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FRIDAY, APRIL 3, 2020
EDITION 313

ENGLISH AND MATHS EXAMS SAT AT HOME GAME CHANGER: LEARNERS TO SIT C&G FUNCTIONAL SKILLS TESTS REMOTELY



Exclusive

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TREASURY: COLLEGES CAN FURLOUGH STAFF

- > Principals parking wide range of roles from apprentice assessors to caterers
- > Not all will top up 80% income from Sunak's Covid-19 staff retention scheme
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University in drive to push MBA apprentice places as government reviews funding

BILLY CAMDEN
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Exclusive

A university is scrambling to recruit MBA apprentices amid the government's review of the programme's funding.

On Monday the University of Bradford contacted small businesses to insist that "if you've ever wanted to do an MBA, now is the time".

An email, seen by FE Week, claims that government has "temporarily opened" the level 7 senior leader apprenticeship "up to non-levy paying companies" – even though the controversial course has been available to all employers since it launched in February 2018.

The university also claims the programme has been "massively subsidised for a limited period, meaning rather than firms having to pay £18,000, they would pay only £900", despite the 95 per cent subsidy referred to for small businesses being government policy since April 2019.

The email adds: "Because there is only a limited window to apply and the government are due to review funding

later in the year, if you have ever been considering doing an MBA, there couldn't be a better time".

It goes on to list eight enrolment dates from June 2020 to March 2021.

Craig Johnson, a senior lecturer at the university, signed it off by stating: "I urge any business which wants to grab this opportunity while it's available."

A review into the level 7 senior leader apprenticeship standard was launched in February after education secretary Gavin Williamson said he was "not convinced the levy should be used to pay for staff, who are often already highly qualified and highly paid, to receive an MBA".

Government funding for it could be switched off later this year as a result.

A spokesperson for the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education said the trailblazer group for the standard is currently reviewing the programme and will provide feedback by May 20.

The Department for Education said the deadline of June 1 for a decision on its funding future still stands.

They added that while the review is underway, it's up to providers to decide how to recruit and promote the apprenticeship.

Training providers, including many top universities, have made millions from the MBA apprenticeship since 2018 as it soared to become one of the most popular standards in the country.

FE Week analysis shows there had been 6,387 starts on the programme since launch to the first quarter of 2019/20. Each of these attracted up to £18,000 of levy funding – meaning as much as £115 million has been spent on this standard to date.

The University of Bradford told FE Week it currently has 15 apprentices on the programme, but could not say how many more are expected to enrol this year.

When challenged on their claims about the programme being "temporarily" opened and subsidised for a "limited period" to small businesses, the university denied that the advert was misleading.

"The funding is under review. MBA apprenticeships are therefore under scrutiny and therefore we do not know how long we will be able to offer the MBA as an apprenticeship," a spokesperson said.

"We want to raise awareness amongst local businesses while it is confirmed that funding is available."



Most universities were not able to deliver apprenticeships to small business until the Education and Skills Funding Agency started moving non-levy payers onto the digital apprenticeship service in January. Prior to that, only providers that won a non-levy allocation via a tender could train apprentices for SMEs.

The University of Bradford confirmed that it only began offering apprenticeships to non-levy payers in recent months.

Natalie Wilmot, an MBA director

at the University of Bradford, believes it is "important that the government continue to support this apprenticeship".

"We see leadership and management development as crucial to boosting UK productivity, as it ensures that people are properly prepared for leadership roles, instead of continuing to rely on 'accidental managers' – people with technical expertise in their area, but little formal training or education in business and management," she added.

AoC: 'It might help' if colleges gain access to DfE free meal vouchers

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"It might help" colleges if they were allowed to access the government's new free school meal vouchers scheme, their membership organisation has said.

On Tuesday schools were told they can provide every eligible child with a weekly shopping voucher worth £15 to spend at supermarkets while they're closed due to coronavirus.

Parents will receive the voucher through their child's school, which can then be redeemed online via a code, or sent to their house as a gift card and used at stores such as Sainsbury's, Tesco, Asda, Morrisons, Waitrose and M&S.

But the scheme is not open to colleges – a decision which one FE



leader has labelled as "extremely disappointing" and shows the government has "deemed post-16 students as less in need of financial support to eat at this time".

The average college has "hundreds" of 16- to 18-year-olds who would

normally receive free meals, according to the Association of Colleges.

The Department for Education told FE Week that FE institutions are already themselves supporting many students who are entitled to free meals, and it will provide further guidance for them

on this in the coming days.

It is not clear whether any financial support, like the sums being made available to schools, will be open to college students.

The government had not provided an update on this at the time of going to press.

AoC's chief executive, David Hughes, said: "Just like schools, the shutdown of colleges has left hundreds of 16- to 18-year-olds in every college who would normally receive free meals at risk of going hungry.

"Colleges have been making their own arrangements to ensure their students access to regular meals – generally by making payments direct to student bank accounts.

"This may not be not sustainable and it might help if Department for Education extended the national voucher scheme on an opt-in basis

for colleges."

A student services lead at a general FE college, who did not wish to be named, was outraged with the DfE's decision.

"This is a gross misunderstanding of the part young people in FE learning play within their community and family," they told FE Week.

"Many are independent livers, carers for parents, grandparents and younger siblings. Currently we need a whole-family approach to financial support. Any delay to this approach puts families at risk."

They added: "Our college has used a system that enables us to ensure we can bridge the Easter holiday gap. However, there will be a variety of systems in place and those who cannot do that will be frustrated by this move."

As reported by this newspaper last week, FE providers have already taken matters into their own hands in the absence of the universal voucher system.

For example, Boston College and MidKent College both opted for direct payments to students or to their parents or carers.

News

Ofqual seeks apprenticeship director to lead new 'field team'

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Ofqual is hiring a director to lead a new apprenticeships team that will be "operating in the field", as it steps up its regulatory work in the end-point assessment market.

This "critical new function" will include a team of nine who work remotely to find out if assessments are being delivered "appropriately and consistently".

Led by the "associate director for vocational and technical qualifications assessment delivery" (a job advert for whom is currently live, with an annual salary offer of up to £71,050), the team will be "deployed to monitor, evaluate and report on" end-point assessment organisations (EPAOs).

They will "secure evidence and insight" that can be used to "address risks that EPAs do not deliver a sufficiently valid and reliable measure

of occupational competence".

The recruitment drive comes a month after a consultation on plans for Ofqual to become the external quality assurer (EQA) for all but integrated degree apprenticeships within the next two years was launched.

Currently there are 20 EQA organisations, a mix of professional bodies, employers and quangos, which monitor the near-300 EPAOs that run examinations for apprentices.

The consultation states that all EPAOs will need to become registered with Ofqual over time.

The exams regulator's job advert states that its work in apprenticeships has increased over recent years, and will be "growing again over the next two years as more end-point assessments become regulated".

The new director and field team's work will range between "very broad thematic activities looking across or within apprenticeships standards,

industry sectors or assessment methodologies to highly specific activity looking at aspects of single-provider, niche provision".

Activity will "routinely include working alongside professional body and employer representatives and the associate director will need to work with the wider VTQ leadership team and external organisations, including the Institute for Apprenticeships, to draw on and maximise the impact of sector expertise".

Field operations could include "supporting EPAO fora to discuss and resolve identified inconsistencies in EPA delivery or to secure greater comparability in the level of demand of assessments between different EPAOs delivering against the same apprenticeship standard".

"The field team may give targeted advice to individual EPAOs, produce thematic reports on cross-cutting issues and gather intelligence or evidence that will inform subsequent



compliance activity," the job advert added.

"Fieldwork approaches must be designed to be both adaptable and targeted and could range between very broad thematic activities looking across or within apprenticeship standards, industry sector or

assessment methodologies to highly specific activity looking at aspects of single-provider, niche provision."

The deadline for applications to the director role is April 19. Interview dates are scheduled for May 2020 but are subject to change in light of the coronavirus pandemic.

Hadlow break-up hits two-month delay due to 'complexity'

FRASER WHIELDON
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Exclusive

Delays have struck the break-up of the first college group to go insolvent owing to the "necessarily complex and resource-intensive" nature of the transaction.

The transfer of Hadlow College's home campus, West Kent and Ashford College's Tonbridge provision and Princess Christian's Farm facility to North Kent College was scheduled to

take place on April 1.

But this has been now pushed back by two months.

East Kent Colleges Group did, however, take over WKAC's Ashford College and Hadlow's Canterbury facility at the beginning of this month – as planned.

A North Kent spokesperson said it had been decided between them, the administrators BDO, and EKC to run to different completion dates "to ensure resources could be focussed on one transaction at a time".

"The decision was to complete the EKC Group elements on March 31, 2020 and the North Kent College elements on May 31, 2020. That remains the plan that everyone is working to."

A spokesperson for the Hadlow Group added that the North Kent transaction is "highly complex".

The break-up of the Hadlow Group got under way on January 1 when its Mottingham campus, which had 186 learners and 23 staff, was taken over by

Capel Manor.

The three-way split was recommended by FE Commissioner Richard Atkins back in July.

Ashford College currently has 1,077 students and apprentices and 103 members of staff. It merged with sites in West Kent, under the auspices of Hadlow College, following the break-up of K-College in 2014.

Both Hadlow and WKAC came under government investigation once irregularities in applications for transaction funding to merge the two of them were uncovered. This led to most of the colleges' senior leaders and governors resigning, FE Commissioner intervention, and the group being placed in administration.

Hadlow went into administration in May with £40 million in debts, and West Kent and Ashford College went into administration in August with debts of over £100 million when including capital grants for the construction of K-College.

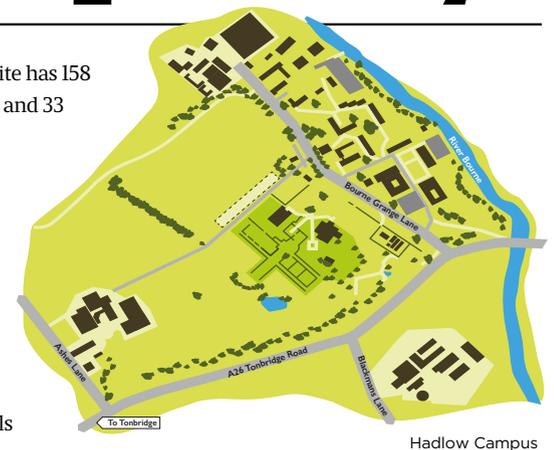
Hadlow's Canterbury site has 158 students and apprentices and 33 members of staff.

The Ofsted grade two EKC Group has around 12,000 students and apprentices spread across five sites in Broadstairs, Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone and Sheppey; it also runs its own schools trust.

Upon completion of their part of the break-up, EKC appointed Folkestone College principal Victoria Copp-Crawley as interim leader of Ashford College.

She has worked in further education for 20 years and was previously principal of EKC's Dover campus as well.

EKC chief executive Graham Razey said the campus transfers "would usher in a new era of technical and vocational education within the whole of East Kent for the first time".



Hadlow Campus

With Ashford College and the Canterbury site joining its existing sites near the Kent coast, Razey said the group can "begin to systematically plan skills delivery across the whole of the area".

Hadlow College interim principal Graham Morley said the transfer to EKC was the culmination of "months of hard work and planning", which had "successfully secured the long-term future of" further education in Ashford and land-based provision in Canterbury.



Victoria Copp-Crawley

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News

Online assessment guidance too vague and open to malpractice, say awarding bodies

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Exclusive

Online assessment will only work for around 40 per cent of apprenticeships and the government's "vague" guidance in the area opens the market up to "widespread malpractice", awarding organisations have warned.

Last week the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education announced that face-to-face end-point competency assessment can be carried out remotely during the coronavirus pandemic.

But in a letter sent on Monday to the quango's chief executive, Jennifer Coupland, Federation of Awarding Bodies boss Tom Bewick claimed to have already received "anecdotal evidence" that quality is already being compromised by some providers, who "may be inappropriately interpreting" the guidance as it is "not specific enough".

Although he could not share the

examples with *FE Week*, he said his organisation is currently vetting various "skilled trades", such as the level 2 butcher and level 3 blacksmith apprenticeship standards, where the "application of real world competence is only really proven by a combination of seeing and doing".

Bewick said that as can be seen in the WorldSkills competitions, the beauty therapist role, for example, is observed working with "real volunteer clients" and "you simply cannot repeat that level of intimacy over Skype or Zoom, especially under the current social distancing rules".

"FAB estimates that only about 40 per cent of the current frameworks or standards could lend themselves to some kind of remote assessment; and even then we would anticipate some challenges around validity and reliability," he told *FE Week*.

His letter to Coupland said he is "not currently confident that the new guidance will protect the quality and integrity of the apprenticeship system as a whole, particularly when there is so much variability and inconsistency

in how the external quality assurance (EQA) providers operate in practice".

The IfATE's guidance states that remote assessment can replace face-to-face observation as long as the arrangements are "cleared in advance" by EQA providers and "appropriate" technology and systems are in place.

Remote tests must be "supervised by an appropriately trained invigilator, or qualified assessor, who has the necessary qualifications, training or experience; and who has not been involved in the training, preparation or line management of the apprentice".

If remote alternatives are not appropriate, a pause of up to 12 weeks in assessment "might be the only action".

Terry Fennell, chief executive of awarding body FDQ Ltd and FAB vice-chair, said he appreciates that the authorities are trying to keep apprentices passing through the system at a time of strict social distancing measures.

But the "problem arises at the level of practical implementation".

"Except perhaps for a few standards,

many apprenticeships and especially those that require face to face observations are not really geared up for mass-scale remote assessment," he said.

"Moreover, the government's guidance is potentially opening up the system to widespread malpractice as EPAOs interpret the flexibilities in different ways that could lead to apprentices receiving inconsistent grades and/or unreliable results.

"The only way I can see potential abuse being minimised is if the Institute requires that all the candidates who pass through assessment in Covid-19 conditions will eventually have their result externally audited, once the crisis is over."

The IfATE told *FE Week* that EQA providers have agreed remote assessment plans applying to over 50 apprenticeships standards, for "thousands" of apprentices approaching end-point assessment since their flexibilities were launched last week.



Tom Bewick

"The institute and EQA providers are working very closely with end-point assessment organisations who helped to develop the guidance," a spokesperson said.

"Together we are allowing assessments to be delivered flexibly and remotely, while maintaining quality."

They added that over 300 of the 538 standards approved for delivery have no EPA due in the next few months.

Students to sit English and maths exams at home during Covid-19 lockdown

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Exclusive

Thousands of students will be able to sit their functional skills exams from home from next week, for the first time ever under "game changing" plans unveiled by City & Guilds.

The awarding giant will move from assessments at centres to remote invigilation by using online meeting software such as GoToMeeting, Zoom and Microsoft Teams during the Covid-19 crisis.

Newly reformed functional skills qualifications in English and

maths were rolled out in September 2019 and include strict invigilation criteria.

Exams regulator Ofqual has however given the move from City & Guilds the green light, explaining that their rules do not rule out remote or even home invigilation.

But they said they do require awarding organisations to satisfy themselves that the assessment arrangements used for a qualification are appropriate.

David Phillips, managing director at City & Guilds, told *FE Week*: "This Covid-19 crisis has helped us think very differently about learner progression and how to get them through assessments.

"The move to remote invigilation, where

learners can securely sit the test from home will be a game changer for colleges and training providers.

"We have had very good and open dialogue with Ofqual and are really pleased to be able to do this from next week."

Last month the government announced the cancellation of the summer exams series for A-levels and GCSEs. Students will instead be graded via teacher evidence of each student's performance throughout their studies, including mock tests.

Unlike GCSE and A-levels that are typically tested in the summer, functional skills qualifications are on-demand tests, with most exam boards running a session each month.

A City & Guilds spokesperson said the organisation will be able to "deliver remote testing of our E-volve tests on-demand at our learners' homes.



"This will continue the delivery of a number of our assessments including functional skills during the Covid-19 closures.

"Centres will be able to remotely deliver and invigilate the online tests

to learners and apprentices in their own home environment."

They added that detailed guidelines and instructions will be available to centres in the week commencing April 6.



David Phillips



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News

Extraordinary efforts of staff still caring for vulnerable learners

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Exclusive

FE Week has spoken to a number of specialist colleges to uncover the impact the Covid-19 crisis is having on the country's most vulnerable learners, many of whom are residential and have "complex needs", and found the extraordinary efforts staff are putting in to keep provision going...

"Try to envisage not being able to easily verbally communicate, having significant physical disabilities, profound and multiple learning disabilities, struggling with sensory overload or not being able to manage changes in your world.

"Add in Covid-19, mixed guidance, public panic and the potential removal of one of the safest environments you know... and you are a little closer to understanding how many of our students must be feeling."

That's how Adrian Sugden, principal of Henshaws College in Harrogate, sums it up for his day and residential learners, aged 16 to 25 and with a variety of complex needs.

However, it is not just students who have had to come to terms with Covid-19: Sugden says senior leaders and staff were "rocked" by the government's decision to keep education settings open for vulnerable learners.

Specialist colleges were initially asked to stay open for all students with education, health and care plans, which would apply to their entire cohort, says Clare Howard, chief executive of specialist post-16 provider organisation Natspec.

As that "seemed inconsistent" with the social distancing guidance, Natspec

worked with the Department for Education and now only those learners who cannot safely be provided for at home should still attend college.

Sugden says his staff now agree specialist settings should stay open as: "It was about supporting the NHS and providing the safest environment we could for our learners.

"We have done everything we can, in these challenging times, to maintain that."

However, it is becoming increasingly difficult, as they are losing staff to self-isolation, childcare, family care and illness.

Henshaws, along with the other specialist providers FE Week spoke with, are not furloughing or laying off any staff – the college has even re-employed ex-staff.

The college will remain open over Easter, and expects around ten per cent of the total cohort of 97 to attend – the students who are full time residents or whose families are key workers.

"The challenge," Sugden says, "will be maintaining a strong staff cohort when Covid-19 fully hits our region."

Portland College near Mansfield, meanwhile, is taking on even more young people, as it is set to run a "holiday club" for a small number of them, at the request of the local authority, over Easter.

It is currently supporting up to 20 learners and five day-service users, about ten per cent of its usual cohort, as well as 25 in residential provision, around 80 per cent of that cohort.

It's all "part of the national effort," says principal Mark Dale. But it does not hurt that the college sits on 32 acres of Sherwood Forest and includes a fully wheelchair-accessible Woodland Adventure Zone.

He said they are treating the whole campus as an isolation "household



Henshaws College student Emma Hughes

unit", so "we have strict policies in place regarding who can access the site during the lockdown period," he said.

Learners who attend on a daily basis are supported in separate areas with separate staff to residential learners.

Yet Portland too is not without troubles: delays in delivering supplies have led to staff making face shields for their colleagues.

Another problem is funding: as a charity, the crisis is taking a bite out of their fundraising abilities and commercial operations.

It was reported earlier this week the Covid-19 pandemic will mean charities will lose around £4 billion in the next financial quarter.

Funding is an "ongoing concern" for the sector, said Howard, as is securing food, cleaning products and personal protective equipment.

For many specialist colleges, a "significant proportion" of income comes from non-education budgets, and Howard says there is "question mark" over whether these sources will be guaranteed.

What adds extra impetus was the fact, she said, "for a small number of students, college is their home for 52 weeks a year; there is no other to send

them back to".

Dale said this was "uncharted territory" and it was "difficult to know" what their long-term future held.

"For now our focus is the health and wellbeing of our learners, residents and staff."

This can-do spirit exhibited by Sugden and Dale can also be seen at National Star College in Gloucestershire, where chief executive David Ellis says staff "have gone above and beyond at this very challenging and difficult time" by keeping in touch with students at home and providing education and therapy resources for their families.

While there are currently about 33 residential and day students and 29 long-term residents in attendance, National Star will still provide respite care for an additional 17 students over Easter.

And out of a total cohort of 142 at Linkage Community Trust in Lincolnshire, around 20 of its 16 to 25-year-old learners have continued to attend. One of its campuses will remain open over Easter for three learners whose parents are key workers.

"We are fortunate to have a relationship manager at the Education and Skills Funding Agency, who has kept

in regular contact and confirmed we will receive normal funding, in line with our payment schedule," a spokesperson said.

But specialist providers also rely on funding from local authorities, and that is proving more troublesome for Linkage.

Its location means it is commissioned by seven authorities and there is no consistency in the paperwork being sent to providers, while the councils are expecting Linkage to complete all the administration of this – which is hard when you have over 30 per cent of staff off work.

For learners who are staying home, Linkage is "working hard" to ensure they can engage in learning through hard-copy and electronic work packs, telephone tutorials and online academic and pastoral support.

Specialist learning is not easily moved online, Howard says, as much of it is based on experience and observation.

But her members have been "creative" in devising ways to get around that, including using adaptive technology and online classes.

Perhaps their commitment is best summed up by Mark Dale: "We are a very small cog in a great national effort and we will keep turning."



Portland college learner Chloe Dolby

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News

Delayed Ney report into financial oversight of colleges still with ministers

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Exclusive

The Department for Education said this week the independent report into their own oversight of college finances will be published "as soon as possible".

The former skills minister, Anne Milton, commissioned Dame Mary Ney to conduct the review after the shock collapse of the Hadlow College Group revealed serious failings by the funding body to spot warning signs.

It is understood Ney submitted the report on time and it was due for publication last December.

But a spokesperson for the DfE told *FE Week* on Wednesday: "Ministers are currently considering the report from Dame Mary Ney and we will publish the report and the government's response as soon as possible."

As previously reported, it is

understood that Ney will heavily criticise the Education & Skills Funding Agency for the calculations it uses to determine the financial health scoring and grading. She is expected to argue that had it been more robust, it could have intervened in college failures, such as that of Hadlow, much sooner.

Colleges self-grade using the agency's scoring system by inputting three measures: one based on cash, another on debt and another on margin.

These metrics then formulate an overall financial health grade of 'outstanding', 'good', 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate'.

Hadlow College came under investigation by the government once financial irregularities were uncovered, including submitting partial information to the agency so it would generate a 'good' financial health rating.

But the FE Commissioner found that had the ESFA looked at Hadlow's published accounts, they would have rated the college as 'inadequate'.

Ahead of Ney's report being published, the system was also criticised by former Skills Funding Agency deputy director Tony Allen, who said when he ran the SFA's Large Companies Unit: "We had a much better sense of what was going on."

"We advised and supported, managed risks and dealt with issues as they were arising. Face-to-face support by individual and group methods headed off many early problems."

But, owing to DfE funding cuts in 2016, this "supportive" approach was dropped in favour of what Allen summarised as "a service desk approach", which he said was unusual in the public sector as it allowed organisations to be given millions of pounds and told to "get on with it".

The ESFA has already made changes to the way in which it oversees college finances, seemingly aware that its past approach had proved troublesome.

Last September, it was announced college financial returns, historically



Dame Mary Ney

submitted at least twice a year, would from then on be consolidated into a single annual return.

This, the agency claimed, would help college governors, as well as the ESFA, "spot signs of declining financial health and ensure preventative action can be taken at an earlier stage".

And in December, the ESFA published

a new integrated financial model for colleges, in place of the agency's modelling for financial plans, financial record and cash-flow forecast.

The National Audit Office has confirmed to *FE Week* they remain on track to publish the findings from their own enquiry, which is similar to Ney's, this summer.

Funding agency 'pause' planned audits during Covid-19 lockdown

BILLY CAMDEN
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Exclusive

All planned routine funding audits of FE providers have been put on hold, the government has confirmed.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency told *FE Week* it had made the decision "prior" to the prime minister's announcement of new Covid-19 lockdown measures last week.

The "pause" on financial assurance audits will "cover the period for, at least, the duration of the lockdown".

A spokesperson said the ESFA "understands" the challenges providers face as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and have been "sensitive to



Mark Dawe

these challenges where we have contacted providers to complete funding audits and investigations already in progress".

They added, however, that it may be necessary for the agency to contact providers during the crisis in order to continue to maintain effective oversight and protection of public funds.

Mark Dawe, chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, said pausing audits "is a sensible decision".

"We're not sure that the agency had understood the seriousness of the challenges facing independent training providers in the light of the DfE's decision not to guarantee funding, but it appears that they are now beginning to realise



this is a battle for survival and that therefore unnecessary distractions such as audits should be avoided at all costs," he added.

The ESFA's decision follows other suspensions of normal regulatory visits by various government bodies.

Last month, Ofsted announced it had paused all of its inspections until further notice and later confirmed it had also suspended the publication of all reports that were due to be published during this period.

The FE Commissioner Richard

Atkins has also confirmed that his team has paused intervention visits. He has offered "confidential" support to any colleges that need it and promised that formal intervention would not be triggered if they seek assistance during the current crisis.

DfE won't force colleges to stay open during Easter to support the vulnerable

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The government "cannot require" colleges to remain open over the Easter holidays amid the Covid-19 outbreak, the Association of Colleges has been told. And colleges that have already closed to all students will not have to reopen.

The AoC published the "urgent clarification" on its website on Tuesday following new communication with the Department for Education.

Earlier this month, colleges were told they must keep campuses open only to vulnerable children and those of "key workers" indefinitely, including during the holidays, while most people go on an unprecedented nationwide shutdown.

Emergency legislation, the Coronavirus Bill, went through Parliament last week and received Royal Assent on March 25. It allows

the government to force colleges and schools to stay open or "relax some requirements around education legislation in order to help these institutions run effectively during the event of an emergency".

While many colleges have stayed open to children of key workers and vulnerable students up to the age of 25, some, such as Totton College and Halesowen College, have closed their sites to everyone. Various plans are in place at the colleges to continue supporting vulnerable learners remotely during the crisis.

The AoC said that over the weekend the DfE published guidance which said vulnerable students, particularly those with a social worker, still had to go into an educational setting during the closure period.

This "raised concerns among colleges", those that have closed their doors to all students.

"Many asked whether they had to reopen to support these students to



attend day-to-day," the AoC added.

The DfE has now provided the association with the following clarification, which officials will publish in due course: "We expect colleges (including those that have closed) to

know where their vulnerable learners are and to have a named member of staff to liaise with social workers.

"We do not expect colleges that have closed to reopen, and given the very small numbers of learners attending

at each institution, we cannot require colleges to remain open over Easter."

The DfE was approached for comment. It had not published its own clarification at the time of going to press.

Applications to apprenticeship provider register to be suspended

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The Education & Skills Funding Agency has announced that it will stop accepting applications to the controversial register of apprenticeship training providers (RoATP).

It will close to new bids, including second applications from providers that have already applied in the past 12 months, from April 15.

This will provide "time for applications in progress and second applications to be completed and submitted" in light of the coronavirus pandemic.

The agency revealed the move in its weekly update to the sector which, said officials, will "take this opportunity to review our future approach to the register".

"We will advise further on when and



Keith Smith

in what form the register will re-open," the update added.

The news comes as the ESFA also confirmed that it has paused plans to implement a "provider growth limit"

that was "to be applied to new RoATP listed providers and planned for later this year".

A "provider earnings limit" was first mooted by Keith Smith, the

ESFA's director of apprenticeships, in November 2018 at the Association of Employment and Learning Providers conference.

He said at the time this would apply to all providers, not just new ones.

No official announcement from the ESFA has been forthcoming since.

The ESFA's review of RoATP is likely to include plans to require providers to be "accredited" for the apprenticeship standards they offer, as Smith told FE Week's Annual Apprenticeship Conference in March.

He said the limits are being considered to give employers more "confidence" in the "future" register of apprenticeship training providers.

Currently, end-point assessment organisations can only assess apprenticeship standards they are experts in and approved for via application.

Yet providers that have never

delivered apprenticeships have no restrictions on which or how many standards they deliver.

Any restrictions would form the second phase of the ESFA's attempts to strengthen its register of apprenticeship training providers, which was relaunched last year following a host of problems with the original application process.

One-man bands with no delivery experience were, for example, being given access to millions of pounds of apprenticeships funding.

This week's ESFA update said that any provider that has been "advised they have been accepted to RoATP, that has not yet completed the onboarding process, and that is planning to start apprentices before August 1 should ensure that they do so by midnight Tuesday April 14, 2020".

"Onboarding is expected to resume from July 1, 2020," it added.

News

Supplier relief: Deals to pay private providers

FRASER WHIELDON

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Many of the seven mayoral combined authorities that had a chunk of the adult education budget devolved last year have committed to making advance payments to private providers to keep them afloat during the Covid-19 outbreak

Their decisions come off the back of Cabinet Office Guidance Procurement Policy Note – Supplier relief due to Covid-19, published on March 20.

It states that managing public money normally “prohibits payment in advance of need” but in the current crisis Treasury has granted consent “for payments in advance of need where the accounting officer is satisfied that a value for money case is made by virtue of securing continuity of supply of critical services in the medium and long term”.

The guidance adds that this consent is “capped at 25 per cent of the value of the contract and applies

until the end of June 2020”.

The Department for Education has said they will support colleges that are ‘grant funded’ but has yet to say if or how they will financially support private providers with AEB and European Social Fund contracts.

At the time of going to press, this position has not changed and a DfE spokesperson said: “We want all providers to continue to deliver learning as best they can using online facilities, so that as many learners as possible are able to continue their studies.

“We are continuing to work closely with the sector and with the Treasury to monitor how our support packages are benefiting organisations and to consider any further action which may be required.”

They added that DfE is working with the Department for Work and Pensions and the EU Commission regarding what arrangements they can put in place for European Social Fund contract providers.

Here are the positions of the seven combined authorities with devolved AEB funding as of April 2.

LCR

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority

Contracted providers in Liverpool will be paid 100 per cent of their funding for delivering adult education budget at least until the end of June.

The authority took this move, a spokesperson said, to make sure “there is a sector to come back to after the current crisis”.

However, the authority will be looking to extend the payments to the end of the academic year in July, and are working with the

Cabinet Office to find out what is permitted.

Anyone in receipt of this funding will, the authority warned, be subject to “robust” monitoring arrangements and any funding deemed to have been spent “inappropriately” will be recovered from providers.

The authority took control of £51.3 million of its adult education budget last year. Of this, 19 private providers shared a pot of around £15 million that went out to tender.

GLA

Greater London Authority

In a letter to providers on March 31, London’s deputy mayor Jules Pipe promised to make advance payments to the capital’s AEB private providers until the end of June.

“Your monthly payments will be uplifted to your average monthly earned funding (based on the average of the previous three months) and up to the profiled contract value for the 2019-20 funding year,” he wrote.

The uplift will be an advance payment, reviewed as part of an end-year reconciliation process in December. It will require a variation of providers’ contracts, and Pipe promised further guidance will follow detailing the arrangements for this.

Providers will need to commit to “open book” accounting where their delivery is “less than the amount we pay you in a month”, as the GLA will not permit them to make any profit on these funds.

A separate letter was sent to GLA providers with a European Social Fund contract and said that if delivery on the 2019-23 programme has

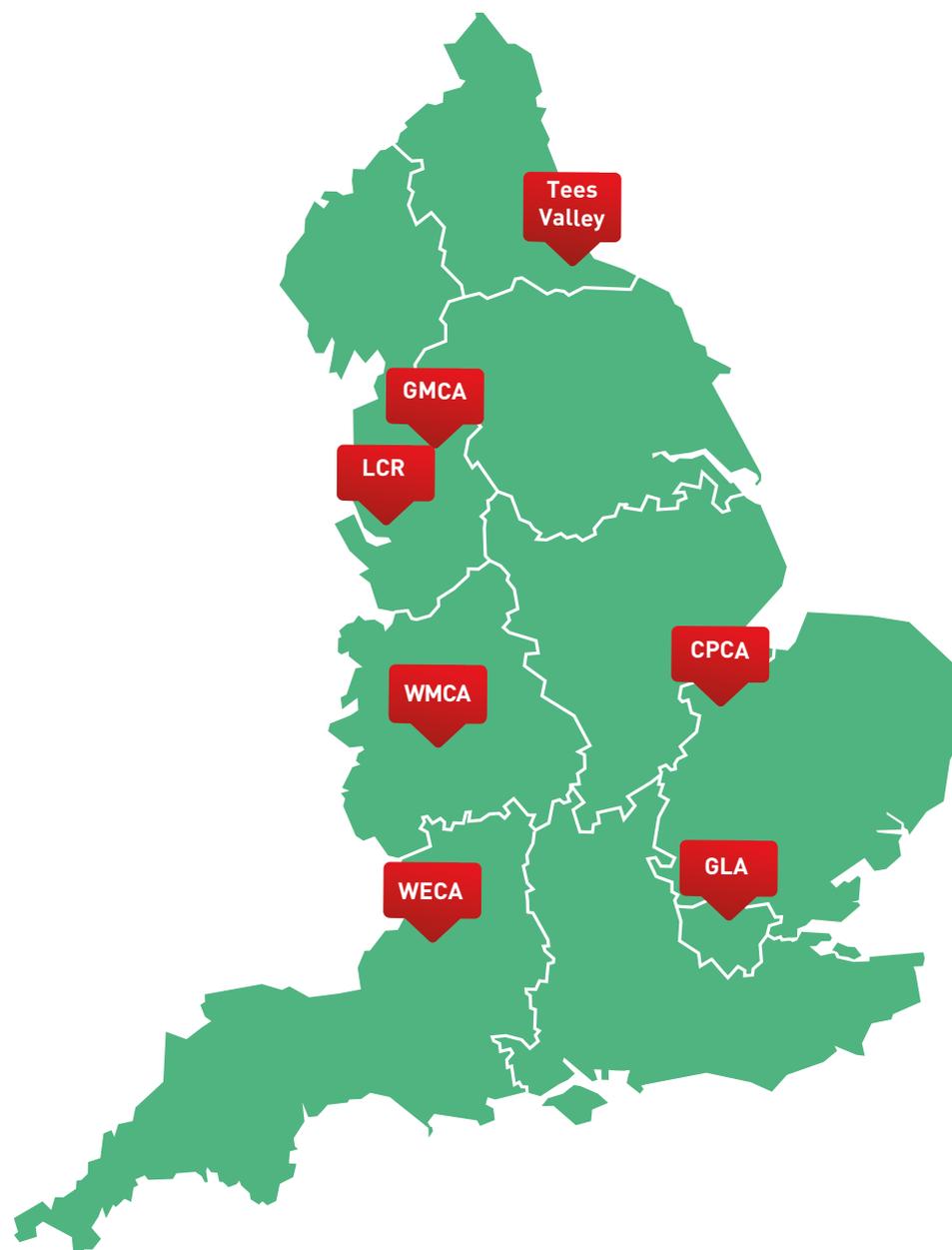
started, providers can “request an additional advance payment of up to five per cent of the lifetime contract value to support the project during the period of classroom closures caused by Covid-19”.

The authority received £306 million when its adult education budget was devolved last year. Of this, £32.5 million was split between 30 training providers following a tender.

Among the 30 was the London Hairdressing Apprenticeship Academy. A spokesperson for the provider said: “Whilst this is a positive move, we need the ESFA to address this national shortage of funding to ensure that people can use their time in isolation positively.”

And a spokesperson for Big Creative Education said: “This is very good news as it provides a safety net should our plans to move all provision online for our adult learners not recruit and deliver as effectively as courses at our well-resourced creative industry campus.”

The 7 combined authorities in England with devolved AEB



WMCA

West Midlands Combined Authority

Providers have been promised they will be made profiled payments for the next three months, until at least the end of June 2020. Payments will be based on an average of the monthly earnings over the previous three months, and will be made irrespective of delivery levels. But the authority will assume providers are continuing to deliver where they can and are not making a profit on the funds.

Providers will have to commit to “open book” accounting, and will still need to have weekly check-in calls to discuss numbers and performance.

Where possible, the authority also needs providers to continue delivery, and online provision will be the norm.

It is expected, as a consequence of these measures, that providers will not furlough any

employees involved in delivering WMCA’s AEB provision, but will instead continue to pay them at their current rate.

WMCA took control of its £125.6 million adult education budget last year. Around £28 million of that was put out to tender and split between 21 private training providers.

Among the 21 was Performance Through People. Its managing director Rob Colbourne said: “The WMCA genuinely seem to want to support their provider base. Their communication is ongoing and they are prepared to think outside the box to find the win win. To be honest, Mr Williamson and Mrs Keegan could learn some lessons, as could the ESFA.”

And Kerry Bentley, boss of DBC Training, said: “A massive thumbs up to WMCA. Let’s hope that the ESFA follow the good practice.”

in advance of delivery

ANDY STREET

West Midlands mayor



Building the future – helping the West Midlands through the coronavirus outbreak

The mayor of the West Midlands Authority explains why it has been quick to act on Cabinet Office supplier support guidance for adult education budget-funded training providers

When the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) took over the £126m adult education budget (AEB) for the West Midlands last autumn, we knew we had a great opportunity to help equip local people with the skills they need to gain new or better employment.

Nobody could have predicted that just six months later, all our training providers would have closed their doors because of the Covid-19 shutdown.

We are now all living and working in a very different way, and the WMCA is working with partners in public health, local and central government, charities and businesses to maintain essential services and to keep our residents safe. It is a huge collaborative effort, and I am confident the West Midlands is well placed to get through this.

But we need to look to the longer term, specifically how we support the continued economic revival of the West Midlands.

When we emerge from lockdown, we expect to have recruitment and skills shortages in key sectors, including construction, digital, advanced manufacturing and engineering, and business and professional services.

Further education colleges, local authorities, and private training providers will be key to addressing this, aiding the recovery of our regional economy from the effects of Covid-19. This is why it is essential that we develop long-term, strategic relationships with all of the colleges and training providers operating across the West Midlands.

We know providers are doing everything they can to support residents and businesses at this difficult time by moving learning online, or over the telephone and by post for those people who don't have internet access.

And so to support providers as they support their learners, we will continue to make scheduled AEB payments to all colleges and local authorities funded under a grant agreement.

Equally, we understand this is a particularly challenging time for private providers. When we first commissioned private organisations to carry out work through the AEB, we said we wanted to develop long-term relationships that would enable us to provide a high-quality offer for adults across the region.

In recognition of this commitment, we will be making profiled payments to all private providers for at least the next three months. This is in

accordance with the Cabinet Office Guidance Procurement Policy Note (PPN) – Supplier relief due to Covid-19, and shows the importance for us of maintaining a strong and responsive provider base.

These payments will be made irrespective of service delivery levels, but we expect that the organisations continue to support local people wherever possible, and do not profit on levels of performance below the payment amount. We also expect that private providers and any sub-contractors won't furlough employees involved in the delivery of AEB-funded learning and will continue to pay them at their current rate.

By supporting our providers in this way, I am confident that we are doing what is best to help our region's economy recover from the effects of Covid-19 as quickly as possible.

And then of course there are urgent needs for new jobs to be filled now, which are likely to increase over the coming months.

“We know local people may need to upskill to find new jobs following redundancy”

So we are asking our providers to support our rapid recruitment service – sourcing candidates for industries which have critical needs now, such as supermarkets, care homes, hospital and other essential services – and we are pleased at how quickly and positively they have responded to this.

We know local people may need to upskill to find new jobs following redundancy caused by the Covid-19 shutdown, or to work differently at home.

In addition, we want to support those who are in work, who may have more time for training, to take advantage of our free online courses to help them improve their skills in areas including coding, team leading, and counselling and, potentially, to consider developing their skills to progress their careers further.

We are publicising these courses through our Covid-19 support site, where residents can also access training on topics ranging from online and mobile banking for individuals, to digital marketing for businesses.

While I know these are difficult times for everyone, staying at home does offer opportunities to learn new skills online, and I hope as many people as possible will take advantage of this training that our colleges and providers are playing a crucial role in delivering.

GMCA

Greater Manchester Combined Authority

The authority hasn't decided on its official policy yet, but in an email to its AEB providers this week, the authority asked for them to “bear with us” while they implement a “business case”.

“As you can imagine this has been a difficult task due to the number of contracts and grants involved and there was no one-size-fits-all solution.”

Instead, the authority said it will need to work with each provider individually to work up the details of their contract or grant

variation.

As “time is of the essence”, representatives of the authority were set to contact each provider early this week to work through the detail.

“Please be assured that we have come up with a plan that we feel will hopefully provide you with a level of stability,” the letter continued.

GMCA has been in control of a £92 million adult education budget since devolution last year. Of this, £25 million went out to tender and split between 17 providers.

CPCA

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority

A spokesperson for the authority said it “remains committed” to providing support and “as much flexibility as possible” to independent training providers. They are

speaking to all five of their training providers “regularly” and will be presenting proposals on how they will be able to fund providers for the rest of the academic year “imminently”.

WECA

West of England Combined Authority

The authority, with its £14.7 million adult education budget, has promised to pay providers until the end of the academic year, putting it at odds with the Cabinet Office guidelines.

FE Week challenged the authority on how it was able to commit to making advance payments past the end of June, but they did not respond at the time of going to press.

The authority previously said they made the decision so disruption to learners can be minimised and so staff can continue to be paid and the overall financial stability of the provider is ensured.

Mayor Tim Bowles said it was “critical” to maintain continuity “where possible” and ensure his authority can “provide long-term viability” through continued funding for education and skills.

“We intend to protect the income of providers, to ensure that a stable and secure network of providers is intact and able to deliver through the current crisis, and carry on once normality resumes,” he said.

Given this, the authority is asking providers to ensure staff, including agency workers and subcontractors, continue to be paid.

Tees Valley

Tees Valley

Tees Valley Combined Authority said the Cabinet Office guidance does not apply to them as they did not procure for AEB services, and their providers are not classed as suppliers. They have grant funded all providers who were successful in securing a funding award through a commissioning process.

All providers will therefore continue to receive 100 per cent of their allocations until the end of the 2019/20 academic year.

Tees Valley mayor Ben Houchen said: “We are continuing to work closely with all of our

commissioned Adult Education providers across the Tees Valley to make sure they have the funding and support they need, especially at such a difficult time.

“We have been speaking directly to each of them to understand their specific challenges and are focused on immediate responses to keep them operational.

“Any decisions on productivity or reclaiming funding will be made in the future, when we have a clearer view on how the coronavirus situation has impacted the sector.”

News

More colleges sign up to Food Bank Friday

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Ten colleges have now signed up to an initiative that aims to tackle food shortages for the most vulnerable in their communities during the coronavirus pandemic.

London and South East Colleges Group launched Food Bank Friday two weeks ago and have now been joined by Boston College, Central Bedfordshire College, Chichester College, Dudley College, East Coast College, Kingston Maurward College, Loughborough College, Trafford College Group and York College.

Each have pledged to set up their own virtual giving page to raise funds for their local food bank.

LSEC has crowdfunded more than £4,500 and donated three trolley-loads of provisions from its own BR6 Restaurant as well as a chest freezer to a local food bank.

The college's student union has chosen the project as its charity of the year and pledged almost £3,000, which was collected from students throughout the year.

Its president, 18-year-old level 3 health and social care student Daniella Oni-Okeke, said: "Life is not easy for anyone at the moment, but by coming together we can all do our bit to help one another and make a positive difference."

Lesley Davies, principal of Trafford College Group, said she was "delighted to be part of the FE Food Bank Friday campaign, which is not only bringing colleges together, but represents the important part that the FE sector is playing through this crisis and beyond".

LSEC chief executive Sam Parrett said it has been "heart-warming" to see colleges coming together to support their local communities amid the "many challenges the last few weeks have thrown at us all".

"We are living in extraordinary and



Hospitality and catering student David Harris helping to sort donations from the BR6 Restaurant

difficult times and never before has it been more important to help one another. Good can come out of every crisis and that is certainly what we are seeing across the entire FE sector as we pull together in time of need.

"We are calling on all colleges to sign up and get involved in FE Food Bank Friday."

Kingston Maurward offers free beds to local NHS staff

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A college in Dorset is offering free beds to NHS workers during the Covid-19 crisis.

Kingston Maurward College will be hosting around 35 staff members from the Dorset County Hospital in its residential accommodation.

It is understood recipients will primarily be senior doctors and consultants who are isolating from their own families for the coming months. They are set to move in this weekend.

Principal Luke Rake said: "In the midst of World War II, Kingston Maurward was used as a base to support the troops on D Day.

"Today, we may face a different battle but the needs of our community for safety and support are the same. We are determined to provide whatever assistance our front line troops need and are willing, able and proud to help the NHS."

He added cleaning

and catering volunteers from the college will ensure the staff are cared for.

Nick Johnson, acting chief executive at Dorset County Hospital, told local newspaper the Dorset Echo: "We have been absolutely blown away by the amount of support we have received from the community.

"We really appreciate all they are doing to support our wonderful staff who are working on the frontline to keep everyone safe. We cannot thank everyone enough."

Residential staff at the specialist land-based college, which has a 750-acre estate, have been looking after animals at the farm, animal park and equine area while students isolate at home during the pandemic.

Kingston Maurward is also operating remote learning for students. For example, last week foundation studies students took part in an online baking lesson on video conferencing platform Zoom.



Luke Rake

Care home, hospital and homeless charity helped by donations

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A college has donated 40 litres of hand sanitiser, 350 face masks and 1,100 pairs of disposable gloves to a local care home which had a "critical" shortage of equipment in its battle against coronavirus.

Northampton College has also donated food stocks to multiple groups and helped to feed around 100 homeless people a day.

Care home Balmoral Place, which received the personal protective equipment, said the reserves would

help keep staff "safe" during the Covid-19 outbreak.

The college's ICT services manager Andy Seymour, who delivered the goods, said: "We were only too happy to step in and help. We're all in this together at the minute and anything we can do to ease the situation for others is obviously a good thing to do.

"We are very much the college in the community and we will continue to do all we can to offer our support to those who need it the most."

Kingsthorpe-based Balmoral Place is a development of 80 homes for elderly people.

Housing scheme manager Jo Robey

thanked Northampton College for its donation.

She said: "It is much appreciated and will go towards keeping the staff safe."

In addition, the college has handed out a number of food parcels to vulnerable families while deliveries of essential supplies were also made to Northampton General Hospital and The Hope Centre.

A spokesperson for The Hope Centre said: "The stock we have received from Northampton College is fantastic.

"With it, we are feeding 100 or so homeless people a day plus people in the wider community who are in need."

Rough sleepers given sanctuary at Somerset college

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A college in Somerset is converting part of its residential accommodation into shelter for rough sleepers during the Covid-19 lockdown.

Bridgwater & Taunton College will also offer three meals a day for vulnerable people within the community at its Canonsgrove Hall site.

The college said it is offering the use for as long as it is needed to those who are currently homeless and for whom it is difficult or impossible to shield from Covid-19 exposure.

The initiative is due to start next week.

Another part of the site is already housing NHS staff.

Principal Andy Berry said: "We are working to support the most vulnerable in our community during this unprecedented period.

"While teaching staff have shifted rapidly to supporting their learners online, support staff have risen to the challenge of making the accommodation site safe, comfortable and ideal to protect some of the most vulnerable in our local community



and we will continue to explore the ways in which we can best optimise the resources and facilities to support our community moving forward."

Mark Nettle, director of student services, thanked YMCA Dulverton Group, which will manage the site on behalf of Somerset West and Taunton Council.

He added: "The project has relied on the commitment and collaboration of various organisations, including Raft, the Salvation Army, Open Door, Turning Point and Arc."

In addition, Bridgwater & Taunton College is supplying the NHS with personal protective equipment from various departments, including the National College for Nuclear.

It is also providing free car parking for all NHS staff and the engineering team is using 3D printers to create spare parts for the local hospital.



Andy Seymour (right) donated face masks, gloves and hand sanitiser to Balmoral Place care home on behalf of Northampton College



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News

Colleges CAN furlough staff

NICK LINFORD
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Exclusive

Treasury officials have given colleges the green light to tap into their coronavirus job retention scheme.

Speaking to FE Week, a spokesperson said staff who work in areas of a college that are not primarily funded by the government and who cannot be redeployed would be eligible for the scheme.

The news will come as a huge relief to college leaders, more than twenty of whom have shared with this newspaper their plans to furlough dozens, potentially hundreds, of staff.

“Without the government subsidising wages there would be large financial deficit”

Responding to an FE Week survey sent to senior college leaders, one said they have a proposal being presented to governors to furlough as many as 185 workers from departments across the college including “apprenticeships, nursery, estates, commercial services, health & safety, finance, HR, student services and marketing”.

The finance director at a college in the East Midlands, who did not wish to be named, said the level of savings was still to be calculated but “without the government subsidising wages there would be large financial deficit,

breach of banking covenants and redundancies”.

And a vice principal at a college in the south west said they plan to start with furloughing 50 staff “in the very short term, but could extend to up to 300 staff” to save “potentially £100,000 in the first instance”.

The coronavirus job retention scheme is a temporary scheme which will last at least three months starting from 1 March 2020.

The Treasury, due to have the scheme up and running by the end of this month, says “employers can use a portal to claim for 80 per cent of furloughed employees’ usual monthly wage costs, up to £2,500 a month, plus the associated Employer National Insurance contributions and minimum automatic enrolment employer pension contributions on that wage”.

But speaking to FE Week, a leading lawyer has urged caution, stressing “the guidance makes it clear that the government does not anticipate significant claims from publicly funded institutions”.

Analysis of college accounts data compiled by the Education and Skills Funding Agency shows close to 80 per cent of FE college income comes from “funding body grants” (see table).

Ben Wood, partner at the law firm Eversheds Sutherland, said: “The criteria that HMRC will apply to applications from colleges for furlough payments are not yet known and there are potentially serious reputational risks if a publicly funded entity is perceived to be unfairly taking advantage of a taxpayer funded scheme.

“Having said that, in the face of depleting budget income there are

Colleges job roles being considered for furlough include:

Administrators

Apprenticeship staff

Business Development Staff

Car Park attendants

Caterers

Cleaners

College shop staff

Crèche Workers

Drivers

Events manager

Exam Administrators

Finance Administrators

Grounds & Maintenance

Gym Supervisors

Health & safety officers

HR Recruitment Officers

IT support

Learning support assistants

Learning support technicians

Nursery nurses

Receptionists

Security staff

Sport centre staff

Work based assessors

Workplace co-ordinators

Source: FE Week online survey

obligations on governors and college leaders to look seriously at any potentially available mitigation.

“I would recommend that colleges take a minimalist approach to accessing the scheme and have a plan B in case an application is not accepted by HMRC.”

Responses to the FE Week survey show many principals have already informed their college board of their furloughing decisions whilst others have sought approval.

David Hughes, chief executive of the Association of Colleges said: “College finances are on a knife-edge and many quick decisions are required by college leaders and

their governing bodies. This decision is something that the Principal would usually make under normal delegations.

“College finances are on a knife-edge”

“Because of the exceptional circumstances many leaders might engage their governing body if they can before making the decision.

“College governing bodies hold their principals to account for the effective operation of their college, including educational, financial and staff performance.

“Different governing bodies approach this task in different ways and with different levels of delegation. We’re confident that college leaders and governing bodies will be approaching these

decisions with care.”

Just one of the 22 colleges that responded to the FE Week survey said they definitely did not plan to top up the 80 per cent government wage subsidy to 100 per cent for furloughed staff.

“What message would it send to those still being asked to work? Most people’s costs have reduced as result of not travelling, lower mortgage rates etc so net difference should be marginal and manageable,” the deputy chief executive of the college said.

The principal at a small college in the North East said they planned to furlough nearly 25 per cent of all staff, 36 out of 155, mainly direct apprenticeship delivery staff and administrative support.

But a spokesperson for the Department for Education stressed that it was not only Treasury guidance on the Covid-19 staff retention scheme that needed to be followed.

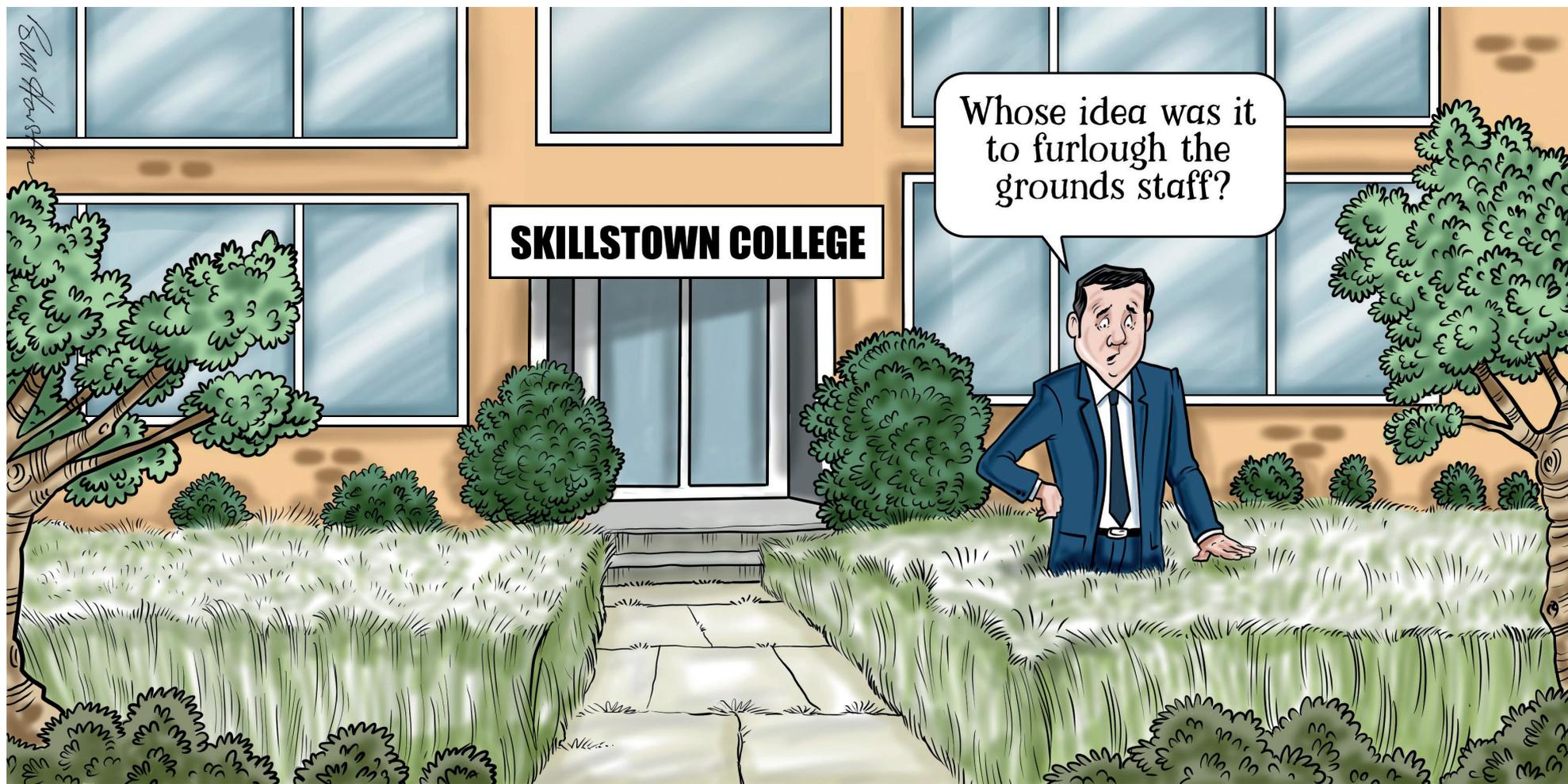
Colleges must, they said, have sufficient staffing resource in place to ensure vulnerable learners and the children of key workers are supported.



David Hughes

2017/18 income for 172 GFE colleges		
Funding body grants	£4,420,203,000	78%
Tuition fees and education contracts	£737,657,000	13%
Other income	£451,663,000	8%
Other grants and contracts	£65,790,000	1%
Endowment and investment income	£3,830,000	0%
Total Income	£5,679,143,000	

Source: ESFA college accounts spreadsheet



EDITORIAL

Treasury will subsidise college wages - but under what circumstances?

The good news is a spokesperson from the Treasury told FE Week that staff working in areas of a college that are not primarily funded by the government and who cannot be redeployed would be eligible for the coronavirus job retention scheme.

So college leaders now have reassurance they will be successful in their applications to HMRC for the 80 per cent wages subsidy.

Or will they?

Without detailed HMRC criteria, something that does not appear to be coming anytime soon, it presents colleges with many potential interpretations of the rules.

As a leading HR lawyer warns (see right), colleges will need to be cautious given the “potentially serious

reputational risks if a publicly funded entity is perceived to be unfairly taking advantage of a taxpayer funded scheme”.

But as David Hughes, chief executive at the Association of College points out: “Quick decisions are required by college leaders and their governing bodies.”

And as we report this week, our survey found some colleges are planning to furlough up to a quarter of all staff in a wide range of roles in many departments.

One vice principal at a college in the south west said they plan to start with furloughing 50 staff “in the very short term, but could extend to up to 300 staff”.

There does appear to be a consensus, even from the lawyer, that commercial and

apprenticeship delivery staff, where there is no delivery or funding, would be eligible for the scheme.

But what about grounds staff or college shop staff or cleaners?

The Department for Education will certainly be hoping the Treasury take a broad definition when it comes to HMRC reviewing the applications.

Or do they?

Like the lawyer they also urge caution, contacting FE Week to point out there must still be sufficient college resource to support the vulnerable and children of key workers.

Nick Linford, Editor
news@feweek.co.uk



Advice from a leading lawyer to colleges

The starting point is that the job retention scheme guidance does not absolutely preclude colleges from applying but they should approach any applications with caution.

The guidance makes it clear that the government does not anticipate significant claims from publicly funded institutions.

Further, the criteria that HMRC will apply to applications from colleges for furlough payments are not yet known and there are potentially serious reputational risks if a publicly funded entity is perceived to be unfairly taking advantage of a taxpayer funded scheme.

Having said that, in the face of depleting budget income there are obligations on governors and college leaders to look seriously at any potentially available mitigation.

The areas where colleges might have some prospect of accessing the job retention scheme are likely to be connected with lost apprenticeship and trading income where activities have ceased as a result of CV19.

I would suggest that if an application is going to be attempted there should be an audit trail that identifies: lost income streams as a result of CV19; individual roles that can legitimately be said to have ceased for CV19 reasons and which cannot properly be said to be publicly funded; an understanding of the letter and the spirit of the job retention scheme and its guidance - and that those principles have been carefully taken into account in putting the application together.

I would recommend that colleges take a minimalist approach to accessing the scheme and have a plan B in case an application is not accepted by HMRC.

Ben Wood is a Partner
at Eversheds Sutherland





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Profile

Introducing...

CHRIS
WEBB

Principal, Bradford College

JESS STAUFENBERG
@STAUFENBERGJ

The new principal of Bradford College has a skill for telling an engaging story. Jess Staufenberg finds herself spellbound

It's a rare interviewee who can narrate their life in so compelling and entertaining a way that questions become essentially necessary, but Chris Webb, the new principal of Bradford College, can do just that. If this Essex boy and experienced sector leader can re-write the story of that struggling institution in as humane a way as he can tell a tale, the staff are in good hands.

Like all natural teachers, he has a habit of turning his past experiences into lessons for the present, and the story of his lorry driver father going bankrupt three times during his childhood is no different. It was an observation in risk that may just explain why Webb has been brave enough to take on Bradford last year, with its humiliating government

bailouts, strikes and grade 3 Ofsted rating. "Today my dad would be described as an entrepreneur but I'm not sure they described them like that in the old days in the East End," he chuckles. "He had three businesses that went broke. Every time he was bankrupt, we had to move out. My mum always said, 'I lost three houses.'" His father, who suffered from pneumonia and flu, "always dusted himself off and began again".

"It's not about success. It's about what you do in failure to turn it around"

The experience made an impression on Webb. "The bit my dad gave me is that it's not about success. It's about what you do in failure to turn it around. I'm where I am because I've

been willing to take risks." The instability of his father's work, however, also drove another point home – get an education. It sounds as though his mother deserves serious credit for endlessly bugging Webb about this.

"My mum was always saying, 'you need to get an education', because my dad dropped out of school so when he went bankrupt, he couldn't get a job." It was his mother who spelt it out straight when he failed English O level – "you won't get a job without it" – and who, when Webb failed his A levels and was working in a betting shop, looked at his friends graduating from university and said "that could have been you, son". He eventually got the English O level, headed to Havering College of Further and Higher Education to get A levels, and took himself off to university. Faced with moments of failure, Webb appears never to have taken it too personally and set out to prove everyone wrong instead.

Webb also has a great eye for spotting a learning moment in unglamorous places. One of my favourite stories is from behind the desk at a William Hill shop, aged 20. "Being a betting manager is about working out the bets," he explains knowledgeably. "When people have multiple bets on horses or football results, it's called 'crashing the block' and it's complicated maths. I used to work it out with a calculator, but these people would know if you'd



Aged five

misculated by a penny. These people who had spelt the name of the horse wrong and played truant at school, they were whizzes at maths. It instilled in me that anyone can learn anything if you're interested enough."

Webb took the hint himself and signed up to study human biology A level at night school in 1991. The deep satisfaction he gleaned from passing is, even all these years later, infectious. "I had an A level! I looked at the brochure and I thought, 'I'll do geography this year. So I did another year at night school, and blow me down I passed it! I thought, 'brilliant, now I've got two A levels.'" I've rarely heard anyone speak with such joy about obtaining their education, qualification by hard-won qualification.

The story of his final A level is more moving. Webb had a sister, smart enough to have studied law before leaving to get married, with whom he was in good-humoured competition about who was cleverest. Together, they studied economics A level, giving

Webb his third – and the same grade as his sister. "It ended in a draw!" Webb doesn't dwell on the sadnesses in his life. His sibling died of cancer in her 30s. Their father followed her five years ago.

Instead, he focuses on the people who gave him his great chances, many of them women. The first was the lecturer who picked up the phone when he applied through clearing for sport science and IT at Canterbury Christ Church university. It was full, but "she spent about 20 minutes on the line trying to help me find the right course. I thought, if she cares about me now, imagine how much she'll care if I go there." Webb held out so he could apply the following year, there also meeting his deeply supportive wife, Belinda.

The next person to give him a chance was Teresa Frith, now senior skills policy manager at



At graduation with family



“By 2024, I want Bradford to be recognised as one of the best colleges in the country”

the Association of Colleges, who interviewed Webb for his first FE job at Bedford College. “I always say, whatever goes wrong in FE that I’m responsible for, it’s Teresa’s fault,” he chuckles. Stints at the City of Westminster college, which supported him through teacher training, as well as Braintree College under Debbie Lavin (“she taught me loads about management”) followed. Then he saw it – the TES article about Jackie Fisher, fearsome principal of Newcastle College, entitled “I don’t do cuddling”. Fisher is quoted as saying “I don’t suffer fools”.

“I thought, I want to go and work for her,” says Webb. “It was one of the first jobs I’ve ever gone for, where I really wanted it. I remember driving back past the Angel of the North thinking, I do hope I see you again.” He did. “Jackie was one of the most inspirational people I ever worked for.

It was tough, of course. I remember one year I had to read my numbers out at the senior leaders’ meeting and we were £0.5 million off target. I thought, ‘this is it then! Well, it’s been good fun.’ But Jackie was understanding. Webb laughs at his surprise at not losing his job, praising Fisher again for all she taught him.

But an even greater learning opportunity, Webb says, was when he was a “rubbish deputy principal” at South Thames College for two years. He quit. “It was my failure. I can look back now and see why she was frustrated with me.” Sue Rimmer, principal of South Thames, was a strong contrast to Fisher. “Sue was very emotionally intelligent about how people felt. She’d come from a union background – students were important, but so were the staff. It was important to look after employees and I struggled with that after Newcastle.”

But, as ever able to pick up a lesson during failure, Webb credits Rimmer with inspiring one of his strategies at Bradford. “Many of the decisions

“Whatever goes wrong in FE that I’m responsible for, it’s Teresa’s fault”

I’ve made at Bradford have been lessons I’ve learned from Sue. Our first strategy is a curriculum for learners; our second is outstanding student experience.” So far, so Fisher. “The third is to be an employer of choice.



Chris competing in the Great North Run

That wouldn’t have made my top 10 before.”

Throughout our conversation, it becomes clear why Webb has now set himself the toughest challenge of all. Easy routes are not his style – and it may be that the success of Barnsley College, where he was from 2011 until March 2019, did not feel fully earned. Its ‘outstanding’ grade was in place before he joined. By contrast, nobody wanted Bradford College, which in 2018 needed two £1.5 million bailouts in one month – an unheard-

of scenario.

“I was the only external candidate. But I wanted a challenge. By 2024, I want Bradford to be recognised as one of the best colleges in the country.”

Webb closes with a final story. “I was with my dad on his last day. He said, ‘here son, you know what, your mum and I, we’ve had a laugh, it’s never been dull, and I don’t regret a thing’

“I could have stayed at Barnsley. I’ve been at Bradford for a year now, and you know what, there’s not been a single dull day. I don’t regret it at all.”

Bulletin

Movers & Shakers

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



Salsabil Elmegri

Vice president, further education,
National Union of Students

Start date July 2020

Previous job

Vice president, education and welfare, Bradford College Students' Union

Interesting fact

In her free time, she's a photographer



Matt Gower

Vice principal, Reaseheath
College and University Centre

Start date April 2020

Previous job

Assistant principal, quality and learner services, Reaseheath College

Interesting fact

He worked as a chalet host in the Alps, alongside snowboarding, before starting a career in education



Victoria Copp-Crawley

Interim principal,
Ashford College

Start date April 2020

Previous job

Principal, Folkestone College

Interesting fact

She is a former Squash champion who played for England

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12:00 - 13:00

FE sector's response & requirements to Coronavirus pandemic

4 APRIL
12:00 - 14:15

Apprenticeship achievement rate methodology and reports

7 APRIL
14:00 - 16:30

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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

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

Difficulty: Easy

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

Difficulty: Medium

Solutions: See right

Spot the difference To WIN an FE Week mug



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



Solutions

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

Difficulty: Easy

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

Difficulty: Medium

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