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DROPPED: FIVE MORE PROVIDERS CANCEL T-LEVEL ROUTE LAUNCHES



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News

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Multi-million-pound cut to College Collaboration Fund

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The Department for Education has slashed the College Collaboration Fund (CCF) by more than one-third as it reopens for applications.

The total pot on offer sat at £9 million when the fund was launched by education secretary Gavin Williamson in February, but this amount has now dropped to £5.4 million.

In confirming the reduction, the DfE told *FE Week* they have had to take some tough decisions and reprioritise planned activity in order to respond to new and developing priorities as a result of coronavirus.

The first round of the CCF was cancelled in March due to the pandemic. It reopened for applications on Wednesday to “support FE colleges to respond to the current challenges around quality improvement and capitalise on good practice, including that developed through new ways of working”.

Eddie Playfair, senior policy manager at the Association of Colleges, said: “We are delighted that the CCF is able to go ahead.

“The fund is very welcome in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the need for the college sector to navigate unprecedented rates of change to every aspect of its work.”

Groups of colleges can bid for grants of up to £500,000 but they will be expected to match at least 25 per cent of the total cost of the programme of work.

However, the DfE said it may now waive a proportionate amount of match funding contribution where a college is in formal intervention with the Education and Skills Funding Agency, as asking for a contribution would “undermine a college’s financial viability”.

The minimum application has increased to £100,000 from £80,000. Each submission will need a lead applicant college with an ‘outstanding’ or ‘good’ Ofsted grade and at least one other “improvement partner” college.

Merged colleges without an Ofsted rating can still apply, as long as one of the two previous colleges meets the criteria.

Each proposed programme of work must address at least one of the fund’s three “quality improvement themes” identified by DfE: quality of education, financial and resource

management, and leadership and governance.

The 12-month CCF follows the Strategic College Improvement Fund – which ended last year after £12.3 million of the £15 million up for grabs was used to help 80 colleges rated ‘requires improvement’ or ‘inadequate’ team up with better-performing colleges.

Williamson previously said the new fund is needed because there “have been examples where colleges haven’t been getting it right, and things that we are not comfortable with have been going on”.

“We mustn’t forget that is a minority,” he added. “Where we have got good we want to make them excellent, where we have got average we want to make them good and then to excellent, and where we have poor we want to make sure that they are actually really achieving the very best on that.”

Applications to the CCF must be submitted by June 28, 2020 and colleges will be notified about the outcome after July 10, 2020.

All colleges that receive the funding must complete their activities from it by March 31, 2021. Successful colleges will receive payment of their grant by September 18, 2020.

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Frustration builds as Ofsted refuses to inspect paused providers

BILLY CAMDEN

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Exclusive

The indefinite pausing of Ofsted inspections could force an apprenticeship provider to make redundancies, its managing director has told *FE Week*.

Wiser Academy Ltd was suspended from recruiting new apprentices following an early monitoring visit last August which resulted in two 'insufficient progress' judgments.

Its "frustrated" leader, Crescens George, said the firm has 30 apprentices waiting in the pipeline but their ban, which has been enforced for almost a year, even though they were expecting a reinspection by March, is blocking them from signing up.

His company is now feeling the financial strain of the suspension and is desperate to take on new apprentices to ease cashflow issues and prevent redundancies.

The provider is one of "many" that have pleaded with Ofsted and the Education and Skills Funding Agency to find a solution, including by proposing a virtual inspection, but none has been forthcoming.

Under government policy, providers that are new to apprenticeships receive an early monitoring visit from Ofsted within 24 months of being funded. If they score 'insufficient progress' in one or more theme they are temporarily banned from recruiting apprentices.

The suspension will only be lifted once the watchdog returns for a full inspection – typically six to 12 months after the monitoring visit – and the provider scores at least a grade three.

Ofsted paused inspection activity in March owing to coronavirus and there is no date in sight for when they will resume.

There are currently 48 apprenticeship providers with a recruitment suspension. Sixteen of them have been waiting for a reinspection for at least nine months.

An Ofsted spokesperson said they "recognise" that this is a "frustrating situation for many providers" while the ESFA told *FE Week* it is also aware that a "small number of providers require



an Ofsted inspection to determine whether they have made the necessary improvements to the quality of their provision to be able to take on new apprentices".

Wiser Academy is based in Hampshire but trains apprentices in the insurance and financial services sector across the country.

It had around 110 apprentices on its books before being suspended from recruiting by government last August.

The provider's director, George, told *FE Week* he has since put a new team in place who have made "tremendous progress" and he is "confident" a full inspection would result in an outcome that would lift their ban, which he was hoping would have taken place by March or June at the latest.

Wiser Academy currently has just over 50 apprentices still on programme and all of them have continued their training during lockdown. The provider's provision was mostly delivered virtually pre-Covid and they already had a "full remote facility" in place, according to George.

He wrote to Ofsted on May 19 asking for an update on when they could restart inspections and if they could possibly conduct a virtual inspection instead.

He explained that during Wiser's monitoring visit, inspectors only spoke to his apprentices over the phone because they were dotted all over the country. He said this could be done again, inspectors could also "dive into a virtual

classroom" and set up video conferences with their employers and his staff to conduct the inspection.

But Ofsted replied to say virtual inspections are not possible, adding they will aim to prioritise provider's like his when they restart inspection activity.

George says an inspection even as soon as the autumn term would be "too late" for his business.

"We have a pipeline of approximately 30 apprentices where businesses are ready to sign off. In fact, they are chasing us asking when can they register these people," he told *FE Week*.

"My frustration is we can't take on these new apprentices. Give it another two or three months we will really hit the financial pressure."

He added that "everybody" is making exemptions to how business is carried out and businesses have adapted "so swiftly into remote working", so he would "be very keen to find out in what way Ofsted has adapted to the current situation to at least keep a few things moving".

"What have they done to adapt to current needs, or are they just waiting for all of this to subside and get back to business as normal?"

George said the ESFA could also come forward to "support businesses like us to say 'we understand you had an insufficient progress, but given the current situation, we will allow you to add ten, 15 or 20 apprentices just to keep your business afloat, rather than dip into the other governmental financial aid'".

Mark Dawe, chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, said his organisation is "aware Ofsted recognise this as an issue and are confident that their approach will tackle this issue in a way that meets these justifiable concerns".

The ESFA said it is "important that we ensure all apprenticeships are high quality and every apprentice has access to excellent training to help them achieve occupational competence" and they are "working with Ofsted to determine the best way forward".

Ofsted said: "No decision has been made about resuming inspection activity, but we are thinking carefully about how and when this will happen, working closely with government and the sector."



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Five providers axe autumn T-level plans

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From front

Five providers set to deliver the first T-levels in just three months' time have cancelled the plans for some or all of their scheduled programmes due to Covid-19.

As confirmed by skills minister Gillian Keegan in April, the Department for Education is pushing ahead with the September 2020 launch of the new technical qualifications, despite disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

But on Thursday, it was announced that Salesian School, Access Creative College, Durham Sixth Form Centre and University College Birmingham had all delayed their delivery for 12 months.

Another provider, York College, announced it will now only offer one T-level route this year instead of all three they had planned for.

This means the number of colleges, schools and other providers in England in wave one of the roll-out of the new post-16 technical qualifications has fallen below 50, to just 46.

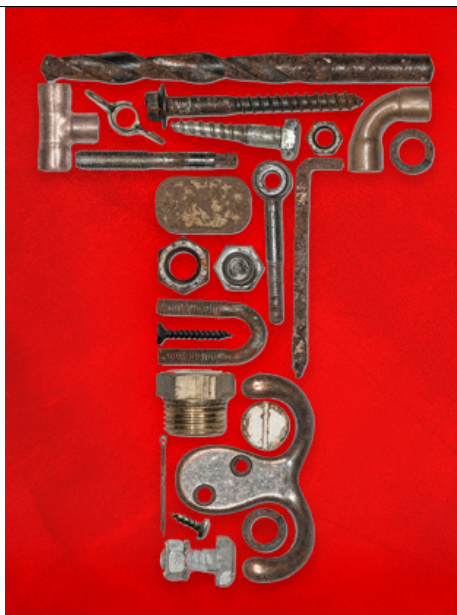
A number of others have pulled out of delivering T-levels in recent years after citing challenges mostly connected with finding enough employers to take on learners for substantial industry placements – an issue that is expected to heighten post-Covid-19.

T-levels are being hailed as the new, high-quality technical alternatives to A-levels. They will combine classroom theory, practical learning and an industry placement lasting at least 315 hours.

On the same day the DfE revealed the five providers who have delayed delivery, education secretary Gavin Williamson announced the names of 88 providers chosen to teach the qualifications from 2022. He stated this would “help us supercharge the roll-out of these new and pioneering qualifications”.

The DfE also announced that the requirement for colleges and other training providers to be rated ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted to deliver T-levels will be partially dropped by 2023.

A spokesperson for the department said the five providers that have deferred delivery will now support students already signed up to the courses for September to find “other suitable courses”, and the DfE will keep in “close touch to



support them to do this”.

York College has postponed delivering both the digital and education and childcare routes but is still planning to offer the construction course in September.

A York College spokesperson said: “We are delaying the roll-out of these T-level pathways because on the impact of Covid-19 on both our planning and our recruitment and information, advice and guidance processes.”

They had planned to run “small initial cohorts” and added that, for learners already signed up to both delayed programmes, “students will be able to enrol on a well-established alternative full-time level 3 alternative course, together with the opportunity for smaller work placements through the college’s usual work-placement programme”.

The other four providers include Salesian School in Surrey, which was due to deliver two T-levels (digital, as well as education and childcare) from September 2020 but has now delayed their start date to the next academic year.

A spokesperson told *FE Week*: “The decision to move T-levels back 12 months is a pragmatic response to both the initial interest that we had, and also our ability to continue to build on that interest in the light of Covid.”

The University College Birmingham was scheduled to deliver the education and childcare route in September. A spokesperson told *FE Week* they had commenced promotion of T-levels in January 2020 but due to Covid-19 and the cancellation of open days and school events, “we

only received five applications”.

While most T-levels will require a 315-hour industry placement, education and childcare requires 750 hours. The university’s spokesperson said “many” of their placement providers have “expressed the restrictions which Covid-19 may play on future placements and, therefore, in consultation with various stakeholders, a decision was made to defer”.

All students have now been offered a place on the university’s level 3 early years course.

Access Creative College had only been set to offer the digital T-level later this year but has “decided to delay delivery until 2021”, according to director of development Mark Compton.

He added: “In the meantime, we will continue to work closely with colleagues at the Department for Education and the Education and Skills Funding Agency, to develop the programme and build demand for T-levels in the regions we serve.”

Similarly, a spokesperson for Durham Sixth Form Centre said it “remains very committed to T-levels but in the current circumstances has decided to delay delivery of the digital T-level to 2021”.

When Keegan confirmed the DfE would plough ahead with the T-levels launch, she said that while providers have “rightly raised some issues” with delivery, “most wanted to continue to deliver the first T-levels this year”.

She added: “We owe it to these young people to find ways to continue to deliver the courses that they have chosen and that will offer them great progression opportunities.”

The initial roll-out of T-levels will see providers teach three routes: digital, construction, and education and childcare. Health and science will be added in 2021.

A Department for Education spokesperson said: “We have always taken a gradual approach to rolling out T-levels to ensure we get the new high-quality qualifications right from the outset.”

This is not the first time providers have pulled out of or delayed T-level delivery. In October, education secretary Gavin Williamson’s old college, Scarborough Sixth Form, dropped out of offering construction and digital pathways from 2020 because of a lack of opportunities for the T-levels’ mandatory 315-hour work placements locally, and a shortage of good-quality teachers.

Three other schools ditched plans to take part in the 2020 wave all the way back in October 2018.



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Worth the wait: 'Outstanding' grade for Riverside College

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A college in Cheshire that recruits most of its students from areas of "high social and economic deprivation" is celebrating after being rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted.

Riverside College, which had its report published on Wednesday following an 11-day inspection in February, was lauded by the education watchdog for applying a "culture of relentless self-improvement" which "permeates" the campus.

The college was formed in 2006 following the merger of Halton College and Widnes and Runcorn Sixth Form College. It currently teaches 3,200 young people, 1,400 adults, 603 apprentices and 136 learners with high needs.

It becomes the third general FE college to be rated 'outstanding' under Ofsted's new inspection framework launched in September, following Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group and Chichester College Group.

Riverside College principal Mary Murphy said they were "absolutely thrilled that this glowing report recognises the tremendous efforts of our dedicated teaching and support staff who over a number of years have worked incredibly hard to consistently deliver high-quality education and training".

Inspectors found that learners and apprentices at Riverside "enjoy a wide range of courses that meet local and regional needs exceptionally well" and help to ensure that most of them "progress to higher levels of study or work".

"Their behaviour is exemplary and in keeping with the senior leaders' and staff members' high



expectations and values," the report said.

They "flourish" in a "calm, orderly, aspirational and safe learning environment", while learners who have high needs develop the skills "they need to equip themselves for independent living, such as cooking simple meals and cleaning living areas".

Ofsted praised the college's attitude to community and fundraising events, with "many" learners doing voluntary work or taking part in competitions which "allow them to demonstrate that they are responsible and caring citizens".

Engineering apprentices, for example, designed and built equipment for the Invictus Games so that athletes with physical disabilities could take part in throwing events.

Riverside College is located in the 13th most deprived borough nationally and the third most deprived in the Liverpool City Region.

Inspectors reported that leaders, managers and teachers have developed a "high-quality curriculum that widens learners' and apprentices' experiences and life skills" and "ensures" that disadvantaged learners develop their self-confidence and self-esteem.

Leaders also have "exceptional links" with local employers and regional business groups, including the local enterprise partnership and regional mayoral authorities, which have been utilised to create their "challenging curriculum" designed to help students "achieve their ambitious

career goals".

The curriculum has been reviewed in recent years to "ensure that there are clear progression routes for learners and apprentices". For example, a pre-apprenticeship course prepares learners "well" by developing the employability skills and confidence they need to apply for a job with apprenticeship training.

The college's "very strong and highly effective relationships" with its four subcontractors were also praised, who deliver a curriculum that "meets local needs exceptionally well".

Ofsted concluded that leadership and management are "outstanding".

Murphy said she was "delighted" that the inspectors "acknowledged the motivation and exemplary behaviour of our wonderful students, who we cannot wait to welcome back to the college as the lockdown eases".

"However, this achievement is also attributed to all the people of Halton, including Halton Borough Council, Halton head teachers, partners, employers, the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and the young people and their parents/carers who have supported the college on our journey to outstanding over the last decade," she added.

"We have never wavered from the belief that we could be outstanding and together we have made this happen."

Senior MPs question £3m spent on UTC membership body

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An influential cross-party group of MPs has questioned the value offered by the membership body for university technical colleges after its cost to the public purse reached £3 million.

The parliamentary public accounts committee (PAC) published a report this week after a National Audit Office (NAO) inquiry last year laid bare the extent of financial failure among UTCs.

The committee criticised the “unusual set-up” of the Baker Dearing Trust (BDT) – the owner of the UTC brand – and its relationship with the Department for Education.

FE Week analysis of BDT accounts found that since the programme launched in 2010, Baker Dearing has taken almost £2 million in “licence fees” from the technical colleges, while also receiving £1 million from the DfE.

Meg Hillier, the PAC’s chair, said the costs “smack of a far too close, special relationship with too little scrutiny from government and too much entitlement from the BDT”.

She said it was “very curious” how Baker Dearing, which she claimed had not offered value for money considering the poor performance of most UTCs, had “managed to brand a type of school and milk the taxpayer and schools just for their brand to be used”.

As revealed by *FE Week* last August, the annual licence fee each of the 48 UTCs must pay Baker Dearing rose from £5,500 to £10,000 this year, despite most struggling to survive as student numbers dwindle. Eleven have closed or announced closure.

The committee’s report highlighted an “apparent lack of interest in what UTCs are getting from paying out taxpayer’s money to the trust in this way... on top of the already generous funding that the department gave to the trust”.

The fee increase came as donations to Baker Dearing plummeted. Accounts show it received £1.7 million in donations in 2017-18, but just £388,000 in 2018-19.

Hillier said the committee was “very suspicious” that the licence fee doubled this year; she didn’t know whether it was “trying to fill another hole in the budget somewhere”.

A spokesperson for Baker Dearing defended



Meg Hillier

the licence fee and claimed the increase was suggested by UTCs themselves.

He said the payment went towards BDT’s work in delivering “hands-on educational, financial, student recruitment, and multi-academy trust rebrokerage support for all UTCs, as well as fulfilling the central role of government liaison and raising the programme’s profile”.

£60,000 spent on secretary for former education secretary

FE Week analysis of the BDT’s accounts also show the trust has spent £60,000 since 2011 on a personal secretary for its chair, the former education secretary and UTC architect Lord Baker.

The trust’s spokesperson said the payment was “very good value for money”. He said Baker, who devoted a few days each week unpaid to the trust, needed help to arrange his diary, and with drafting letters and speeches.

The £1 million DfE grants were for the trust to support the opening and running of UTCs. The grants stopped last year.

The UTC model, originally for students aged 14 to 19, has been fraught with setbacks since its inception.

The PAC’s report cited many of the findings from last year’s NAO inquiry that found £792 million was spent on the programme between 2010-11 and 2018-19.

Most of this was capital funding, but the DfE has also propped up financially struggling colleges with £36.8 million in extra cash between

2015-16 and 2018-19.

The report also found that the 48 UTCs open as of January last year were, on average, at 45 per cent capacity; more than half were rated as less than “good” by Ofsted in October 2019.

No clear vision

Despite the DfE launching a three-year programme to improve the financial and educational performance of UTCs in 2017, the PAC said the government did not have a clear vision for UTCs in the future.

Hillier concluded that the taxpayer was paying over the odds for a programme in which good results were “alarmingly thin on the ground”.

Her committee has called on the government to set “clear” three-year financial targets for each UTC and to close those that do not meet them.

MPs also want the DfE to work with UTCs to “obtain the information necessary to gain assurance about the value schools are getting from the licence fee they pay to the BDT”, and write to the committee with its findings within three months.

A DfE spokesperson said: “This government is committed to improving technical education and strong UTCs have a key role to play this, helping to build the invaluable skills our country needs now and in the future, as well as supporting the recovery of our economy in light of the pandemic.

“UTCs are still relatively new and we have always sought to make improvements and address challenges that individual UTCs may face.”

Coronavirus covered: Coupland in conversation with FE Week

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FE Week was joined by Jennifer Coupland, chief executive of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE), during this week's webcast on the response to the coronavirus pandemic for the FE and skills sector.

Here are the main takeaway points.

1 Temporary discretions and flexibilities for over 100 apprenticeship standards

Coupland outlined how external quality assurance bodies had agreed flexibilities to the delivery of end-point assessments (EPAs), such as by allowing online assessment, across more than 100 standards.

This included "fundamental" changes to around 30 assessment plans by, for example, replacing a workplace observation with a professional discussion.

She also pointed out that the IfATE is permitting the "re-sequencing" of the EPA process to enable the EPA to be taken before the functional skills calculated result is received.

Coupland said the institute wants to ensure there is "no cliff edge on these flexibilities" so they will keep them under review and assess them on a case-by-case basis.

2 'Deep dives' planned for remote EPAs

The IfATE is looking to conduct "deep dives" into the operation of assessment flexibilities to ensure the "balance between flexibility and quality is being maintained".

Coupland continued: "I think we would be remiss if we didn't also look at things that actually we're learning from doing things in a really innovative and creative way that actually might be better for the longer term."

She is planning a "lessons learned exercise" with the sector to examine where improvements can be made to the system.

3 Monitoring the survival of EPA organisations

Coupland said the IfATE is working with the Education and Skills Funding Agency and Ofqual to look at the sustainability and viability of EPA organisations going forward.

She said they want to avoid a scenario where

EPAOs have "gone to the wall" as a result of the pandemic and "we have gaps in the ability to assess apprentices against those standards".

The bodies are determining whether it is a widespread problem and are thinking about what actions they could take to mitigate the risks.

4 Backing for the PM's 'apprenticeship guarantee'

The chief executive claimed "you don't really get much better" than the prime minister talking about apprenticeships, in reference to when Boris Johnson promised to "look at the idea" of giving young people aged 16 to 25 an apprenticeship guarantee.

She asserted it was "very early days" as IfATE will have to work "very" closely with the DfE to establish what it would "genuinely involve" and how it might be delivered.

5 Quickly adapting standards to meet new ways of working

Coupland said the IfATE has work under way to adjust to industry changes, the first of which is a "revisions process". This will enable an employer group to update an individual standard rather than having to wait for a full-scale route review if there is "a whole new suite of things that people are being expected to do" where an industry has "moved on".

The other is consideration of using different mechanisms to develop particular "novel" modules that could be "pulled off the shelf" and added to a standard in the event that something emerges quickly, such as new emerging technologies.

6 'Right decision' made on frameworks switch-off

Coupland lent her support for the secretary of state's decision to carry on with the July 31 date for turning off starts on frameworks, even in sectors where there is no viable replacement standard ready.

She said: "I think we've got really good coverage now of the economy with standards, so the 550 standards covers 90 per cent or more of the existing frameworks, and so on that basis I think that he [Gavin Williamson] has made the right decision to proceed with the timetable".

She added that due to the long, seven-year run-up to the switch-off there "isn't really



Jennifer Coupland

any kind of excuse for being surprised" by the decision and that postponing moving to the system would mean "delaying the opportunity for all of those apprentices who would otherwise benefit" from the new standards Coupland describes as "more rigorous and better quality".

7 No regrets on business admin level 2 rejection

The IfATE boss was asked whether she regretted turning down the proposal for a level 2 business administration apprenticeship standard, which was developed by many high-profile employers, including the NHS, given the likely demand post-coronavirus from young people.

Coupland replied: "So we've got a live business administration level 3 standard and the take-up of that is really increasing rapidly. I think people will gain confidence that that is something young people are able to access as we go forward."

"I do not regret the decision to not pursue the level 2. I do think that, as we highlighted back in the Richard Review, as you start to increase standards in apprenticeships, there are going to be some things in the framework world that no longer meet those quality tests."

She added that IfATE needs to ensure there is a wide range of training opportunities for young people and older adults who want to upskill and retrain if they're affected negatively by Covid-19, but that "it can't just be an apprenticeship solution to every skills problem".

A photograph of three young women with long hair, smiling and working together on a project. One woman is holding a red object, possibly a small robot or a piece of equipment. They are in a classroom or workshop setting with a green wall and a large orange flower decoration in the background.

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ESFA 'considering' extensions to coronavirus supplier relief schemes

BILLY CAMDEN

BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The Education and Skills Funding Agency is "considering" reopening its Covid-19 supplier relief after the Cabinet Office announced the scheme can continue until October 31.

The Cabinet Office's Procurement Policy Note (PPN 02/20), which allows public authorities to pay their suppliers in advance of delivering during the coronavirus pandemic, was due to end on July 31 but was extended on Tuesday.

In updated guidance named PPN 04/20, the Cabinet Office said all contracting authorities "should be reviewing existing arrangements as soon as reasonably possible".

The ESFA's own supplier relief scheme for non-levy apprenticeships and the adult education budget concluded last month and resulted in one-third (107) of the 165 training providers that applied being awarded extra funding.

A separate relief scheme for European Social Fund providers was also run last month. The results are yet to be revealed.

Following the new Cabinet Office guidance, the ESFA said: "The Cabinet Office has published Procurement Policy Note 04/20. As a consequence we are considering the options for extending our Provider Relief Schemes,



and will provide further information soon."

The Association of Employment and Learning Providers' chief executive Mark Dawe said the scheme "must reopen immediately".

"With furloughing coming to an end, this is a timely intervention which ought to allow providers to plan through until the end of October, and it's absolutely essential that the DfE applies the latest guidance and extends the current relief scheme for non-levy apprenticeships, AEB and European Social Fund programmes," he told *FE Week*.

"AELP has always maintained that the further we get into the summer, the situation with providers' cash reserves is going to become critical and therefore the four-month extension could make a huge and positive difference.

"In our view, the DfE must reopen the relief application process immediately in the light of the Cabinet Office announcement."

While non-levy apprenticeships were eligible for the ESFA's relief scheme, any apprenticeships funded through the government's digital system – mostly with levy-paying employers – were not.

The agency claimed this was because the contract is directly with the employer and provider rather than government. AELP challenged this legally but dropped the action

last week after weighing up the costs.

Dawe said this week that "we continue to struggle to understand why the DfE seems to be alone in not recognising that the supplier relief scheme should apply to all apprenticeships and other skills programmes".

"The DfE must reopen the relief application process immediately"

"It should be offering proper support instead of kicking the can down the road," he added.

Karen Woodward, the Education and Skills Funding Agency's deputy director for employer relations, told an *FE Week* webinar in May that many providers struggled to "prove need" for the financial support as a "number of them are not really facing huge cash flow problems at the moment".

But she did acknowledge this situation could change beyond July as starts on new courses and apprenticeships dry up.



ESFA chief executive Eileen Milner

DfE seeks 16 senior policy advisers ahead of FE 'revolution'

BILLY CAMDEN

BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The Department for Education is drafting in a group of new policy experts as it gears up for "revolutionary" changes in FE.

Job adverts for 16 senior advisers to "craft a wide range of policies" within the department's "higher and further education group" are currently live, with annual salaries ranging from £49,000 to £60,000.

It comes as the DfE continues its work on a new white paper for the FE sector, to be followed

by legislation.

Education secretary Gavin Williamson said in May that the reforms could be "revolutionary", and FE Week previously reported that one key option being considered is to bring colleges in England back into public ownership.

Work on the white paper is being led by Keith Smith, who was redeployed from the Education and Skills Funding Agency in April. He reports to Paul Kett, director general for higher and further education at the DfE.

The 16 policy adviser adverts include five "heads of policy" and 11 "policy leads".

The successful candidates will be deployed to

the DfE's higher and further education group to work in directorates including careers and further education; further education reform; career learning, analysis, skills and student choice; international; higher education, STEM and tertiary providers; transformation and digital.

Responsibilities will include "leading the delivery of innovative policy reforms".

"In the role you will quickly familiarise yourself with detailed knowledge to enable you confidently to brief ministers and manage relationships with the educational sector," the adverts add.

AELP calls for one-off £8.6bn post-pandemic skills package

BILLY CAMDEN

BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The government should set aside an extra £8.6 billion for a one-off skills package to "reboot" the economy post-Covid-19, according to the Association of Employment and Learning Providers.

AELP says a large chunk – £3.6 billion – of the "costed" proposal should be spent on subsidising wages for half a million young apprentices to protect them from redundancy, while most of the rest should go towards tripling the existing annual adult education budget to £4.5 billion.

Mark Dawe, chief executive of the membership organisation, said the country "can't wait" for government to take six months to come up with entirely new employment and skills programmes and must instead "mostly scale up existing programmes using trusted delivery partners".

He added that the prime minister's proposed "apprenticeship guarantee" shouldn't be dismissed as "unworkable", but employer sign-up is "essential, and this requires a realistic level of wage subsidy during the recovery period".

Boris Johnson told the nation during a coronavirus briefing last week that young people "should be guaranteed an apprenticeship" after warning of "many, many job losses" expected from the fallout of Covid-19.

The unexpected announcement divided opinion in the FE sector, with some lauding the proposal while others were sceptical about its viability. Labour's shadow apprenticeships minister Toby Perkins branded it a "deception".

AELP's proposals, submitted in advance of the expected July statements from the prime minister and the chancellor on post-pandemic recovery, says the only way to achieve an apprenticeship guarantee would be through a wage subsidy at a level "high enough to persuade the employer to make apprenticeships opportunities available".

They said this should be offered to apprentices aged 16 to 24, and in "some ways" would be an extension of the principles of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

"For this to be a guarantee with teeth, we think that this subsidy would need to be at least 50 per cent of the apprenticeship salary, which might include National Insurance relief," the AELP said.

"Employers should receive a start payment, a midpoint payment and an achievement payment. We also think this will be most critical for roles at level 2 and level 3."

To support half a million young apprentices, the subsidy cost would be around £3.6 billion, according to the association. Unless wage subsidy is offered to employers, AELP believes large numbers of apprentices will be made redundant over the next 12 months.

On top of this, the organisation said an additional £1.5 billion needs to be committed for

non-levy apprenticeships.

For adult workers, AELP believes that the government should "park" plans for its £3 billion National Skills Fund and £100 million National Retraining Scheme and instead channel the funding mostly into "well-established adult skills programmes".

The annual adult education budget (AEB) of £1.5 billion "needs increasing to £4.5 billion to help tackle mass unemployment and support vital reskilling for those who have remained in work".

Training providers have struggled to spend their adult education budget allocations in recent years, but the AELP believes mass unemployment means that there will be a big spike in demand.

The AELP has also called for an additional £450 million to be invested for 16-to-18-year-old programmes, including traineeships.

The organisation wants traineeships to be introduced for adults aged over 25, as well as the development of a new "pre-apprenticeship" programme for young people and adults, which "involves a job commitment being offered by an employer from day one".

Free travel "should also be considered" for 16-to-24-year-olds nationally "in respect of apprenticeships and other skills and employment programmes".

AELP said the £8.6 billion package should be launched as soon as possible, with a review of its effectiveness taking place 12 months later.



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- Achieve monthly targets for employer engagement and learner starts
- Develop, implement and monitor the effectiveness of employer and learner voice strategies.
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You will need to submit a written statement (maximum 4 sides) detailing your CV and a cover letter (maximum 2-sides) setting out specifically how you meet the requirements of the role. You should use font size 11pt. Please submit your completed application to n.baker@ucb.ac.uk by no later than 5pm on Thursday 18 June.

An informal telephone conversation can be arranged by appointment with Alice Wilby, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Access and Widening Participation) by emailing a.wilby@ucb.ac.uk



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Introducing... MICHELLE BRABNER

Chief executive and
principal, Southport College

'The vision is the
same, but the journey
is going to be different'

JL DUTAUT
JL.DUTAUT@FEWEEK.CO.UK

FE Week meets a new college chief whose fresh and flexible approach may be just what sector needs post-pandemic

Taking up your first principalship, walking straight into an Ofsted inspection and then, within weeks, dealing with a college closure

resulting from a global pandemic starts to sound like a nightmare.

But Michelle Brabner is sanguine. "Looking back," she says, "if that hadn't happened in the way that it did... Well, if you're not a believer in karma, this is probably a good point to become one. I would have taken my post in the Easter break, and by that stage we were all in lockdown. So the timing was probably fortuitous in the end."

John Clarke, the previous principal of

Southport College, was forced to leave early because of ill health. Appointed to Southport in October, Brabner's six-month notice period from the deputy principalship at Runshaw College, where she'd been in post for five years, was shortened by mutual agreement.

"We wanted to be able to do that because the college [Southport] was without a principal as an Ofsted inspection was happening, so I was there helping as principal-designate. It's a very small senior team and I wanted them to have

Profile

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somebody, because normally you have a person that's responsible that you can go to and say 'Oh, this has just happened!'. They didn't have that."

Southport retained its 'good' rating for the third time since 2007. It spent the early part of the noughties with satisfactory and less-than-satisfactory judgments, but has sustained its performance through a merger with King George V Sixth Form College in 2017, overseen by Clarke. There are reasons to be optimistic at Southport.

Indeed, more than sanguine, Brabner is positively cheerful throughout our video chat, clearly comfortable with the medium after extensive practice over the past months. "I am the only one on the senior team now that's got a child at home of school age. So when teachers are struggling with trying to do remote delivery, I understand because my daughter frequently pops up. In fact, don't be surprised if she appears."

She's also happy with how she is settling into the job and with the team. "I've been so fortunate that I've joined a college where there are so many people that are just lovely and warm. Within the first few days, I'd been to an awards ceremony where people were talking about the college community and it being a family. I feel like they've embraced me into this



With her dogs in the Lake District. "I've always been an animal lover."

family even though they've only known me for a very short space of time."

There's no denying that the ground has shifted under this new leader's feet, as it has under everyone else's. But the freshness of her response to these circumstances could be exactly what Southport – and the sector more broadly – needs to get beyond the crisis and prepare for what's next.

Not that she is without anxieties. "My concern, in this period of distance working ... is whether I have done anything that inadvertently or unwittingly caused upset because I've simply not known people well enough to know what they needed from me. Also, I suppose there's a possibility that people have formed a view of me based on my all-staff emails. I did a little 'thank a teacher' video for them all yesterday and sent that out. What does that view then become and how does it compare to the reality of when we're back on site and working? Their view of their new principal is being formed on working from home with a fleece and a t-shirt on, and not the

persona that perhaps is normally out there."

It's the humanity of that response that strikes me. Some may dismiss this as naivety, but Brabner has been around long enough not to be accused of that.

"I am the only senior team member with a child at home of school age"

She qualified at the University of Plymouth as a biologist with a marine specialism, before her master's took her for three months to the south of France. "I got into marine conservation and probably went through the typical teenage thing where you want to save all the whales and dolphins, which I'd still love to do." She helped on a lobster conservation project, but soon found herself working in research at the Royal Liverpool University Hospital. "It was there that I had my eyes opened and realised that what I thought would be the research I would go



Graduating from Leicester University with a master's in zoology, 1996

Profile

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into was no longer a high priority. I thought, 'actually, this isn't exciting anymore'. The bit that really excited me was the work I was doing with the undergraduates, helping them with their research projects."

A colleague made the leap into teaching and encouraged her to do the same. Brabner wasn't persuaded. But when she discovered she could qualify for further education, she quickly followed. "That was the moment when I stopped and thought 'OK, that actually could really work for me. I can carry forward my passion for the subject at a level that's stimulating and actually do the thing that I'm getting some pleasure out of' - which really boiled down to the fact that I was able to help some people in a small way and see their pleasure in what we were getting out of it."

That passion for helping and that satisfaction with impact measured on a small scale – one student at a time – doesn't seem

to have left Brabner as she has climbed the ranks. In part, that might be down to her and her sister being the first in their family to access higher education, a desire to replicate for others the experience and motivating power of a supportive family environment and supportive teachers. But talk to Brabner and you'll quickly realise that there's something less cerebral and more visceral to it.

Her father was a mechanic from a seafaring background; her mother a hairdresser whose family were traditionally farmers. "I do some inspection work too, and whether I'm going in that guise or in my own college environment, I love to chat to the people that are in the workshops or in the hair salons, because they're all the smells of my childhood. Having grown up with parents that are from that skills area, I understand the value of that."

Nothing in the past few months has shaken her core values. "The vision is still the same," she says. "I just think the journey is going to be different." It's an uncomplicated vision, and one that is shared by the senior team, staff and governors alike. "It sounds a cliché, but we want to be able to – as a college and particularly having two colleges under the one – provide for the educational needs that the area has."

"The reintegration into a bigger social circle could be quite a challenge for some"

That uncomplicated message is responsive by design. It's already guiding a very positive response to the challenges posed by Covid-19 now and for the months to come. "Granted," she says, "that educational need has probably changed."

In considering what these needs might be, her first focus is not on employment prospects but wellbeing. "We have quite a lot of students that come to us having had difficulties with school or with particular needs. We will always find ways to get through curriculum delivery.

"But my bigger concern for them is actually about how they feel and attending to that. Just the reintegration back into a bigger social circle could be quite a challenge."

Brabner and her team are quietly reviewing elements of their curriculum to include more focus on welfare. If this sensitive and flexible approach stretches to other aspects of Southport's provision as responsively in the future, then it's hard to imagine how it could be anything other than successful in a sector that's likely to face a multitude of challenges.

It may even give them an edge. Though of course Brabner may prefer for things to settle down a little in the meantime.



Her first ski trip, c.2000. "I love the challenge of trying something new."

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GILLIAN KEEGAN

Apprenticeships
and skills
minister

The transition to our new normal will not be straightforward

From next Monday, colleges and providers will have the flexibility to offer more students face-to-face learning, explains Gillian Keegan

Last month I virtually visited Weston College to meet students and staff. It was another incredible insight into how a college has been able to successfully move its learning and resources online at speed, with an impressive 88 per cent overall remote lesson attendance.

I know, from speaking with many across the sector, that FE is leading the way in digital delivery of education. Survey results from the Association of Colleges found that 70 per cent of providers have scheduled online lessons for most of their subjects and that 95 per cent of providers reported that all, or the majority, of their students are continuing their learning remotely.

"I know you all have the best interest of your students at heart"

As great as these efforts have been, we all know there is no substitute for being back in a classroom or workshop, particularly where that enables access to specialist facilities. That's why we are giving colleges and providers the flexibility to

offer a wider number of students and apprentices some face-to-face support to supplement their remote learning from June 15.

This initially should focus on those aged 16-19-years-old, who are in the first year of a two-year study programme. We know that colleges and training providers are best placed to know the needs of their students, which is why we have given them the flexibility to prioritise who can attend based on who will benefit from it the most.

To help reduce the transmission risk, we are asking providers to limit the number of learners attending at any one time to no more than a quarter of that group. We have published a checklist, which sets out steps to ensure risks are minimised, including enhanced hygiene care, limiting movements around exit and entry points and staggered start and end times, to make sure staff and students are safe.

Our guidance also makes clear that as part of their planning, all providers should carry out a risk assessment to identify any issues associated with coronavirus, so that sensible measures can be put in place.

I know a great deal of you are already putting these plans in place, including Sunderland College. Their overall remote attendance has been exceptionally high, at 93 per cent and they are now preparing for the increase in classroom contact. They are providing dedicated

support for vulnerable learners and inviting year 11 pupils in feeder schools to join virtual classes at the college to help with the transition. They plan to flex their college week, to provide catch-up support for learners who need it most, with dedicated coaches for those at risk of dropping out.

The TEC Partnership (formerly Grimsby Institute Group) has continued to offer high standards of education throughout lockdown with an amazing 89 per cent remote attendance rate and has also been considering re-opening since the very beginning. The partnership has worked out the maximum number of students who need to be on site whilst achieving social distancing, started installing extra sanitisation in rooms and is identifying where one-way systems would be required. Although there will continue to be a blended approach – of online and face to face learning – reopening presents a huge opportunity

for the TEC Partnership, and more importantly the students, who I am sure will benefit from the additional face-to-face engagement in a college setting.

The transition to our new normal will not be straightforward, and so we are starting cautiously, focusing on smaller groups of students, and asking providers to make plans now that will work for them. These are the first steps to providing greater flexibility and ensuring we have the right delivery that meets the needs of every learner. No student should be held back from progressing because of the coronavirus, so it is vital that plans are put in place so we can make sure that doesn't happen.

As we start our phased reopening, I want to thank everyone for their continued support and hard work. I know you all have the best interest of your students at heart, so I'm urging you all to work with us, continue to show leadership and take that first step.



Opinion

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JOHN WIDDOWSON

Principal, New College Durham



MARK CORNEY

Education Policy Consultant



FE should be at the heart of shielding 19 to 24-year-olds from unemployment

It makes financial sense for FE colleges to ease the pain of unemployment sparked by Covid-19, say John Widdowson and Mark Corney

We are heading for a youth unemployment crisis this September. Thankfully, the prime minister is on the case and a policy package is expected as part of an economic statement due early next month.

When the pandemic started, 2.5 million 18 to 24-year-olds were in employment and 300,000 of them were apprentices. Employment, however, could quickly fall by 500,000 and unemployment rise to 750,000.

Boris Johnson has promised an apprenticeship guarantee for young people. The key question is whether it is workable.

To have any chance of success, the Treasury will need to contribute towards wage costs. The apprenticeship rate is £4.15 an hour. Working and training time must be at least 30 hours a week and apprenticeships must last 52 weeks. Restricting the employer wage grant to a single payment for each apprentice, the cost for 52 weeks would be £6,474. This is higher than the average maintenance loan award for full-time higher education students of £6,150 where the Treasury gets 55 per cent back in repayments on earnings above £26,575.

Set at the £6,474 per apprentice, the cost of the wage grant to assist 500,000 newly unemployed 18 to 24-year-olds would be £3.25 billion. A further £2 billion would be needed to cover training costs assuming, say, an average of £4,000 per apprenticeship. A further £0.3 billion might be needed if 30,000 of the present 60,000 16 to 17-year-olds in apprenticeships lose their jobs. Together, the total cost could be £5.6 billion.

An alternative would be for the Treasury to limit the employer grant to the amount it pays unemployed 18 to 24-year-olds on JSA for a full year of £3,062.80 (ie, £58.90 x 52 weeks). This would reduce the employer grant to £1.6 billion. With training costs unchanged at £2.1 billion, the bill would be £3.7 billion.

“Bankrupt and downsizing employers don’t need apprentices”

Some of the extra cost might emerge from what the Department for Education pencilled in for the apprenticeship programme budget in 2020-21, before the pandemic as existing apprentices lose their

jobs and the job retention scheme ceases in October.

But the problem lies not with the promise of wage subsidies but with the promise of a guarantee. Whatever the amount, bankrupt and downsizing employers don’t need apprentices and the danger is some young people will feel desperately let down. Other parallel pathways are needed.

Eighteen to 24-year-olds can shield themselves from the labour market by staying in full-time education (FTE). Sadly, this option with maintenance support is only open to full-time HE students.

About 1.5 million 18 to 24-year-olds are in FTE. During the summer, more than 250,000 will leave full-time HE and will compete for non-graduate jobs or seek a one-year postgraduate degree.

Loans worth £11,200 are available for taught master degrees. Some universities are pricing them at £8,000. The remaining £3,200 is available for living costs, just a tad over JSA for a year.

Eighteen to 24-year-olds with relevant level 3 qualifications can also shield themselves by entering full-time undergraduate HE. The minimum maintenance loan payment is £3,410 a year and 92 per cent of full-time HE students take them out.

There are 150,000 18-year-olds in full-time FE; 90,000 19



to 24-year-olds. However, 19-24 FE students are not entitled to maintenance loans, let alone grants. Moreover, even though education is “free”, only 14,000 study for a first level 3.

From this September, the government should introduce a full-time study entitlement for 19 to 24-year-olds to achieve a first full level 3. Free education should be backed up by maintenance loans of at least £3,062.80 (equivalent to JSA for a year) so at last full-time 19-24 FE students will be eligible for maintenance loans alongside full-time HE students, redressing a serious inequality.

A maintenance loan entitlement to study full-time FE would help to shield more 19 to 24-year-olds from unemployment and supply more STEM and vocational level 3 qualifications, at a time when apprenticeships cannot guarantee to do so.

FE colleges would be at the heart of helping the other 50 per cent who do not go to university to get higher qualifications. And young people will be proud to be full-time students rather than welfare claimants.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

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AYRES

National head of technical education, Education and Training Foundation



Fellowships in technical teaching: here's why you should apply

Having a fellowship doesn't change the quality of the work you do – but it certainly gives you a big platform from which to shout about it, and to connect up with others in a meaningful way, says Cerian Ayres

Fellowship. It's a word that says so much. It says recognition by peers, it says achievement, and it says intellectual leadership. But it isn't just what the word says that makes a fellowship important; it's what it does.

In the case of those who are awarded a Technical Teaching Fellowship – an award made in partnership by the Education and Training Foundation and Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851 – it does rather a lot. It creates opportunities to share the results of the work undertaken by the distinguished recipients, and in doing so positively influences the delivery of technical teaching across the country.

“Simply being in receipt of the Fellowship opens doors”

Hearing from James Maltby of Plumpton College and Steven Mariadas of Exeter College about the work they have undertaken since being awarded Technical Teaching Fellowships last year is an inspiring experience.

James, a learning technology

manager at Plumpton College, has explored the use of immersive technology and how it can be used in technical settings, sharing the emerging practice from that work. His work has three main strands. The first has focused on supporting students and lecturers at Plumpton using 360 degree cameras to create virtual reality films that have been used for assessment and to create learning resources; the second on working with regional and national further education colleagues, employers and stakeholders to develop students' knowledge and workplace skills; and the third on regional and national conferences and webinars to disseminate that learning.

Stephen, meanwhile, has been doing work to capitalise on the opportunity presented by the South West's status as a hotbed of data. The presence of the MET Office, along with many other businesses that require data skills, demands a joined-up approach to recruitment. His work has been addressing that by bringing employers together with further education colleagues, creating local, regional and national networking opportunities to allow genuine two-way street working, and setting up a data science summer school to create awareness of data as a career for young people to aspire to.

The result is that employers from as far west as Penzance and as far east as Somerset are now engaged and recognise the contribution to technical



skills that the further education sector can make. Importantly, this effective practice is being shared more widely with schools, higher education institutions and technical STEM employers and stakeholders.

The work each is engaged in has already had a significant impact and will continue to do so. Both acknowledge that simply being in receipt of the Fellowship opens doors – in terms not just of the funding that it attracts and the time that allows to pursue your professional interest, but also the speaking engagements and media opportunities and avenues into higher-level study that are afforded to holders.

But both also understand that being a Fellow isn't about doing anything differently. The truth is that the award opens many doors and creates unforeseen opportunities, but it doesn't make the holder a different person. Those who become Fellows by

award are already Fellows in spirit and in practice; they're out there showing the drive and leadership that holders require in institutions around the country and helping to transform lives and communities, and in doing so raising the status of our sector.

Four more such individuals – Dr Lynda Broomhead of Petroc College, Chris Fairclough of Lakes College, Shell Fearn of North Hertfordshire College and Nicholas Hart of Sheffield College – were recognised with the award of a Fellowship at the end of January. I look forward to seeing the work they will do over the next 18 months, writing four more inspirational stories of excellence that extend the reach of our sector.

The work that these Fellows do is, without doubt, is of extremely high value. But without the status that Fellowship gives them, they simply don't have the kind of platform to shout about it and be heard. I know that there are many of you out there whose own ideas and dedication could benefit similarly from the platform a Technical Teaching Fellowship affords. For inspiration, I encourage you to listen to James' and Stephen's own accounts of their time as Fellows so far. And, having done so, I encourage you to go a step further and envisage yourself becoming a Fellow. And then I encourage you to take the next step and apply. Applications for next year's awards will open later in the summer. It could be you.



READER'S REPLY

Worth the wait: 'Outstanding' grade for Riverside College

Ian Clinton, website:

Wonderful news and what a brilliant achievement. A real credit to staff, managers, principal and governors. I spent about three years at Halton College, from early 2000, debts at £16.2 million, franchised two-year-olds from Scotland and artwork in my office costing over £250k! Delighted to learn of Mary's success.

The prime minister's 'apprenticeship guarantee': over-optimistic or visionary?

Mike Daykin, Facebook:

It will be a breath of fresh air if the government put funding into apprenticeships after obliterating it over the last three years.

Sally Dicketts announced as AoC president-elect

Olly Newton, Twitter:

Huge congratulations @SallyDicketts – really excited for you and looking forward to working with you.

Tony Allen, Twitter:

Many congratulations, Sally. All good wishes for your stewardship of this important position.

AELP calls for one-off £8.6bn post-pandemic skills package

Paul Butler, Twitter:

I'd be astonished if govt released that amount of new cash. The vast bulk would have to be through re-prioritisation and recycling of existing budgets from a range of departments, such as DWP, plus some additional funds.

They would also have to consider state aid rules. Wage subsidy grant is the only way to generate anything remotely resembling

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REPLY OF THE WEEK

Switching off frameworks before standard ready is 'right decision', says IfATE boss

Colin Leighfield, website

This is wrong. There is a failure to recognise that the very significant proportion of British industry that is SME, or at the smaller end of large, has never been properly represented in the standards development process. Apprenticeship levy and the associated standards development has mostly worked with larger businesses that already had structured training in place. Just at the time when we should be concerned that existing apprenticeships are threatened and new uptakes will reduce, they do something that will reduce it further. We need to pursue this.

an "Apprenticeship Guarantee". If it's linked to the Job Retention Scheme for existing apps; and a heftier (at least 50 per cent of the AMW) version of the old AGE grant, you should get some traction.

I firmly believe the solution should be a wider FE/HE participation guarantee, backed up with wage subsidies and placement incentives.

T-level wobble as another four providers cancel September launch plans

Steve Hewitt, Twitter:

Can't see there being 1,000 starts in September... down to 90ish cohorts and there's always going to be some that don't run, even where the provider is 100 per cent ready and willing.

FE's fight to tackle hate crime

Jacqui Clarke, website:

It is great that they are tackling hate crimes but they also need to look at institutional racism. A look at trade union stats show quite a high incidence of racism towards staff.

Bulletin

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Movers & Shakers

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



David Balme

Chair of Board
of Trustees,
One Awards

Start date May 2020

Concurrent job

Executive Director of Governance,
Assurance and Risk, NCG

Interesting fact

Since passing his driving test David
has owned 22 different cars



Vanessa Housley

Board member,
Education Training
Collective

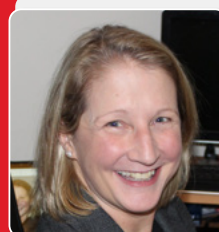
Start date May 2020

Concurrent job

Interim Chief Advisor, Stockton
Education Improvement Service

Interesting fact

Vanessa is a certified PADI Advanced
Open Water Scuba Diver



Sam Knowlton

Principal, UTC
Oxfordshire

Start date April 2020

Previous job

Assistant Principal, Swindon Academy

Interesting fact

She took a break from educational
leadership to run a manufacturing
company as an MD whilst competing
at international level in archery

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

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THE **FE WEEK**

BIG FE & SKILLS QUIZ

CONGRATULATIONS TO
THE WINNER

**EXETER
BRIDESMAIDS
NEVER THE BRIDE**

AND WELL DONE TO THE REST
OF THE TOP 5 ENTRANTS

2. **TEAM WILLIAMS**
3. **LIVING LA VIDA LSEC**
4. **HAWK TRAINING**
5. **3 CHAMPIONS, 1 MID TABLE**

**A TOTAL OF £2,250 WAS
RAISED ON THE NIGHT!**



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THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROSITY!

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