



# FE WEEK

In-depth, investigative journalism, determined to get past the bluster & explain the facts for the FE & skills sector

## OFSTED DOWNED TOOLS BUT...

ESFA WILL NEXT WEEK  
'CHALLENGE' POOR  
QUALITY AT HUNDREDS  
OF APPRENTICESHIP  
PROVIDERS



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## REVEALED: COVID-19 HIT TO STARTS

- FE Week survey finds 80% fewer apprenticeship starts in April
- Nearly half of all providers went a month with no new learners
- Minister says 'biggest worry is the recruitment of new apprentices'

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FEWEEK

MEET THE TEAM



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# Covid-19 hit to starts

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From front

Exclusive

The dramatic impact of the coronavirus crisis on apprentice recruitment is laid bare for the first time in a survey of over 300 providers.

Responding to an FE Week request for data on the last day of April, 304 providers said they had between them planned 13,732 starts in the month but only achieved 2,693, missing their pre-coronavirus expectations by 80 per cent.

And 137 of the providers that responded, whilst planning 3,756 starts in the month, said they had not been able to start a single apprentice.

The findings will come as a concern to the apprenticeships minister, Gillian Keegan, who earlier in the week had said her "biggest worry is the recruitment of new apprentices".

On an FE Week webcast Keegan said the ESFA would be receiving data on starts in early May "so we'll have a couple of weeks probably to look at that and analyse it".

She acknowledged that "potentially businesses and others are not going to have this top of mind right now" but was concerned about "how to keep the whole pipeline going with all this uncertainty".

Many providers spoke openly about the impact on recruitment this month, with employers hit by the lockdown and focused on little else other than survival.

Grant Glendinning, principal at Carlisle College, said they had no starts in April, despite originally planning for 180, covering construction, engineering, motor vehicle mechanics, accounting, business administration and health and social care.

He told FE Week: "There is huge disruption to the apprenticeship 'supply chain' currently. Employers are in survival mode, and there is little capacity for them to focus on training over business continuity."

Lee Acton, chief executive at Skillnet Limited, planned 120 automotive starts in April but in



reality there were none "as in the main they would have no members of staff to mentor them as they are either furloughed or working flat out to deal with existing business".

Other providers continue to start apprentices, but far fewer than planned.

HIT Training, one of the largest training providers in the country, had 102 starts out of 700, representing just 15 per cent of the plan. Managing director, Jill Whittaker, said: "80 per cent of the hospitality sector is on furlough, and the care sector is either closed (early years) or extremely busy (healthcare and adult care)."

But not all providers have seen reductions. Jo Phillips, apprentice operations manager at Staffordshire University, said all 34 starts on police-related apprenticeships that had been planned did take place in April.

Responses to the survey suggested the ability to continue to start apprentices was highly dependent on the industry.

In the case of Capital City College Training, with 27 starts out of a planned 100, their managing director, Jackie Chapman, said they haven't recruited the planned starts in healthcare, construction and catering but they did go

ahead in project management, pharmacy and management.

The provider feedback also suggested that where starts are still taking place, they were typically from public sector organisations.

One respondent from a large apprenticeship provider with 200 out of a planned 400 starts in April said: "The impact is almost a clear split between public and private sector. The public sector has shown significant growth in comparison to normal months. Whereas, as a provider, we traditionally see 10 to 15 per cent of total starts being from the public sector, April has seen this jump to almost 60 per cent. Even this number in comparison to a 'standard' month is showing comfortable growth. This has been heavily driven by cohort level starts in central government departments."

Keegan was keen to point out earlier this week that it was important to make sure "everybody is aware that furloughed employees can start apprenticeships".

September is the "peak" month for recruitment, she said, so "we really need to stay close to this over the next few months to really do the best job we can".

# DfE backtracks on shock plans to scrap monthly appren stats

**BILLY CAMDEN**  
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The Department for Education has backtracked on a decision to scrap monthly apprenticeship data releases by now committing to “replace” and “repurpose” them.

In a controversial announcement on Tuesday, described by one sector leader as “staggering”, the department said it would “cancel all in-year further education and apprenticeship releases” from May until further notice due to the coronavirus pandemic. The DfE added that it would still publish the end-of-year releases normally in November.

The move would have meant that the sector would be temporarily prevented from regularly seeing the impact that the Covid-19 outbreak is having on recruitment numbers, which are expected to fall sharply.

But in their apprenticeship stats to include the month of February, published on Thursday, the DfE said it would now be “replacing the remaining in-year dates” to “enable us to provide release(s) with more relevant information to cover the period affected by the pandemic”.

The department “intends to make headline

statistics”, such as apprenticeship starts, available on a “regular basis, and to similar timescales to those currently, but we intend to repurpose our releases to focus on the most relevant information available”.

The stats publication explained that the current releases and measures “may now provide very little value and/or may be misleading, given how the pandemic will have impacted on both apprenticeship training and provider reporting from March”.

“While collections remain open, we have no way to quantify how robust any reporting by providers will be during the period affected by the pandemic,” it said.

“Where there are updates, they may well be small corrections to pre-lockdown periods. Therefore, given the expected large drop in starts from March, comparing a participation measure in, say, the third quarter of 2019-20 to this point in 2018-19 would offer no meaningful insight to activity in the third quarter.”

It continued: “While we expect to include some headline summary, we wish to repurpose our releases to focus

on the most useful and relevant measures and comparisons.

“We are therefore consulting users on this and seek your feedback on key data needs in terms of the regularity of data needed and also the type of breakdowns users would find most useful, for example, similar to those we currently publish, such national apprenticeship starts by age, level and individual framework/standard etc, so we can consider going forward and in light of continued data-quality assessments.”

The apparent U-turn will be welcomed by many in the sector, including Mark Dawe, the chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, who described the DfE’s original decision as “staggering”.

Labour’s new skills minister Toby Perkins said earlier this week that scrapping the monthly releases would be “alarming”.

Following the backtrack, he said: “I very much welcome DfE’s decision to reverse their previous edict about not publishing apprenticeship data.

“Hiding data that points to problems is no way to tackle them, and glad that government have realised that.”



Toby Perkins

# Pre-covid: Apprenticeship starts fell 11% in February

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Apprenticeship starts for the month of February 2020 fell 11 per cent on the previous year, figures published on Thursday show.

In that month, 22,400 learners started an apprenticeship, compared with 25,300 in 2019.

The data, published by the Department for Education, also showed that starts have plunged to 198,600 from 214,200 in the first two quarters of 2018-19, a decrease of 7.3 per cent.

The DfE goes on to say that of the 198,600 starts in the first half of this academic year, 64.9 per cent (128,900) were on the apprenticeship digital system and 74.3 per cent (147,600 starts) were on standards.

Reacting to the data, Gillian Keegan, minister for apprenticeships and skills, said: “The reforms introduced in 2017 mean

apprenticeships are longer, more rigorous, and quality assessed by independent organisations. This has resulted in a slight decline in the number of starts, but we will continue to prioritise quality over quantity.

“While the impact of the coronavirus is still becoming clear, we are supporting employers, apprentices and training providers during this challenging time so people can continue to access high-quality apprenticeship opportunities.”

Mark Dawe, chief executive of the Association

Apprenticeship starts (provisional)	Age	Feb-19	Feb-20	Feb shift	
Intermediate level (L2)	Under 19	2,600	2,300	-300	-12%
	19-24	2,700	2,300	-400	-15%
	25+	3,700	3,200	-500	-14%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>9,000</b>	<b>7,700</b>	<b>-1,300</b>	<b>-14%</b>
Advanced level (L3)	Under 19	1,600	1,500	-100	-6%
	19-24	3,400	3,200	-200	-6%
	25+	6,000	5,000	-1,000	-17%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>11,100</b>	<b>9,700</b>	<b>-1,400</b>	<b>-13%</b>
Higher level (L4 - L7)	Under 19	100	100	0	0%
	19-24	1,100	1,100	0	0%
	25+	4,100	3,800	-300	-7%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>5,300</b>	<b>5,000</b>	<b>-300</b>	<b>-6%</b>
All levels	Under 19	4,300	3,900	-400	-9%
	19-24	7,200	6,500	-700	-10%
	25+	13,800	12,000	-1,800	-13%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>25,300</b>	<b>22,400</b>	<b>-2,900</b>	<b>-11%</b>

Source: DfE Monthly Apprenticeship Statistics Data published in April 2019 and 2020  
Analysis by FE Week

of Employment and Learning Providers, said the figures shows that new apprenticeship starts are “falling off a cliff, and the more time the government vacillates over the Covid-19 guidance, the worse it’s going to get” (see page 6).

# Lawyers claim ESFA provider relief scheme 'unlawful' in letter to minister

**BILLY CAMDEN**  
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A high-profile QC has worked with solicitors to write to the apprenticeships minister, Gillian Keegan, arguing that the Education & Skills Funding Agency's provider relief scheme is "unlawful".

James Goudie QC, a senior silk at 11KBW, as well as a deputy High Court judge and a master of the bench of the Inner Temple, was instructed by the law firm VWV to help present the case in a letter on behalf of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers.

The letter from VWV, dated April 27 and shared with the media, comes after the ESFA excluded the majority of apprenticeship provision from the relief scheme launched last Friday on the basis it was not covered by the Cabinet Office's coronavirus policy notice PPN 02/20.

Keegan had told MPs that where apprentices are recorded on the government's digital system, the contractual relationship is between the employer and the provider, rather than the government.

The lawyers counter this argument, stating that "this is comprehensively wrong in at least three respects".

"First, the source of funding is simply irrelevant. Second, there is a contractual relationship for the provision of apprenticeship services. Third, there is more than one contractual relationship and it is important to focus on the right one."

Goudie goes on to explain that the "scope" of the Cabinet Office guidance states that it "covers goods, services and works contracts being delivered in the UK" – which all apprenticeship providers fall under.

"These are public service contracts, by way of duly procured framework agreements and all providers had to go through an application process with the ESFA to pass quality and financial thresholds to be admitted on to the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers," Goudie said.

"Our clients are calling for no more, and no



less, than the straightforward application to their situation of straightforward guidance."

His letter states that the AELP's case is that apprenticeships funded through the digital system have a "plain and obvious entitlement by way of legitimate expectation to supplier relief under the guidance" and it is "unclear on what the failure to pay is based".

The failure not to provide supplier relief, if persisted in, will be "unlawful", it continues.

"This is on each of two broad grounds. First, the failure is not in accordance with, but is contrary to, the guidance. Second, it is discriminatory."

It goes on to list a number of aspects of the DfE's decision that "display a multiplicity of legal errors" including that failure to comply with Cabinet Office guidance is an "abuse of power".

The letter concludes: "We understand that you are conducting a review. We trust that the threatened injustice will speedily be removed."

A DfE spokesperson confirmed they have received the letter from the AELP and "we will respond in due course".

There are 1,624 main and employer providers on the register of apprenticeship training providers currently, of which 593 have non-levy allocations this year, amounting to £690 million.

That means there are 1,031 providers that only have access to levy funding, and are therefore not eligible for the supplier relief. The DfE has also

confirmed that non-levy apprenticeships funded via an employer transfer or that have recently transitioned on to the government's digital system will not be eligible for supplier relief.

*FE Week* analysis shows that of the 198,632 apprenticeship starts in the first six months of 2019-20, around two-thirds of the provision would be ineligible for supplier relief.

The provider with the largest number of starts in that period was Lifetime Training. *FE Week* analysis shows that of their 10,000 recruits, more than 90 per cent were funded through the government's digital system and are therefore ineligible.

Lifetime's chief executive, Alex Khan, told this newspaper they will not be applying for the financial support as a result.

But Khan is not expecting the lack of additional help to have a big impact on his business, as it may do for others.

"Whilst the government furlough scheme is in place the main cost burden for Lifetime can be managed. However, it is worth noting that we do not have many training facilities or academies that we are exposed to funding whilst they are vacant," he said.

"This is not true, however, for large portions of the sector, where the financial exposure to such indirect costs will make things incredibly difficult."

# Highlights from our webinar with Gillian Keegan

**BILLY CAMDEN**

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*FE Week* was joined by apprenticeships minister Gillian Keegan on Monday for our latest webinar on the response to the coronavirus pandemic for the FE and skills sector. Here were the main takeaway points.

## 'Anomaly' leaving majority of apprenticeships ineligible for ESFA supplier relief

The majority of apprenticeship providers are not eligible for supplier relief from the Department for Education because of the Cabinet Office's "very specific" policy notice, Keegan said.

She described the support as an "anomaly", which is "over and above" what almost all other businesses are receiving across the country, and explained that her team worked closely with Treasury to see what parts of the FE sector could use the coronavirus supplier relief scheme.

When asked why apprenticeships funded through the DfE's digital system, mostly those with large levy-paying employers, are excluded, she said: "I will be honest, it did take us a little bit of time to come out with this. That was because the original purpose of that Cabinet Office notice was actually more for critical suppliers to government in terms of direct services to government, so people maybe operating prison services and all that kind of thing."

"So we had to work with Cabinet Office and Treasury to see if it related to this sector, and that is what resulted in that guidance on Friday. It really is only for those covered under that very specific Cabinet Office notice PPN 02/20.

"You need to look at this as quite specific, quite special under this Cabinet Office notice that has allowed a bit of extra support that goes to those where it has more of an impact, on small and medium-sized business apprenticeships and providers."

She stopped short on the webcast of expanding on the contractual issue, which many in the sector have queried and on which the Association of Employment and Learning Providers is seeking legal advice (see page 6).

## It was tougher for ESFA to launch supplier relief than MCAs

The minister said some in the sector were concerned the ESFA was "deliberately trying not to" launch supplier relief for providers after mayoral combined authorities announced theirs within days of Cabinet Office's guidance. "None of that's true," she claimed.

"We were trying to do as much as we possibly could, but it's more difficult sometimes for the department to do it.



Gillian Keegan

"You know we have to obviously get everything agreed through Treasury as well.

"We're dealing with an awful lot of stuff, quite frankly, so it does make it a little bit more challenging."

## Starts pipeline is the 'biggest worry'

Keegan said her "biggest worry" is the recruitment of new apprentices and how to keep the "whole pipeline going, with all this uncertainty" during the pandemic.

She claimed that the next "peak" for many apprenticeship starts is September, so "between now and then we really have to make sure that everybody is aware that furloughed and existing employees can start apprenticeships".

She added that it will be crucial to inform school leavers of apprenticeships as a potential next option.

## Minister 'shocked' at 'rubbish' apprenticeships in early stages of the levy

Keegan expressed concern at historic "low quality" apprenticeships delivery.

"I was quite shocked at some of the lower quality delivery that happened in the first stages of the levy being introduced, and I never want to go back to those days... I've met people on the doorstep who've actually said to me, this is a load of old rubbish. We have to make sure that every apprenticeship is quality."

When pressed on whether she believed there was

a correlation between low-paid and low-quality apprenticeships, she said: "No, not at all, low quality is low quality.

"Low quality and low pay are not necessarily together, but low quality is low quality."

## Traineeships on DfE radar

Keegan was joined by Peter Mucklow, the director of further education at the Education & Skills Funding Agency, during the webcast.

Asked about whether the government was working on plans to add flexibilities to traineeships during the current crisis, as they have done for apprenticeships, Mucklow said "nothing specific" has been drawn up yet, "but that's something we're very happy to take away".

"We will be looking at traineeships. It's really quite tricky as obviously the work experience placement is such an important part of the qualification," he added.

Keegan said there are "difficulties in delivering the work placement for traineeships, so they're looking at that right now".

## 'A big thank you from me to everyone in the sector'

Keegan said the FE sector has done a "remarkable job to keep the show on the road despite massive headwinds and all the challenges we have all had to deal with" and offered the following thank you message.

"Clearly the priority for the sector was to keep people studying, in particular, apprentices, still getting access to continue their studies as much as possible.

"It has been a challenge for many, but from what we have seen, many have stepped up to that challenge.

"Wherever I look there are just great examples of the sector going above and beyond to deliver brilliant experiences to apprentices to continue online learning and for all kinds of other training courses and full-time qualifications.

"New apprentices being signed up – we are continuing to see activity of that kind.

"I have been in business for 30 years before becoming an MP, and I completely understand the difficulty when your business model changes. You have very little time to react, you have got to change your delivery mechanism, change your staff in some circumstances and make difficult decisions about staff.

"The more that we can keep close, discussing things... We are here, we are listening and trying to do our best. But of course, this is across the whole economy, across many sectors, and it is something that none of us was expecting to do just a couple of months ago.

"A big thank you from me to everyone in the sector."

# Education secretary quizzed by MPs on coronavirus supplier relief

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The education secretary this week dodged an MP's question about his department's delay in launching supplier relief support for training providers.

On March 20, the Cabinet Office published a policy notice that allowed payment in advance of delivery on publicly funded contracts up to June 30, owing to the coronavirus pandemic.

Mayoral combined authorities were quick off the mark in letting their training providers know how they would comply with the notice, but it took the Department for Education more than a month (until April 24) to launch applications for support.

During an education select committee hearing on Wednesday, primarily focused on vulnerable children, the first question on FE was from Ian Mearns MP, who asked education secretary Gavin Williamson: "Why didn't the DfE immediately comply with the Cabinet Office guidance and announce support for those providers with an ESFA contract? Why wasn't this support package automatically done?"

Williamson offered a blunt response: "We always comply with Cabinet Office guidance and we always will do."

Mearns pressed back that the "implication" is that the DfE "hasn't done so on this occasion, so I would ask you to look at that, please".

On Monday, skills minister Gillian Keegan joined an FE Week webcast to answer questions on the same topic and described the difficulty in figuring out with the Treasury which parts of the FE sector could benefit from the support (see page 7).

Williamson went on in this week's select committee hearing to state that apprenticeships will play a "really important part" of the country's economic recovery from coronavirus.

He said his department has taken a "whole number of actions in terms of increasing the flexibilities so people can continue their apprenticeships". He quoted the Association of Employment and Learning Providers' survey that found over 81 per cent of apprentices are "continuing [training] as we speak".

"What we have been looking through the ESFA is how we support some of those apprenticeship providers who aren't able to continue to deliver apprenticeships, either through online learning or being able to access those apprentices in those critical areas where we are needing to preserve that high quality, how we can put a package there to support those providers and making sure we have a sustainable future in apprenticeships," he added.

Williamson was also questioned on why the DfE



Gavin Williamson

was ploughing ahead with the launch of T-levels in September, despite the disruption caused by the Covid-19 outbreak. To this, he replied that the new qualifications are "one of the most important tasks that this government has... I want to see that happen, I want to make that happen."

Williamson also touched on the Augar review and said the DfE's response to it has been pushed back with the spending review.

And on the upcoming white paper and FE Bill, the education secretary said it has the possibility of being "revolutionary" for the sector and is currently being worked on by a task force led by the DfE's new director of post-16 strategy, Keith Smith.

# Ofsted staff 'considerably under occupied' admits chief inspector

**BILLY CAMDEN**  
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A "considerable number" of Ofsted's 1,700 staff are under-occupied, despite offering themselves up as Covid-19 response volunteers, the chief inspector has admitted.

Amanda Spielman told the education select committee this week that nearly all of the watchdog's workers have "expressed willingness" to help with "suitable alternative options" that fit with their skillset.

But while they are "absolutely open and responsive to all initiatives", the "general reaction" from schools and education providers at the moment is that there is "not a perceived need for additional capacity" as less than one per cent of students are currently attending.

She then said: "We have a considerable number of people who are less than fully occupied at the moment and we are absolutely open to volunteering."

Spielman did not provide figures for how many of her staff are

currently not in work. Ofsted chief operating officer Matthew Coffey said that a total of 56 staff have reported Covid-19 symptoms to date, but all but five of them were back to work as of Friday.

Ofsted's rolling blog for their response to coronavirus states that more than 50 councils have asked for the watchdog's help with tasks such as mapping and supporting vulnerable children, developing safeguarding processes and communicating with education leaders.

It also says they have agreed for "suitably qualified" colleagues to work in children's homes, and others to staff advice lines for parents and schools.

And a number of the watchdog's people are being redeployed to other government departments to support the wider civil service response.

Spielman stressed that the watchdog's "default assumption" is that "everybody who is not required for the business-as-usual work, or for redeployment to other government departments, is available for wider work".

She said a "number of pieces of work have already been lined up" but stopped short of naming them, apart from a recruitment project with the Gold Group. Ofsted told FE Week a project team of 16 staff is working to create a "new flow of candidates into the care workforce, particularly home and domiciliary care, across the London boroughs, by mobilising the Proud to Care London recruitment portal".

The watchdog's staff are "contacting those who have applied through the portal to help establish their suitability and get them trained, speeding up the usual recruitment process and getting people into vital care roles across London in a matter of days".

Earlier in the accountability session, the chief inspector confirmed that there were no "definite" plans to restart routine inspections, adding that this decision would be largely based on when schools and colleges return to normal operation.

But she made clear they are "not expecting to be asked to resume full routine inspections before the end of the summer term".

The Association of Colleges has previously called for inspections to be delayed until 2021.



Amanda Spielman

# MPs in fight to save land-based college

FRASER WHIELDON

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A cross-party group of MPs is fighting to save a land-based college they fear could be closed following the launch of an FE Commissioner review of its provision.

Conservative MP Neil Hudson, who represents Penrith and the Border in Cumbria, has been joined by other local members of parliament, including former Liberal Democrat leader Tim Farron and former education select committee member Trudy Harrison in an attempt to preserve Newton Rigg College.

FE Commissioner Richard Atkins has been ordered to review the provider by its parent college.

Askham Bryan College, based 100 miles away in York, took over the running of Newton Rigg from the University of Cumbria in 2011.

While Askham Bryan has remained tight-lipped on the reasons behind the review, Hudson told *FE Week* it is “looking at how the needs of the students can be supported and what provision is required locally and what alternative options are required for delivery”.

## “The governing body will consider the findings and decide what further action is needed”

The worry for the community and himself is “what does this mean for the long-term future of the college?”. His understanding was that the review would look at whether its provision could be run elsewhere.

Because of that, he decided to launch a campaign to secure that future and seek support from like-minded stakeholders to discuss “viable future plans for the college”, which they can present to Atkins and the Department for Education.

Hudson is currently running a petition for people to show their support for Newton Rigg College, which he said has been signed by over 900 people at the time of writing.

He said the college, which is over a century old, had a “tremendous” heritage and is “unique” in the county for specialising in land-based sectors.



Neil Hudson

Newton Rigg offers apprenticeships between levels 2 and 4, as well as a number of short courses, in a range of land-based disciplines, including agriculture, arboriculture and animal and vet nursing.

Just eight months ago, plans were being drawn up for a new state-of-the-art “high tech” centre for the college, after a £2.4 million dairy unit was opened there in 2014, followed by a £450,000 sheep husbandry centre in 2017.

Hudson said the Covid-19 crisis had put into “sharp relief the importance of training people up to go into the land-based economy” as the pandemic highlighted the importance of both food security and “good supplies of locally provided food”.

The FE Commissioner was invited to carry out the review in December, according to the Department for Education, and when it is finished, the findings will be given to the college, who will have discretion on when to publish it.

Askham Bryan principal Tim Whitaker said it was “an independent review of educational provision”, anticipated to conclude in May.

“The governing body will consider the findings and decide what further action is needed,” he said, adding: “All courses at Newton Rigg campus are continuing as planned for this academic year, 2019-20”.

The college declined to comment on why it had commissioned the review.

Were Newton Rigg to close, the nearest FE college would be Carlisle College – which is over an hour away on public transport.

Hudson's petition can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/yaxbyl2j>

He is not the first MP to stand up publicly in recent months for under-threat local campuses.

In February, Conservative MP for Rother Valley, Alexander Stafford, organised a meeting with Atkins over plans by the RNN Group to shut its “under-utilised” campus in Dinnington, South Yorkshire.

After Cornwall College Group announced plans at the start of the year to sell off its Saltash campus in her constituency, Conservative MP Sheryll Murray called for an investigation into how the group used a £30 million government bailout the year before.

And former Conservative MP and minister Margot James held a debate in parliament last October to raise her concerns with minister Michelle Donelan over the sale by BMet of Stourbridge College, in her constituency.

Meanwhile, Labour MP Mike Amesbury has called on Warrington & Vale Royal College principal Nichola Newton to stand down over plans to sell off the college's Hartford campus, telling *FE Week* last month that a “more concerted effort” should have been made by the college to develop “a good FE offer” at the campus.

# Construction is still under way – but with new rules and procedures

FRASER WHELDON  
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Exclusive

While the government has promised £1.5 billion of new cash to colleges over this parliament to create “cutting-edge facilities”, a number of multi-million-pound building projects are already under way.

Construction was being pushed ahead for Institutes of Technology and T-level facilities ahead of their rollout in September, but the coronavirus pandemic has stopped some in their tracks and put question marks over their completion dates.

In recent days the government has said work on construction sites can continue as long as it is done safely, so a number of providers have introduced safety protocols and got straight back to work.

FE Week spoke with a number of affected colleges to find out how they have adapted to delivering the projects during this crisis.



## Capital projects to launch T-levels in September

Almost £40 million has been made available in capital funding for providers delivering T-levels from this September to use for building new classrooms and refurbishing buildings.

Derby College Group received £1.2 million as it was delivering T-levels in the construction, digital and education and childcare, which it has spent on a virtual reality laboratory, new digital laboratories and a space for construction students.

After skills minister Gillian Keegan told providers in April the T-level roll-out would go ahead as planned in September, DCG decided to progress the works as the time was “opportune”, due to minimal occupancy levels by staff and students on-site.

Vice principal Kate Martin said although lockdown presented the estates team with “some challenges in progressing the work, we are confident that these will be ready for the first T-level learners in September”.

The college said construction workers are encouraged to wear gloves and masks, and hand-washing facilities and sanitisers are being provided. An independent health and safety consultancy is checking whether social distancing guidelines are being adhered to.

The college is also putting in place measures so that a minimum amount of

personnel are on site at any one time – including through the use of staggered start and finish times.

Shipleigh College was awarded £120,000 from the T-level capital fund last July to help deliver qualifications in digital and education and childcare.

Principal Nav Chohan said his college is “still on target to deliver all capital works and the new curriculum for September”, but would “continue to monitor progress in the light of any future Covid-related restrictions”.

Although “the planned works are not major”, he said the current lockdown restrictions would need to be lifted to some degree so work can continue.

Havant & South Downs College in Hampshire, which won £495,000 in July, has said work is due to start in June on refurbishing three spaces for T-levels in education, construction and digital. A spokesperson told FE Week: “Our focus for T-level delivery from September 2020 remains.”

With regard to social distancing measures to be followed on site, she said: “We are content that the necessary steps will be taken to comply with government guidelines.”



The Roundhouse at Derby College, which will be getting enhanced facilities for its T-level

News

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### Building the Institutes of Technology

Nine colleges and three universities were announced as the winners of a £170 million pot of capital funding to develop Institutes of Technology by the government in April 2019.

But construction work for Dudley College, which led a successful £30 million bid to build facilities in advanced manufacturing, modern construction methodologies and medical engineering, grounded to a halt following the Covid-19 outbreak.

It has since put in social distancing measures, but the project is now five weeks behind.

The measures meant that toilets, the canteen and site offices were scaled up to multiple cabins so workers could be the minimum two metres apart.

A spokesperson said contractors are "confident" some time will be made up so the institute can open as planned in September 2021.

Exeter College, which was part of a consortium led by the University of Exeter and received £15 million for an Institute of Technology, is building a new digital and data centre on site that is set to be completed early next year.

Robert Woolcock, operations director at Exeter's building contractor Willmott Dixon, said personal protective equipment (PPE) was in adequate supply at the site and, after initial difficulties in getting hold of stocks, hand sanitiser and cleaning products were being

distributed.

And because the college is closed: "We have been able to open up additional canteen and welfare facilities for the site workforce to use which has ensured that social distancing can be observed in break times as well as during construction."

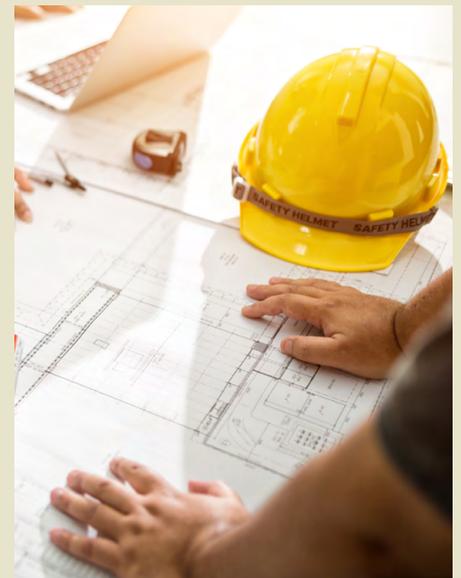
HCUC in London is part of a group building an £8.6 million Institute of Technology, based on Uxbridge College's campus and focused on subjects such as computing, games design and animation, electrical engineering, mechanical engineering and building services and construction.

The college said all construction work had continued through the pandemic with a reduced workforce, and the institute will be ready to accommodate new learners from October.

Solihull College and University Centre said its advanced manufacturing and engineering Institute of Technology opened to its first students last September, but it then carried out capital investment projects on campus, with a completion date set for this September.

The college said it is "ensuring building work is completed in a way which adheres to social distancing and associated safety advice".

But where this is not possible, the spokesperson said, construction work has been paused.



Conceptual images for Dudley College's Institute of Technology

### Mayoral combined authority and local enterprise partnership projects

A number of college building projects, paid for out of mayoral combined authorities' and local enterprise partnerships' capital funds, have also been in the works for a number of years.

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority, which has handed out over £75 million through its Skills Capital programme since 2017, has confirmed that all the sites it helped finance are continuing with construction, and that social distancing guidelines are being adhered to.

A spokesperson said it does not yet know how its projects will be impacted by coronavirus, but "there will likely be some impact in the long term".

Halesowen College, in the West Midlands, is

spending £8.4 million to reshape its main campus to create an essential skills and business, construction management and digital centre, along with a student hub.

However, construction work on the project, which is being part-funded by the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership, stopped for a week when the lockdown was announced, and only resumed once the government made it clear such work could continue.

Following this, workers had to sign to say they have read and understood the government's guidelines on safe operating procedures and new Covid-19 risk assessments.

Everyone working on site has been issued with PPE and the number of people on site is kept to a minimum, with people like architects and surveyors working digitally through the use of live streams and video conferencing.

Regular safety briefings are held for everyone working on site, and they are all aware that if they or a member of their household display symptoms, they should not come to site, a spokesperson for the college said.

She said this "fastidious approach" to safety on site means the project is still on track to meet its original deadline of December 2020.

# Plans to scrap MBA apprenticeship delayed

**BILLY CAMDEN**  
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Government plans to axe the controversial MBA qualification from the level 7 senior leader apprenticeship have been put on hold.

The Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education (IfATE) has revealed that the move will not happen until at least November 2020, and possibly even in 2021.

It was set for the chop after education secretary Gavin Williamson requested a review of the popular programme, worth up to £18,000 per apprentice, as he was “unconvinced” that it provides value for money.

A revised level 7 senior leader standard that excludes the MBA was drawn up by its trailblazer group earlier this month and has been consulted on.

But in a blog post this week, the IfATE’s senior relationships manager for standards development, Sally Timmins, said that due

to Covid-19, they have agreed an “update to the envisaged development timeline to project when the revised apprenticeship standard could be approved for delivery if it got through the institute’s approval process without any problems”.

“We have agreed separate submission dates for the standard and the end-point assessment plan/costings, which now means a final approval date of end November/early December,” she added.

“Consideration will also need to be given as to whether a notice period needs to be provided between its approval and final implementation.”

As previously reported, the IfATE ordered the trailblazer group of the level 7 senior leader apprenticeship to remove the MBA from the programme as it would no longer “meet the intent of our policy on mandated qualifications”.

However, the institute has since confirmed to FE Week that providers would still be allowed to offer the MBA as a non-mandatory qualification, though costs for qualification registration,

certification and any training not directly related to the standard would not be fundable from the levy.

An employer could choose to pay these costs out of their own pocket to enable their apprentice to acquire the qualification in addition to passing the apprenticeship via the end-point assessment.

FE Week has spoken to a number of universities that have said they intend to continue offering the MBA in the apprenticeship after it is scrapped as a mandatory qualification.

The IfATE previously told FE Week that as the changes to the occupational standard and end-point assessment plan are likely to be significant, they expect to change the funding band, which currently sits at £18,000.

The level 7 senior leader apprenticeship has proven extremely popular since its launch in February 2018. FE Week analysis shows it had 6,387 starts on the programme up to the first quarter of 2019-20, worth up to £115 million.

# Providers face 'positive action' for missing minimum standards

**BILLY CAMDEN**  
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## From front

Providers that failed to meet the minimum standard for apprenticeship achievement rates last year will be informed next week of the government’s “positive action to challenge this situation”.

With a minimum standard threshold of 62 per cent for apprenticeships, the move is expected to impact on several hundred providers after the sector average rate fell 2.2 percentage points to just 64.7 per cent.

Action for failing to meet the minimum standard can be as severe as contract termination, according to the Education & Skills Funding Agency’s “oversight of independent training providers” operational guidance.

The ESFA said in an update this week that they have now “reviewed” providers’ data published in the national achievement rates tables (NARTs) for 2018-19.

Where a provider did not meet the minimum standard achievement for “all-age apprenticeship provision”, the agency “will be

writing to all providers from next week on our proposed action”.

The moves to tackle poor quality apprenticeships comes as the education watchdog Ofsted has paused all of its inspections.

Providers have to have more than 40 per cent of their cohort on frameworks and standards above the 62 per cent to achieve the minimum standard.

This means that even if a provider’s overall achievement rate was above 62 per cent, they could still fail the minimum standard.

The published NARTs list the overall apprenticeship achievement rates for providers with cohorts of at least 30, and shows 215 out of 737 (29 per cent) with an achievement rate below 62 per cent, failing the threshold but not necessarily failing the minimum standard.

The ESFA’s minimum standards policy document reminds providers that “poor or declining education performance data can lead to escalating intervention action and we will act early in the best interests of students, apprentices and the public purse”.

It adds that where the underperforming provision “exceeds the tolerance level but the cohort is small and it is predominantly

new or immature provision that is below the minimum standards threshold, we will take this into account when deciding whether to take intervention action or what intervention action to take”.

The agency’s operational guidance warns that where independent training providers fail on minimum standards, they can “expect to have their contracts terminated early, subject to protecting the interests of learners”.

It adds, however, that “where we have evidence that learners’ interests would be best served by maintaining the contract, we will only do so under strict conditions, with rigorous monitoring, and we will seek to terminate the contract immediately if the provider fails to improve”.

In an FE Week webcast on Monday, skills minister Gillian Keegan expressed concern at historic “low quality” apprenticeships delivery.

She said: “I was quite shocked at some of the lower quality delivery that happened in the first stages of the levy being introduced and I never want to go back to those days... I’ve met people on the doorstep who’ve actually said to me this is a load of old rubbish. We have to make sure that every apprenticeship is quality.”

News

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East Sussex campus adapted to help 85 chemo patients a day

BILLY CAMDEN BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

A college in Eastbourne has allowed its local hospital to relocate its chemotherapy unit to its campus to ensure cancer patients can be treated in a safe setting during the coronavirus pandemic.

East Sussex College's Kings Building has been transformed to support the East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust and is currently used to treat, on average, 85 patients per day.

A spokesperson for the trust said the purpose of the move was to "protect the most vulnerable from entering the acute hospital" and to provide "additional bed capacity within the hospitals, should we have seen the Covid surge that we were expecting".

The trust's healthcare team had to make a number of adjustments to the college's building, which is usually used for beauty courses, such as reviewing health and safety, fire safety, deep-cleaning and security.

Becky Cavalier, head of nursing at the trust, said they are "extremely grateful to East Sussex College".

"Everyone involved in organising this temporary relocation has been fantastic and pulled out all the stops to make it happen," she added. "We were



From left: Caroline, Jenny, Maria, Emma, Seena, Tracy, Lorraine from the East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust chemotherapy team in East Sussex College

treating patients within a week of our first initial conversation with the college."

And this is not all East Sussex College is doing to help the NHS during the current crisis.

Julian Kupper, an engineering tutor who teaches at the Ore Valley campus in Hastings, has been using his 3D printer at home to produce hundreds of protective face shields for local healthcare staff, alongside teaching his students online.

The first batch of 150 visors were delivered to Eastbourne District General Hospital on April 6.

Kupper said: "About four weeks ago it became evident to me that there would be an increasing and dire need for PPE and specialist medical

equipment. I spent two days looking at what others were doing in different countries to tackle this issue and found a design for masks that I could produce using my 3D printer."

He found a suitable design that met EU specification and began printing at his home at the end of March.

"I arranged for two of the college-owned printers to be delivered to my house and have spent time producing the visors and communicating with the local NHS trust and the exec team at the college."

Kupper said he is determined to continue with the production of the masks until the demand begins to drop.

Hospice 'astounded' at funds raised by Darlington College staff

FRASER WHIELDON FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

More than 30 Darlington College workers have run the equivalent of four marathons in their daily hours of exercise since April 14 to raise funds for their local hospice to battle Covid-19.

The college's marketing and engagement manager Claire Turner said she was "thrilled and quite emotional" when so many staff signed up for the event.

"We asked them to chronicle their runs and it has been fascinating to see where our colleagues have been running and how they are getting on. We are looking forward to how much the event will finally raise."

Staff raced to raise the funds, almost £700 so far, after hearing that locally based St Teresa's Hospice had to cancel or postpone a number of fundraisers due to coronavirus.

The hospice needs to raise £3 million a year

to provide free care for people with life-limiting illnesses and their families.

Even though it can get extra support from government, the hospice is still facing a deficit on that £3 million target.

Although each staff member was asked to do a mile of the marathon, some chose to run the full 26 miles themselves.

St Teresa's chief executive Jane Bradshaw said the speed with which the college organised the fundraiser was "astounding".

"We are so grateful for their continued support and can't thank the staff enough because it is help like this that allows us to continue our work



Darlington College Assistant Principal Mike Chapman with his son Hendrix as they prepare to join a virtual marathon in aid of St Teresa's Hospice

at this very difficult time."

Darlington College has also donated personal protective equipment to the hospice.

Anyone who wishes to donate should visit the college's Co-Run A Marathon page on JustGiving <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/co-run-a-marathon>.

Introducing...

# CHRISTINE RICKETTS

Principal, Brooklands College



**'We've got all this noise going on with finances, but the students come first'**

**JESS STAUFENBERG**  
**@STAUFENBERGJ**

**Propelled rapidly upwards when her predecessor left, Christine Ricketts has been a steady hand on the wheel following troubled times at Brooklands College, in Surrey.**

She had long aspired to be a deputy principal when Christine Ricketts spotted the advert for the

role at Brooklands College, on the far outskirts of south-west London.

She went for it, and just four years later, she's the principal, stepping into the top job after the college became embroiled in one of the biggest scandals in further education in recent years. The former principal left sharpish in March last year, and Ricketts was propelled rapidly upwards

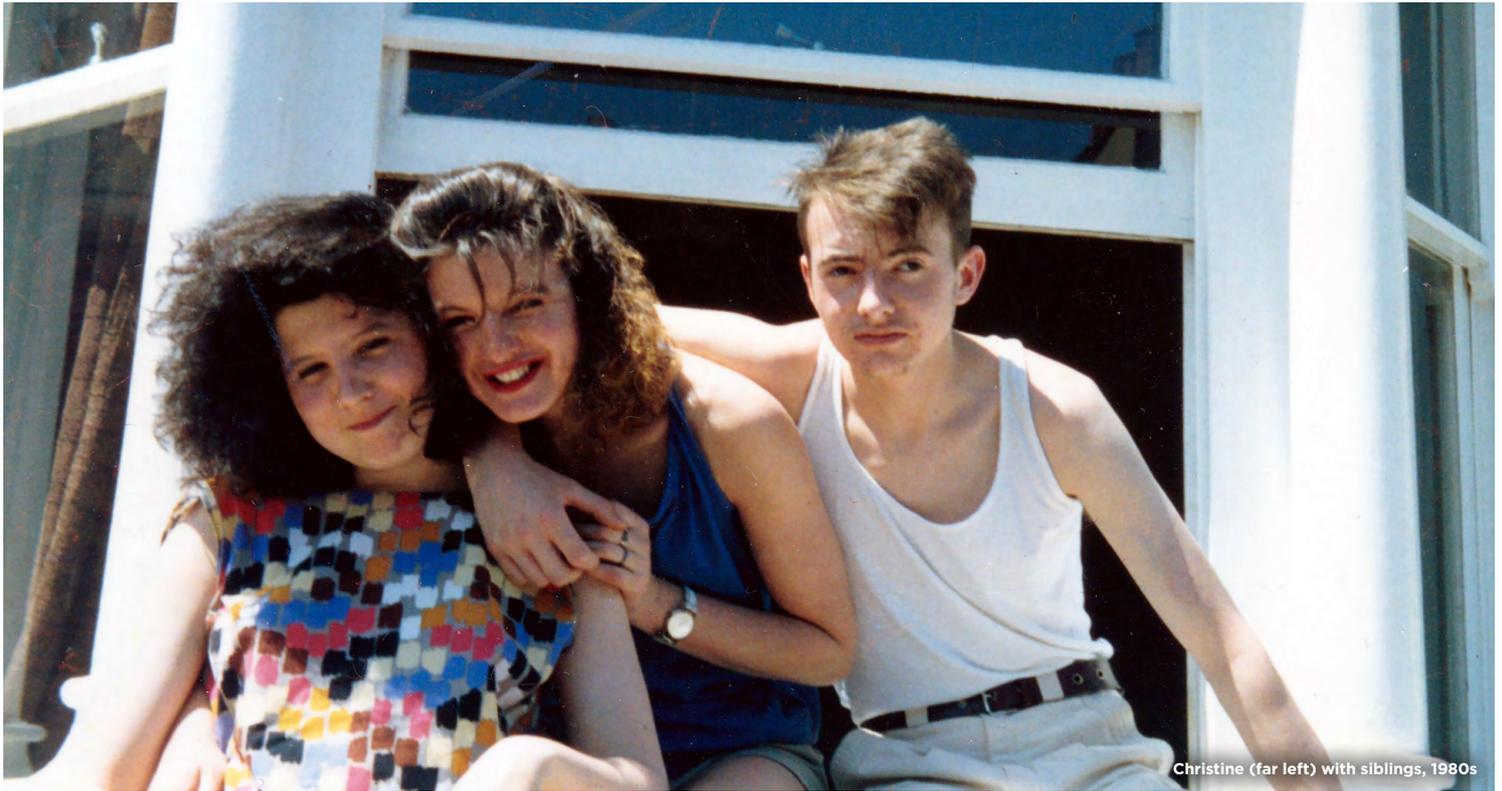
Tasked with steering Brooklands out of FE commissioner intervention, and on an income that's dropped significantly since she arrived, it's

what some might call a brutal introduction to the top job. But Ricketts strikes you as one of the least self-pitying, most resilient people around.

"No, I didn't expect to be principal this quickly!" she laughs. Her resilience may be rooted in an unusually deep level of commitment to the college – Brooklands was where Ricketts first trained as a teacher at the age of 23. Not only that, but she stayed for an extraordinary 16 years before moving on to jobs in other colleges. In a way, Ricketts is Brooklands' home-grown

Profile

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Christine (far left) with siblings, 1980s

talent returned to rescue the family reputation. "I suppose there is an emotional attachment for me at Brooklands," she says with characteristic briskness.

Rescuing the college was never the plan, though. In fact, Ricketts had left Brooklands in 2011 after it hit financial difficulties a few years earlier and restructures came in. When she saw the deputy principal position five years later, all looked well again. "The college was back on track, it had a 'good' Ofsted," she explains. "The college was in a really positive place."

It didn't last long: in 2018 FE Week revealed the college was subcontracting out a huge proportion of its apprenticeship provision to a mysterious provider that seemed unable to explain where its training centres were. The government soon demanded the college pay back £20 million.

It was a "stressful time", admits Ricketts. But she comes out with heartfelt praise for the FE commissioner Richard Atkins's team. "Rather than a negative, I've found the support of the commissioner's team absolutely vital. They were really supportive. Although at first it felt as though we were being 'done to', as we moved through it, trust and confidence built as they could see we were trying to take the college in

the right direction."

With all apprenticeship provision now coming inhouse, the college's income has taken a real hit. Yet she and her team secured a 'good' Ofsted report just before Christmas. "Leaders have worked very hard and successfully to improve the quality of education in the last 18 months,"

### "I really got the hunger for working strategically"

says the report. It's a significant achievement, and you can imagine that as the scandal unfolded, someone with Ricketts' no-nonsense, roll-up-your-sleeves attitude was a point of calm amid the storm. "Yes, we've got all this noise going on with finances, but we're here for the students and they come first. We have to make sure they aren't impacted."

It seems testament to Ricketts' willingness to frankly analyse and troubleshoot that she was

entrusted to lead the college after the scandal. My only question is why Ricketts, as deputy principal, was kept entirely out of decisions about the apprenticeship subcontracting, which she says was handled by her former boss. "In terms of the way it was structured, apprenticeships were set up as a separate unit." She has now changed the set-up so that apprenticeship provision will be increasingly delivered from within the college, with curriculum directors given direct responsibility for them at last. "That is the way apprenticeship provision works best, I think."

Born in Essex to Geordie parents, as she puts it, Ricketts' mother was a primary school teacher and her father a graphic designer. Rural life was "idyllic" and she says she was "very happy at school - keen and hard-working". Her sister studied fashion while she did a foundational art diploma before studying fine art in Dundee, and both are now teachers (they also have a brother). "So in a way, we've both taken a bit from each of my parents. Our house was a very creative environment growing up, my father was always drawing." Ricketts says she "lost herself a bit" during her A-levels and would have done better doing BTECs, meaning she "often thinks about young people and the opportunities they have

# Profile

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open to them and their sense of direction”.

It was her brother – a “bit of a rebel” – re-sitting his GCSEs at Brooklands College who told her they were looking for an art teacher. She trained on the job and came under the wing of a senior member of staff who, in another full-circle story, is now one of her governors. “She encouraged me and made me aware of an opportunity to work cross-college rather than in art and design. And that’s when I really got the hunger for working strategically. That’s when I started to think I wanted to be a deputy principal.”

Being principal didn’t appeal so much because Ricketts thought it would take her too far from her main interest: the students. However, she was also deeply career-focused. “Every two or three years, I managed to go up into a more senior position. If I hadn’t had that I would definitely have left. I was always ambitious, always thinking what skills I could learn while doing a role to help me move on to the next.”

Ricketts has an unrelenting ability to turn potentially tumultuous events into a major positive in her life. “When I left university, I was pregnant. I think that was a real driver for me in that I was determined to still have the career I wanted. Me and my husband are quite proud

of how we managed that time and came through it. It enriched my drive.”

Soon she was head of faculty for foundation studies, covering adult, special educational needs and lower-level provision up to level 2. After the college ran into financial difficulties (not for the last time) Ricketts moved on for the first time in her career, to Richmond College, where she stayed for two years. Her next few jobs taught her a lot about staff management. “The culture there was more unionised and it still is. It was about learning the role and meeting the challenges.”

She and her husband had a holiday home on the Kent coast, so Ricketts took a job as assistant principal at East Kent College for two years. “I didn’t feel I was where I wanted to be in terms of my career. I felt my confidence was growing.” Frustrated and in the face of another re-structure, this time Ricketts headed over to Lambeth College, where she worked with the English and maths staff teams as a “kind of troubleshooter” for five months. “I absolutely loved that job. I learnt so much. I was going back to working closely with a team. I learnt how important the dynamics in a



Christine Ricketts in the Art & Design department, 2019

team are.”

Ever since, Ricketts says she has thought carefully about how leadership decisions might affect staff. “I got a sense of understanding why they were frustrated with systems and processes, and I would go back to the vice principal and say, ‘they’re not just being difficult, they physically don’t have the time or resources’. Now as a senior leader, I always go back to that time. I think, ‘if we do that, I just need to check the impact of that.’”

Then she spotted the deputy principal job at Brooklands. “I thought, ooh, I’ve always wanted that post! If it’s meant to be, I’ll get it.” It brought her full circle after a great journey around the colleges of the south that had lasted only five years – a crash-course in roles that taught her how other college environments worked, none of which held her for very long. Now it looks like she’s here to stay.

“I’m often heard talking about a ‘sustainable college,’” she says. “Whether as a merged institution or stand-alone, it’s about making sure there’s a college here.”

Having trained within its walls, Ricketts is probably more invested in Brooklands than most. “I’m resilient. I think that’s one word that’s in my DNA.”

It looks like she’s already imparting some of that back into the college.



Christine (far left) with siblings, 1970s



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# READER'S REPLY

## Target-driven anything is never a fair way of measuring quality

If 62 per cent is acceptable, then, by definition, 61.9 per cent is not. This takes no account of the quality of the apprentices, their commitment to (for them) a long learning programme, the quality of the EPA delivery, the type of industry they are employed in, historic staff turnover, the economic record of the employer.

I'm not clever enough to think of an answer, but what's wrong with success stories of learners' development and career enhancement? Surely, the whole premise of an apprenticeship is to deliver improved skills to the learner and the employer.

However, Covid-19 will seriously scupper the whole system, so let's see what the bright new dawn brings.

Philip, website

Hopefully this challenge will be (to quote the ESFA Update) "positive action", working \*with\* new providers to improve quality, rather than anything more kneejerk (and I know account managers have been working on this with providers since the initial pre-publication data was available).

Steve Hewitt, Twitter

## Hundreds of Sheffield College support staff win pay rise

Fabulous. Now let's get this nationally for all FE colleges

Maxi Jenny, Twitter

## Talks under way to extend apprenticeship frameworks cut-off date

As suggested, extending the frameworks deadline is a sensible measure. However, there is no point in doing this unless the new small-to-medium enterprise Digital Apprenticeship Service rules are changed to allow frameworks to be funded or increases in non-levy contract starts introduced.

Most non-levy contract holders received limited new starts on their contract extensions for the current year, and these are likely

## REPLY OF THE WEEK

### ESFA will individually 'challenge' hundreds of apprenticeship providers after poor achievement rates

Providers must get very confused by all this. On the one hand, the ESFA is saying that achievement rates are everything and bashing providers over the head, and on the other hand, Ofsted is regularly handing out grade twos to some of the same providers, insisting that achievement rates don't carry much of a weighting and it is the development of new knowledge, skills and behaviours that matters most. Consistency of message is required and I feel very sorry for providers who are dragged from pillar to post.

Richard Moore, website

to be already committed. This means there is unlikely to be any existing funding available to fund any extension of frameworks if it is approved without these measures included.

Just Saying, website

## Monthly apprenticeships update: February starts fall 11 per cent

IMHO if we had the business administration level 2 standard, I am sure the figures would have looked a lot better, for all age groups.

Clare Parker-Doyle, website

## 'Staggering': DfE to stop the monthly publication of apprenticeship starts

Transparency of information is really important and at times like this, even more so!

Susan Plant, Twitter

## Plans to scrap MBA apprenticeship delayed until possibly 2021

This is no time to waste tens of millions of pounds putting senior executives through a training course when young people and other new recruits are watching their career prospects go up in smoke.

Tom Richmond, Twitter

# 20,000+ LEARNERS WAITING FOR FUNDING

Learning Curve Group have over 20,000 learners waiting for funding to study an online qualification whilst in isolation.

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For more information, contact: [tom.aust@learningcurvegroup.co.uk](mailto:tom.aust@learningcurvegroup.co.uk)

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**Vice Principal - James Watt College**  
£80,000

BMet is extremely ambitious for the future of its learners and its colleges. It has a strong desire to deliver to regional and national agendas in Further Education and skills development, build new professional partnerships and deliver outstanding learning opportunities.

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Our New Vice Principal for James Watt College will have a proven track record of leading on a complex and diverse curriculum as well as delivering continuous improvement in teaching, learning and assessment.

Morgan Hunt has been appointed to support the College with this crucial appointment. Interested parties are recommended to have an initial conversation with Reece Turner ahead of the advertised closing date. To arrange a convenient time, please email [reece.turner@morganhunt.com](mailto:reece.turner@morganhunt.com)



**Head of Quality Improvement**

£46,293 to £49,203 per annum | Start September 2020

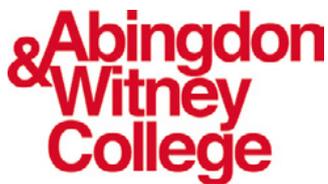
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A degree or professional qualification and a recognised teaching qualification at level 5 are essential.

For further details about this vacancy, please visit our website [www.waes.ac.uk/vacancies](http://www.waes.ac.uk/vacancies)



**Senior Management Team positions**

**We are a highly successful, inclusive and ambitious general college of further education and proud winners of multiple national and local awards for our work. Following the appointment of the current Deputy to Principal, applications are sought for the following opportunities within our Senior Management Team:**

**Vice Principal (Funding, Planning and Systems Improvement)**  
£73,980 per annum

A new role, and a very exciting opportunity for the right candidate to transform the college-wide data and information agenda in the interests of students, staff well-being and business performance.

**Assistant Principal (Apprenticeships and Employer Engagement)**  
£65,000 per annum

Could you provide strategic leadership for our Ofsted-graded "Outstanding" apprenticeship provision through the next stage of its development, and drive forward an innovative cross-college employer engagement strategy? Then this could be the right opportunity for you!

We are also looking for two exceptional candidates to join us as Heads of Faculty:

**Head of Apprenticeships**  
£51,144 - £56,442 per annum

To lead our Ofsted-graded 'Outstanding' apprenticeship team.

**Head of Technology**  
£51,144 - £56,442 per annum

To lead our Technology Faculty, incorporating FE and HE provision in Engineering, Motor Vehicle, IT and Science.

**Our wider mission is to change the lives of our students and our community. If you would like to be a part of that, we'd love to hear from you. If you are interested in applying for any of these opportunities, please email [humanresources@abingdon-witney.ac.uk](mailto:humanresources@abingdon-witney.ac.uk) for full details in order to apply.**

# EDU WEEK JOBS

## Coronavirus Cover Roles

Education organisations are seeking to fill the following emergency cover roles:



EM Skills CIC	SEN Teacher	Colchester
EM Skills CIC	Volunteer Online Teachers - English, Maths and Science	Home Based
The Open University	Functional Skills Tutor-Assessor (Online)	London
The Open University	Functional Skills Tutor-Assessor (Online)	West Midlands
The Open University	Functional Skills Tutor-Assessor (Online)	South Coast
The Open University	Functional Skills Tutor-Assessor (Online)	North East
The Open University	Functional Skills Tutor-Assessor (Online)	South Yorkshire and Derbyshire
Finchale Group	Teacher/Lecturer	Durham

**For more information and to apply, please click here**

We are offering free advertising for emergency cover roles at education organisations that are staying open to support key workers. To advertise a role, please click here

**Advertise**

# MICHELLE BRABNER

Principal,  
Southport College



## Why it's good to get out of your comfort zone and create 'the new normal'

### Michelle Brabner's first days in her new job as college principal occurred just as the coronavirus pandemic took hold

It would be fair to say that I consider myself fortunate. My family and I remain healthy so far, I have a career I am passionate about, and even though I find myself working from my spare room, I do have a spare room and garden space to enjoy (in those intended, but never quite managed, breaks!). I was thrilled to become the principal of Southport College and King George V Sixth Form, and started in my role with great excitement on March 9. Coronavirus was impacting on the UK and discussions around how it would affect colleges were high on the agenda.

My first couple of days were a repeating whirlwind of meeting staff and students and discussing coronavirus. At the end of my first week I remember thinking what an amazing and crazy time it had been, not quite what I expected, and thank goodness I didn't have to close the college in the first few days. Starting contingency planning for a pandemic wasn't my preferred focus when joining the college – I wanted to get to know the people.

Starting week two, closure was certain, and the priority had to be continuing the planning for this. Thankfully, the college staff had focused on the need to move

to distance learning after our early discussions, and lots of testing of systems and processes were under way. Eight days into my time at the college we had to take the decision to move to remote working. I fear I may go down in history as the principal that joined the college and then closed us within days! But, it was the right thing to do.

### “We found PPE in far-flung corners of our buildings to deliver to the NHS”

I have always been a believer in the crucial importance of relationships and how we make people feel. Every day in lockdown I miss the chance to interact with the students. Thankfully I had opportunities before the coronavirus hit to make a start on establishing relationships. The college had a successful full inspection in February and I was able to spend many hours with staff focused on securing the best possible outcome. At the time I could never have known just how much of an investment that would be. The outcome was 'good', although celebrations have been somewhat muted by

the pandemic.

On day one at the college I did introductory presentations, just so staff knew who I was – the person behind the role. At the time it felt a little self-indulgent, but at least the staff now know the face at the end of the emails I am sending to keep everyone informed and hopefully feeling supported. Who knew that Teams, Zoom and emails would become the main tools in developing those critical working relationships? But oh how I miss a face-to-face brew with the people I work with!

I am one of many people who have completed a course at the Oxford University Saïd Business School to prepare me for a principalship. It was great, prepping me for finance, governance and strategy among other things. What was certainly not included was moving a college to remote working in a matter of days.

Despite this, I find many positives, not least what a superb group of people I have joined. They are committed to supporting everyone, whether it means finding PPE in far-flung corners of our buildings to get to the NHS, delivering loan laptops to students, or rapidly creating a vibrant learning community online. I love nothing more than to hear the great news of innovations that are happening. We've seen motor vehicle workshop sessions delivered from home garages,



and A-level students discussing current affairs in online debates.

New to the college? Yes, I definitely am. Proud to be working with staff who respond to a challenge with positivity, gusto and passion? Absolutely. Looking forward to the day when we're working physically together in our new and improved "normal"? Categorically. FE has great support networks and I am sure we will come out of this with innovations and a continued passion for our role in the community.

Someone close to me recently shared that when we work outside of our comfort zone we feel challenged. But our comfort zones are not rigid – they stretch. Without realising it, magic happens, and what was once a challenge starts to fall within our comfort zone. Let's keep making the magic happen and carry on expanding and growing as a sector.

## DR NEIL BENTLEY GOCKMANN

Chief Executive,  
WorldSkills UK



## Young people's skills vital to recovering from the post-Covid-19 recession

**The forecast recession looks likely to hit young people the hardest, but investing in their skills is key to recovery. Neil Bentley-Gockmann sets out three ways his organisation is leading the charge**

It is an understatement to say that these are tough and uncertain times for us all. And for young people looking to get their first step on the career ladder, the outlook is particularly challenging. Many have had their education and training unavoidably disrupted at a point in their lives when they should be finding their feet, working out what to do next and thinking about their career direction.

However, we know that crucial to rebuilding the UK economy will be highly skilled, motivated young people. That is why, alongside working to attract more inward investment by tackling slow productivity growth, adopting new technology and plugging our skills gaps, we must stay focused on supporting the next generation so that they can play an active role in our economic recovery and see a better future.

The government is working hard to protect employment against the Covid-19 crisis, but a recession is forecast and research reports this month from The Learning and Work Institute, The Resolution Foundation and Youth Futures Foundation have shown that its impacts will affect young people disproportionately. This analysis has helped us focus on three ways



that we can best help to support nearly 200,000 young women and men in the coming months.

Firstly, we are increasing our online support for thousands of young people who are going through our national and international skills competitions' training programmes. We will continue to develop their skillset and mindset to the highest possible levels so they can build their confidence and potential. Working with our national competition partners, we will deliver online assessments to help students and apprentices compete virtually in our skills competitions to enhance their current training.

Secondly, we are increasing our online careers advice and guidance for thousands of young people not yet in work – who are in school or college – to help them make more informed choices about their next steps. We are aiming to engage 35,000 students through our toolkits and will be targeting resources at schools and colleges in disadvantaged areas to ensure we are engaging those who are hardest to reach.

By deploying more online careers advice models (our alumni network of highly skilled individuals) we will be increasing our efforts to encourage young women and men to make career choices that challenge gender stereotypes. We will support more young people who are BAME, identify as LGBT+ or have a learning disability to take up apprenticeships and technical career routes.

**“We should reset the dialogue on the importance of skills for the recovery”**

Thirdly, we are drawing on the expertise of our established network of 1900 partners across the UK (colleges, training providers and employers, sector skills bodies and organisations like NCFE, National Careers Service, Youth Employment UK, Education and Employers and the Careers & Enterprise Company) to ensure our outreach

has maximum impact. And together we will continue to explore ways to power the development of a world-leading technical education sector through global benchmarking and bringing international best practice back to the UK. Through the new WorldSkills UK Centre of Excellence, in partnership with NCFE, we will work with college partners to help mainstream world-class standards in skills development.

As the public health and economic context evolves, we will work with our partners to prepare for a skills-led recovery and the development of a “skills economy” that rightly values high-quality apprenticeships and technical education routes for all young people. The significance of workers in public and other essential services – many of whom are trained in our skills system – is shining a bright light on the value of skilled work. And as we all adapt to new ways of living and working, we should hit the control-alt-delete buttons to help us reset the dialogue on the importance of skills for the recovery, the country and the future of the next generation.

The young people we support today with advice, knowledge and skills, will be the workforce of tomorrow, helping employers lead the charge towards recovery and economic growth for the prosperity of all. That's why investing in young people now is crucial. Because when young people succeed, we all succeed.



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# Movers & Shakers

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



**Daniel Canavan**

**Executive Director of PM Training**

**Start date** April 2020

**Previous job**

Director of Training Operations, PM Training

**Interesting fact**

He started the very first gardening team at the provider, of which there are now more than 60



**Rebecca Long Bailey MP**

**Shadow education secretary, Labour Party**

**Start date** April 2020

**Concurrent job**

MP for Salford and Eccles

**Interesting fact**

Her background is in law



**Toby Perkins MP**

**Shadow minister for apprenticeships and skills, Labour Party**

**Start date** April 2020

**Concurrent job**

MP for Chesterfield

**Interesting fact**

He is a former county rugby player and club cricket captain

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

FEWEEK

Got a story?

Get in touch.

Contact: [news@feweek.co.uk](mailto:news@feweek.co.uk)  
or call 020 81234 778