to parents that the residence was subject to Ofsted inspection, but in November, FE Week found the education watchdog had not regulated the halls since they were constructed in the 1970s and re-clad in 2001.

At the time the Department for Education told this newspaper that

it was unaware of the residential provision, and therefore had not informed Ofsted it was in scope for their oversight, as the college had not declared it on the Get Information About Schools (GIAS) website.

A spokesperson added that all post-16 providers with residential provision for people aged under 18 are “required to inform the department about students in residential accommodation” and have a “responsibility to self-record this information on Get Information About Schools”.

An Education and Skills Funding Agency update, published on Wednesday, confirmed “the move from EduBASE to Get Information About Schools has resulted in some data inaccuracies relating to FE colleges and special post-16 providers (SPIs) in respect of the recording of residential provision”.

It said: “We will write to all colleges and those SPIs in scope directly now for the 2019 to 2020 academic year, and on an annual basis thereafter, to gather this information on the age and status of residential learners. It is important that we have accurate data to support Ofsted in meeting its responsibilities.

“Ofsted is required to inspect residential provision in colleges and some SPIs for all student residents under the age of 18 or under the age of 25 for those with an education health and care plan and rely on our data collection to ensure that they schedule inspections appropriately.

“All FE colleges and SPIs should continue to self-report information on GIAS and complete the appropriate fields on the individual learner records.”

Higher education providers which receive ESFA funding for residents aged 16 to 18, including Nottingham Trent University and University of the Arts London, are also in scope for “social care” inspections.

Courses run by universities for 16- to 18-year-olds include the art and design foundation studies programme, which among others is offered by Loughborough University.

Highbury’s residential provision was finally inspected after FE Week’s revelations in November 2019, the report of which was published last Friday.

It found that the halls “require improvement to be good” under the judgment, which scrutinised “how

well young people are helped and protected”.

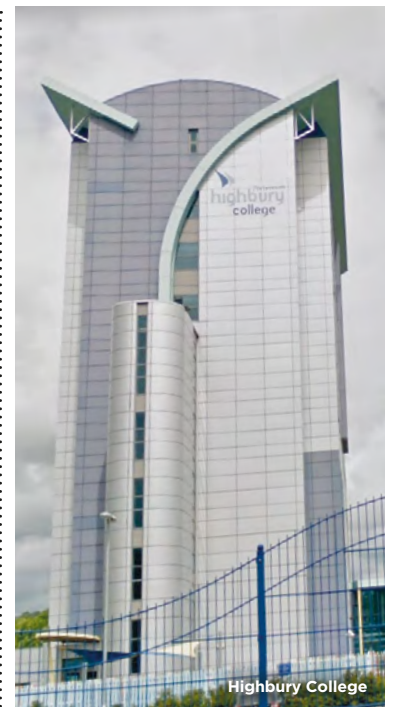
The report noted the cladding replacement project and said that “specific plans are in place and additional measures have been applied to address the concerns in the meantime”.

These included additional staffing at night and “ensuring that every student is aware of what to do in the event of the need to evacuate the building”.

Regular checks of the building and fire systems as well as fire drills “ensure that awareness is maintained” and “importantly, managers have sought advice and checks from the local Fire Rescue Service to ensure that the measures in place are likely to be effective”.

Work to remove non-compliant panelling at Highbury College is planned to get under way in the spring and is anticipated to take up to 12 months.

It remains unclear whether the Department for Education has signed off on the college’s £5 million application for financial support to fund the project. A DfE spokesperson said the outcome would be revealed in “due course”.



Highbury College

There are 18 students currently housed in the ten-storey block in Portsmouth, eleven of whom are aged under 18. They will have to move before it closes on January 31.

Students have been offered alternative living arrangements for the rest of the academic year, including local host family accommodation.

A statement from the college said the renovation project includes “upgrading the external cladding system and the replacement of all external doors and windows with new energy-efficient models designed to reduce utility costs and background noise”.

ESFA apprenticeship roadshow to cross the country

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Providers are being invited to a series of roadshows to find out more about non-levy paying businesses transitioning to the apprenticeship service and the withdrawal of frameworks.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency is running events across the country in February and March for employers on the register of apprenticeship training providers.

According to this week’s ESFA update, the six roadshows “will focus on the transition of smaller employers that do

not pay the apprenticeships levy to the apprenticeship service”.

The ESFA announced earlier this month that small employers would be invited to use the digital apprenticeship service, which had previously been reserved for levy-paying employers only.

Small employers will be capped at reserving apprenticeship funding for just three apprentices to start off with, to allow the agency to manage the transition and help keep the apprenticeship programme affordable.

The move has been seen as an attempt by the government to help small-to-medium enterprises access apprenticeships, after it was found



that two-fifths of providers are having to reject up to 40,000 of those firms looking to recruit apprentices.

The need for affordability comes after the Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) warned that the apprenticeship budget would be overspent, and the National Audit Office sounded the alarm over the financial sustainability of the programme.

Employers on the digital service will also be restricted to reserving funding for apprenticeships standards, instead of frameworks.

The imminent withdrawal of apprenticeships frameworks, which is

due to happen by the start of the 2020-21 academic year in September, will also be addressed at the “collaborative and consultative” roadshows.

The process of withdrawing standards has been running since March 2016, but has been rocked by criticism.

Sector leaders have called for a replacement standard for the Level 2 business administration framework, but proposals have been rejected by IfATE due to concerns it would overlap with a Level 3 business administrator standard.

The institute and ministers were also worried that the standard would not meet the 20 per cent off-the-job training

requirement.

But the government’s case was not helped by the Department for Education launching a recruitment drive for Level 2 business administration apprentices on frameworks in May.

The ESFA update says the roadshows “will provide you with opportunities to network with other providers, and to feedback around key themes, so we all have a chance to share good practice and learn from experiences of others”.

Main providers were previously invited to a set of roadshows which ran last September and also covered the transition of small employers to the apprenticeship service.

This latest series “builds on your feedback from our last events,” the ESFA said, adding: “The insight and information we collected has informed our planning to help make sure we bring you – our providers – on this change journey with us and we want to share this with you.”

More details about the agenda will be sent to providers next month.

Anyone with any questions has been asked to contact apprenticeship.providers@education.gov.uk.

Roadshows will take place on the following dates and locations:

- **Tuesday 25 February** – North East – East Durham College
- **Tuesday 3 March** – North West – Haydock Park Racecourse
- **Thursday 5 March** – London – Holiday Inn, Wembley
- **Tuesday 24 March** – Midlands – The Citrus Hotel, Coventry
- **Thursday 26 March** – South Central – Farnborough College of Technology
- **Tuesday 31 March** – South West – Taunton Conference Centre at Taunton RFC

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News

Coupland: 'Public funding for management apprenticeships is perfectly legitimate'

NICK LINFORD
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Exclusive

The new chief executive of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education has given her backing to scarce levy funding being spent on controversial management qualifications.

"It's not government money, it comes from the levy that was levied directly to support apprenticeships"

Jennifer Coupland also stood up for the employers that the quango represents, warning the Treasury and Department for Education that the £2 billion budget "is not government money, it comes from the levy that was levied directly to support apprenticeships".

The levy is paid to the Treasury, which means it is technically public funding, and its use for management qualifications has come under criticism from Ofsted's chief inspection, Amanda Spielman, who said "we see levy funding subsidising re-packaged graduate schemes and MBAs that just don't need it".

The National Audit Office last year reported that these "new types of apprenticeship raise questions about whether public money is being used to pay for training that already existed in other forms".

"Some levy-paying employers are replacing their professional development programmes – for example, graduate training schemes in accountancy or advanced courses in management – with apprenticeships," they added.

"In such cases, there is a risk that the additional value of the apprenticeship to the economy may not be proportionate to the amount of government funding."

And in recent weeks a former adviser to the skills minister, Tom Richmond, claimed £1.2 billion was being wasted on

"fake apprenticeships".

Richmond said: "Employers have used up over £550 million of levy funding on rebadged management training and professional development courses for more experienced employees."

But speaking to *FE Week*, Coupland said using public funding on management apprenticeships is "a perfectly legitimate use".

"Yeah, I absolutely think that is right [to use public funding for management apprenticeships]. Most organisations you'll find people get promoted out of being good at a particular role, and then they find themselves leading a team of people which is a completely different job to the one that may have got them promoted to that role in the first instance.

"So those people will need to have opportunities to gain significant and substantial skills in that leadership and management role," she said.

FE Week was the first to report on the rapid rise of state-subsidised management courses, even before the introduction of new higher and degree-level standards and the levy-funded apprenticeships in May 2017.

In October 2016, analysis by this newspaper found management frameworks were already the third most popular apprenticeship subject, based on the number of starts.

Three years on, Richmond, in his research, claimed "the most popular 'apprenticeship' in the country is now becoming a 'Team Leader / Supervisor' – accounting for almost 1 in 10 apprentices".

"People will need to have opportunities to gain significant and substantial skills in that leadership and management role"

And the previous skills minister, Anne Milton, told *FE Week* last March: "What sticks in people's throats is people on £100,000 a year and the state subsidising their MBA.

"There is no easy answer. You put more money in the pot, or you restrict



what you are doing. Those are the choices."

Having left a civil service post at the Department for Education, Coupland was using her first outing with the media to call on the government to invest an extra £750 million in apprenticeships for small employers.

The National Audit Office had last year reported that the £2 billion per year apprenticeship budget is running dry. Employers are increasingly choosing higher level and higher cost qualifications, such as in management, for existing employees.

But Coupland said there was no cause for concern.

"On management and leadership apprenticeships I think we've got a significant productivity gap with our competitor nations – and about 20 per cent of that productivity gap is made up of a lack of skills," she said.

"There is quite a lot of evidence to show there is a significant lack of skills in our leadership and management tier within organisations within this country. So if we are going to plug that, one element has got to be looking at that leadership."

"On management and leadership apprenticeships I think we've got a significant productivity gap"

Asked whether an extra £750 million would be enough to fund everything employers wanted, Coupland would not

be drawn on what the DfE permanent secretary referred to as the potential for "tough choices".

"We'll work within the policy parameters that we are set", she said.

"At the moment we are looking at an all age, all level programme and as we look at each apprenticeship standard, standard by standard, we are looking at how we settle appropriate funding cap for those standards."

Coupland went on to say that the IfATE needs to "make sure that we are generating as much value out of the programme as possible, in order to generate as many apprenticeships with as many organisations as we can.

"So we are looking across the suite, but I think at the heart of it, we do want the apprenticeship programme to reflect the needs of the economy – and for me that means having apprenticeships at level 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 and so forth."

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News

IfATE seeks £35m bids for third wave of T-levels

FRASER WHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Awarding bodies are being invited to develop qualifications for wave three of the T-levels programme, which is due to be delivered from September 2022.

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education this week opened up a £35 million tender for eight qualifications, based on three routes: legal, finance and accounting;

The bidding lots are as follows:

Lot 1: Legal	£3,080,000
Lot 2: Finance	£2,640,000
Lot 3: Accountancy	£3,190,000
Lot 4: Manufacturing, Processing and Control	£4,600,000
Lot 5: Maintenance, Installation and Repair	£5,700,000
Lot 6: Design & Development	£4,470,000
Lot 7: Management and Administration	£7,860,000
Lot 8: Human Resources	£2,940,000

engineering and manufacturing; and business and administration.

Chris Morgan, IfATE's deputy director for commercial, called it a "really exciting opportunity for awarding organisations to bid to take on T-levels for several key sectors".

IfATE welcomes "widespread interest" and are looking forward to receiving their submissions, he added.

T-levels are two-year courses which will be equivalent to three A-levels and will include a combination of classroom

learning and a mandatory, 315-hour industry placement.

The bidding process will involve two stages: the first will close on Wednesday, February 12 and applicants that pass this hurdle will progress to stage two, where they must complete their bid submission by Tuesday, April 28.

The winning organisations will develop and then implement qualifications based upon outline content created by T-level Panels – employer-led groups which come up with the key knowledge and behaviours a T-level student ought to learn.

The Department for Education opened up applications for providers to deliver these T-levels earlier this month.

The awarding organisations developing wave one of T-levels for delivery from this year onwards were announced last February: NCFE was awarded a contract to deliver the



education and childcare pathway, while Pearson was commissioned to deliver T-levels in design, surveying and planning as well as digital production, design and development.

NCFE is also developing qualifications for digital business services, digital support and services, health, healthcare science and science

for the second wave next year.

City & Guilds is working on the onsite construction and building services engineering qualifications to be delivered from the same time.

The procurement documents to develop wave three of T-levels can be found at procontract.due-north.com/Login.

Sixth form college in spat with UTC over 'inaccurate' data claims

FRASER WHIELDON
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A row erupted between a university technical college and a sixth form college this week over "inaccurate" achievement rate claims.

Scarborough UTC, in North Yorkshire, posted a tweet which included a graph entitled 'Engineering and Computer Science Average Results' showing the UTC had outperformed Scarborough Sixth Form College in the latest Department for Education 16 to 18 performance tables.

The tweet, which has now been deleted, said the UTC's average result of 35.93 was above both the national average and that of the sixth form college.

The SFC, formerly attended by education secretary Gavin Williamson, tweeted in reply (also since deleted) that the claims were "misleading" and "inaccurate".

Scarborough 6th Form @S6F

The @ScarboroughUTC have posted inaccurate and misleading claims about Scarborough Sixth Form College's technical results. We don't like to publically challenge another college however our requests to have these removed have been ignored.

To clear up any confusion:

- The statistics the UTC are quoting are not our Engineering and Computer Science results.
- Our Engineering course is a BTEC not a technical qualification in which 100% of students achieved Distinction or Distinction Star.
- Our Computer Science course is an A Level with 100% pass rate.
- We outperform the UTC with academic results from **342 students** compared to **14 students at the UTC**
- Overall 82% of our students achieve A* - C (or equivalent for BTEC)
 - We were awarded GOOD at our latest Ofsted compared to the UTC's REQUIRES IMPROVEMENT

If you need any more clarification on our students' achievements, come along to our Open Event on Thursday 5th March (4-5:30pm).

2:38 PM · Jan 27, 2020 · Twitter Web App

Scarborough 6th Form @S6F

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2:38 PM · Jan 27, 2020 · Twitter Web App

Source: Yorkshire Coast Radio

Results in the two subjects could not be compared, the sixth form college retorted, because their engineering and computer science courses were BTECs, not technical levels – as they are at the UTC.

The college also mentioned how it

had achieved an Ofsted grade two at its last inspection, compared with the UTC's grade three.

A spokesperson for the college said they were "disappointed the UTC felt the need to publish some inaccurate statistics" and had requested they

take the post down, but received no response.

The college "felt it was important to ensure the correct data was available, which we posted".

The spokesperson added that "We have no argument with the UTC, and

will continue to work in partnership with all local schools to ensure the best possible offer for the young people of Scarborough."

The UTC has since backtracked on the tweet, with a spokesperson telling FE Week they "absolutely acknowledge" there had been a "technical inaccuracy".

The graph should have said 'Technical Level Results' instead of just 'Engineering and Computer Science', the spokesperson explained.

They said the mistake was down to a member of staff misinterpreting something the principal had written to parents about the provider's technical levels performance.

A post on the UTC's Facebook page showing the correct graph, based on the DfE 16 to 18 performance tables, details how the UTC's average point score for technical levels is indeed 35.93 per cent, compared to the sixth form's 28.17 per cent.

This isn't the first time UTCs have been called out for data claims: in October 2018 FE Week revealed how government data undermined boasts about UTCs' 'excellent destinations', and showed the level of NEET leavers to be eight times higher than was claimed.

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News

Is September simply too early for Ofsted inspectors to call?

FRASER WHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

A college has questioned the “rationale” of Ofsted inspecting them within days of the new academic year starting. However, others believe there are advantages to it – so, should the watchdog be visiting providers in September? Fraser Whieldon investigates

The Sheffield College received an inspection between September 24 and 27, with inspectors reporting learners enjoy their education but leaders needed to quicken the pace of improvement at the college after its third consecutive grade three report.

It came just 15 days after the college officially opened for the 2019-20 academic year – a time when student inductions were still being carried out and normal teaching hours were only just getting under way.

Governors later questioned the “rationale for the timing of the visit”, according to minutes from a December board meeting, and discussed whether they could seek an early re-visit from inspectors.

The chair even met with the inspectorate’s deputy director for further education, Paul Joyce, to raise the issue.

Governors were said to be “pleased” Joyce “had listened to the college’s feedback and offered to engage further on the matters discussed”.

The college declined to comment

any further about their concerns about the visit’s timing, but did say they welcomed Ofsted’s new education inspection framework and are “pleased grade three colleges will be given longer to improve”.

Following Sheffield expressing concerns, FE Week spoke to a number of sector leaders, as well as colleges and training providers which were inspected around the same time, and asked them what pros and cons are there to an inspection taking place at the start of a new academic year.

“We are keen to make sure that we see colleges and providers as they actually are”

Should Ofsted stop inspecting in September?

The Association of Colleges’ director of education and skills policy David Corke thinks it would “always be sensible for inspections to be undertaken outside induction weeks” so that learners can settle in properly and staff can begin to embed their curriculum for the year.

But, he reasoned, Ofsted only has a narrow number of weeks during which to conduct an inspection because of holidays and exams.



Sheffield College

North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College was inspected at exactly the same time as The Sheffield College, but achieved a grade two.

One advantage of an inspection so early on in the academic year, according to NWSLC’s vice principal of quality Ben Crook, was that any messages to students given during induction are “fresh in their minds”.

Additionally, student attendance is higher and the energy levels of staff and students are “obviously higher at the start of the year”.

Another plus is that NWSLC can work on any areas identified as needing improvement throughout the year, whereas “if you wait six months after the start of the year for an inspection, you are constantly in this state of inspection preparation, so it can have a fatiguing effect”.

When asked, Crook did not go as far as to say that there should be certain times of year (when the college is open) when Ofsted should not inspect.

Another college that received a grade two after a September inspection was Bedford College Group.

Chief executive Ian Pryce said they were “surprised” to be visited so early in the year, but overall found the inspection, the inspectors and the new inspection framework “worked well for

staff and students”.

He added: “We had no issue with the timing of our Ofsted. We were two years into a merger, which seemed a reasonable time frame to judge progress.”

FE Week also contacted Coventry College, which was inspected a week before Sheffield and also achieved a grade three, but they would only say they were “encouraged by the outcome of its recent Ofsted inspection”.

The benefits and downsides of a September inspection are less keenly felt in the independent sector, where they teach learners throughout summer.

“We had no issue with the timing of our Ofsted”

N-gaged managing director Neil Brayshaw said it was “good to get it out of the way,” rather than having it “hanging over you”. N-gaged received a grade three after being inspected at the same time as Sheffield College.

Brayshaw has been at providers

where they have been on constant “Ofsted watch”, which is “not good for anybody”.

Having also served as an inspector and said that he could not see much difference between providers being inspected in September and later in the year. “Stronger providers are ready for an inspection whatever time of year.”

What has Ofsted said?

Ofsted bullishly defended its policy when asked by FE Week if it would consider reviewing its timings, stating it “reserves the right to carry out an inspection or monitoring visit to any provider at any reasonable time”.

“Ofsted puts the interests of learners first, and we are keen to make sure that we see colleges and providers as they actually are,” a spokesperson said.

“If a provider is teaching or training and learners are learning, they are delivering a publicly funded service and may be subject to inspection.”

But, he added, they work with providers to ensure the time of an inspection is “reasonable,” and a college may request a deferral if there are extenuating circumstances.

The Sheffield College declined to disclose whether they had requested a deferral.



Paul Joyce

11% of 15-18s encouraged to take up an apprenticeship by teachers

YASEMIN CRAGGS MERSINOGLU
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One in ten 15 to 18-year-olds are being encouraged to take up an apprenticeship by their schoolteachers, a new YouGov survey has revealed.

The research was commissioned by training provider JTL ahead of National Apprenticeship Week, which starts on Monday, February 3.

It found that 73 per cent of students reported that the most likely recommendation from their school or sixth form would be to follow a university route.

There was an increase of three percentage points in the proportion of those surveyed being encouraged towards apprenticeships since JTL's last survey – from eight per cent in 2017 to 11 per cent in 2019.

Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief executive Mark Dawe said that considering that the Baker Clause – a legal requirement for schools to promote apprenticeships and other skills programmes – has been in force since 2018, this report

“makes depressing reading”.

He questioned how the “disastrously low figure” of 11 per cent was possible, considering that the Careers Enterprise Company “is claiming 74 per cent of all schools are engaging with them”.

Dawe called on Ofsted to “crack down really hard in its inspections on schools’ non-compliance with the Baker Clause”.

The policy stipulates schools must ensure a range of FE providers have access to pupils from year 8 to year 13 to provide information on technical education and apprenticeships.

All schools are required to publish a policy statement to show how they ensure education and training providers can talk to students.

However, a 2019 report by the Institute for Public Policy Research found two-thirds of schools were flouting the controversial rule a year after it came into force. The DfE later confirmed “no action was taken” against schools that failed to comply.

The results of the YouGov survey also indicated that just ten per cent of 15 to 18-year olds are “very content” with the amount of technical job support or



practical skills, such as engineering or plumbing, they receive in lessons.

In addition, a gender gap was revealed in relation to students being directed to certain professions – only five per cent of females surveyed felt they had been encouraged to become a skilled tradesperson compared with 14 per cent of males.

Jon Graham, chief executive of JTL, said: “These results are disappointing.



They show there is still much more work to be done in ensuring school leavers are fully aware of the benefits of undertaking an apprenticeship – and in helping their parents or guardians feel confident and empowered in choosing this route”.

He claimed that the UK is experiencing a skills shortage, particularly within the building services engineering sector, so

apprenticeships “offer a fantastic opportunity for school leavers to embark on a career in a highly skilled and well-paid job”.

“We really want to challenge people’s understanding of what an apprenticeship involves and importantly what it can lead to, so that all school leavers are fully informed,” Graham added.

“We also want to encourage more female and BAME learners, who are massively underrepresented within the trades, to consider an apprenticeship as an option.”

YouGov surveyed 1,060 children aged 15 to 18 in December 2019 to collect the data.

For this year’s National Apprenticeship Week, the Department for Education has asked employers to “open their doors in a nationwide series of ‘Look Beyond’ events to bring apprentices, parents and teachers together and fire up conversation around apprenticeships”.

Activities include Twitter Q & As with employers and apprentices, as well as a ‘Big Assembly’ online interactive webinar for teachers.

More than 350 other events are planned across the country to “celebrate the diversity and value that apprenticeships bring to employers, apprentices and communities”.

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News

Baroness Wolf tipped for role as skills adviser to Prime Minister

YASEMIN CRAGGS MERSINOGLU
YASEMIN@FEWEEK.CO.UK

From front

FE expert Baroness Alison Wolf is set to become the skills and workforce policy adviser to the Prime Minister.

According to news website Politico Europe, the King's College London professor of public sector management will join the Downing Street policy unit with initial focus "on skills and apprenticeship policy across all government departments".

Wolf is currently on sabbatical from the university and a source close to her told *FE Week* that she will be advising the Prime Minister three days a week.

She was commissioned by the government to author a report into 14 to 19 vocational education in 2011, which informed future skills policy, and was nominated for a life peerage by then Prime Minister David Cameron in 2014.

Wolf made the case for an employer levy to fund apprenticeship training in a report published days before the government first unveiled the charge.

David Hughes, chief executive of the Association of Colleges, told *FE Week*: "I'm really pleased that Alison has been brought in to advise the government on its skills and post-16 policy.

"Alison knows a lot about the sector and has taken a lot of interest in trying to make it work more effectively and we look forward to working with her."

In June 2019, Wolf said further education funding had "been devastated," when writing for Conservative Home – after being a member of the Post-18 Review of Education and Funding Independent Panel (the Augar Review).

She added: "Courses teaching technician and advanced craft skills are vanishing from English education at speed, even though the economy is crying out for these skills.

"...Augar does its sums and recommends more money for the neediest – cash to get FE back on its feet, to invigorate technical education, to allow adults to retrain and progress, and to reinstate maintenance grants for the poorest students."

After graduating from Oxford with a degree in politics, philosophy and economics in the early 1970s, Professor Wolf moved to America and worked for the National Institute of Education and the US Government, advising on educational matters, before returning to the UK in the mid-1980s.

In the early 1990s, Professor Wolf secured Nuffield Foundation funding for research into the evaluation of GNVQs, which took her back to a policy role and into the media spotlight.

She worked for the Institute of Education before joining King's College and being invited to advise the government, which adopted her principle of study programmes for learners aged 16 to 19 among other policies.



Will Alison Wolf persuade the Treasury to levy smaller employers?

The apprenticeship levy could be in for a shake-up, following the appointment of Baroness Alison Wolf to the policy unit at Number 10 to advise the Prime Minister on skills.

In early July 2015 the Social Market Foundation published a report authored by Wolf, entitled *Fixing a Broken Training System: The case for an apprenticeship levy*.

Exactly one week later, the then Chancellor of Exchequer, George Osborne, announced to general surprise that the government would indeed introduce a levy to fund apprenticeships.

But, the levy would only be charged to employers with a payroll in excess of £3 million per year, making up less than 2 percent of all employers.

Wolf thinks limiting the levy to only the

largest employers was a mistake.

She told the education select committee in June 2016 the decision to introduce the levy seemed to have been made "the night before" the budget announcement.

"One of the mysteries to me remains why – well, I can imagine why politically – we created another problem for ourselves by saying there is only going to be limited number of employers who are involved in this, and there's going to have to be a completely separate system for small businesses."

The professor, who was part of Lord Sainsbury's panel looking into technical and professional education reforms as well as the more recent Augar Review, continued: "Nobody

in government has given me an explanation, and why would they?"

"I suspect it was one of these things that was decided the night before."

As *FE Week* reported at the time, she went on to say: "If you're going to have a proper apprenticeship system, and one that's attractive to young people, you've got to get small and medium employers involved."

Extending the levy to smaller employers is an option being explored by the recently re-elected chair of the education select committee, Robert Halfon.

In 2018, the former skills minister said: "Once we are clear about what works best, we could then make a powerful case for expanding the levy."

And in an interview with *FE Week* this week, he said: "I do definitely think we need to look at the levy. I don't have all the answers because I would love our committee to hopefully do an inquiry on reform of the levy."

He anticipates that there "will be reforms" by this government and says his preference is for the levy to be extended by the number of companies that pay it.

Halfon said the £3 million threshold could be reduced to £2 million.

And the Guardian is reporting today that the Chancellor will announce, what the newspaper calls, "a further expansion of apprenticeships".

College's T-level delivery in jeopardy

FRASER WHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Exclusive

The government is reviewing whether a large college group approved to start delivering T-levels from 2021 should be kicked off the programme after receiving a grade three from Ofsted.

United Colleges Group, which is lined up to offer the digital and construction courses, was told it 'requires improvement' in a report released this week.

The government wrote in its T-level action plan for 2018 it would only accept 'outstanding' or 'good' providers for the programme.

When asked by FE Week what will happen to United College Group's ability to offer T-levels, a Department for Education spokesperson said they will work "closely" with the group to look at the issues raised by the report, and "will make a decision in due course".

They informed providers when they were selected that the DfE "reserved the

right to review a provider's continued participation".

Last February, London Design and Engineering UTC was stopped from delivering T-levels in 2020 after it received a grade three from Ofsted.

A DfE spokesperson said they will consider each case on its merits then decide whether the provider can continue to participate; and will discuss any changes with the provider before a decision is made to "ensure we are taking a fair and consistent approach, taking into account the needs of learners".

The time invested by institutions and the work done to prepare students may also impact on the decision, as will the extent of any issues outlined in the Ofsted report.

If United Colleges Group is dropped from T-levels, it will be another blow to London's access to the new qualifications, dealt barely two weeks after Richmond-upon-Thames College withdrew from provision.

FE Week analysis revealed no providers in the capital will be offering the construction course this year and,



after Richmond's departure, none south of the river will offer it from 2021.

Only United Colleges Group, Barking and Dagenham College and Newham Sixth Form College – all based north of the Thames – are scheduled to deliver.

A United Colleges spokesperson said they will be discussing their planned T-level provision with the DfE, but have made "huge progress" since being formed two years ago and welcomed the fact Ofsted recognised this.

"We are already seeing improvement and we're confident that the steps we

have taken will deal with the issues raised in the report"

Inspectors at the group decided that since being formed from a merger of City and Westminster College and College of North West London, the group had failed to maintain those colleges' grade two.

After that 2017 merger a significant number of senior staff have left, there has been disruption to courses and the management of those courses "is not yet effective enough".

Teaching is also "not good enough for

younger learners" and teachers do not consistently challenge them to extend their knowledge or apply it to new situations.

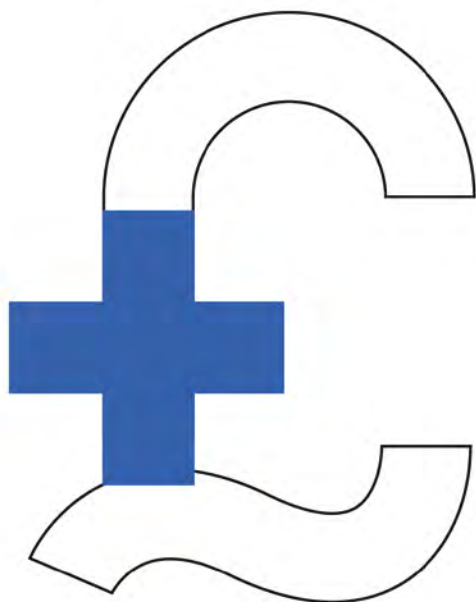
"Learners are confused about what they are learning and find it challenging to build on their knowledge and skills," because teachers do not effectively assess gaps in learners' knowledge and skills to understand what in the course needs reinforcing.

Too many learners and apprentices do not attend their taught sessions "frequently enough," and not enough of their teachers challenge their poor punctuality.

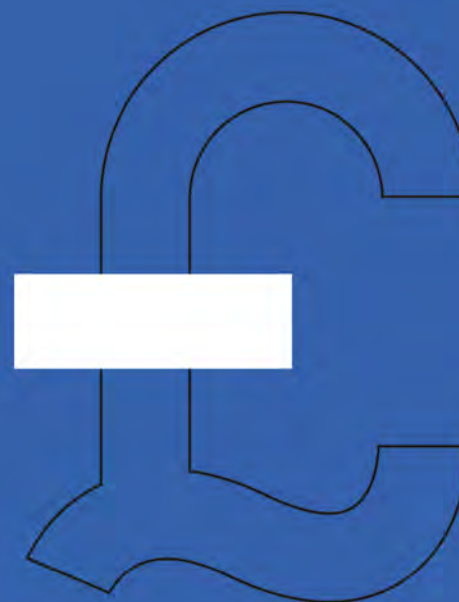
The watchdog did report United Colleges Group's governors took effective action to set up a new leadership team following the merger, and both they and the senior leaders evaluate the curriculum well.

Safeguarding was found to be effective as leaders and managers have implemented appropriate checks to ensure staff are safe to work with learners and staff are appropriately trained in both safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty.

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News

Halfon: FE must recognise 'step forward' in funding even if it is not a 'giant leap'

BILLY CAMDEN
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Exclusive

The FE sector needs to recognise that government has “made a step forward, even if it may not be a giant leap” when it comes to funding, the re-elected chair of the education committee, Robert Halfon, has said.

He also believes the apprenticeship levy is in need of reform, but he does not agree with the view of Ofsted boss Amanda Spielman who wants to restrict employer spending decisions.

Halfon – the MP for Harlow and former skills minister, who was re-elected unopposed this week – insists priorities for the cross-party committee will be set by the entire membership once other MPs are elected.

And he told *FE Week* he has pledged to continue to set government “hares running”.

Halfon insists that it was his committee that put FE and school funding on the agenda “big time” in the build up to last year’s general election.

The £14 billion extra for schools, the £3 billion national skills fund and £1.8 billion for college capital projects committed by the Conservative party are “significant” and an “important step towards stabilising funding”.

In July 2019 the education committee backed the Sixth Form Colleges Association’s Raise the Rate campaign. They said the government needs to “urgently” increase the base rate for students aged 16 and 17 to “at least £4,760”.

A month later the chancellor announced a £400 million boost for FE which included increasing that base rate by 4.7 per cent, from £4,000 to £4,188.

Whilst it wasn’t the substantial growth his committee had called for, Halfon said: “When the government does something right, even if it’s not everything, I think you’ve got to recognise that they’ve made a step forward, even if it may not be a giant leap.”

“I’ll always advocate for more,” he added,

“especially on FE, because that has always been underfunded.”

Halfon’s new committee will look very different. Former members Michelle Donelan and Emma Hardy have been appointed to the government and opposition frontbench education teams respectively. Trudy Harrison is now the prime minister’s parliamentary private secretary.

“I’ll always advocate for more, especially on FE”

“Clearly, education committee is a ladder of opportunity,” Halfon smiled as he deployed his famous catchphrase.

Parliament looks very different now, too. So how can Halfon, a Conservative, reassure those who doubt his ability to hold his own government to account now that it has a large majority?

“First of all, I’d say all they need to do is look at my record in the last parliament,” he says.

“And secondly... my passion is education. I wake up thinking about it, I go to bed thinking about education and skills. And I want to make things better. That’s why I’m doing the job.”

Investigating the plight of demographics that get “left behind” by the current education system is a priority for Halfon, as is probing the activities of education quangos.

“Some of them are pretty big cash cows, untouched by austerity,” he said. “We’re talking about [shortages of] funding – and yet some of these quangos can spend money seemingly unsupervised, wherever they want.”

The last education committee savaged the Careers and Enterprise Company over its spending on research and events, and Halfon has said the body can be “ludicrously wasteful”.

Another area that Halfon is keen to continue scrutinising is apprenticeships.

Amanda Spielman



Robert Halfon

His committee held an inquiry into apprenticeships and skills training in 2018, but the chair now wants a specific investigation into the levy which he helped launch during his time as skills minister.

“I would love our committee to hopefully do an inquiry on reform of the levy”

The levy has continued to make headlines over the past year with projections that the apprenticeships budget will soon be overspent, and Department for Education officials admitting that “hard choices” will be

needed to prevent it from going bust.

Last week, Ofsted said in its annual report that high levels of management and health apprenticeships need to be addressed “urgently” because they are a “mismatch” with the government’s industrial strategy.

Chief inspector Amanda Spielman then admitted that she has been “encouraging government” to restrict spending choices made by levy-paying employers.

Does Halfon agree with this approach? “No, not necessarily,” he says.

“I do definitely think we need to look at the levy. I don’t have all the answers because I would love our committee to hopefully do an inquiry on reform of the levy.”

He anticipates that there “will be reforms” by this government and says his preference is for the levy to be extended by the number of companies that pay it.

Currently, only firms with an annual wage bill of more than £3 million fork out 0.5 per cent of their salary costs to pay into the levy. Halfon says this amount could be reduced to £2 million.

He added that the apprenticeship levy “is a very important thing and I absolutely believe in it”, and he rejects calls for it to be expanded to pay for different types of training.

Having said that, he does believe in creating “social justice or skills credits”.

“So, if you employ people with disadvantaged backgrounds to do skills, you would get a skills credit on your tax bill – that’s how I think the government should invest in the system.”

He said this could be “particularly useful in terms of adult and lifelong learning” – an area that his committee announced an inquiry into before the general election and one which he “hopes very much” will be picked up again in this Parliament.



Analysis: Apprenticeship starts nosedive 18% in November

NICK LINFORD
NICK@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The number of apprenticeship starts in England crashed by nearly 20 per cent in November, according to government figures published on Thursday.

Starts fell just 4 per cent between August and October, but provisional figures for November when compared with the same publication last January reveal a fall of 5,200 (18 per cent) in a single month.

The analysis by FE Week (see image) shows starts for those under the age of 19 fell the most, by 22 per cent.

Level two saw the largest percentage decrease in November, with a 26 per cent fall, part of a 21 per cent overall reduction since August 2019.

Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief executive Mark Dawe said: "The fall in young people starting apprenticeships by nearly a quarter since the levy was

introduced has been catastrophic for the communities that the government is promising to level up.

"The lack of apprenticeship funding for smaller businesses is largely behind this – because it is those businesses which traditionally recruit from the younger age groups.

"The chancellor needs to sort this out and review the mistaken removal of financial incentives for offering places on the programme for 16- to 18-year-olds."

Labour's shadow skills minister, Emma Hardy, said that by failing to tackle the declining number of level 2 and 3 apprenticeships, especially in small and medium-sized businesses, the government is "denying the opportunities and progression for young people".

"This needs to be addressed urgently in the upcoming budget," she added.

The government's data also showed that overall starts for August to November 2019 sat at 155,700. This is a 6 per cent drop on the same period in 2018, when 166,400 starts were recorded.

Liberal Democrat education spokesperson Layla Moran said the new statistics "show the Conservative government is fundamentally failing to reassure business by helping to equip our workforce for these future challenges.

"Everyone, no matter their

background, has the right to learn new skills and develop their talents. We need a revolution in lifelong learning that puts people in control of when and how they learn."

A Department for Education spokesperson said: "We are investing significantly to level-up skills and

opportunity across the country and apprenticeships are playing a key role in this.

"Our higher quality apprenticeships have been designed with employers of all sizes so apprentices can learn the skills they need to go on to have successful careers and businesses can build the workforce they need for the future.

"We recognise there is more work to do and we are continuing to look at how the apprenticeship programme can best support the changing needs of businesses so more people can get ahead and all employers can benefit."

Level	Age	Apprenticeship starts last year			Apprenticeship starts this year		
		Aug-Oct 2018	Nov-18	Aug-Nov 2018	Aug-Oct 2019	Nov-19	Aug-Nov 2019
Intermediate (L2)	Under 19	25,400	4,700	30,100	21,000	3,400	24,400
	19-24	13,100	3,100	16,200	10,500	2,400	12,900
	25+	14,100	4,000	18,100	11,000	2,900	13,900
	Total	52,600	11,800	64,400	42,400	8,700	51,100
Advanced level (L3)	Under 19	19,600	2,700	22,300	18,600	2,300	20,900
	19-24	19,400	4,100	23,500	17,800	3,400	21,200
	25+	21,200	6,000	27,200	21,000	5,200	26,200
	Total	60,200	12,700	72,900	57,400	10,900	68,300
Higher level (L4-7)	Under 19	2,500	200	2,700	3,000	100	3,100
	19-24	7,900	1,000	8,900	10,600	800	11,400
	25+	14,100	3,300	17,400	18,500	3,100	21,600
	Total	24,800	4,400	29,200	32,100	4,000	36,100
All (L2-7)	Under 19	47,600	7,600	55,200	42,700	5,900	48,600
	19-24	40,500	8,100	48,600	38,800	6,600	45,400
	25+	49,400	13,300	62,700	50,500	11,200	61,700
	Total	137,500	28,900	166,400	132,000	23,700	155,700



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Profile

Introducing...

PROFESSOR KEVIN ORR

*Professor of work and learning and
associate dean, University of Huddersfield*

JESS STAUFENBERG
NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

**Jess Staufenberg meets an education
researcher with a unique and singular
focus on teaching in further education**

Professor Kevin Orr of the University of Huddersfield has spent his whole career teaching or researching into teaching in the further education sector. Listening to his soft Belfast lilt as he eloquently explains both roles, it strikes me that two things are unusual about Orr.

The first is that he is the only grammar-school educated person, who moved seamlessly through a selective school and on to an academic university degree, I've spoken to whose career has then been dedicated to further education. Usually FE leaders left school around 16, worked as apprentices, in factories or worked their way up from receptionists, and they have a deep affinity with the purpose of FE as a result. Not so with Orr.

Second, he is obsessed with teaching – not assessment, not Ofsted, not workload, not the unions – but with

teaching and pedagogy. Only when you speak to someone whose sole interest is actual teaching do you realise this is too rarely the subject of conversation among FE leaders. Orr is one of the leading researchers in this area, with his most recent publication on “enhancing subject specialist pedagogy” out in March last year. Currently, he is looking into higher education courses delivered in further education settings.

**“History shows
us the nature of
work can change
very quickly”**

So how did a grammar-school boy come to FE?

“My own educational career was a very traditionally academic one. Interestingly the school I went to, the Belfast Academical Institution, was right beside Belfast Tech, which is an enormous and very impressive building. It had the best technical facilities in the whole of Europe, even better than Germany. That this amazing building was on the lawn

of the grammar school in a way symbolized the divide between technical and academic education. The irony is not lost on me that I'm a grammar school boy who is an advocate for further education.”

The school was mainly for Protestant pupils, and Orr and his three sisters were encouraged by their mother to move away from Northern Ireland to escape sectarian tensions and better their prospects, something which “broke her heart”, explains Orr.

With strong A-level results, he studied French and history at the University of Manchester, a decision mainly swayed by the existence of the huge new nightclub there, The Hacienda. “Bear in mind I was coming from Belfast in the 80s, so excitement was hard to find! The opening of this new nightclub was a big deal.” Safely through grammar school and packed off to an English university, a career in FE wasn't the obvious route. But one observation from Orr's childhood stayed with him.

“My dad had done an apprenticeship in textiles and he'd worked at York Street Mill, which was the largest linen works in the world at the time. The industry collapsed and he lost his job, not because of a lack of skilled workers, but because of the development of nylon and artificial fibres. And that's important for me when thinking about FE today. While it's right we prepare young people for the world of work, history shows us the nature of work can change



At a teacher development centre in Toulouse making recordings for English teachers in 1988

very quickly. We need to make sure we are not just educating people for a particular job, but educating them to be prepared for their lives.”

This view is reflected in Orr's first permanent job in FE, teaching French at Stockport College in 1992. I am taken aback when he explains he was teaching French to builders, to broaden their education. “That wasn't considered unusual at the time, it was just to give a different dimension to their learning. I also taught French to students doing early childcare. That was quickly cut after incorporation. But it wasn't considered outlandish then, there was a real commitment to these students not just as people who were going to work, but as people who were going to live. I think sometimes we might be losing that.”

It is perhaps this background as a languages teacher, and later a teacher of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), that means Orr takes a much broader view of the purpose of further education than some of its

champions. Rather than regarding FE as providing people with necessary skills, he seems interested in the transformative joy of learning and teaching – including builders learning French they may never need.

Orr then landed an ESOL teacher job at Tameside College in Greater Manchester in 2002 and enrolled on a masters in Teaching at Manchester Metropolitan University. “That was completely transformative,” he says. “I had a chance to watch people teaching in nursery, higher education, further education – it really challenged me to consider how I applied my values in the classroom.”

He speaks with an enthusiasm about the process of teaching that I've rarely encountered before. Should all teachers to do a masters in teaching?

“I would be cautious about saying everyone has to have an MA, but if we are to develop excellent vocational and technical education in this country, we have to have qualified



With international ESOL students at Stockport College in 1998



“I’m a grammar school boy who is an advocate for further education”



Kevin with his sisters and mother in Belfast, 1985

teachers.” A requirement for qualified status was introduced by New Labour and then removed in 2013 under the Conservatives.

“It’s a shame teachers in FE don’t have to be qualified,” warns Orr. “We’ve had so many reforms in one form or another, but unless the people implementing them have excellent knowledge and skills about teaching, they won’t work. Too often, reform has overlooked teachers in education.”

Later, he puts this even more brilliantly. “I think very often policy change has been in the form of assessment, but not the process of teaching.”

Orr is one of a handful of researchers in FE who has spent a lifetime trying to drag the importance of teaching back to the fore of any improvement efforts. Following his MA, and whilst working as a teacher trainer at the now-closed Manchester College of Arts and Technology, he won funding for a PhD at the University of Huddersfield

to look into the experiences of trainee teachers in FE. The leading researchers he met took him “into a world where research into FE was taken very seriously.”

“Too often, reform has overlooked teachers in education”

Orr’s most recent published research was funded by the Gatsby Foundation, which tasked him and his team to understand the role of subject-specialist pedagogy in teacher education – in particular, whether improving the subject knowledge of trainee teachers was the best way to improve technical education in colleges.

Orr’s team created an intervention of face-to-face sessions, videos and online resources, with the aim of prompting the trainee teachers to think about the way they were using their subject knowledge to lead the lesson. “Our intervention was there to help trainees think about sequencing topics, knowing what questions to ask and so on. Teaching is complex and multi-faceted, and this was a way to get them to think about it.”

The findings from the research are telling. In the conclusion, Orr’s paper states: “Despite the generally enthusiastic response to the intervention from both trainees and teacher educators, the lasting impact on individuals’ practice was limited [...] This was mainly due to conflicting pressures that restricted their capacity to innovate, mainly associated with workload and the general instability

of many FE colleges at a time of cuts and mergers. For some participants it reflected a very restricted perception of what the role of a teacher is, which does not include innovation.”

During our interview, Orr says the word “teaching” 20 times. It is way above the average when I speak to FE bosses. Since Orr is not actually a teacher anymore but an academic; it seems something is not right when he is more enthused about the technical skill of teaching than others in the sector, who are swamped by policy change and funding cuts. But Orr is undeterred, with two more research projects lined up: one on why some

students choose to study degrees in college rather than university settings, and another on the experiences of black and minority ethnic students in FE.

He reflects back on his first encounter with teaching, at a youth outreach centre after he’d graduated, just a few years out of grammar school. “I was hooked. It was so exciting. That was when I thought, ‘I want to become a teacher.’”

At a time when retention of teachers is such a challenge, Orr’s total prioritisation of their professional growth and experience is a lesson the government would do well to follow.

EDITORIAL



Two strong appointments with Halfon and Wolf – but still no FE minister

This week two powerful advocates of the further education sector were appointed to influential roles within Whitehall.

On Monday, the former skills minister and Conservative MP Robert Halfon was reappointed to chair the education select committee.

Halfon is widely and rightly regarded as having done a good job in the chair for the past two and a half years, scrutinising the work of government and education policy.

So it was not surprising when he was re-elected without any opposition.

When we caught up with Halfon later this week, he said that the extra FE funding in the Conservative

manifesto (£1.8 billion for capital and £3 billion for a skills fund) was “an important step forward” but “I’ll always advocate for more, especially on FE because that has always been underfunded”.

Nothing to disagree with there!

Today we reported that Baroness Alison Wolf has been appointed to work three days per week within the Number 10 policy unit, advising the Prime Minister on all things skills and apprenticeships.

Wolf has already played an important part in influencing government policy, including her report in 2011 into 14-19 vocational education and being an official panel member on

both the 2017 Sainsbury and 2019 Augar Reviews.

In July last year, after the Augar Review was published, Wolf writing for the ConservativeHome website said: “the review panel discovered that technical and further education were in even worse shape than any of us had realised”...“its funding has been devastated”.

She went on to compare the plight of FE to the relatively well funded higher education sector, and said the “imbalance looks even harder to justify in the light of regional inequalities”.

The need to invest in further education, particularly to tackle “regional inequalities”, will

be playing well in Number 10, as Boris Johnson and his policy adviser Dominic Cummings look for ways to cement constituency gains in the areas that switched from red to blue at the last election.

Both appointments are good news for FE at a time when the Chancellor is likely to make significant spending commitments to match the pledges in the manifesto.

But it should not go unnoticed that the FE and skills sector has no dedicated minister, following the departure of Anne Milton last July.

The Secretary of State appointed at the time, Gavin Williamson, has taken the reins, claiming he

wanted the gig for himself.

And to give him credit, the FE investment commitments in the subsequent manifesto are substantial and to be applauded.

But I remain unconvinced the lack of an FE and skills minister is wise in the longer term.

There is much work to be done, many new policies to introduce and the sector deserves and should demand the return of a dedicated minister in any forthcoming reshuffle.

Nick Linford, Editor
news@feweek.co.uk

Readers' reply



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REPLY OF THE WEEK

Ofsted boss still 'not happy' with colleges 'flooding' economy with arts and media students



We have noted the comments and reaction to Amanda

Spielman's latest comments on arts and media courses.

There are two aspects which we think have not been challenged as strongly as they should be. First, there is some sweeping sense that all arts and media courses are the same. It is clear that they are not.

Second, the notion that there aren't jobs for arts and media graduates. Again, that is too sweeping a generalisation. The screen industries are booming and have skills shortages. The forthcoming Baftas and Oscars are likely to again showcase the success of British talent

on-and-off-screen – and Office for National Statistics figures showed that the screen industries saved the economy from pre-Brexit recession last quarter. It is a disservice to young people and to the economy to make grand claims to the contrary.

Obviously, we speak about the screen industries, but, for example, the former director of design at Jaguar Land Rover always said the whole process starts with a pencil and a drawing – and the car industry still employs (very well-paid) clay-modellers in the design process.

Louise Jury

Where is Ofsted's evidence that colleges are being dishonest over job prospects?



Some college courses only convert 15 per cent of young people into a job in that industry. As with many universities, unfortunately for our young people, it's about bums on seats and chasing the money. Where is the link between what you study and what job you get next?

Amy Ealing, website

Back A Bid: Campaign to host WorldSkills 2027 in the UK



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over 140 years, we need to 'shout loud' about the value and positive impact of technical skills and their ability to transform lives, societies, employers – and massively contribute to UK plc as a whole.

Kirstie Donnelly, website



If we're going to close the skills gap we need to show people the best of what is out there. Hosting WorldSkills here in the UK would be a brilliant way to do that. Let's celebrate skills and inspire the next generation.

Steph McGovern, website

SFA lost 1,000 staff in just six years



Sorry to be pedantic, but 1,000 staff weren't accidentally 'lost' – they were deliberately made

redundant in the course of successive restructures. The key question is whether the rationale for those restructures stands up to scrutiny.

Gillian Miller, Twitter

Profile: Stuart Rimmer, CEO, East Coast Colleges



I love the integrity and authenticity of this feature article – thanks for sharing @coachinception and well done for capturing such spirited reflection & insight @FEWeek – a great read for current and future leaders #loveFE #loveourcolleges.

Sam Parrett, Twitter

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Closing date for this post is **12 noon, Tuesday 11th February 2020.**

Interviews will take place on **Thursday 27th and Friday 28th February 2020.**

For further information and to apply, please visit <https://www.runshaw.ac.uk/the-college/jobs/our-vacancies/>. Alternatively, please email HR@runshaw.ac.uk or call **01772 642004**, quoting the vacancy reference number.

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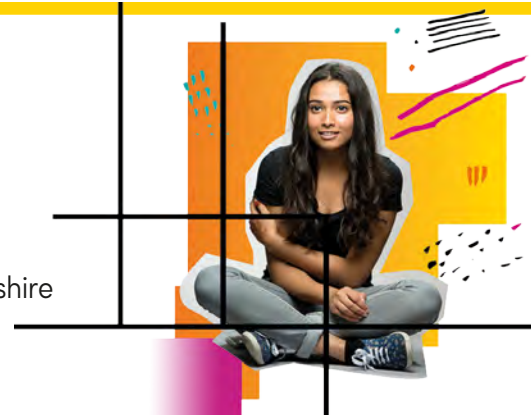
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Interview Dates: 18th and 19th March 2020

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Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality

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

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Experts

JO MAHER

Principal and CEO,
Boston College



Hosting WorldSkills 2027 would have far-reaching benefits for the whole UK

Everyone should support efforts to host the WorldSkills international competition, says college leader and former psychologist to Team UK, Jo Maher, because the benefits to UK plc are far-reaching and promote economic growth

My role as psychologist and team leader for WorldSkills Team UK meant that I was lucky enough to attend five international skills competitions all over the world. It is widely known that I think WorldSkills is a transformational experience for competitors, and that world-class standards need to be the benchmark for our skills system.

However, I have never spoken about the competition itself as a major event, nor the wider economic and cultural benefits that hosting a WorldSkills competition event can bring to the host nation. In line with *FE Week's* 'Back the Bid' campaign, I hope to offer some insights and reflections on the wider economic returns an event of this scale can bring to the UK, and how home advantage can benefit competitors.

Many of you will have attended WorldSkills UK Live (formerly the Skills Show) at the NEC in Birmingham, or have been to another large event at the venue that you can picture. In terms of scale, it is not an exaggeration to say that on the international stage for WorldSkills, you can multiply the size of the event by four to get a feel for why I refer to it as a major event.

“An event of this scale offers wide economic and cultural benefits”

Every WorldSkills competition is supported by a full conference-style exhibition. At WorldSkills Kazan this was an Expo, and the event included 137 strategic partners and suppliers – among them, Samsung, Coca-Cola, Siemens and Volvo.

The Department for International Trade (DIT) in the UK drives inward and outward investment, and we know that even with technological changes it is people that 'do' business, with face-to-face still being the preferred way to make things happen. Bringing together delegates from over 60 countries at WorldSkills, as well as global companies and suppliers, with structured visits

from UK plc, creates a platform for business. Host venues normally ensure official delegates and politicians from each country are able to host breakout meetings in the venues. The setting creates the opportunity for businesses to engage with each other – but also to promote their business to over 100,000 people at the same time.

One School, One Country is a program that each host nation runs at WorldSkills in the week before the event, connecting each of the 60-plus countries with schools from across the host country.

The international competitors and support staff engage in cultural exchange and careers programs with the school. Work happens in the months prior to the competition to create meaningful engagement, and the visits are a celebration of the relationship. The aim is to create a legacy around skills competition and to raise career aspirations.

A cultural programme for competitors and support staff takes place in the build-up to the competition, as well as on the day after (while the marking takes place).

The cultural programme promotes tourism and heritage and has benefits to the host companies involved through on-sale activity. In addition, there are thousands of supporters who travel from abroad to watch the competition, and who engage in tourism- and hospitality-related activities while in the country.

Blue chip companies, such as Toyota, enter teams from their sites across the globe. In many cases, their competitors then become their internal trainers to raise standards for their company and to develop skills. The work of FETL and the RSA and WorldSkills UK demonstrates how skills competitions can be used as a platform for global skills innovation. WorldSkills creates communities of knowledge which use world-class standards as a base point.

In competition, world-class serves as the benchmark for a medallion of excellence, but gold medal standard is the pinnacle. Therefore, it is no surprise that some of the world's best companies want their employees to operate at these standards.

The benefits to UK plc for hosting WorldSkills international competition are far-reaching and promote economic growth. Add in the transformational impact on competitors' lives and why wouldn't we back a bid?

ADRIAN PERRY

Former college principal
now consultant



To be critical of colleges for running the courses learners want is bizarre

Blaming colleges for simply recruiting students to course subjects they want to study is weird and not the solution to the problem of matching skills to the economy, says Adrian Perry

After years of cuts, FE is getting mentioned in government education briefings and House of Commons debates. This is good news, but it brings back some old nostrums that we would do well without. *FE Week* reported on the keenness of bureaucrats to tell colleges that they must run courses that meet the economy's needs, and the head of Ofsted wasn't slow to join in.

Sounds really sensible, doesn't it? It was recently pointed out that there is a mismatch between the numbers doing particular courses, and the numbers of likely jobs in the economy when they leave. Fifteen per cent of youngsters want to work in entertainment and sport, a sector that provides just three per cent of jobs. By contrast, accommodation and catering need almost seven times as many workers as there are students expressing an interest. So let's just fund courses, it's argued, that lead to jobs. But before we run off with this policy, let's look at the reservations:

- The delivery of the policy depends on persuading someone who wants to be, say, a sports journalist, or a beauty therapist, to do something entirely different – “No hairdressing places? OK, I'll do electrical installation”. Success here is unlikely. And blaming providers for the situation – as some have done – is weird. They provide what customers want: if they didn't, they'd soon go bankrupt.
- Young people face working careers that stretch ever longer as life expectancy increases. Who knows what skills they will need? We need to prepare them for the next forty years, which argues for maintaining a good general education, and for generous retraining opportunities. Even vocational courses need a generalist flavour. Volkswagen once found that, 10 years in, technical change meant that those who had taken its apprenticeships no longer used most of what they had learned. Nor do we want nurses or doctors wedded to 20-year-old practice.
- The proposal seems pretty Stalinist. Markets are supposed to work not via administrative fiat, but via price signals. The way to get more catering staff, care workers or hospitality sector employees is for employers to offer higher wages and more interesting jobs. I remember visiting a college of

building during enrolment week, just as the stories about plumbers earning fortunes hit the press. There were queues literally round the block. Give them the wages and they will come.

“Blaming providers for the situation is weird”

- We're endlessly told there's too much media studies. Media provides a bigger chunk of GNP than the fishermen and the farmers for whom Brexiters weep – and not everyone studying media plans to work in that industry. Media studies is an important part of modern general education – especially in a world of fake news, where information is filtered by newspapers owned by rich tax exiles, where the internet berates “MSM” whilst being even less accurate itself. Understanding better the world we live in, and vote in, is vital.
- Note how this proposal is restricted to students at training providers and FE colleges. There is no intention to extend it to universities. If Jessica and Ollie want to study History of Art (like Kate and William), or Classical Literature (like Boris Johnson), well, that's OK. The needs of the labour force are not mentioned. That cohort will continue to enjoy freedom of choice, despite the argument being pretty much the same.
- Lastly, there is a point about choice and liberty. If someone wants to train as an actor, dancer or journalist, in the full knowledge that the rewards are low and jobs rare, let them. A lifetime of regret, if-only and what-if, is never happy.

Of course we don't want students leaving college to find that there is no call for their skills. But the place to start is the demand-side, not the supply-side. This implies a bigger role for careers education – a well-funded and expert service for adults as well as teenagers. The other need is for a well-funded and organised continuing education offer. Jobs will change, and so will people; employers will train to upskill their staff, but people often want to – or have to – change jobs. Continuing education, from evening classes to university adult admissions, needs to be reinstated and expanded. What we emphatically don't need is direction from those who are not on the frontline, and do not have to balance a college budget or talk to students.

The government and business lobby groups need to get their act together when it comes to both immigration and skills, says John Cope – former head of education and skills at the CBI

With Brexit Day here, the government is fleshing out plans for how migration will work once the transition period ends at the end of 2020. Given the importance of getting this right, it's unedifying to see government and business groups trapped in a perennial and wearisome scuffle.

The government has made clear it will not accede to employer demands for a more open post-Brexit immigration system, with a frustrated No 10 arguing that business should spend less time bleating about easier hiring from abroad and more time investing in its own workers.

Both are right. Both are wrong. But both are missing the real issue.

When it comes to investing in people, the UK needs to wise up and grasp the pace of change. Careers are getting longer, with the majority likely to work into their 70s. There is a steady march of artificial intelligence, driverless cars, automation (the most visible sign of which is the death of the checkout), and algorithms that better understand our buying habits, relationships, and motivations than we do ourselves. Our lethargy shows – UK workers are less productive than their German counterparts by a quarter and lower than the G7 average by a sixth.

No 10 are right to be frustrated. Despite the pace of change, employer spend on training is stagnant, barely moving from £43.8 billion in 2011 to £44.2 billion in 2017, despite the huge rise

JOHN COPE

Deputy Director,
Public First



On immigration and skills both No 10 and employers are missing the point

in the number of people in work since 2010. Add in the fact that the number of adults in education is at a two-decade low, and you can see why No 10 are touchy.

Business is right, though, that Brexit should not be about pulling up the drawbridge. Nor should it be about just letting in 'the brightest and the best', whatever that means in reality. An immense strength of the UK, and every free society around the world, is its openness to people, trade, and a free market economy. Importantly, most British people get this. Focus group after focus group shows that what most people want is not quotas or a shameful 'hostile environment' – they want to know that criminals are being stopped at the

border, and that the system is under control, with migrants in work and contributing their fair share to public services. A generous work visa supports that.

The mistake No 10 and business groups make is to portray this as mutually exclusive. We desperately need employers to spend more on training as much as we need to remain an open, welcoming country. And it also misses the point – which is how we do get employers to spend more on training?

Having spent several years at the CBI leading their work on education and skills, I would say that the elephant in the room is the struggling Apprenticeship Levy.

When it was introduced, its purpose was clear: get more money into apprenticeships, make apprenticeships core to our education system, and hold employers' feet to the fire on training.

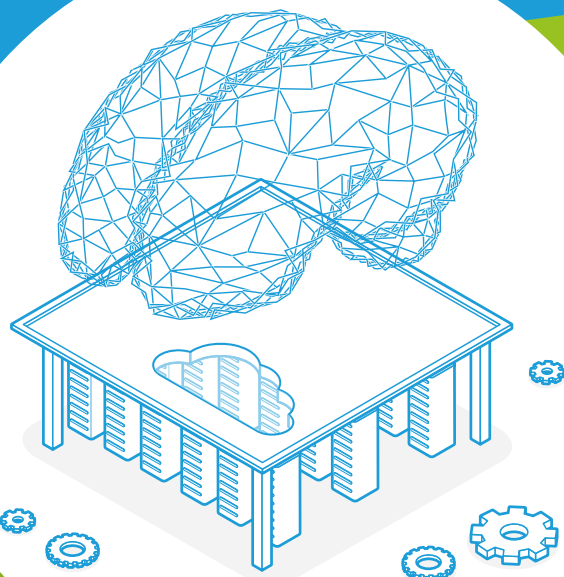
“More restrictions on the Levy are not the way forward”

Several years on, the impact is mixed. Apprenticeship starts are subdued, with young people affected most. The Levy has also become overspent, with funds now rationed to smaller firms. Anecdotally, I've met CEOs who admit that to pay the Apprenticeship Levy, they've reduced, or replaced, other training. One of the consequences of this has been an explosion in 'degree apprenticeships' where employers, with justification, are using Levy funds to pay for training they used to do.

More restrictions on the Levy are not the way forward. To fix it, there needs to be a government top-up to the £3 billion employers pay to fix the overspend; a beefed-up Institute for Apprenticeships; flexibilities to use the Levy on high-quality training; and more support for smaller companies that struggle the most to offer training and take on apprentices. Finally, the Institute needs to look carefully at how to adapt apprenticeships to act as 'retrainerships', so that employers aren't forced to quietly rebadge apprenticeships to retrain or upskill their staff.

To coin a phrase, let's end the dither and delay. Let's get Apprenticeship Levy reform done.

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Mo Dixon

Principal, Tyne
Metropolitan College

Start date January 2020

Previous job

Vice principal, New College Durham

Interesting fact

She is a big fan of Newcastle United and a frequent winner of *FE Week* Spot the Difference



Sarah Houghton

Assistant principal for
land-based education,
The Cornwall College Group

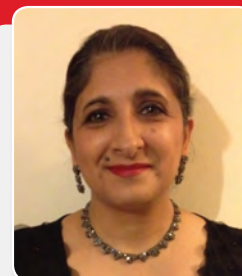
Start date May 2020

Previous job

Assistant principal for land-based curriculum,
Reaseheath College

Interesting fact

She has a horse called Duke, who "is the love of my life" and has been with her for 12 years



Anita Lall

Vice principal for curriculum
and quality, Craven College

Start date February 2020

Previous job

Assistant principal for quality, Bradford College

Interesting fact

She once had to drive across the country to deliver a donor bone marrow for a transplant patient in an icebox on the front seat of her car

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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

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

Difficulty: Easy

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

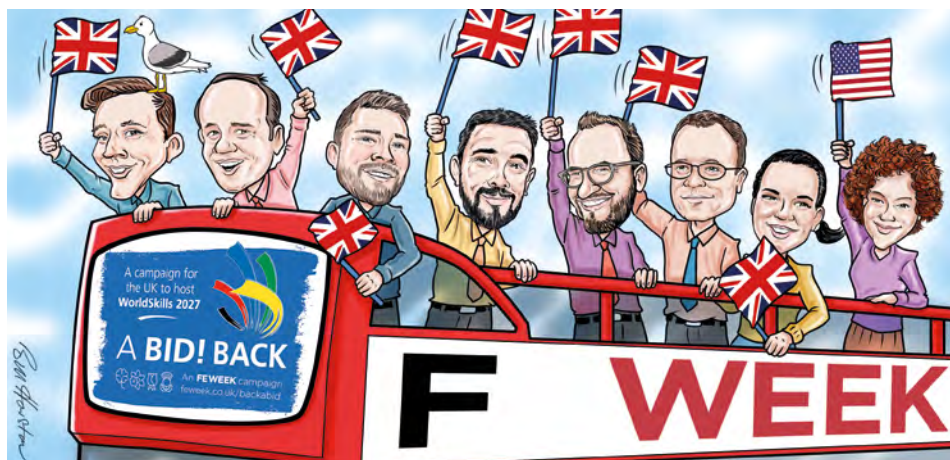
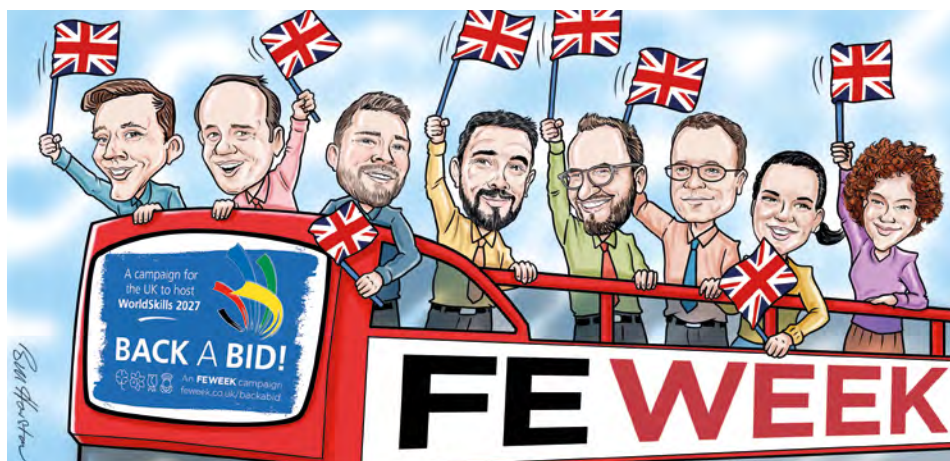
Difficulty: Medium

Solutions: See right

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



Last Edition's winner: Laurence Ford

Solutions

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

Difficulty: Easy

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

Difficulty: Medium

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