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COLLEGES WON'T SURVIVE ON WARM WORDS ALONE

- Bradford to make 107 redundant after plea for help rejected
- FE sector refused access to DfE's £1bn 16-19 catch-up funding
- AoC warns college sector income could fall from £7bn to £5bn



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IN PEOPLE BUT NOT IN THEIR POTENTIAL."**

Teanna Maguire Midwifery Undergraduate at
Manchester University and former BTEC student

FEWEEK

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Page 17



Possible stay of execution for Newton Rigg

Page 12



Profile: Sarah Stannard: Principal and Chief Executive, Southampton City College

Page 22



How one adult education provider went above and beyond the conventional

Page 27

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FE colleges to fully reopen in September is the 'intention'

BILLY CAMDEN
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It is the government's "intention" to get colleges "back in September", the prime minister said this week after announcing that schools will reopen by then with "full attendance" as social distancing rules are relaxed.

Boris Johnson told the House of Commons on Tuesday that he will reduce the distance that needs to be maintained between people from two metres to one from July 4.

After announcing a raft of industries reopening from that date, such as pubs, restaurants, hairdressers, hotels and campsites, the prime minister said: "Primary and secondary education will recommence in September with full attendance and those children who can already go to school should do so because it is safe."

He was later asked by Richard Graham MP if he would agree that the "absolutely crucial goal is for all children and students and FE colleges and universities to be able to go back to school, college and university in the autumn absolutely safely?"

"It is going to be very difficult to open fully"

Johnson replied: "It is our intention to get not just schools but FE colleges back as well in September and get our young people back where they need to be in education and preparing for their future."

Colleges have been allowed to welcome back more students from June 15, but are only allowed up to a quarter of 16-to-19-year-olds in the first year of a study programme on site at any one time until the summer break.

Principals have previously warned that it



Boris Johnson

would not be possible to return all students with social distancing rules in place.

David Hughes, chief executive of the Association of Colleges, appeared in front of the education select committee on Wednesday and was asked by MPs if he thought his members could restart with full attendance by September as the prime minister suggested.

"I think it is going to be very difficult to open fully," he said.

"We are expecting most students to have a blended offer. That might mean one or two days in college and one or two days working at home.

"I think we have got to invest in the technology and the online materials and that is a big investment that the Department for Education could make quite urgently and could make a profound impact on the success for those learners.

"Social distancing is still going to be an issue, public transport is going to be difficult

and lots of students post-16 travel a long way to get to college."

Following Johnson's announcement on Tuesday, Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said that it was "pure fantasy" to suggest that reducing the social distancing rule to one metre would allow all children and students to return in September.

"We need a proper strategy to bring children back into schools and colleges based in reality and on public health guidance," he added.

Johnson said that his government will soon publish Covid-secure guidelines for every sector that is reopening and "slowly but surely these measures will restore a sense of normality".

"After the toughest restrictions in peacetime history, we are now able to make life easier for people to see more of their friends and family and get businesses back on their feet and people back into work," he added.

Covid financial support for 16-19 private providers finally revealed

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Private training providers whose recruitment of 16-to-19 students has been “limited” due to Covid-19 have been offered financial support to ease budget pressures.

Independent learning providers (ILPs) can now make a business case to the Education and Skills Funding Agency to prevent clawback of any underperformance they have experienced for this group of learners.

The ESFA said: “ILPs may be recruiting fewer part-time students than they would normally recruit between March 2020 to July 2020.

“This will impact on the level of funding that these students would usually attract and will result in clawback of funds for 2019 to 2020.

“The ESFA will support ILPs whose recruitment of students, to a 16-to-19 study programme, have been limited due to the lockdown situation and who have faced clawback for under-performance.”

For approved cases, the ESFA said it will base

the expected delivery in March to July on the previous year’s delivery for students recruited between March 1, 2019 and July 31, 2019, taking up to half of this into account.

In addition, the agency will “add the actual delivery for students recruited between March 2020 and July 2020, up to a maximum of 100 per cent of the 2018 to 2019 funded delivery for March 2019 to July 2019”.

No clawback relief will be possible if the cash delivery in 2019 to 2020 exceeds the cash delivery in 2018 to 2019 for the period from 1 March to 31 July for each year.

The ESFA added that to further support ILPs, they are extending the clawback period to include January 2021 to March 2021.

“The clawback that is planned for July 2020 will be included into the re-profiling, from August 2020 to March 2021. This does not need to be requested and will be shown in the R10 reconciliation statement.

“There may be a small number of exceptions where a risk to ESFA and public funds is identified. In these instances, we cannot delay July 2020 clawback, but we will extend the

clawback profile until March 2021.”

The ESFA made clear this funding support is a “one-off” in response to the unexpected disruption caused by the arrival of coronavirus and ILPs should “not expect this to be repeated in future”.

ILPs making a business case should also “not seek” support from government’s Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) to furlough staff whose salaries are paid from continuing ESFA or any other public income.

“ILPs submitting a business case must demonstrate they have not received support from the CJRS to furlough staff involved in the continued direct delivery of provision remotely of 16-to-19 study programmes and where possible recruitment of 16-to-19 students between March 2020 to July 2020,” the ESFA said.

“The Department for Education is considering appropriate measures to monitor use of claims from CJRS in order to detect any duplication of public funding and will be considering potential options to recover misused public funding as required.”

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College leaders all for Covid action – not ‘warm words’

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From front

College leaders have warned the sector is facing a financial crisis owing to the “enormous impact” of Covid-19 as they plead with government to replace “warm words” with actual support.

Bradford College is one of the first forced to make drastic decisions to stay afloat by announcing 107 redundancies after experiencing a £2 million drop in apprenticeship income since lockdown.

The college’s principal Chris Webb accused the Department for Education of being “short-sighted” after he approached them for supplier relief support to help protect the job losses only to have the bid rejected.

But Bradford is not alone in feeling the severe impact of the coronavirus pandemic. On Wednesday, Association of Colleges chief executive David Hughes told MPs on the education select committee that his members’ income, which currently totals around £7 billion annually, could fall by up to £2 billion next year.

He said colleges that have moved into the apprenticeships market and increased their commercial income streams are “no doubt” the most at risk.

Hughes added that this was “ironic” as the government has been “urging them to do that for years [increase their apprenticeship delivery], they do it and a crisis hits and they are the most exposed”. In 2015, the then skills minister Nick Boles told the AoC conference to stop letting private providers “nick your lunch” – urging them to get more involved in apprenticeships.

Hughes said his organisation recently surveyed the 17 colleges that provide apprenticeships and they predicted a 50 per cent drop in starts next year, which would equate to a £30 million loss just to those 17.

He insisted “it is not just independent training providers” that are at risk of going bust without additional financial support from government when it comes to apprenticeships as starts plummet.

A spokesperson for Bradford College

explained how a “significant reduction in apprenticeship starts” has left them with “no option but to reduce staffing costs in this area”.

They added that “unfortunately in six to 12 months, when apprenticeship roles are needed to restart the economy, we won’t have those staff in place”.

East Sussex College is another college feeling the strain of the drop in starts. They told FE Week they are anticipating a £400,000 to £500,000 reduction in apprenticeship income by the end of this financial year compared to pre-Covid-19 budget planning.

And this will only get worse next year: “Apprenticeship income is budgeted to reduce by £1 million in 2020-21 compared to the out-turn for the financial year ending March 2020, and £1.4 million lower when compared to the pre-Covid-19 budget.”

The college’s spokesperson added that “at present”, this has not required redundancies but “some fixed-term contracts have not been renewed”.

Another college that offers apprenticeships, Dudley College of Technology, told FE Week they are still modelling the impact of Covid-19 but they have had to request “short-term government support”.

Dudley’s spokesperson would not say how much emergency funding they have requested, but added they “await further government announcements to guide our decisions”.

A spokesperson for West Nottinghamshire College said they have “lowered our forecast activity by around £1 million to reflect employer feedback, which indicates starts will be delayed or in some cases, firms will miss a year of recruitment”.

Hughes said the government “must must must” do something to support colleges, especially after the DfE “indefensibly” snubbed them from their £1 billion plan to help students

catch up with the teaching they have missed since lockdown (see page 10).

The government has also said colleges must pay for equipment and measures to make them a Covid-secure site out of their existing budget and no additional support will be provided.

As FE Week revealed last week, multiple principals have said they are having to fork out hundreds of thousands of pounds on personal protective equipment (PPE), hand sanitiser, signage, shields and temperature guns.

Hughes described the potential £2 billion loss in college income as an “enormous impact and this is on a sector that has faced a decade of austerity and neglect” and insisted there are a “number of things” government can do protect the sector.

“They can help with cashflow, they can bring forward some of the payments. It is not about more money, it is just about when the money comes, they can absolutely do something around apprenticeship capacity in key priority sectors with employers, they can support colleges where the solvency is now an issue.

“They can definitely give colleges more certainty about the flexibilities they will need. What we know is lots of young people will be persuaded by schools to stay in school and then after a little while they will get a bit disillusioned and go to college. The college needs the certainty that they will have the funding to support those learners and at the moment they don’t have that.”

Hughes said there is a “lack of urgency and understanding of what is going to hit us in the autumn” and “we’ve got lots of warm words but no real action”.

Minister for apprenticeships and skills Gillian Keegan said: “We recognise the challenges that colleges are facing as a result of Covid-19.

“We have provided unprecedented support through the Job Retention Scheme, guaranteeing existing grant funding as well as the bursary and supplier relief schemes for contracted provision. We have also increased the base funding rate for 16 to 19 provision from September.

“For colleges in significant financial difficulties, the existing support arrangements remain in place including short term solvency support through emergency funding.”



David Hughes

Chris Webb

ESFA provider relief round 2: what you need to know

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The Education and Skills Funding Agency launched its second Covid-19 provider relief scheme on Thursday.

FE providers can now bid to receive apprenticeship and adult education budget funding in advance of delivery for the period July to October 2020.

The first supplier relief scheme was run from April to June and resulted in a third (58) of the 165 training providers that applied being awarded extra funding.

The ESFA said any provider that bid in the first scheme can apply for support from this second round.

A spokesperson for the agency said: "In offering supplier relief, the aim is to continue to retain capacity within the apprenticeships and adult education sector to deliver the skills needed to support economic recovery post-pandemic.

"As part of that, ESFA also wants to support training providers to maintain delivery to, and support for, existing learners and employers and enable new learners to enrol."

Who is eligible?

Eligibility rules for apprenticeship and AEB Covid support have largely stayed the same as the first round.

Providers must hold a direct contract that was procured as a service under Public Contract Regulations 2015, and their 2018-19 qualification achievement rates must be above 40 per cent.

Providers with rates below that threshold can, however, submit an "exceptional case that they are a critical supplier based on niche provision".

Those bidding for supplier relief must have submitted their latest financial accounts to the ESFA where these are due by June 19, 2020, not been judged by Ofsted as making 'insufficient progress' as a result of a new provider monitoring visit which resulted in a suspension on new starts, and delivered under the contract prior to April 2020.

Providers must also plan to deliver learning under the contract in July, August, September and October 2020, and demonstrate the "ability to continue to deliver without additional support from November".

They also must not have furloughed the staff required to deliver the contract, and not received a notice of termination from the ESFA.

What do providers need to prove to be successful?

The ESFA stressed that providers will need to demonstrate that they have a "need" for the funding requested "in order to maintain capacity within their organisations to support learners and respond to the economic recovery".

They will also need to "explain how they are

going to update and change delivery models to operate without further relief from November 2020".

The ESFA said training providers receiving support from this scheme "must be prepared" to provide "all evidence of spend for future reconciliation and provide 'open book' access to accounting records, upon which their application is based".

They must also be prepared to "provide forecast financial information with an accompanying commentary to demonstrate their plans for sustainability over the coming year".

What support will successful applicants receive?

The ESFA will calculate a "funding cap" for each training provider requesting support from the scheme, which will be "applied to the amount requested by the provider".

"The cap will be based on the proportion of funds you were paid, through each eligible contract for services for the corresponding month in 2019," the agency explained.

"For example, if you were paid eight per cent of your allocated AEB funds in July 2019, then your AEB funding cap for July 2020 will be eight per cent of your current allocation.

"A cap for August, September and October 2020 will be applied using the same method. However, existing maximum contract values (MCV) continue to apply and your funding cap cannot exceed 25 per cent of the MCV even where the average earnings exceed this."

The relief scheme will apply to activity undertaken in July, August, September, and October 2020 and will be paid in the subsequent months.

"Funding through this relief scheme will be paid on top of the regular payment claimed via the individualised learner record (ILR)," the ESFA added.

"The total of the two payments will not exceed the provider's funding cap, if you earn more funds through your ILR claim than your funding cap we will not pay any relief."

Closing date for applications is midnight July 9. The ESFA will respond to applications by August 6.



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Treasury made decision to exclude colleges from £1bn catch-up fund

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Exclusive

It was the Treasury's decision to pull colleges from the Department for Education's £1 billion Covid-19 catch-up plan, FE Week understands.

Last week, the DfE sparked outrage after telling the press that 16-to-19 providers would be included in the support package only to send out a "correction" two hours later that removed them.

Ministers have so far refused to say why colleges were suddenly snubbed at the 11th hour despite pressure growing on them to provide answers.

A cross-party group of MPs wrote to education secretary Gavin Williamson on Tuesday urging him to extend eligibility for funds to colleges, while a petition has also been launched by a former principal calling for the decision to be reversed.

But FE Week understands it was actually the Treasury's call.

When approached for comment, the Treasury did not deny that they overruled the DfE. A spokesperson would only say they have nothing further to add on this matter additional to the education secretary Gavin Williamson's words in the House of Commons on Monday.

Williamson had dodged multiple questions from MPs who challenged him on the exclusion of colleges from the £1 billion scheme during education questions on Monday.

The very first question came from Wes Streeting, Labour MP for Ilford North, who said: "Last Thursday the incompetence, or was it a row between DfE and the Treasury, that saw at half-past six the DfE press release announcing support including early-years and post-16 education, only by half-past eight to see a support package only for schools.

"Isn't it time for the secretary of state to get a grip and get the action that we really need?"

But Williamson had nothing to say about colleges in his response: "This is the party and this is the government that is absolutely committed to closing the gap between those who are most advantaged and those who are most disadvantaged.

"That is why we are not just talking about it like the party opposite did, we are driving up standards in education and in schools. That's why we're



Gavin Williamson

spending an extra billion pounds in terms of raising standards and helping those youngsters who have been impacted by it."

Pressing Williamson on the same topic minutes later, former shadow education secretary and MP for Salford and Eccles, Rebecca Long-Bailey, asked: "What on earth happened?"

But again, the education secretary ignored the question and instead criticised the Labour Party, stating: "Maybe it would be nice if the lady opposite could welcome such proposals."

Later in the session, Chesterfield MP and shadow apprenticeships and lifelong learning minister Toby Perkins asked how the government can "justify leaving them [16-to-19 providers] out of that announcement when a plan for schools was in place last week?"

Skills minister Gillian Keegan replied this time and said the DfE would provide more details "soon" on how 16-to-19 providers can "further support students" needing to catch up on the education they have lost due to Covid-19.

"I think it's clear the initial focus has been on the school catch-up. There has been a great response from the further education sector.

"They were quick to move online, they have provided a wide range of engaging and innovative classes but we do recognise the need for catch up, particularly those starting college from school. We are working to see what more support we can give to make up for the disruption due to Covid-19."

Boris Johnson was also quizzed on the issue by Daniel Zeichner MP during prime minister's questions on Wednesday. The prime minister said: "We will of course do everything we can to ensure not just our schools but our colleges also get the

attention they need."

Under the DfE's £1 billion proposal, all state primary and secondary schools will split £650 million in additional funding for the 2020-21 academic year to help their pupils catch up on education missed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

The remaining £350 million will pay for the establishment of a National Tutoring Programme, which will run for the duration of the next academic year and give schools access to subsidised tutoring sessions and free coaches for up to two million disadvantaged pupils.

The Association of Colleges and Sixth Form Colleges Association had been in discussions with the DfE about the support package and both expected their members to be included in the announcement.

The cross-party letter sent to Williamson on Wednesday was from the officers of the All Party Parliamentary Group for sixth-form education who said they "do not understand why 16-to-19 providers such as sixth form and other colleges are not able to access" the support package.

It was signed by Conservative MPs Jason McCartney, Peter Aldous, Caroline Nokes and William Wragg, while Labour Party signatories included Dame Diana Johnson and Rachel Hopkins and the only Green MP, Caroline Lucas.

A petition calling on the government to reverse their decision to drop 16-to-18-year-olds from the funding has also been launched by Christine Megson, an education consultant and former Stafford College principal.

Almost 700 people had signed the petition at the time of going to press.

Long-Bailey sacked from opposition front bench by Starmer

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The shadow education secretary Rebecca Long-Bailey has been sacked by Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer.

A spokesperson for Starmer said she had been "asked to step down" after sharing an article that "contained an antisemitic conspiracy theory".

On Thursday, Long-Bailey shared an interview with actor Maxine Peake in the Independent newspaper, in which Peake claimed that "the tactics used by the police in America, kneeling on George Floyd's neck, that was learnt from seminars with Israeli secret services".

Long-Bailey insisted in a later tweet that her original tweet "wasn't intended to be an endorsement of all aspects of the article."

"I retweeted Maxine Peake's article because of her significant achievements and because the thrust of her argument is to

stay in the Labour Party," she said.

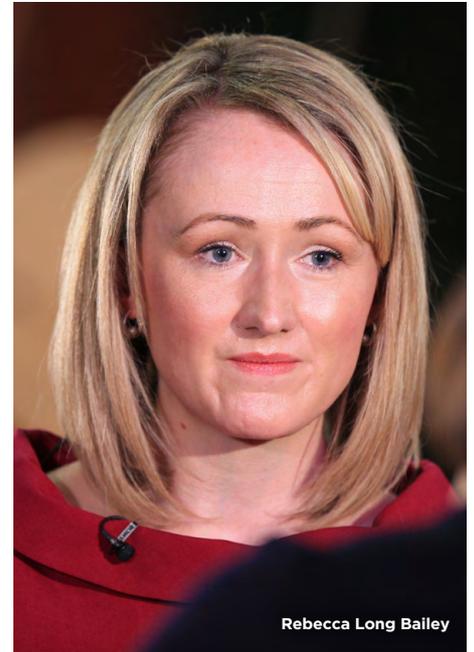
Starmer's spokesperson said: "As leader of the Labour Party, Keir has been clear that restoring trust with the Jewish community is a number one priority. Antisemitism takes many different forms and it is important that we all are vigilant against it."

Long-Bailey was appointed in April after Starmer won the Labour leadership election. She replaced Angela Rayner, who became the party's deputy leader.

Long-Bailey later tweeted she had tried to discuss the matter with Starmer but he had "already made his decision".

She added: "I am proud of the policies we have developed within the party from our Green Industrial Revolution to a National Education Service and I will never stop working for the change our communities need to see."

"I am clear that I shall continue to support the Labour Party in parliament under Keir Starmer's leadership, to represent the people of Salford and Eccles and



Rebecca Long Bailey

work towards a more equal, peaceful and sustainable world."

It is not known at this stage when Starmer will appoint Long-Bailey's successor.

EU students to be barred from FE loans next year

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Students from the European Union will lose eligibility for advanced learner loans from August next year, the government confirmed this week.

Universities minister Michelle Donelan announced new rules on Tuesday, which also apply to students from the European Economic Area and Swiss nationals.

It comes as the UK prepares for the end of the transition year for leaving the European Union at the end of December.

"Following our decision to leave the European Union, EU, other EEA and Swiss nationals will no longer be eligible for home fee status,



undergraduate, postgraduate and advanced learner financial support from Student Finance England for courses starting in academic year 2021-22," Donelan said.

She confirmed that this change will apply to further education funding for those aged 19 and above, including the national and devolved adult education budget, and funding for apprenticeships.

The EU makes up 11 per cent in terms of learners and funding for colleges currently, according to statistics published by the Student Loan Company.

Donelan said the changes will not affect students "starting courses in academic year 2020-21, nor those EU, other EEA and Swiss nationals benefitting from

Citizens' Rights under the EU Withdrawal Agreement, EEA EFTA Separation Agreement or Swiss Citizens' Rights Agreement respectively".

"It will also not apply to Irish nationals living in the UK and Ireland whose right to study and to access benefits and services will be preserved on a reciprocal basis for UK and Irish nationals under the Common Travel Area arrangement."

She added that EU, other EEA and Swiss students, staff and researchers make an "important contribution to our universities...I want that contribution to continue and am confident - given the world-leading quality of our higher education sector - that it will".

Home fee status currently allows those impacted to pay tuition fees at the "home" rather than the more expensive overseas rate on courses of FE in England.

Possible stay of execution for Newton Rigg College

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A land-based college facing closure could retain its educational purpose after the government agreed to conduct a review of the proposals put forward to take over the site.

Newton Rigg College, in Penrith, was due to shut in July 2021 after a local provision "needs analysis" conducted by the FE Commissioner last month found it was no longer financially viable.

But the Department for Education said on Thursday that "several interested parties" have since approached Askham Bryan College, the owner of Newton Rigg, who are interested in acquiring the site "for educational purposes".

As a result, "the college governors have agreed that the FE Commissioner will conduct a strategic review on their behalf in order that the merits of each proposal can be fully explored," a spokesperson for the DfE said.

The outcome is expected in December and transfer of ownership will take place "in time for the beginning of the 2021-22 academic year".

The DfE told *FE Week* that the strategic review is an open and competitive process, and any further interested parties who wish to submit an expression of interest "should write in the first instance to the chief executive at Askham Bryan College by July 10".

While neither the college nor government could disclose what bids have been put forward, local MP Neil Hudson, who is campaigning to save the college, told *FE Week* that "educational provision will certainly be at the heart of the proposals".

"I am glad that Askham Bryan have agreed to this process, which will allow the FE Commissioner to fully evaluate the exciting proposals for Newton Rigg and I truly believe it will help in securing a viable and sustainable future for the campus," he added.

Despite this, Askham Bryan is continuing with a consultation on the potential loss of 117 jobs.

Principal Tim Whitaker said: "We understand the strength of feeling about Newton Rigg, and are committed to supporting the strategic review, given the interest expressed in the potential future use of the site.

"The statutory consultation process with Newton Rigg staff and the trade unions is continuing and is unaffected by the strategic review of proposals from interested parties.

"We regret putting staff at risk of redundancy and are doing all we can to support colleagues at this difficult time."

The college said the first FE Commissioner review, which started in March and concluded last month, found that Newton Rigg lacked "a sustainable business model due to declining student numbers and demographics".

It was also said to have found that the estate would require around £20 million worth of capital investment in order to "keep pace" with land-based sector skills needs.

Newton Rigg was first established in 1896 to "serve the needs of agricultural and rural industries" in Cumbria and since incorporation in 1992, it has been owned or governed by four different corporations including two universities.

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

Courses currently provided include agriculture, gamekeeping,

animal and equine management, forestry, horticulture and agricultural engineering.

The University and College Union previously vowed to fight the closure of the Penrith-based college.

Officials called the decision "a hammer blow" to the region and said it would leave the county without any specialist agricultural education.

Around 888 learners are currently based at the college including 221 apprentices as well as 667 FE students – the majority of whom are enrolled on one-year programmes.

Newton Rigg is one of a number of colleges that have announced plans to close campuses and been met with MP opposition.

Other cases have included the RNN Group, Cornwall College Group, BMet and Warrington & Vale Royal College.

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Disadvantage is found at every stage of apprenticeships, mobility report finds

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The apprenticeships system is “failing” young disadvantaged people and needs “decisive” government action to stop it becoming worse, according to the Social Mobility Commission.

A report published this week by the independent advisory non-departmental public body warns that disadvantage gaps exist at “every stage” of the apprenticeship journey, from initial selection of candidates by employers to the quality of training apprentices get.

Their analysis found there was a 36 per cent decline in starts by learners from disadvantaged backgrounds between 2015-16 and 2017-18 – the year the levy was introduced – in comparison to a 23 per cent decline for more privileged apprentices.

At the same time, only 13 per cent of degree-level apprenticeships – the “fastest growing and most expensive apprenticeship option” – were taken by disadvantaged apprentices.

And on average, apprentices from disadvantaged backgrounds earn less than non-disadvantaged apprentices.

The authors of Apprenticeships and Social Mobility: Fulfilling Potential also warned that the coronavirus pandemic may further worsen the disparity.

Steven Cooper, joint deputy chair of the Social Mobility Commission, said the apprenticeship levy, introduced in April 2017, has “disproportionately funded higher-level apprenticeships for learners from more advantaged communities, rather than those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, who would benefit more”.

He added that it is “no longer credible for the government to assume that apprenticeships automatically improve social mobility and leave the system to its own devices”.

The Department for Education said they are “absolutely committed

to levelling up opportunity across the country” and will do “all we can to make sure no one is left behind as a result of coronavirus”.

The Social Mobility Commission’s report sets the government six targets to meet by September 2023 (see list below).

Despite the apprenticeships system currently “not delivering”, the commission states that apprenticeships are one of the most “effective means” of boosting social mobility for workers from poorer backgrounds.

They found, for example, there is a 16 per cent boost to wages for disadvantaged learners who complete their training, compared with 10 per cent for others.

But it is getting into and through the system that is the problem.

The research, conducted by London Economics, mirrored the traditional steps in the apprentice journey: from selection into apprenticeship training until entry into the labour market.

They found a “big gap” between apprentices, depending on their socio-economic status, in terms of employer selection for training; the quality or “value” of the training received; the likelihood of completing training and of progressing into higher-level apprenticeships, or further and higher education; as well as levels of pay after undertaking an apprenticeship.

The authors described this as a “remarkable” finding and proves that the levy has been “ineffective” in narrowing the disadvantage gap.

For example, in 2017-18, disadvantaged learners “clustered” in apprenticeships at lower levels: 48 per cent of disadvantaged starters were enrolled into an intermediate apprenticeship, compared with only 41 per cent of starters from non-disadvantaged backgrounds.

They also “clustered in low-paying subject areas at higher apprenticeship levels, particularly for women”, such as the services, health, education or public administration sectors, and had “shorter planned apprenticeship durations than their peers, on average, within higher-earning subject areas such as engineering, construction and

information and communications technology”.

The commission found that disadvantaged apprentices are less likely to complete their training than non-disadvantaged peers.

A total of 63 per cent of apprenticeships started between 2013-14 and 2014-15 were successfully completed within three years at intermediate level by disadvantaged men and women, compared to 67 per cent for their more privileged peers.

The main reason for dropping out included low levels of pay, with small and medium-sized enterprises more likely to pay apprentices the minimum wage.

And young disadvantaged learners were up to four percentage points less likely to progress to qualifications at higher levels, compared with non-disadvantaged learners.

Cooper said strategic action and direction are needed to target the apprenticeships system better on disadvantaged communities and improve the system’s value for money.

“This is an easy win for the government in its attempts at levelling up – if it can get this right.

The government must look at the structural barriers in place and take action to channel resources where they will have the greatest effect,” he added.

The commission’s six targets for government to meet by September 2023:

- 1: Increase the share of apprentices from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds to pre-levy level.
- 2: Increase the proportion of starters from disadvantaged backgrounds at advanced and higher levels to comparable levels currently prevailing for non-disadvantaged apprentices.
- 3: Eliminate the disadvantage gap in levy support for starters at higher level.
- 4: Ensure the average planned duration of comparable apprenticeship programmes are at least as long for disadvantaged learners as for non-disadvantaged learners (with no shortening of planned duration compared to current levels).
- 5: Reduce incidence of non-achievement for all socio-economic backgrounds to levels comparable to those in other education sectors.
- 6: Ensure completion rates for comparable apprenticeship programmes are the same for both disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged learners (and comparable to completion rates in the wider education arena).



Apprenticeship starts continue to plummet since lockdown

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Apprenticeship starts have dropped by almost half since lockdown compared to the same period last year – with young people the hardest hit, according to new Department for Education figures.

Provisional data published on Thursday shows that from March 23 to May 31 there were 26,090 starts compared to the 50,050 reported between those months in 2019 – a fall of 47.9 per cent.

The DfE stressed that final data will not become available until later in the year, therefore at this point it is “unclear what the true number of starts in the affected period was, or if the level of under-reporting at this point in the year has been affected by the lockdown”.

Young learners have been the hardest hit by Covid-19, as the data shows just 2,020 (7.7 per cent) of the 26,090 starts were for those aged under 19. Starts for over 25s made up 16,670 (63.9 per cent).

And level 2 apprenticeships accounted for 7,020 (26.9 per cent) of starts; this was 37.1 per cent in 2018-19.

The number of apprenticeships advertised on the Find An Apprenticeship government website for vacancies also dropped substantially in March, April and May this year: from 36,080 across the three months in 2018-19, to 11,760, a decrease of 67 per cent.

Last month DfE data revealed there had been 13,020 apprenticeship starts reported between March 23 and the end of April, compared to 26,300 for the same period last year.

Responding to the latest figures, Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief executive Mark Dawe said: “With youth unemployment having doubled, we need an urgent policy response that protects both existing apprentices coming off furlough and stimulates new apprenticeship opportunities for other young people while also providing an option for unemployed adults.

“The Department for Education should finally recognise too that both levy and non-levy apprenticeships need to be protected by its

Table 1: Apprenticeship starts from 23 March to 31 May 2020, reported to date
(The return date for 2019/20 was 4 June 2020; the equivalent date for 2018/19 was 6 June 2019)

	2018/19 (at this point last year)		2019/20 (reported to date)	
	Apprenticeship starts	Proportion of total	Apprenticeship starts	Proportion of total
Total starts	50,050		26,090	
Age				
Under 19	7,360	14.7%	2,020	7.7%
19-24	14,490	28.9%	7,410	28.4%
25+	28,210	56.4%	16,670	63.9%
Level				
Intermediate Apprenticeship	18,560	37.1%	7,020	26.9%
Advanced Apprenticeship	22,550	45.0%	10,890	41.8%
Higher Apprenticeship	8,940	17.9%	8,180	31.3%

Source: DfE

provider relief scheme.

“Apprenticeships are jobs, and most observers agree that a significant wage subsidy is required to encourage employers, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, to offer new opportunities.”

A Department for Education spokesperson said: “We acknowledge this is a challenging time for employers, apprentices and people thinking about their next steps, but we absolutely remain committed to investing in apprenticeships.

“They are an excellent way to get ahead in a wide range of rewarding careers and will continue to play an important role in delivering the high-quality skills that employers need and will support our economic recovery post Covid-19.

“We are looking at how we can support employers, especially

small and medium sized businesses, to take on new apprentices this year and will provide further detail in due course.”

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Online ceremony for ‘inspirational’ BTEC learners & institutions

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The winners of Pearson’s tenth annual BTEC Awards have been announced in a ceremony which took place online for the first time ever.

Due to the coronavirus, the 2020 awards were presented virtually to the 17 winners from the UK and abroad by host Flex, a YouTube influencer and BTEC ambassador.

Prizes were also handed out via YouTube by double Olympic Gold medallist Max Whitlock and TV presenter George Clarke.

One of the big winners was Marium Shafique from Nelson and Colne College Group, who was awarded the adult learner and business and enterprise learner of the year award. Judges said she was recognised for her “determination as well as her self-starting approach to acquiring skills needed for her career”.

Elsewhere, Aaron Wilson from Wigan and Leigh College won the top prize for art and design. He was praised for demonstrating “passion, hard work, tenacity, curiosity and talent”.

Georgina Green from Riseholme College received the land-based learner of the year award as she showed “real dedication to her subject and real commitment to use her learning not only for herself but for the positive impact she can have on animal welfare”.

Cindy Rampersaud, senior vice president BTEC and apprenticeship at Pearson, said: “I’ve been overwhelmed by the quality of BTEC award nominations we received and I am delighted to celebrate this year’s winners and the achievements of all learners who will be awarded a BTEC this year.

“Over the past few weeks and months, we’ve seen how the current pandemic has

highlighted the critical role of key workers and individuals who are likely to have followed a vocational educational pathway such as BTEC.”

Performing at the virtual ceremony were the four finalists of the Showstopper Challenge – in which BTEC students put on a performance whether they be a singer, dancer, film maker, actor or artist of any other kind. These were: Ruth Hilborne and Nicky Rush from Bridgwater College, Jodie Wiggins from East Norfolk Sixth Form College, Imogen Latta from North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College as well as a group from Woodkirk Academy.

A public vote took place during the virtual ceremony to decide an overall winner of the challenge, which was won by Woodkirk Academy. Entrants had been invited to make submissions in response to the brief ‘I am more than a BTEC student...’

Other winners of the main awards included Blackpool Sixth Form College for college of the year.

Tutor of the year was awarded to James Booty from Basingstoke College of Technology for his “innovative and exceptional teaching style”, which motivated both learners and other members of his department.

Also in attendance at the ceremony was previous host and journalist Steph McGovern and Thailand’s ambassador to the UK, His Excellency Pisanu Suvanajata, who was another presenter at the awards.

He said, “I offer my congratulations to all of this year’s award winners, and the Thai government looks forward to continuing this exciting journey to equip our young and talented workers with the skills they need to thrive in the labour market of the future.”

Each BTEC award winner was awarded a £1,000 cash prize.

The 2020 BTEC Awards winners are:

- Adult Learner and Business and Enterprise Learner of the Year 2020: Marium Shafique, Nelson and Colne College Group
- Young Learner and Construction Learner of the Year 2020: Lin Min Khant, Myanmar Noble University
- Art and Design Learner of the Year 2020: Aaron Wilson, Wigan and Leigh College
- Child and Social Care Learner of the Year 2020: Emily Campbell, Ballyclare Secondary School
- Creative Media Learner of the Year 2020: Jonathan Morris, Walsall College
- Engineering Learner of the Year 2020: Caitlin Marsh Brown, Isle of Wight College - CECAMM
- Hospitality, Travel and Tourism Learner of the Year 2020: Jessica Elmore, Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College
- IT and Computing Learner of the Year 2020: Andrea Rodrigues, Ada – the National College for Digital Skills
- Land-Based Learner of the Year 2020: Georgina Green, Riseholme College
- Performing Arts Learner of the Year 2020: Charis Pulei, Braeburn International School Arusha
- Public Services Learner of the Year 2020: Cooper Sommerville, East Surrey College
- Science Learner of the Year 2020: Hannah Whyatt, Tupton Hall School
- Sport Learner of the Year 2020: Stefanie McCluskey, Belfast Metropolitan College

Teacher / Tutor Award Categories:

- Teacher of the Year 2020: Kimberly Stephens, Maesgwyn Special School
- Tutor of the Year 2020: James Booty, Basingstoke College of Technology

Provider Award Categories:

- School of the Year 2020: Cambridge House Community College
- College of the Year 2020: The Blackpool Sixth Form College



James Booty



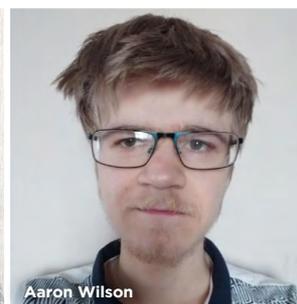
Emily Campbell



Georgina Green



Marium Shafique



Aaron Wilson

'Recognising FE's role in equipping our key workers' in partnership with Pearson

YASEMIN CRAGGS MERSINOGLU
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10 key workers share their experience of working and learning as they kept the UK going during lockdown

Covid-19 has highlighted the crucial role of key workers in society, including those in industries such as health and social care, the supply and distribution of food, utilities, transportation, the emergency services and the armed forces.

FE Week, in partnership with Pearson, wants to celebrate the contribution of these heroes and highlight how colleges and training providers have helped them develop the knowledge, skills and experience they are now using to serve their communities at this unprecedented time.

We spoke to ten critical workers about their roles during the coronavirus pandemic and how further education has prepared them for the crisis.

Susan Miller, registered nurse degree apprentices from Northumbria University and the Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Miller, 54, completed her 18-month apprenticeship in March and is now working as a registered general adult nurse at the Royal Victoria Infirmary in Newcastle upon Tyne on a ward converted to care for Covid-19 patients. During her first eight weeks, it witnessed 23 deaths, which she said was "emotional and stressful".

Miller explained the importance of the role. "I would say the nursing job is crucial really because you take a lot of responsibility for patients' health... [and] the doctors look towards you for extra support."

Miller has been employed by the trust for 21 years, working her way up from a domestic assistant (cleaner) to her current position. She praised the apprenticeship programme, which she feels "passionate about", for developing her ability to keep calm in a crisis environment.



Susan Miller



Toby Roberts



Darbie Hughes

"The lectures actually give you good theory and it marries really well with the practical that you see in the hospital. And without the lecturers I couldn't have [gone] on the ward and been as confident as I am."

Toby Roberts, police constable degree apprentice with Nottinghamshire Police

During Covid-19, Roberts, 23, has been deployed in three different departments across the force, the first of which was criminal investigations. After this, he was part of the prisoner-handling team, where a new system had been introduced to limit exposure to the virus.

"There was a significant increase in the amount of Covid-19-related offences coming in, specifically assaults on emergency workers."

Roberts is now working within neighbourhood policing. "It is important for the police to be enforcing the laws and making sure that the public are safe and feel confident."

The three-year degree apprenticeship, which he started in September 2018, has allowed him to "understand more about why crime happens" as well as provided awareness of criminological theories and investigative strategies.

After gaining experience in multiple departments, he added: "I've been able to gather knowledge from every single one."

Roberts said the apprenticeship has also taught him to manage his time, be adaptable and always to expect the unexpected. "Covid-19 was definitely something that changed the whole world but, because I'm used to different changes every day, it didn't shock me that much because I was ready for it."

Darbie Hughes, level 3 craftsperson apprenticeship with UK Power Networks

Hughes, 23, completed her apprenticeship with the employer provider last year and is now an electrical extra-high-voltage fitter helping to maintain different types of equipment at sub-stations across Sussex and Kent to prevent power cuts.

She said: "Although [people] may not initially

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



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CONTINUED

think of the power industry as key workers, it is nice to know you are doing your bit.”

The utilities worker claimed the best example of why her job is important at this time is that doctors and nurses rely on electricity. “We need to do our job so they can do their job.”

Hughes said her apprenticeship “hammered home the importance of safety” and a gold Duke of Edinburgh award, which apprentices completed alongside their programme and received from Prince Edward, developed her resilience and taught everyone how to work as a team. “We’re using the knowledge that we’ve learned to find any problems before they become a problem.”

She added: “I think that, although it has been quite a scary time, it has been nice to know you are going out there and making a difference.”

Alice Pendlebury, adult support worker level 2 apprentice at Oldham College

Pendlebury, 22, has been deployed to work at Medlock Court care home in Lees, which provides rehabilitation for residents after they have been in hospital, as part of her rotational programme with care and support provider MioCare.

“It gets them back on their feet, back home, where they want to be. It’s just a really lovely job to have.”

She has to wear a full set of personal protective equipment while currently working three days a week. Her shifts involve general care, which can range from getting residents in and out of bed, to socially distanced activities and dinner.

Pendlebury said: “I love going in for a chat with them sometimes because they are all isolating in their bedrooms.”

Pendlebury’s apprenticeship helped her prepare for this role by emphasising a duty of care, safeguarding and safe methods for manual handling. “I’d say my communication has also



Alice Pendlebury



Georgia Crowe

improved a lot.”

She started her apprenticeship last summer and is due to finish in October. “I’m feeling proud of everyone working, especially all through the pandemic. It has been stressful at times but we’ve got through it as a team.”

Georgia Crowe, BTEC level 3 extended diploma in business student at Halesowen College

Crowe, 19, has been working at supermarket Sainsbury’s throughout the pandemic to ensure local residents are still able to buy the essentials. She has helped ensure floor markings, signage and customer-level controls are being adhered to, as well as social distancing and the regular cleaning of surfaces to ensure there is no risk of contamination.

“It has been a lot busier than we first anticipated,” she says.

She mainly works on the checkouts, which are protected by screens, but she is also the public relations ambassador for the Wombourne store, in south Staffordshire, and manages its social media pages.

“It has been very surreal but really rewarding, as well, to be part of people’s Covid-19 journey.”

The team decided to deliver 100 care packages containing necessities such as pasta, tinned goods and toilet rolls to the local community. “Some of them were just so grateful and they were in tears. With a few of them, we had a good cry, me included.”

Crowe says her studies help prepared her for working during a pandemic by developing her interest in marketing as well as improving her customer service skills and understanding of the way the business runs.

She said that the coronavirus has showed how much people rely on supermarkets. “I had some customers who had been isolating for ten weeks



Saranjeet Kaur Soni

and we were the first people they’d seen in that period of time, and it is amazing – that is what we are there for.”

Saranjeet Kaur Soni, dental nursing apprentice at Uxbridge College

Kaur Soni has been working up to seven days a week at a practice which was selected as an urgent care hub and has remained open during lockdown.

She said: “I’m feeling proud of myself that I’m there in this crisis to help our patients and any patients around London.”

The dental surgery has received 50 to 60 referrals every day and, without the service, Kaur Soni explained “people would be suffering from toothache, which is really unbearable”. Her team has received chocolates and promises to clap on Thursday evenings in recognition of their work.

The apprentice has been wearing double or triple layers of PPE, including masks, gloves, a gown and apron, a visor and cap and shoe coverings throughout her shifts which involve checking the medical history of patients, passing instruments to the dentist during procedures as well as disinfecting tools and cleaning the surgery after appointments.

Kaur Soni said that support of her tutor developed her confidence and communication skills. “When someone is there to push you, and you make progress, then that makes you stronger as well,” she added. “My apprenticeship really helped me a lot.”

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



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Private Kai Weir

CONTINUED

Private Kai Weir, logistics supply apprentice in the British Army

Weir, 18, has been deployed to a walk-in mobile testing unit in Leicester during the pandemic at which up to 200 people are tested for Covid-19 a day.

He helps facilitate the general public to perform the test on themselves and walks them through step-by-step if necessary. "I get a lot of questions because they're quite confused and scared."

He started his class three apprenticeship in November 2019 and was originally due to move to the next class in February. The training taught him about "dealing with a lot of people, keeping everyone calm and reassured".

Other skills Weir has picked up include working with hazardous items and ensuring kit does not get mixed up to avoid the wrong results. "Safety comes into play."

During Weir's shift he has to wear a face mask and gloves and must follow the correct technique while changing PPE. His other tasks during this period have included dealing with large quantities of kit and prepping vehicles to go out to mobile testing units.

Chloe Timperley, VTCT level 3 advanced professional cookery at Truro and Penwith College

Timperley, 19, is volunteering at Hillcrest House nursing home in Cornwall, to help out during the pandemic. She works one or two shifts a week in the kitchen preparing meals and stocking up on food supplies for the elderly residents.

Her role involves "trying to keep them as safe as possible, especially during this time" and "just making sure they are cared for".

Timperley started the level 3 in September and is due to finish next week.

"College has definitely helped me." She said her course meant that it was "quite easy to be able to adapt to looking after and feeding different people".



Chloe Timperley

She has also been applying transferrable skills developed during her work placement at a pub to be able to cater for the different needs.

"I've just quite enjoyed being able to help and feel like I'm giving back to the community."

Timperley received training on the use of PPE but noted wearing a mask has made it more difficult to communicate in the kitchen.

Rhona Sapsford, assistant principal for SEND, London South East Colleges

Sapsford has been in charge of the FE provider's Bexley campus, which has remained open since the outbreak for vulnerable learners and the children of key workers. It first only had one vulnerable learner coming in at the start of lockdown but this grew to 25 – the majority of whom are on individual personalised timetables – by the time of the wider reopening last week.

"Initially at the point of lockdown you do take a little sharp intake of breath because we didn't know what was happening, but once you're in work... by the end of it, it becomes the norm."

The department has also been completing annual reviews of students' education and healthcare plans and assessing whether they can meet the needs of students wanting to join in September.

Sapsford said she was "always there for giving guidance and support" to the original team of four teachers who were coming on to campus, which she described as a "little family".

The college had protocols such as temperature



Clare Ramsbottom

checks, signage for social distancing, hand sanitiser and cleaning stations in place. "I'm really proud because we never shut down in Bexley and we've had absolutely no cases."

Clare Ramsbottom, apprentice development coach, Seetec Group

Ramsbottom has been continuing to remotely train 50 learners on the independent learning provider's level 3 international freight-forwarding apprenticeship. "These are the young people who are keeping the country going, distributing PPE, bringing in food," she explained.

Ramsbottom reminds the apprentices they are "an integral part" of the response to Covid-19, with the logistics industry arranging the delivery of stock to hospitals, factories and shops.

She said there has been a few early starts and late finishes but "it doesn't feel like a job. I absolutely love what I do."

Ramsbottom has had to adapt her work so now schedules video calls with learners, checks in with their managers and puts on "bitesize" days with regular mini-tasks such as workbooks or 30-minute online courses issued along the way.

She has also been "putting in extra time so that I can learn about the functional skill side and help my learners when it comes to maths and English".

Ramsbottom started as an apprentice herself 27 years ago. She says that to now "be able to see the learners, who are also so passionate about it – it's fantastic. It has come full circle."



Rhona Sapsford (centre) and some of her students



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THE TEAM**

Profile

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Introducing...

SARAH STANNARD

Principal and Chief Executive,
Southampton City College



**'Doing the right thing
by the community
keeps me going'**

JESS STAUFENBERG
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FE Week meets a principal with a history of bravely sailing against prevailing winds. Is her ship about to come in?

Sarah Stannard learned resilience young. The principal of City College Southampton, who cut her teeth in business before moving into FE

leadership, was brought up by a Navy man and strikes you as the sort of person you'd want on your boat in stormy weather.

Her father's job meant she, her mother and sister moved around, from Hampshire to Wales and Kent, attending comprehensives, grammar schools, sixth forms and sixth-form colleges.

This peripatetic lifestyle had two impacts. First, experiencing different kinds of schools meant the academically capable Stannard realised "an academic education is not right for

everyone" and being helped towards a fulfilling career trumped top exam results. Second, she realised she liked to roll up her sleeves and get stuck in. "What it taught me was to be pretty resilient. I reflect now that I'm not too bothered by change. We just got on with it."

It's a trait Stannard has needed. Last year, the Education and Skills Funding Agency told her that City College Southampton, which she has led since 2013, received the highest subsidy for free school meal students in England because

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of the high level of disadvantaged learners on roll. The college is also in the top 10 per cent for students need to retake English and math GCSEs. Meanwhile, the challenges of recruiting to coastal colleges are well-documented, and parts of Southampton rank among the most deprived in the country.

For her first principalship and second FE college, it was already a tough outlook. Yet in the past six years, Stannard has weathered two 'requires improvement' Ofsted grades (with reasonable progress noted at last year's monitoring inspection) and has faced Department for Education rejection of two merger proposals. She's staunchly hopeful about her third plan (more later). When I ask about future plans, she replies: "To get this done."

The younger Stannard completed her secondary education at grammar school and won a place to read history at King's College London. The first person in her family to go to university, she was determined to build a solid career and landed a graduate scheme place with Abbott Laboratories, a US pharmaceutical company with a branch in Kent. Later she moved to another huge US company, Kraft Foods, which specialised in coffee, chocolate and cheese.

The company's investment in staff development has stayed with her. "I've got files from the training courses sitting in



Sarah at City College with staff award winners at their annual awards event

my cupboard and I still go back to them occasionally as they were really high quality!"

Kraft was also the first place Stannard encountered apprentices, who were trained at the nearby Banbury College. "I got to see apprentices from the employer's point of view. It was about people coming in at entry level and developing them." Stannard was placed on Kraft's Top Talent scheme, but it wasn't compelling enough. A passion for developing others would soon take her out of the business world.

She continued as a senior management consultant for PricewaterhouseCoopers and then IBM until 2006, simultaneously volunteering with the Tall Ships Youth Trust. As watch leader, she was responsible for 16 to 24-year-olds for a fortnight at sea, many of whom were from disadvantaged backgrounds and had never set foot abroad. "It was brilliant. I learned a huge amount about how quickly people can change. You saw them blossom in two weeks.

"I also learned a lot about

leading a team. People ask me, what was your most important people management learning moment? For me it was that." Sailing the famous Bay of Biscay race in force 10 gales have also helped her to gain nerves of steel!

Her first role in FE was as vice-principal responsible for business development at Chichester College. During almost seven years there, she realised that the worlds of business and FE are not so unaligned. "People often say to me 'it must have been a huge shock moving over from business'. But my standard answer is actually it wasn't. They're both big, complex organisations employing many people."

"FE does an OK job of thinking into the future"

She also thinks FE beats itself up too much about not having a long-term strategy. "Actually business operates in some ways even more on a day-to-day basis. The meetings are all about what this quarter's results are like. I think, actually, that FE does an OK job of thinking into the future."



Stannard on summer holiday along part of the Silk Road in Central Asia

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However, as someone with a career and an employer's perspective, she saw one area in need of improvement. Students were not encouraged enough on to their next steps. Shortly after she joined Southampton she was invited to the local education forum, made up of the secondary schools, colleges and universities in the area. "I remember being very passionate about the fact that careers at that time was still low on schools' priority and the Ofsted framework didn't give much attention to it. Meanwhile, employers were still saying that students weren't arriving work-ready."

"We are the most inclusive college in the city"

Stannard told the forum that "although nationally no one is very interested in this, we can do something in Southampton if we want to". She has been vindicated since, with Ofsted

announcing careers guidance in schools wasn't working just months later and the DfE introducing a full careers strategy by 2017. "We certainly started focusing on it before it hit the national agenda."

But the real challenge was more unexpected. The college, which was briefly graded 'good' in 2011, got graded 'requires improvement' in 2017 and again in 2018.

This must have put pressure on Stannard and her team, who were nevertheless praised for delivering "good-quality, impartial careers advice". There have been improved indicators since: the percentage of students completing their level 2 programmes has shot up from 83 per cent three years ago to 92 per cent in 2019, with similar rises for level 3 qualifications.

But achievement rates in a minority of courses remain too low and particularly declined last year for marine apprenticeships, Ofsted said. Stannard doesn't complain about the ratings, except to note that "there is a selective process going on about who goes where" in terms of post-16 education in the area. "We are the most inclusive college in the city."

She is, however, frustrated by the long delay to a goal she's held since 2013 (and officially recommended in an area review not long afterwards), which is to merge the college to secure its finances and future. FE Week readers will know her first proposal for a merger, with Southampton Solent University, fell through in 2018, while a plan to join Eastleigh College collapsed at the eleventh hour in 2019 after ESFA rejected an application for emergency funding.

"I've never wanted to throw in the towel"

Third time, tantalisingly lucky: the college is set to join Itchen Sixth Form College in August next year, delayed only by Covid-19. In the meantime, Southampton got about £2.5 million in emergency funding last year and warned it would soon run out of cash. I ask Stannard whether she expected such challenges when she became principal.

"I knew that it didn't have very much money. But I didn't know funding was going to decline as much across the sector in the way it did." In Southampton, the failure to merge has been all the more frustrating because there are three colleges in the city and three more on the outskirts – too many. "I didn't foresee that it would be so difficult."

"No, I've never wanted to throw in the towels," she responds to my inevitable question. "I do ask myself the question sometimes. The frustration has been not having control over it."

"But the community in this city really deserves good education. It doesn't matter what the name over our door is. That sense of doing the right thing by the community is what's kept me and our staff going."

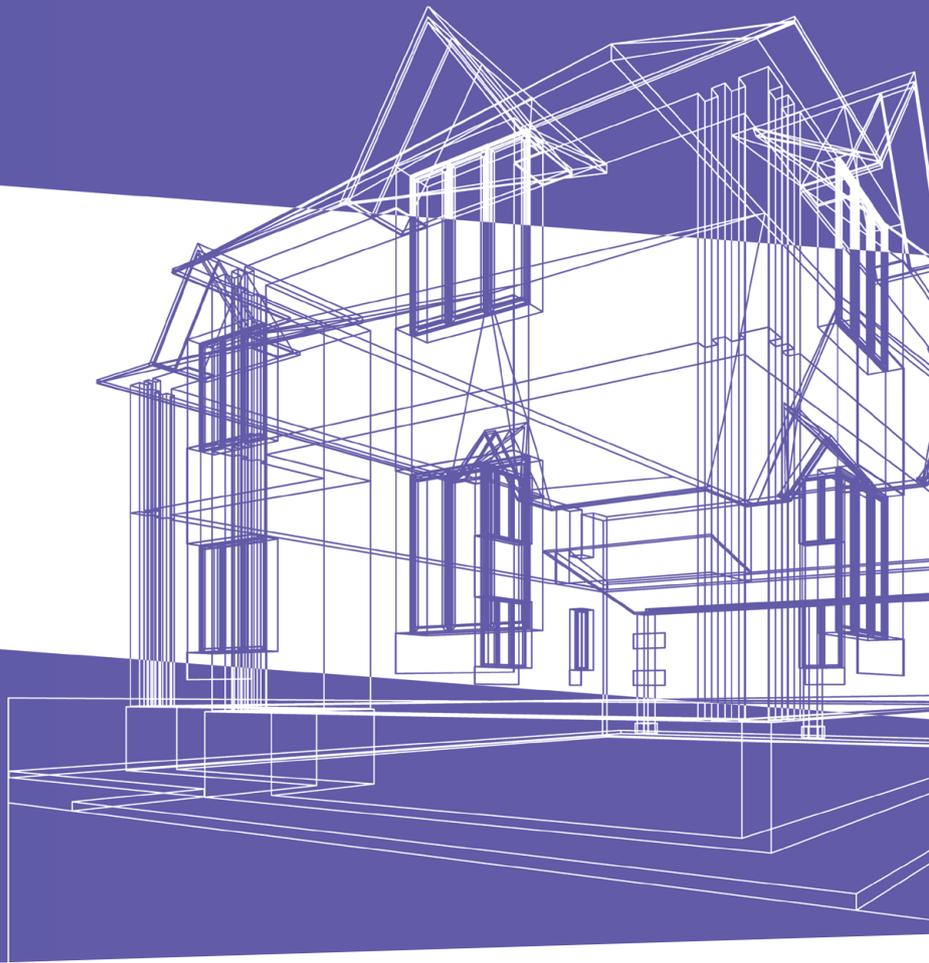
Stannard has needed that resilience. Maybe this time the ESFA will let her sail this ship into harbour.



Stannard in the middle of a sailing race on smaller boats, in the blue and white top

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Editorial

The reformed apprenticeship system need not fail the young and disadvantaged



It should come as no surprise that the reformed apprenticeship system has been found to be failing young disadvantaged people.

At *FE Week* we, and many others, predicted young people would be hit hardest in the move to the employer-led levy-funded system introduced in 2017.

Today the Social Mobility Commission joins the voices calling for a rethink, and, given they are an advisory body funded by the Department for Education, the government might have been expected to listen.

Yet the response from the DfE, in the form of a statement from a spokesperson – as opposed to Gillian Keegan the apprenticeships minister – fails to even respond to the report findings.

Instead of acknowledging that they need to prioritise young people, the government appears preoccupied with a solution to the lack of funds for small employers, a problem of their own making in the way in which levy funds have been distributed.

This suggests it is ministers in the Treasury and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy who are developing and directing apprenticeship policy.

If the government wanted to take a step back from the policy of employer-ownership and reverse the decline in the take-up of apprentices there are some simple policy changes they could make in time for the new funding year, from August 1.

Firstly, the need to acknowledge that the government cannot simply purchase more apprenticeship provision for young people. If employers aren't incentivised they won't recruit – which is why an "apprenticeship guarantee" policy sounds attractive but operationally impossible.

So rather than putting a lot of energy into debating the merits of an impossible apprenticeship guarantee, here are six practical modifications to the current apprenticeship system that would benefit young disadvantaged people. It is worth remembering that before 2007, funding was only available



for those under the age of 25, and there are plenty of funding levers that can be used to swing the balance back towards young people. Here are six of them:

1. Reintroduce a ring-fenced budget for young people but widen it from 16-to-18 to 16-to-24-year-olds. This could be funded by, for example, making half the levy funding available only for this age group. Providers would then actively prioritise the recruitment of young people in order to access the funding.
2. Remove the ten per cent top-up to the levy funds, worth close to £200 million per year, and re-purpose the funds to widen the provider and employer 16-to-18 financial incentive to 16-to-24. By increasing the financial incentives, both employers and providers will be more likely to prioritise young people.
3. For the small employers, increase the employer co-investment from five per cent to at least 20 per cent for those aged over 24 and reduce it to 0 per cent for those under the age of 24.
4. Increase the funding rate caps on lower-level apprenticeships, particularly at level 2. My concern is the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education see these as low value and risk setting unaffordable funding rate caps. But for many young and disadvantaged learners

they are their only entry route.

5. Significant reductions should be made to the funding caps on higher-level apprenticeship standards, particularly those in management that are being used by employers to re-badge their existing training. Employers should be expected to pay fees in addition to the levy funding and this would free up more levy funding for the younger apprentices (see point 1 above).
6. The public sector could and should be a significant recruiter of young and disadvantaged people to the apprenticeship programme. So the government should revisit the effectiveness of the 2.3 per cent public sector annual starts target and focus it on young people. Seeing government departments putting dozens of their managers on MBA apprenticeships and continuing to only take graduate trainees does not impress me.

Hopefully these suggestions are useful. If nothing else, it would be good for Gillian Keegan to take more of a leading role joining and then driving the debate about how to encourage and incentivise both providers and employers to recruit many more young and disadvantaged people.

Nick Linford, Editor
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TONY GALLAGHER

Education consultant and former Ofsted inspector



How one adult education provider went above and beyond the conventional

Outreach community work, always a cornerstone of one Essex adult education provider, came to the fore during the pandemic, writes Tony Gallagher

Southend Adult and Community College (SACC) has long been well-rooted in its community. Managers have been determined and outward-looking in ensuring that the Essex college attracts and retains vulnerable learners and the make-up of the student body is a good testament to the college's inclusive mission, spanning ethnicity, class and cultures.

“Managers put food on the plates of vulnerable local people”

Ros Parker, the principal, has concentrated on skills development and close ties with employers. Senior officers of the sponsoring Southend Borough Council have been quick to spot the potential of the college in furthering the council's strategies in areas such as welfare, housing and employment.

But that was before Covid-19. The first concern after lockdown was to ensure students continued to participate in learning. True to its community-ethos, managers recognised the social dimension, structure and security that

attending college brought to the lives of learners. Older learners had flourished within their art lessons, often forming wider social networks. Young people struggling with mainstream education patently benefited from the inclusive culture. The need to ensure that learners maintained a personal link with tutors and peers was therefore paramount.

In common with many other FE institutions, managers introduced online learning. Existing technology was adapted and new technology and pedagogy introduced. Tutors rose to the challenge and a high proportion of learners continued with their studies remotely. In truth, this level of continued engagement was higher than managers could have anticipated.

Far less commonly, managers moved overnight to support the welfare and well-being of the Southend community and, in some instances, put food on the plates of vulnerable local people. Outreach community work has always been a cornerstone of SACC. Its relationships with partner voluntary organisations and charities enjoy a good reputation.

As the pandemic accelerated, it was clear to Ros Parker that the college was well-positioned to respond to immediate local needs, above and beyond the conventional. She and her senior leaders recognised that the college's assets included ancillary, catering and support staff who



knew their communities well. It also had kitchens and stocks of food.

Overnight, college staff arranged to put food on the plates of vulnerable families, provided 140 meals daily for homeless people and helped to respond to the personal safety problems faced by sex workers in the town. This response illustrated well a community college's wider mission, the motivation of managers and arguably, a moral imperative.

Parker says that in a time when 8.9 million jobs have been furloughed, adult education providers could be upskilling and retraining these adults remotely and in college to supplement online learning.

“There has been a significant increase in levels of anxiety, depression and loneliness during the pandemic impacting on adult's and young people's mental health.

“However, no one is talking about adults returning to learning, which is incredible when our society needs us to provide that lifeline.

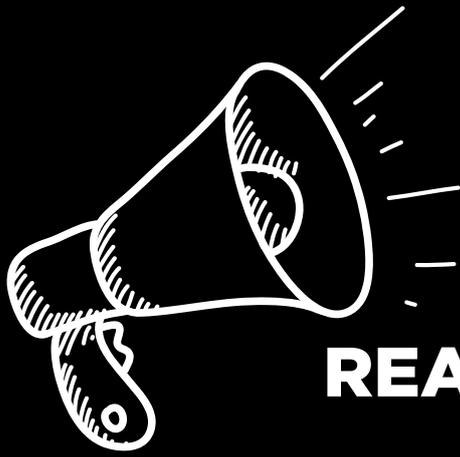
“I could take out space in the shopping centre, I could even take my construction students to the park to build a social distance resting station, but I can't have them back in college.

“We are ready, we are open and safe, we just want to be recognised for the massive positive contribution we can make to economic recovery by allowing us to partially open for adults in the same way we are for young people.”

Many recipients of SACC's support were not, and will not, be registered as learners, but benefit they did. Were college managers' actions in deploying SACC's – the community's – resources to support the well-being of Southend residents a blip, or an altruistic response from a big-hearted team of educators?

Given the necessary actions SACC took in relation to the broader welfare, health and fortunes of the community, what then for established accountability and standards frameworks...and how are locally determined social actions such as these given credit?

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READER'S REPLY

FE snubbed in 'corrected' DfE £1bn catch-up plans

Tom Oliphant, Twitter

This government is indefensible.

Paul Peacock, Twitter

Does anyone think there is a plan for anything? Really?

Principals sound warning on high cost of Covid safety measures

Bob Jenkins, website

Just goes to show how un-commercial they are. With the footfall, they could attract sponsorship but no, let's get the government to bail us out again, something that the AoC should be doing for its members, or ask people who can.

Financial auditors conclude former principal's expenses failed public money test

Barney C, website

Also failed the common sense test, the morality test, and the proper self-scrutiny test that any senior figure in a public role should factor in themselves.

Remote inspections of 'paused providers' will be challenging

Phil Hatton, website

Many monitoring visits have comprised little or no face-to-face interviewing of learners or employers, nor observation of training and assessment. One provider I worked with at the end of 2019 delivered theory remotely in groups with their own platform similar to Zoom, but inspectors refused to sample any of the sessions. Sadly the element of transparency in inspection with regard to telephone interviews seems to have lessened and on this inspection, although the inspectors said they spoke to a number of learners, they would not give a number or any idea who they were. No learners could be found post-inspection who had been interviewed.

In some sectors it is almost impossible to get telephone interviews – in childcare and hospitality, for example. I have

REPLY OF THE WEEK

Speed read: The 8 apprenticeship assessment concerns according to Ofqual

John Sims, website

Your article couldn't be more poignant. We've been delivering standards for 3 years and putting learners through EPA for around 20 months. From the outset the process has been ambiguous, over-complex and convoluted. Despite many promises to resolve these matters the process remains problematic. We have engaged with four EPA organisations and unfortunately the same issues arise time and again. We can relate to all 8 points in your article and hope Ofqual start to hold EPAOs to account sooner rather than later.

tried this out for providers to see how it would go on a real inspection and the best I have seen was a 1-in-8 response, the worst was a 1-in-28. Set up properly and depending on sectors it should be possible to join Zoom reviews, training and assessment – but it needs real transparency and Ofsted to relax on not giving providers the "ammo" to challenge their verdicts. No one should need to fear any form of inspection if carried out with proper planning and with nominees as fully involved as they used to be.

Minister forces all employers to drop PhD apprenticeship plans

Lesley Craddock, Facebook

Time for a reset, we should offer employers flexibility to use some of levy funds to pay salaries of apprentices. This could encourage larger organisations to increase provision at lower levels. Higher levels equal easier levy spend, also less impact of 20 per cent otj.

Dr Mardy Leathers, Twitter

Sad to see this move. Degree level apprenticeships are key to modernising and expanding the framework. Cultivating talent over a lifetime of service increases commitment and productivity. As a globally leading model, this innovation should be continued – others will follow suit.

Movers & Shakers

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



Philip Johnson

Chair,
LTE Group

Start date June 2020

Previous job

Partner at Deloitte

Interesting fact

Philip started his career as the office boy in a small accounting practice in Manchester



James Lane

Sector Manager
Digital, NCFE

Start date April 2020

Previous job

Training Director at Hypestar

Interesting fact

James' career in digital and education has taken him to the USA, Canada, Mexico and the UK



Arif Patel

Governor,
Blackburn College

Start date April 2020

Concurrent job

Associate Director of Technology-enabled Care, East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust

Interesting fact

He possesses experience in research, application, procurement and maintenance of medical devices

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