



# FEWEEK

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

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## £30BN PLAN FOR JOBS

Chancellor gambles on  
'temporary and targeted'  
Kickstarter wage subsidies  
and cash incentives to avoid  
youth unemployment crisis

DWP and DfE scrambles to  
rewrite funding rules as AoC  
asks 'how this all fits together'



## CABINET BLOCKS T-LEVEL MARKETING

- DfE reveals it was told to 'turn off' advertising due to Covid-19
- Fear that it will 'not be able to deliver expected amount of T-levels'
- The 'long-term sustainability of programme has major challenges'

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IN PEOPLE BUT NOT IN THEIR POTENTIAL."

Teanna Maguire Midwifery Undergraduate at  
Manchester University and former BTEC student

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## FEWEEK

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# Cabinet Office blocked T-level ads during lockdown

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## From front

The Cabinet Office blocked the Department for Education from promoting T-levels during the Covid-19 pandemic, despite first delivery of the new qualifications being just months away.

The decision to "turn off" advertising, which one communications expert for the FE sector said "doesn't make sense", was revealed in an updated "major projects portfolio" published on Thursday by the DfE.

The document rates the "confidence" of delivering T-levels successfully as amber/red – the fourth lowest on a five-point scale – largely because the "long-term sustainability of the programme has major challenges" and the "strategic landscape for T-levels is not considered to be stable".

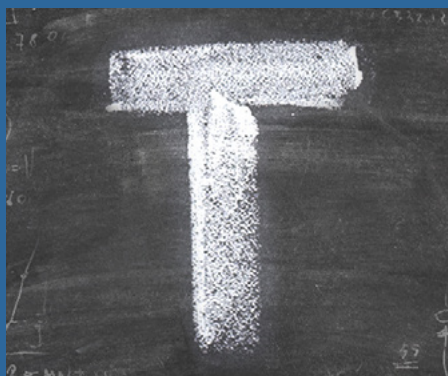
It reiterates that the government remains committed to the delivery of the first T-levels from September 2020 even though the current Covid-19 circumstances "bring additional challenges, particularly for providers and for employers who might offer industry placements".

Despite these unforeseen challenges, the document states that Cabinet Office and Number 10 have "restricted government comms during the coronavirus outbreak, which has resulted in comms on T-levels being paused" and this will "impact our planned comms and engagement strategy, which is currently under review".

It goes on to further explain that Cabinet Office "advised our communication campaign colleagues to turn off the social media advertising in March 20, due to Covid-19", which has "led to an underspend in financial year 2019-20".

The DfE document adds that due to Covid-19 "we may not be able to engage the employers needed to deliver the industry placements and therefore will not be able to deliver the expected amount of T-levels in September 2020, leading to an underspend".

Ben Verinder, founder of Chalkstream Ltd and consultant in the FE sector, was perplexed by the move. "This is an odd decision given the circumstances," he told *FE Week*.



"Our own recent research on public awareness of T-levels chimes with national studies – low awareness of T-levels among potential students and their influencers persists.

"So pausing online promotion at a time when young people are still finalising their plans doesn't make sense. Particularly when offline communication opportunities are so limited due to Covid-19."

Raising awareness of T-levels nationally has proved to be a huge challenge for the DfE.

Its £3 million "NexT Level" marketing campaign only launched in October 2019 – around the same time that a survey of more than 1,000 parents of children aged 11 to 18 commissioned by the Chartered Management Institute found that two-thirds had never heard of the qualifications.

The campaign, which involves commercials and adverts on TV and social media platforms, had been scheduled to run throughout the full 2019-20 academic year to help support providers recruit T-level learners.

The Cabinet Office refused to explain the rationale behind their

decision to halt communications about T-levels during the pandemic but did say the restrictions have now been lifted.

A spokesperson said: "Coronavirus is the biggest challenge the UK has faced in decades, and it is absolutely right for the government to focus communications on providing the public with the information it needs to fulfil its crucial role in tackling coronavirus.

"The T-levels campaign has been given approval and is now live to run over the summer to support recruitment in September."

The Department for Education did not respond to requests for comment at the time of going to press.

The first three T-levels, in construction, digital and education and childcare, are due to be rolled out from September.

The much-vaunted new post-16 qualifications have been dubbed the "gold standard" of technical education, to match their academic equivalent A-levels.

# One T-level dropped, and two delayed by a year

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The rollout of T-levels has taken another slip after the government canned one subject and delayed the start of two others by a year.

Cultural, heritage and visitor attractions (CHVA) has been removed altogether by the Department for Education after the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education reported that there was “insufficient employer demand” for a new technical qualification in that field.

A spokesperson said that as well as “viability and deliverability concerns”, the T-level employer panel for the proposed subject “raised concerns that the level 3 standards in scope did not accurately reflect positions

found in industry”. They also shared concerns that most organisations tend to recruit individuals with graduate or post-graduate degrees.

The IfATE added that the employers who were consulted “felt that the management and administration T-level would be well placed to develop the skills that are relevant to many occupations within the sector”.

It means the total number of T-level subjects set to be rolled out has dropped from 25 to 24.

Meanwhile, the legal and human resources T-levels, which were due to start in September 2022, have been pushed back to 2023.

A DfE spokesperson said the IfATE has assessed the bids put forward to develop these subjects but judged that “these did not meet the minimum quality standards”.

They will therefore “not be awarding

contracts for these T-levels in the autumn” and the institute has “taken the decision to postpone the legal and HR T-levels until 2023 pending a renewed procurement process.

The first three T-levels, in digital, construction and education and childcare, are due to be rolled out from September 2020 with more phased in until 2023.

Many of the providers set to deliver the first of the new qualifications, dubbed to be the “world-class” technical alternative to A-levels, have either pulled out or deferred their participation in recent months.

Last week, the government unveiled a “package of support” to encourage more employers to take on T-level learners for substantial work placements of at least 315 hours – including cash incentives of up to £750 per student.

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# Providers 'seriously concerned' that Kickstart will displace apprenticeships

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Exclusive

Training providers are “seriously concerned” that wage subsidies as part of the new £2.5 billion Kickstart scheme will displace apprenticeship starts for young people.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced on Wednesday that the government will pay the wages of “hundreds of thousands” of people aged 16 to 24 who are claiming Universal Credit to take newly created six-month work placements with employers, who will have their overheads covered.

For a 24-year-old, the grant will be around £6,500, Sunak said. Participants will be paid the relevant national minimum wage for at least 25 hours a week.

At the same time he revealed that employers will be offered cash incentives of £2,000 to take on apprentices under the age of 25, which can rise to £3,000 for 16-to-18-year-olds, for six months, from August to January.

The Treasury was quick to confirm that young people who take part in the Kickstart scheme cannot also be apprentices.

Providers have since questioned why an employer would opt for an apprentice, whose training has to last at least a year, with 20 per cent of their time spent off the job, when they can benefit much more financially from the Kickstart programme.

Association of Employment and Learning Providers Mark Dawe said: “Apprenticeship providers are seriously concerned that with programme starts and vacancies in the basement, as well as the worry about furloughed apprentices being made redundant, the Kickstart wage incentives are going to lead to employers choosing Kickstart over apprenticeships.

“The obvious answer is to allow a young person on Kickstart to transfer on to an apprenticeship at any time during the scheme and for the employer to retain the scheme’s wage incentives for the remainder of the scheme’s duration.”



Rishi Sunak

In an attempt to rebut provider fears, the Treasury explained that the subsidised work placement scheme for a young person “who otherwise might not have got into work, or be able to get an apprenticeship”.

Those benefiting will be identified by Department for Work and Pensions work coaches as “at risk of long-term unemployment, once they have assessed the individual’s needs”.

A Kickstart job “must” include some element of training or jobsearch support, to help the participant find unsubsidised work beyond the placement.

Further guidance on eligibility will “come in due course”.

The Treasury added that those benefiting from apprenticeships will be “chosen by employers, and are likely to be closer to the labour market”.

Addressing an *FE Week* webcast on Thursday, skills minister Gillian Keegan insisted the Kickstart is focused on “different people” to those who would take an apprenticeship. They will be those individuals who are “furthest from the jobs market” and “at risk” of not ever

entering it.

Dawe said that while the government’s thinking is that Kickstart is aimed at young people mostly in the NEET (not in education, employment or training) group and furthest from the labour market, AELP is “not sure at all that employers can and will distinguish between this cohort and potential level 2 apprentices”.

“The potential is often assessed by the provider before the young person starts work, or by the employer and provider after they start, and the real concern is that the differing financial incentives for the employer will override this process,” he added.

“It’s great that the prime minister and the chancellor are championing apprenticeships and traineeships in an unprecedented manner but if this crowding-out issue isn’t rectified before September, then we could see the take-up of Kickstart far outstrip the restoration of apprenticeship starts.”

David Hughes, chief executive of the Association of Colleges, welcomed the raft of actions announced by Sunak but admitted “we need to see more of the details and vitally how this all fits together”.

Alex Khan, chief executive of Lifetime Training – one of the largest apprenticeship providers in the country – said the apprentice incentives will be a “great boost” for the sector, and while he welcomed the Kickstart programme “we can’t understand why individuals on the scheme can’t also be apprentices”.

“Whilst we recognise and respect the intention of the Kickstart programme, surely a combination of this and an apprenticeship programme, which lasts a minimum of 12 months, must be better for the individuals, employers and the overall economy,” he told *FE Week*.

“We believe that the two schemes should go hand in hand rather than either/or, as we do run the risk of employers moving toward the Kickstart scheme to the detriment of apprenticeships.”

Sunak said there will be no cap on the number of Kickstart placements and the scheme will be open to funding applications from August 2020, with the first jobs expected to begin in the autumn.

# Sunak pledges £101m for 'free' third year of study

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The government has pledged £101 million to give all 18-to-19-year-olds who are struggling to find work due to Covid-19 the "opportunity" to study "targeted" level 2 and 3 courses for a third year for free.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced the "high-value courses for school and college leavers" scheme during his summer statement on Wednesday.

He said: "To support 18-to-19-year-olds leaving school or college to find work in high-demand sectors like engineering, construction and social care, we'll provide £101 million to create more places on level 2 and 3 courses."

The funding will be made available for the 2020-21 academic year only. The Department for Education told FE Week the scheme will involve offering school and college leavers this year who are at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) an optional extra 12 months in education free of charge.

Skills minister Gillian Keegan touched on the scheme during an FE Week webcast on Thursday and explained it will essentially be a last resort for those young people for whom the government's other employment programmes, such as the Kickstart, traineeships and apprentice incentives (see page 11), are not suitable.

"If all of those other options are not suitable, or there isn't an opportunity for somebody depending on where they are, they [18-to-19-year-olds] have the opportunity to get some highly valued additional training and skills full time in college that will help them get ready for the employment market in the following year."

The full criteria will be published "next week or the week after" as "we still have some of the details to work through", Keegan added.

A full list of qualifications available for the fund will be published alongside the criteria. It is expected to apply to A-levels in science, technology, English and maths, as well as qualifications in ICT



Gillian Keegan

and construction, for example.

While the sector waits on more details on how the offer will work, including funding levels, the DfE said "we will cap funding above where we expect demand to be, and inform providers of their allocation".

"Should demand exceed our expectations, we will review the funding arrangements," the department added.

Bill Watkin, chief executive of the Sixth Form Colleges Association, welcomed the scheme but said it will be "important to address the funding reduction for 18-year-old students to ensure colleges and schools are not financially penalised for delivering these one-year courses".

For the 2020-21 academic year, the funding rate for 16-and-17-year-olds will be £4,188 per student, but this drops to £3,455 for 18-year-olds.

"We'd now like to see the list of eligible qualifications to be published as soon as possible, and for the government to confirm that the funding reduction for 18-year-old students will not apply to these courses," Watkin told FE Week.

"In an ideal world, colleges would receive this funding before the start of the 2020-21 academic year. We think these one-year courses could really benefit the employment prospects of young people who would otherwise be entering a very challenging jobs market."

David Hughes, chief

executive of the Association of Colleges, said the additional funding for level 2 and 3 for 18-to-19-year-olds is a "welcome boost".

"Colleges will use this to support young people who usually would have entered work, or started apprenticeships after their college courses," he added.

"An extra year, focused on relevant labour market skills will be invaluable to thousands of young people."

While there were many policy announcements to tackle youth unemployment, Hughes said it was "disappointing" that there was little for adult education, other than all-aged apprentice incentives and the furlough bonus.

Susan Pember, policy director of adult education network HOLEX, was also disappointed with the lack of schemes for adults to get back into work.

"Although there was much to applaud in the chancellor's statement for young people, there was a large omission in not tackling the needs of adults," she told FE Week.

"We were hoping to see a more ambitious plan for adults, including bringing forward the National Skills Fund to start this year.

"We will continue to call on the DfE and the Department for Work and Pensions to put the interests of the individual first and support long-term financial gain over a quick 'any job will do' fix and prioritise individuals doing a training course that leads to improved financial prospects and job security."



Sue Pember



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Advertorial

# View from the market: Colleges in need of 'digital renewal' to deliver the 're-imagined' Student Experience of 2020 and beyond

With online enrolment and hybrid learning environments set to become 'the new norm' from September 2020, students are left wondering, will the Student Experience ever be the same again?

We asked colleges, current student cohorts, and Blueprint Education Services for their views...

## Accelerating the rate of digital change

Colleges have had to adapt quickly to new ways of working during the Covid-19 pandemic - presenting both challenges and opportunities. Blueprint Education Services CEO, Jason Folkett explains the need for 'digital renewal':

*"Lockdown has precipitated innovative approaches to teaching and learning, which, if harnessed through the smart use of technology will bring about not only efficiency, but [also] improve retention and success."*

Indeed, a recent Tribal Group customer research survey of 240 students across 4 colleges and 53 subject areas revealed a 353% increase in usage of Tribal's app 'Engage', when comparing a 3month pre and post lockdown average. Many students say they are now reliant on digital platforms to create their learning experience and stay connected with staff and other students:

*"My college password had expired and I was unable to go into college to change it; I had assessment deadlines due which I needed to access my account for to submit. I was able to message my lecturers for help and they replied without an hour!"*

*"I've used the app for contacting my tutor while struggling with mental health issues during the Coronavirus."*

Building on this uptake in usage and the digital transformation of services - colleges now need to focus on re-imagining the Student Experience, especially for new starters. As having the right approach and delivery tools in place is key to the short and longer-term success of FE colleges everywhere, Jason Folkett (Blueprint) concludes:

*"I strongly believe that those colleges that embrace technology as a key component of business success will be the ones that thrive and survive."*

Digital solutions will also help overcome the immediate challenges of facilitating 'live interaction' during the 'new normal', which takes into consideration:

- Changes in college opening hours to adapt to capacity constraints on public transport
- Restricted numbers in class and staggered staff 'rota' working
- A hybrid model of 'blended learning' comprising face-to-face teaching and online classes.

It's why demand is currently skyrocketing for apps, learner hubs and staff solutions that are accessible and engaging for all users, including blind, deaf, and non-ambulatory learners.

## Four must-haves for delivering high-quality Student Experiences

### 1 Digital enrolment

Many colleges are now deploying digital enrolment solutions to deliver a hybrid approach where only brand new starters come onto campus, and returning students re-enrol online, using video and live chat to support the process.

### 2 Digital participation

Whilst attendance has gone up since offering students online learning, participation remains an issue - and with more 'live lessons/training' moving online, further innovation is required. Polls, instant messaging and gamification features within software solutions could prove really useful as teachers and students adjust to and make the most of 'virtual' contact-time.

### 3 Digital learning communities

Collaboration outside of contact-time is also vital for individual study, peer-to-peer learning and developing relationships that are essential to wellbeing. Collaboration apps are now a 'must have' for colleges that want to nurture safe, secure and personalised communication between staff and students in a private social network.

### 4 Digital student wellbeing and support

All FE colleges are expecting an increased pressure on pastoral and welfare services following the pandemic. Ensuring your Student Wellbeing services can be accessed digitally and students can find the support they need, when they need it 24/7 365, has never been more important - for student welfare, for retention, and for success.

For more ways to 're-imagine' the Student Experience and enable your business to respond to market changes with agility, visit Tribal's [FE Digital Intelligence Hub](#) and access video resources, webinars on topics like enrolment, and a wealth of resources to support your transition to a digital focus.



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# Speed read: What the chancellor's summer statement promised for FE and skills

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Chancellor Rishi Sunak delivered a summer statement on Wednesday in which he outlined the government's "plan for jobs" to tackle unemployment post-Covid-19.

The statement included a number of "temporary and targeted" funding boosts and policies for apprentices and skills, ranging from employer cash incentives to a third year of education to school and college leavers.

*FE Week* has the key points:

## 1 Cash incentives for employers to hire new apprentices

Sunak announced a "brand new bonus" for employers to hire apprentices over the next six months.

From August 2020 to January 2021, any firm that hires a new young apprentice aged 16 to 24 will receive £2,000, while those that hire new apprentices aged 25 and over will be paid £1,500.

These payments will be in addition to the existing £1,000 incentive the government already provides for new 16-to-18-year-old apprentices, and those aged under 25 with an education, health and care plan where that applies.

It means that employers could receive up to £3,000 for hiring 16-to-18-year-old apprentices during the six-month incentive scheme.

## 2 £2bn 'kickstart' programme

The chancellor said the government will introduce an "initial" new £2 billion "kickstart" fund to create "hundreds of thousands of high-quality" six-month work placements aimed at those aged 16 to 24 who are on Universal Credit and are deemed to be at risk of long-term unemployment.

Funding, which will cover 100 per cent of

the relevant national minimum wage by age group for a minimum of 25 hours a week, will be conditional on the firm proving that these jobs are "new".

If employers meet these conditions "we will pay young people's wages for six months plus an amount to cover overheads", Sunak said. That means for a 24-year-old the grant will be around £6,500, he added.

There will be no cap on the number of placements and the scheme will be open to funding applications from August 2020, with the first jobs expected to begin in the autumn.

However, young people taking part in the programme cannot also be apprentices.

## 3 £111m boost for 'proven' traineeships

Sunak confirmed the government will provide an additional £111 million this year for traineeships in England, in a bid to triple participation in the "proven" programme.

Incentives of £1,000 per trainee will be paid, and eligibility for traineeships will be expanded to those with level 3 qualifications and below.

A Treasury spokesperson told *FE Week* the £1,000 bonus will be limited to ten trainees per employer and the budget increase will also pay for a 55 per cent increase in the training provider payment for 19 to 24-year-olds from £970 to £1,500.

There were just 14,900 starts on traineeships last year.

## 4 £101m for school and college leavers to return for a third year

The chancellor pledged £101 million to give all 18-to-19-year-olds who are struggling to find work in England the "opportunity" to study "targeted high-value level 2 and 3 courses" throughout 2020-21.

*FE Week* has asked Treasury for further details, but the Department for Education explained it will involve offering school and

college leavers who are at risk of becoming NEET an additional optional paid extra year in education.

A full list of qualifications available for the fund will be published in due course but it is expected to apply to A-levels in science, technology, English and maths, as well as qualifications in ICT and construction, for example.

## 5 £32m for the National Careers Service

The government will provide an additional £32 million funding over the next two years for the National Careers Service so that 269,000 more people in England can receive "personalised advice on training and work".

## 6 Tripling of sector-based work academies

Sunak said £17 million will be made available to "triple the number of sector-based work academy placements in 2020-21".

The scheme, run by the Department for Work and Pensions, typically lasts for up to six weeks and includes pre-employment training, a work experience placement and a "guaranteed" job interview.

The Treasury said the funding boost will enable sector-based work academies to provide "vocational training and guaranteed interviews for more people, helping them gain the skills needed for the jobs available in their local area".

## 7 Early release of college capital funding

In his budget last year, Sunak committed to making £1.5 billion available for college capital projects from 2021.

As previously announced by prime minister Boris Johnson, the government will bring forward £200 million of this to 2020-21 to support colleges to carry out "urgent and essential maintenance projects".



# Treasury took back £330m of apprenticeships funding in 19-20

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## Exclusive

The Department for Education quietly handed back £330 million of the 2019-20 apprenticeships budget to the Treasury, *FE Week* can reveal.

The admission comes despite concerns that small employers had struggled to find providers with sufficient non-levy funds to train their apprentices, with some being turned away.

Mark Dawe, chief executive of the Association of Employment of Learning Providers, said it will remain "one of life's great mysteries as to why this was allowed to happen".

"The department knew full well that there was huge demand from small and medium-sized employers for apprenticeships that was not being met by the non-levy contracting system," he added.

"Providers could have got the money out the door in an instant at a time when apprenticeship starts were crashing from their pre-levy levels."

The admission of surrendered funds was made by education secretary Gavin Williamson in a letter to the education select committee this week.

In a series of questions about the DfE's spending plans for 2020-21, the committee asked Williamson why the apprenticeships budget had increased by 17 per cent to £2.5 billion compared to last year, as noted in the department's recently published "main estimate memorandum".

The education secretary explained that the apprenticeships budget is in fact at the same level as the last financial year, and the document "shows an increase of around 17 per cent because the funding in 2019-20 was reduced for unspent funding surrendered to Treasury".

The DfE then told *FE Week* that a total of



Mark Dawe

£330 million was handed back to Treasury last year, explaining that where departments are not on course to spend the full amount allocated to them at the start of the year, they can "surrender part of their budget cover back to Treasury to allow them to use these funds for other government priorities".

A spokesperson said: "Spending on the apprenticeship programme is demand led, and employers can choose which apprenticeships they offer, how many and when. In particular, we do not anticipate that all employers who pay the levy will need or want to use all the funds available to them – but they are able to.

"As is usual practice, any underspends in overall departmental budgets by the end of the financial year are first returned to Treasury as per the consolidated budgeting guidance."

This isn't the first time the DfE has handed back lumps of apprenticeship funding to the Treasury. In 2017-18 – the first year of the levy – around £300 million was surrendered.

The DfE claimed it did not surrender an apprenticeships underspend in 2018-19.

As per levy rules, businesses with a payroll of £3 million or more pay each month into the pot and have a rolling 24-month deadline to spend the funds.

The levy policy was designed so that large employers wouldn't use all of their funds. The unspent money is meant to be recycled and

made available to small businesses who do not pay the levy to use to train their apprentices. Unspent funds are also used to top up levy funds by ten per cent as well as pay for English and maths teaching for relevant apprentices, among other things.

In February 2019, *FE Week* revealed how training providers' non-levy funding was running dry and that some had even had to turn apprentices away, with the government insisting it couldn't offer more cash as it didn't have any left in the system.

In January 2020, the AELP further warned that training providers are "having to turn their backs" on up to 40,000 small businesses due to the shortfall in apprenticeship levy funds.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency is currently in the process of transitioning all small employers on to the digital apprenticeships system, which has only been used by levy-payers since its launch in April 2017 to spend their funds.

This will bring an end to provider funding allocations, secured through a procurement process, being used to train apprentices with small non-levy paying businesses. The transition is due to complete by April 2021.

Dawe said: "We can take solace from the fact that the moving of all employers on to the digital apprenticeship service should reduce the chances of this happening again."

# HS2 college at risk of insolvency seeks partner

FRASER WHIELDON

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The national college for HS2 is on the hunt for a provider to partner with following a grade four Ofsted report and warnings from the FE Commissioner it was facing “potential insolvency”.

The National College for Advanced Transport and Infrastructure (NCATI) told *FE Week* it was “working through a shortlisting process for a new partner” after it was late submitting financial statements for 2018-19.

A spokesperson said a new partner would “help us deliver the NCATI vision and improve quality”, and following the shortlisting process, NCATI plans to “embark on an open public consultation”.

He said they “remain confident” they will be able to “fulfil our ambition to train and upskill a broad and inclusive generation of talent from across the country”.

NCATI refused to go into more detail about what the partnership would mean for the future of the college, or who the potential partners are.

This isn't the first time a troubled national college has had to partner with other providers. The National College Creative Industries (NCCI) partnered up with two local providers and then dissolved itself earlier this year, having swallowed a £600,000 bailout from the Department for Education to make it through 2017-18 as a “going concern”.

Access Creative College took over NCCI's apprenticeships provision and South Essex College took over its classroom provision while NCCI restarted as a limited company.

NCATI, then known as the National College for High Speed Rail (NCHSR), took £4.55 million from the DfE to sign off its 2017-18 accounts.

NCHSR was opened in 2017 by then-education secretary Justine Greening with £40 million in capital funding from the Education and Skills Funding Agency to purchase equipment and construct facilities.

It became the National College for Advanced Transport and Infrastructure last October.

The college was engulfed in controversy at the start of 2020 when *FE Week* broke

the news it had hired lawyers to stop a grade 4 Ofsted report from November being published, through a judicial review in the High Court.

NCATI eventually dropped its legal challenge at a cost of £73,000 and the report was released last February, revealing that employers were having to teach apprentices skills that were not covered by the college.

The FE Commissioner Richard Atkins intervened in the college in December, finding it would not be able to sign off its 2018-19 accounts as a going concern “without a commitment of 12 months of continued emergency funding”. He had instructed the board on how to operate while facing “potential insolvency”.

Atkins found NCATI had also based its 2019-20 budget on having 761 apprentices and 263 full-time learners, whereas in December 2019 it only had 216 apprentices and 94 other full-time students.

NCATI was placed in supervised status and since then has been undertaking a structure and prospects appraisal (SPA) with the commissioner.

To ensure this SPA process “is thorough and comprehensive”, NCATI agreed with ESFA to not file completed financial statements for 2018-19 until the culmination of the SPA, the spokesperson said.

A DfE-commissioned report published in February criticised how the national colleges were set up as standalone institutions, saying: “More detailed consideration could have been given to other models such as evolving new institutions from existing education and training providers”.

The report found NCATI had struggled with learner numbers due to delays in announcing HS2 contractors, which meant employers were unable to commit to the apprentice volumes they had originally anticipated.



# DfE to reveal plans this autumn to create an employer led 'German-style' FE system

BILLY CAMDEN

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Education secretary Gavin Williamson has pledged that the upcoming White Paper for further education will lead to a reformed "world-class, German-style" system.

In a speech hosted by the Social Market Foundation on Thursday, Williamson said that "for decades, we have failed to give FE the investment it deserves" as he "tears up" Tony Blair's target of sending 50 per cent of young people to university.

He believes there should be fewer people going into higher education as it can "all too often" end with graduates "not having the skills they need to find meaningful work", and instead the country should see FE and apprenticeships as equally valid routes to "productive" employment.

"FE stands for further education but for too long it may as well have stood for forgotten education," Williamson said.

"I don't accept this absurd mantra, that if you are not part of the 50 per cent of the young people who go to university that you've somehow come up short. You have become one of the forgotten 50 per cent who choose another path.

"It exasperates me that there is still an inbuilt snobbishness about higher being somehow better than further, when really, they are both just different paths to fulfilling and skilled employment."

Williamson reiterated the government's ambition to move Britain to a German-style technical education system. He launched a target at the Conservative Party conference last September to overtake the country in this area over the next 10 years.

His commitment comes ahead of the publication of a White Paper this autumn which will set out plans for "long-term" change in FE.

"For decades, we have failed to give further education the investment it deserves," Williamson continued.

"Our universities have an important role to play in our economy, society and culture, but there are limits to what we can achieve by sending ever more people into higher education,

which is not always what the individual and nation needs.

"That's why this autumn I will be publishing a White Paper that will set out our plans to build a world-class, German-style further education system in Britain, and level up skills and opportunities.

"As we emerge from Covid-19, further education will be the key that unlocks this country's potential and that will help make post-Brexit Britain the triumph we all want. I want everyone to feel the same burning pride for our colleges and the people who study there, in the way we do for our great universities and schools."

Association of Colleges chief executive David Hughes said the speech "isn't about reducing the power and mission of universities, but recognising and supporting the power and mission of colleges alongside universities to meet the education, skills and training needs of every adult across their lives".

"Our current system simply does not support the half of adults who don't get the chance to study at higher levels," he added.

"In fact, it relegates them to second-class citizens, without the investment and the opportunities to improve their life chances."

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said he hopes the education secretary's "warm words" about the importance of FE are "backed up with adequate funding".

During his speech, the education secretary explained that while "many" of the skills that employers are demanding require intermediate or higher technical qualifications, only

ten per cent of all adults aged 18

to 65 actually hold higher technical qualifications as their highest qualification in the UK.

That compares to around 20 per cent of adults in Germany and as much as 34 per cent in Canada.

Five years after completion, the average higher technical apprentice will earn more than the average graduate.

James Kirkup, Social Market Foundation director, said: "Socially, too much of our national conversation is based on the implicit judgment that people who don't go to university aren't worth as much as those who do. Economically, decades of underperformance on technical education and training, for young people and adults alike, has held back growth and productivity.

"More support for further and technical education, and more respect for the people who benefit from it, would make Britain happier and richer."

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Gavin Williamson



# Ofsted to resume visits in September with published reports but no grades

BILLY CAMDEN

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Ofsted will start visiting colleges and training providers again from September – with letters about what the inspectors find to be published, but with no grades given.

The watchdog will also carry out an additional monitoring visit to new providers that have an existing 'insufficient progress' rating, which will result in a "brief" report but will include fresh progress judgments that could lift their ban on recruiting new apprentices.

This programme of work will take place until January 2021 when a return to full education inspections is planned, as announced by education secretary Gavin Williamson on Thursday.

Ofsted's inspection activity has been paused since March owing to the outbreak of Covid-19.

Amanda Spielman, Ofsted's chief inspector, said the inspectorate will be "part of the rebuilding effort from September" and their visits will "help parents understand how schools and colleges are getting children and students back up to speed after so long at home".

"And we want to help [schools and colleges], by having constructive conversations and not passing judgement," she added.

But Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said many leaders will need "a lot of convincing that these visits will bring real value or otherwise they will simply be a distraction".

Guidance specifically for the FE and skills sector about Ofsted's new "visits", states that they will "look at how effectively leaders are enabling provision to resume fully following an extended break in formal education, including considering remote education and safeguarding".

The visits will focus on "all" providers with 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement' inspection grades as well as providers that the inspectorate has "identified risks or concerns about".



Amanda Spielman

A "sample" of 'good' and 'outstanding' providers will also be visited, which will be "based around a series of professional conversations with senior and middle leaders, staff and learners, with a focus on identifying the barriers that colleges and other further education and skills providers have faced and are still facing in managing the return to full education for learners".

They will also focus on the curriculum and "how it meets the reasonable needs of learners and stakeholders"; the "approaches used to develop learners' knowledge and skills"; and safeguarding arrangements.

Ofsted stressed that these visits are "not inspections" and made clear they will not use the education inspection framework and FE and skills inspection handbook, and "we will publish a brief operational note in September about how we will carry out visits".

The visits will "not result in any grade or progress judgment; we will publish a letter explaining why we visited, what we found, and the next steps leaders should take," the guidance added.

The visits will also "not judge providers on their response to Covid-19 during the spring and summer terms 2020", and "not require any pre-written planning or other documentation for the visit" as the lead inspector will make a "simple phone call" to discuss the logistics of

the visit.

FE and skills providers will be given up to two working days' notice of a visit, but "occasionally longer where necessary".

In terms of new provider monitoring visits from September 2020, Ofsted said: "We will carry out an additional monitoring visit, covering the three usual themes, to new providers that have one or more existing 'insufficient progress' judgments and that would have been due a full inspection up to and during this interim period."

Since October 2018, Ofsted has conducted early monitoring visits of new training firms and any that are found making 'insufficient progress' are suspended from taking on new apprentices in line with ESFA rules.

Providers have been unable to recruit until they have achieved a grade of at least 'requires improvement' in a follow-up full inspection.

But on Wednesday, the Education and Skills Funding Agency announced that the suspension can now be lifted if Ofsted has undertaken a "subsequent monitoring visit" and the training provider is "making reasonable or significant progress in all three themes".

The watered-down rules will be welcomed by providers such as Wiser Academy Ltd, which last month warned they could be forced to make redundancies as the pause in Ofsted inspections since March has prolonged their inability to recruit.

## Feature

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# Life support for traineeships – but what exactly are they?

FRASER WHIELDON  
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The flagging traineeships programme was given a new lease of life by the government this week with a major funding boost to help combat youth unemployment post-Covid-19.

But what exactly are traineeships and how are they run? *FE Week* has spoken with providers, employers and a former skills minister to find out...

Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced in his summer statement on Wednesday a £1,000 employer bonus for each traineeship learner they take on, funded from an injection of £111 million.

The plan, which allows incentives to be paid for up to a maximum of ten trainees per company, is to triple the number of traineeships to over 30,000.

Introduced as a flagship pre-employability programme in 2013, traineeships had been created for 16-to-24-year-olds (and 25-year-olds, if they have an education health and care plan) who are qualified below level 3. However, the government is now expanding eligibility to those with A-level-equivalent qualifications.

Once on the course, the trainee will take part in work placements with an employer on the programme which can last from six weeks to six months.

## “This cannot be a churn of young people”

Trainees will also receive work preparation training and English and maths training if lacking a level 2 qualification.

The training is funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency, but unlike



apprenticeships, trainees are not paid for the work they do. However, they are guaranteed an interview for an apprenticeship or job at the employer at the end of the traineeship, if one is available.

Traineeships are, says Tony Holloway, operations director for provider Qube Learning, what amounts to a “paid induction” for a job with an employer.

Qube trains around 40 to 50 trainees a month in retail and the services sector and Holloway says around 76 per cent of their trainees end up in full-time employment and around 60 per cent of them go into apprenticeships.

Holloway thinks the £1,000 incentives will “give employers reassurance they can carry on investing in young people and in future talent”.

“So this is going to create many more opportunities for young people,” he adds.

But what the sector has to be careful of, he warns, is “those opportunities are not exploited by either providers or employers. This cannot be a churn of young people – it has to be long-lasting jobs.”

It is a point also raised by Janet Holland, chief executive of Derwent Stepping Stones, a childcare charity based in Derby. “There is a real risk of young people being exploited through the programme. Employers could see

the opportunity of getting some free labour.”

Holland says those in the childcare sector “are on our knees”, so she is looking to use this scheme to start trainees in September and see if their usage levels go up. If they do, there will be an apprenticeship for them.”

## “It needs to be understood by the parents of people who need traineeships”

Derwent Stepping Stones takes on a couple of trainees each term for eight to 12 weeks and over 20 of Janet’s 60 staff have come up through the traineeship route, she says.

The main benefit to them as an employer, and for the learners, is the chance to “try before you buy”, and because their traineeship programme is “very structured”, by the time the trainees move into an apprenticeship, they have been

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signed off on many basic skills for the job.

Holland briefed early years managers in Derby about traineeships earlier this year and said many had “never heard of them”, but there was “a lot of interest, particularly about ‘try before you buy’.”

## “Employers could see the opportunity of some free labour”

Despite the advantages of the programme, traineeships have not had much love up until now: in terms of starts, there were just 14,900 last year, down from 24,100 in 2015-16.

The slump in delivery levels previously led the Department for Education to decide to cut the traineeship budget from £20 million to £8.5 million, as revealed by *FE Week* in February.

This came after then-skills minister Anne Milton hailed the success of traineeships in June 2019 once research showed 75 per cent of learners move on to work or further study within a year of completing their programme.

Speaking to *FE Week* ahead of the chancellor’s announcement, Milton said that despite the cuts, ministers involved in the programme were “well aware of the benefits” of traineeships but

that the programme has not had “very much attention” and was “poorly understood” outside the sector.

“It was the last area when I was a minister that I felt really needed grabbing hold of,” she said.

“It needs to be understood by the parents of people who need traineeships,” she argued, but there also needs to be a “clear pathway” from a traineeship to a job with progression opportunities. “Without a doubt we probably need incentives for employers.”

Yet despite the public’s lack of awareness of the programme, it can be popular among certain employers.

Phil Eves, employment and skills coordinator for BAM Construction Midlands, which works with around a dozen trainees every year, is another advocate of the programme: “We’re trying to work smarter, faster, safer and through traineeships and the work [training provider] JTL does, that gives us the right sort of candidates.”

“With schemes like this, I can talk to our supply chain and say we need to give people the opportunity to get on site.”

Employer support is crucial to the success of traineeships, as Smart Training and Recruitment data, quality and compliance director Rich Ashton knows from his provider’s work with the British Heart Foundation.

Smart takes on about 100 trainees a year and has seen “fantastic success”, with some, for example, progressing up to level 4, according to

Ashton. And while most traineeships are unpaid, small fees to cover costs, such as travel, can be introduced.

As an inducement, and also to help trainees pay for costs, for every week a participant attends their placement, Smart pays them £40. Ashton says: “It just seemed fair. There were odd queries about bus fare, so as long as they attend their work placement and are doing their work hours, we will pay them £40.

“One of the first barriers we found was, while they were eager to take the opportunity, they literally had no money to get to the location. We looked into different schemes, refunding bus fares and obtaining tickets, but sometimes we found we were having to subsidise them before, because they had no money.”

Ashton said the scheme, which has been running for three years has: “Worked quite well for us. While we know it’s not a requirement, we want to put something in their pockets so they’re covered for their outgoings while attending their work placement.”

## “Now, everyone is talking about the scheme”

Without BHF’s partnership, he adds, “we would have struggled for employers who were willing to participate because it wasn’t something they were aware of and even when we talked about the benefits of traineeships, it was apprenticeships they were primarily concerned with”.

He feels the new incentive is “good news” as the scheme has, in the past, not been promoted among school leavers and employers, but now “everyone is talking about it”.

Smart, until the Covid-19 pandemic, delivered teaching and learning on site of the trainee’s work placement, but has had to adapt to remote delivery. The provider “pushes for as many hours as possible” on the work placement and plans courses to include 240 hours in total.

A lot of their participants opt for a digital skills course to add on to their traineeship as, Rich says it’s a “good fit in the modern world” and the provider does not want it to be a “generic, off-the-shelf course”.



Anne Milton



## Feature

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# The training programme that stokes up the 'engine room of FE colleges'

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The middle tier of managers have become more and more pivotal as roles within FE senior leadership change. But there is "a price to pay" if colleges do not prepare staff for the job, according to the FE sector's workforce development organisation.

The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) spoke up for the leaders it calls "the engine room of a college" while promoting a compendium based on its Leading From The Middle training programme, run by the skills consultancy FE Associates.

The programme trains middle leaders, usually heads of department, in areas such as leading a diverse workforce, understanding college finances and building awareness of how reforms impact upon the sector.

The ETF has run the programme on behalf of the Department for Education since October 2018, reaching more than 350 participants.

It has now published an online compendium that looks into more than 30 issues based on projects completed by the programme's participants. These include improving attendance in sports academies, supporting ESOL learners, and setting expectations to create work-ready learners.

## "There is a price to pay if you don't train people"

To mark its publication, *FE Week* spoke with the programme's leaders and participants to find out more about the challenges behind middle management and how the course prepares staff to be what one participant called



Matt Atkinson

"the sponge of the college, soaking up pressure from every angle".

The ETF's director of design and development, Mark Wright, says the programme "emboldens participants to be more confident leaders, and use that confidence as a thrust to apply for more senior roles".

"This is about impact and effectiveness, so we designed it on the basis of it being the shot in the arm that the sector needs."

That is in response to what he calls "a delayering of FE" over the past ten to 20 years, whereas "there used to be lots of micro steps taking you up the rungs.

"Now those steps have become more gulf-like."

The Social Market Foundation's 2019 paper on policies for strong leadership in FE colleges says middle managers have taken on more responsibilities for managing budgets and management information systems since college incorporation, and are handling pressures from other departments.

Yet the training offer has been "thin".

The paper called for the Department for Education to "increase investment in training



Mark Wright

and development for middle leaders", adding such programmes should be "expanded significantly".

## "This is the shot in the arm that the sector needs"

Wright agrees that middle managers have taken on more duties, to the point they are "the engine room" of the college.

"It is a really pivotal position and it is becoming more so because of the sector has had a lot of value taken out of it. It's put more of an onus on to the middle tier."

He cautions providers that there is a "price to pay if you don't train people. You can tell the difference between colleges that do invest and those that haven't been able to".

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FEA's managing director, Matt Atkinson, says the mounting challenges faced by middle leaders prompted the compendium.

"Participants were dealing with very similar issues and challenges so we wanted to create a resource bank that other leaders, particularly middle leaders, could use.

## "We wanted a resource bank for middle leaders"

"What we're trying to do is put something out into the sector that says 'we're all dealing with similar things at this time, a number of people have come up with quite creative ways of solving problems'.

"A lot of the stuff that comes out about leadership development tends to be focused on the senior tier.

"Whereas 360 people have completed this programme ... there has been so much learning."

That learning involves a number of sessions, firstly involving an initial assessment to give



Mark Treagust

participants a baseline of what they need to focus on.

"Primer days" then help them to understand the issues around the programme's five modules.

But this is blended with online provision, featuring webinars and short videos from leaders to explain what they have done to raise their capacity.

But, Wright says, the ETF recognises that not everyone will feel "comfortable" with the face-to-face element, so it is trialling an online-only version.

Atkinson also highlights the programme's mentoring from "very experienced" sector managers and "focused learning activities" - the individual projects that have been adapted into the issues covered by the compendium.

And what do the participants make of the programme?

Florence Marfo, a programme manager for languages at Morley College in south London, was one of the first to take the programme in October 2018 after feeling "lost and dumped" at work. She had tried to raise standards in her department but did not know how to make the most of the support from other departments.

The training was "very practical" with "excellent coaching". But the most useful thing was the chance to get the frustrations of work off her chest: "It was very good to have somebody to sound ideas off. We did not have that in my workplace. It really helped and made a difference.

"Eighteen months later I was contacted by somebody. That was also like another coaching session because I talked to him about some of the frustrations I had. It was just like having a one-to-one session again."

She says the programme has made her "happier" to stay in her current role. A second cohort of Morley's middle managers have now done the course, all of them enjoying the experience.

While it made Marfo happier in her current role, it helped Farnborough College's head of faculty Mark Treagust to boost his career.

When he took part earlier this year he looked at assistant principal roles as part of his study, soon realising "we are capable of going for those jobs and getting them".



Dr Florence Marfo

"It was very well-timed for me because I had applied for a new role myself. I feel that if it was not for the course, I would not have had the confidence to go for it - and the knowledge and the ability to get it."

Treagust becomes assistant principal of Sparsholt College, also in Hampshire, in August and says the course taught him: "There is no upper ceiling, anything is possible."

He describes the role of middle management with an analogy used on the course: "You are the sponge of the college, you have to soak up pressure from every area, whether that be your peers, your staff, students, parents, senior leadership. That can become quite laborious."

## "It was good to have somebody to sound ideas off"

Aside from boosting his confidence, he found the course changed his perspective on his own performance. After working in FE for ten to 15 years and being a manager for more than five, he says he was "in danger of having an opinion my management style had been formed, but I've learnt it is a very fluid thing".

The compendium is available on the ETF website at <https://tinyurl.com/y7rd2kz9>



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Lincoln College International is part of Lincoln College Group, the UK's largest exporter of further education. LCG is a place where exceptional and amazing people come together with the aim of achieving extraordinary things. 130 years of education shows we are here for the long term. We offer education in the UK, Saudi Arabia and several other countries. All of our senior managers are British, so you can be sure that you will understand our methods of working.

The International Technical Female College in Qatif opened in March 2015. It is the largest female technical college in the Kingdom. As the College has matured it has come to play a central role in the local community, engaging students, parents, employers and community leaders. Young Saudis have a thirst for learning and there is great admiration for the UK vocational system. At Qatif we deliver various vocational diploma courses preparing young women for work in Business and other Industry sectors. The aim of Lincoln College International is to deliver an outstanding experience and opportunities in education, qualifications and progression for the next generation of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

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## Profile

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Introducing...

# NAV CHOHAN

Principal, Shipley College,  
West Yorkshire



**'To be fairly confident  
about the future, that's  
not a bad place to be'**

**JL DUTAUT**  
[JL.DUTAUT@FEWEEK.CO.UK](mailto:JL.DUTAUT@FEWEEK.CO.UK)

**FE Week meets a principal whose small and perfectly formed college provides a fitting platform from which to launch a big recovery**

The miracle college turnaround. The supersized provider. The super-principal. The disruptor who transformed the system. We're all guilty of

fetishising the big and bold stories. You won't find that here.

Instead, you'll find a reminder of the value of longevity, of putting down roots and committing to a community. In fact, if there's a lesson to be learned from Nav Chohan and his principalship of Shipley College, we might as well break all the conventions and get to it from the start. It is that in this age of globalised economy and global pandemic, the little guy has the advantage.

The little guy here is Shipley College,

"probably one of the smallest FE colleges in the country", says its principal. "Quite often when I'm at principals' parties, they're quite surprised about how small we are." Shipley has just 2,725 learners on roll. Chohan, however, has a big personality, just the kind of person you'd trust to liven up a party. His next comment is a humorous dig at his big-college peers: "People often talk about economies of scale, but they don't talk about 'diseconomies of scale', which is on the second page."



# Profile

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

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There's more than a gentle ribbing of other principals here. "Economies of scale is a manufacturing term," he says. "It doesn't really apply to the service sector. So at Shipley we stay firm to our roots, and we have an incredible staff. Have you ever been there?"

In times past I'd be in Saltaire to interview him. Instead, when we speak by video conference, I have to confess that I haven't. His clear enthusiasm for the place makes me regret it. "It's just north of Bradford and it's a World Heritage site. It's the most beautiful college site in the country probably, an absolutely gorgeous place to be."

I'm sold. To speak of the zeal of the convert would be an over-statement, but London-born Chohan clearly loves where he finds himself. His career began as a maths teacher in a Nottingham comprehensive 32 years ago. He has since taught computing at West London and Hammersmith College, and before his move to Shipley he gave 12 years to Leeds City College, finishing there as its director of further and higher education.

There are few principals who stay 11 years in one college. ("They usually leave before their mistakes come out," Chohan quips.) He has been chair of the West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges (WYCC) and Leeds



Nav in front, his Mum and Dad to his left, 1969

City Region Skills network (LCRSN) since 2019 – a group whose influence and policy work he typically downplays to focus on their value as colleagues and critical friends ("They've let me do the job because I've been in post longest."). Under his leadership, Shipley has been a "rock-solid good" college in Ofsted's book since 2013.

It didn't start that way. Just over a year into his tenure, in October 2010, Ofsted

downgraded the college to 'satisfactory'. His statement that "it was a hard thing to get out of" typifies someone who is his own harshest critic. Indeed that Ofsted report mentioned his recent arrival, his already effective agenda for change and the college's honest self-appraisal. Had Shipley been inspected 18 months earlier, the story may have been of a transformative turnaround with Chohan as its hero in 2013 when the college was once again rated good.

Since then, Shipley has received two further grade 2s from the inspectorate. "I suppose one regret would be that we haven't got to outstanding."

But that might be a reflection of the way we manage the place. I think we're worth celebrating, but maybe there's just a little too much humility. I don't want to call it outstanding because we're never perfect."

## "Principals usually leave before their mistakes come out"

Chohan is full of praise for the colleges that have secured the elusive rating, but he isn't the type to dwell on a judgment by someone else's standards. Even that early 'satisfactory' report, far from a terrible failure, gives a clear indication of his vision for Shipley and his priorities in leadership. It deemed the college "good for employer-responsive provision", and praised its inclusive curriculum and provision for employers, "strong partnerships with a wide range of groups that lead to benefits for all parties," and support for vulnerable learners.

Ten years on and a decade of government austerity, economic uncertainty following Brexit and a global pandemic may just show



Nav playing drums at the back, 1989

# Profile

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

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the wisdom of setting those priorities as Shipley College's foundations. "Having a solid FE college, even in the common difficulties the sector is facing, to be fairly confident about the future, that's not a bad place to be."

## "I won't call Shipley outstanding because we're never perfect"

Like everyone else, Chohan is concerned about the Covid-19 shutdown's impact on his students' industry placements. Yet his focus isn't so much on qualifications, which he has faith can be sorted. His worry is for something greater that his students will have lost: "The most important thing – maybe even more important than the education bit – is having that placement, being in adult situations. It brings them along and develops them so much."

Placing value on the real experience over the paper evidence evidently runs deep with the Shipley principal. It applies to his assessment of the college as much as to his assessment of his learners' needs, and it can be traced throughout his career. When he graduated from the University of Bath, he pursued glory as a drummer over a predictable career platform. The rest, as they say, is history.

"I had no talent and this probably wasn't the direction for me, so towards the end of my year on the dole I got a place on a community programme. That community programme had me working at a city farm in Bristol. I started to teach kids in the local area some basic IT stuff and that's probably what got me into teaching."

Later, he took a four-year break from teaching to go in search of industry experience, ostensibly to become a better teacher. It took him back to London, and then to Edinburgh where he worked his way up from systems analyst to project manager for the NHS. A return to teaching was always on

the cards, however.

It's only days later, in a sort of postscript to our interview, that I learn from Chohan that his mother, Bikram, was a junior school teacher. She and his father, Nirmal, were first-generation Sikh immigrants from India who lived and raised him in Greenford, west London, "which has all the hassles of living in London, but none of the glamour".

They had high aspirations for their future – dad became a civil servant and mum a teacher – and for their son's. "There is absolutely no way on Earth I wasn't going to university. That was presumed from minus nine months." He took five years to complete his degree in electrical engineering. "My key lesson from university was I wasn't quite as bright as I thought I was," he says with a wry smile.

And yet, despite that harsh self-assessment, Chohan occupies a place from which he can affect policy in West Yorkshire and beyond. As I write this piece, chancellor Rishi Sunak is set to announce a "Plan for Jobs" with a major focus on young people, and Chohan's closing statement of our interview springs to mind: "We do need some kind of solution for people who have unfortunately been made unemployed, and making that happen is going to be a partnership among all the institutions of West Yorkshire, private, and public. Because people deserve that chance."

## "Other principals are surprised about how small we are"

With a devolution deal announced for the region just days before lockdown, the influence of local organisations such as the WYCC and LCRSN is only likely to grow, with little Shipley College at its heart.

It's not a big, brash story, but it does go to show that staying lean, flexible and honest can really pay off.



On his wedding day, along with wife and children, 2013



A man with short brown hair and blue eyes, wearing a black t-shirt and a watch, stands with his arms crossed in front of a wooden staircase and bookshelf. The bookshelf contains books, some with titles like 'INTERIOR' and 'COLLECTION' visible.

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## TOM BEWICK

Chief executive,  
the Federation of  
Awarding Bodies



## Covid jobs plan must support quality training and be more than a gangplank to the dole

**We need to avoid a fiasco of schemes like Train to Gain when rolling out the Covid-19 jobs and skills rescue plan, writes Tom Bewick**

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has announced the latest Coronavirus jobs plan. As with the ambitious furlough scheme, the Treasury is willing to pledge big interventions to help stave off a potential tsunami of employee layoffs and mass unemployment. As reported in this paper, the measures include a complex interplay of wage subsidies for young people, bonuses for taking on apprentices and additional careers support.

**“Eligibility rules were relaxed to the point where a massive overspend opened up”**

While these measures are hugely welcome, given the scale of the economic crisis that the country faces, we still need to get the execution right. Equally, the government needs to remember some of the lessons of the recent past when it comes to the design and implementation of any demand-side interventions in the labour market.



For example, it has been a decade since the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee (PAC) passed judgment on the Treasury-inspired Train to Gain programme. It was a scheme devised to get employers investing in their workers, with generous public subsidy of over £850 million per annum.

Eligibility rules were relaxed to the point where a massive overspend opened up, with subsequent evaluations finding the training delivered was of dubious quality. The PAC report made it clear: the government should “focus expenditure on training with the most benefits, in sectors with the highest needs, and with providers who provide good-quality training”.

The question a lot of sector leaders are asking is: will quality be placed at the heart of this jobs rescue plan? Will we learn the lessons of Train to Gain

and look to minimise so-called deadweight effects and only let our best providers participate? How do we ensure learning is accredited and leads to qualifications that are valued and have ongoing currency?

One of the many challenges of the latest Treasury scheme is the potential perverse effects of the various measures that have been announced. The total grant available to an employer keeping a 24-year-old in work is £6,500. This is twice as much as the support available for an apprenticeship. In cash terms, there is even less public subsidy for under-19-year-olds, notwithstanding the different minimum wage rates. From an employer perspective it adds up to yet more complexity, whereas the furlough scheme was stunningly simple in both its design and execution.

The Department for Education needs to get out on the front foot

and explain the “offer” to firms in plain English. When I worked on Labour's New Deal programme in 1997, we funded a multi-million-pound TV advertising campaign explaining the different ways in which employers could support the programme. It proved extremely successful in nearly eradicating long-term youth unemployment.

**“The 1980s' make-work schemes were too often just a gang-plank to the dole”**

The most important lesson is to ensure we link coronavirus jobs support to quality training. The experience of the 1980s and make-work schemes demonstrated that too often government was merely providing a gang-plank to the dole. Unscrupulous employers engaged in the revolving-door syndrome whereby young people were laid off after six months, only for a new cohort to be taken on. It was the era of jobs without training and training without jobs. This generation of sector experts and labour market planners have the opportunity to rise to the challenge and get the Sunak plan right.

## TOBY PERKINS

Shadow apprenticeships minister

Disappointing:  
Sunak's skills package  
dodges the issues

**The measures announced this week by the chancellor fail to address the key skills challenges the government faces, writes Toby Perkins**

The scale of the threat to our crucial apprenticeship and FE sector is severe. The Association of Employment and Learning Providers warns that learning providers could close their doors, with FE colleges consulting on redundancies and college principals talking of the collapse in new apprenticeship vacancies. Worryingly, within hours of the chancellor's statement, colleges told me that that employers were calling them to cancel apprenticeships and choosing instead to employ "the ones the government are paying". Meanwhile, a generation of young people stand on the precipice of leaving education with no little to no job opportunities.

### "The new measures follow years of chronic under-investment in FE"

In the context of the era-defining crisis that faces us, the skills package the chancellor outlined on Wednesday is hugely disappointing.

At a meeting of college principals, with a particular focus on apprenticeships, a few

hours after the chancellor had sat down, I heard disappointment and frustration that this crucial opportunity had been lost.

Individually, the measures announced all have potential merit, but as a package they fail to address the key skills challenges the government faced going into this statement, namely:

- To create incentives for nervous businesses currently declining to employ apprentices to take the plunge and recruit.
- To reassure the FE sector that they would have the finances in place to prevent a rash of redundancies that would hamper their capacity to react.
- To create mechanisms that will be able to be delivered quickly, accessed simply and have clear objectives and outcomes to give confidence to employers, learning providers and students.

They have failed to do all three.

The government's new offerings will require very careful signposting if they are not to create perverse incentives against the employment of apprentices.

The Kickstart programme was trailed as a six-month free employment programme, though I understand that it will entail three months of training followed by three months of employment. The recruitment of new work coaches will be crucial but the speed of delivery of recent government announcements doesn't create confidence about their ability to



put in place the staff needed to oversee the many new initiatives.

The government must avoid creating a division between the 18-year-olds who firms can employ for free and the 16-year-olds they can have with a 25 per cent wage subsidy.

Whilst government may have a clear idea about the difference between the young people suitable for the different categories of scheme, communicating these nuances to employers will be tough.

Both colleges and employers tell me that the £2,000 grant will be welcomed by employers who would have taken on an apprentice anyway but is unlikely to make a huge difference to the numbers of apprenticeship starts this autumn. The government should consider whether the incentive on apprenticeships is enough to address the collapse in apprenticeship starts.

FE colleges who are dependent on apprenticeship revenue are facing a perilous financial picture, and many of them are already consulting on redundancies. One of the key issues is the one-year

funding lag on full-time course numbers which should be addressed with real-time funding this autumn.

Without addressing this, FE redundancies are likely. That could lead to employers deciding to take on apprentices only to find that learning providers lack the capacity to deliver.

The chancellor has rightly identified the threat to a generation of young people. But the new measures follow years of chronic under-investment in FE. With policy driving more apprenticeship funding away from young people, and private providers unprotected, the government is risking young people's futures and the means to rescue them.

There is an urgent need for greater simplicity and flexibility, and for support for the FE and private institutions who deliver the training. There must also be a greater commitment to supporting employers to use apprenticeship funding to prevent the lost generation that the chancellor claims to be setting out to protect.

ANNA  
MIMMS

Interim head,  
Derby Adult  
Learning Services



## How adult education added colossal 'social return' during lockdown

**All over the country, ACL tutors didn't just provide new online courses – they kept an eye on the vulnerable during the Covid lockdown, writes Anna Mimms**

Adult and Community Learning (ACL) changes lives. The Covid-19 crisis has seen ACL at its most responsive. We created online offers so fast that we surprised ourselves. In Derby we produced an online response to lockdown reducing isolation, improving mental health and wellbeing, whilst increasing support for people affected by job insecurity. Within five weeks of lockdown, Derby Adult Learning Services had provided new online learning opportunity to about 750 learners. I'm showing off. We weren't the only ones.

Around the country tutors phoned their vulnerable learners, made sure that food boxes were delivered, checked up on unpaid carers. Courses were created for people who are sheltering. We might not be as fancy as Colleges of FE, but my goodness we make sure that we add social return on the ESFA funding investment, which is seldom either understood or properly quantified.

David Hughes, chief executive of the Association of Colleges, has published A Skills-Led Recovery Plan, a document that describes the Covid-19 crisis as the biggest shock to the economy, to our society and to labour markets that any of us will have seen before. The plan acknowledges that young people

and adults with lower qualifications always suffer worst in a recession.

My experience of the 08-09 economic crisis was that entry-level jobs went to people with degrees. It's happening again in 2020, a constant influx of the newly redundant, followed by the inevitable tsunami of unemployed as furlough schemes end, flood the labour market.

Of course, ACL will provide courses and workshops helping people gain employability skills, but in addition to mass unemployment, we are hurtling towards a national depression. People are scared and isolated – our collective mental health is taking a real hit.

**“People are scared and isolated – our collective mental health is taking a real hit”**

School doesn't work for everyone – we are a second, third, fourth chance. Many of our learners have complex and challenging backgrounds, and ACL provides a lifeline. We are a melting pot of humanity. ACL is invaluable to the socioeconomic wellbeing and social mobility of communities nationally.

Improved literacy and numeracy skills, especially in the current climate, can be instrumental in



reducing social isolation, improved access to universal services and increased ability to compete in the labour market.

Here is just one example: “When we started the Zoom meetings, I was worried that I won't make it. You helped me feel more confident. I broke the shame barrier and I started speaking English”, an ESOL student told us.

These feelings of “shame”, in our learners are real. They affect mental health, isolate and destroy families and employment opportunities.

One of the biggest challenges facing the sector is digital poverty. With services, courses and support going online, those without access to wi-fi and technology are at risk of increased isolation and disadvantage.

Ian Bond, head of Nottinghamshire County Council's ACL Service and the East Midlands LEAFA lead, highlights the key role that digital skills will play in boosting economic recovery during the Covid crisis: “Across the D2N2 LEP region, the local industrial strategy clearly recognises that a

lack of digital skills contributes to a productivity shortfall that is 14 per cent lower than nationally and is around 32 per cent lower for the Information and communication sector.

“Adult and community learning services offer a unique combination of non-accredited and accredited programmes, and they have recently reinvented themselves to provide their programmes digitally due to Covid-19. ACL providers are ideally configured to play a vital role in promoting the resilience of individuals. Regional and national policymakers need to wake up to the unique support that ACL services can provide to help our communities tackle rising unemployment, address the disproportionate negative economic impact on the low-skilled and help our economies to thrive.”

Adult and Community Learning has a key role to play in the national response to the socio-economic and mental health challenges that we face. Now is the time to listen to our voice and notice our collective social impact.





## READER'S REPLY

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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### New rules for subcontracting starting from 2020-21

It's about time these rules were put in place. Too many primes are using the subcontracting route as a cash cow and not providing much in relation to quality support for subs. Currently, there are no ESFA rules to protect the subcontractor – everything is in the favour of the prime.

Anonymous, website

### Why we must avoid the 'one size fits all' approach to FE

The removal of FE colleges from their local community and democratic accountability in 1993 when they were "incorporated" was a fundamental mistake. I spent some time visiting and researching the US community college model which would have been much more effective.

Bob Harrison, website

### Locked-up and locked-down: how prison education has fared during Covid-19

Lots of people have been working hard to provide resources, but let's hope teaching can resume soon. And let's recognise how much better the situation would have been with proper digital technology available.

Ruth McFarlane

### DfE to pay employers £750 for every T-level industry placement

Great piece in @FEWeek on the importance of government decision to take a flexible approach to T-level placements. By removing barriers to industry placements and apprenticeships, govt can ensure the next generation can obtain the skills they need to get ahead

Lawrence Barton, Twitter

I think as an employer I'd be asking the provider why should I jump through all these hoops to justify all the tangible costs

## REPLY OF THE WEEK

### New rules for subcontracting starting from 2020-21



I cannot understand why the ESFA are once again bringing in rules that do not recognise that some subcontractors, the smaller niche providers delivering to hard-to-reach groups, are delivering high-quality provision, outcomes for the learners and added value through their other resources. Lose us and many people would once again fall through the net and be left behind. Why haven't they listened? The big primes and colleges looking for quick fixes once again have put in jeopardy provision that is vital for many harder to reach groups. ESFA, PLEASE do not introduce a "one size fits all" approach. Have faith in those local authorities, voluntary community provider hubs and the good colleges who know what their community needs and how to deliver the right provision to get the results. There will be many redundancies, loss of expertise and big gaps in provision as a result of this decision to reduce subcontracting

Cassie, website,

in order to get £750 limited to 50 per cent upfront to provide 315+ hours of specific industry placement, when I can get £1,000 for just offering just 100 hours of work experience with the only commitment being to provide meaningful written feedback at the end of it.

Robert, website

### Provider shuts its doors to hundreds of young engineering apprentices



So, despite the complex and bureaucratic RoATP process – which is supposed to weed out weak/at risk apprenticeship providers – PTPs continue to go under? PTP staff, employers and apprentices are left high and dry. And the ESFA are unwilling or unable to cover the often substantial costs involved in transferring learners to other training providers.

Unless there is proper structural reform, the risk is that employers will begin to view the whole apprenticeship system as unfit for purpose: too risky and volatile to be worth the trouble.

Jason Pepper, website

# Bulletin

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## Neil Bates

Managing director,  
Seetec Outsource

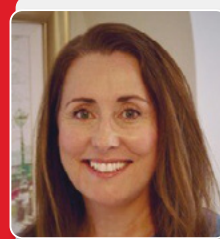
**Start date** July 2020

**Previous job**

Managing director, Technical Professional Education Limited

**Interesting fact**

He is passionate about Plymouth Argyle



## Erika Bannerman

Chair,  
SFJ Awards

**Start date** April 2020

**Concurrent job**

Managing Director, NHS Shared Business Services (SBS)

**Interesting fact**

She is an aspiring drummer

# Movers & Shakers

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



## Paul Morris

Governor,  
Blackburn College

**Start date** April 2020

**Concurrent job**

Director of Capital Development & Estate Operations, Lancaster University

**Interesting fact**

He is currently leading and delivering on a five-year capital programme of circa £250m at Lancaster University



## Dan Lodge

Principal, The  
College of  
Richard Collyer

**Start date** September 2020

**Previous job**

Vice Principal (Quality & Curriculum), The College of Richard Collyer

**Interesting fact**

His early working career started out in tourism in the Maldives, but now he's happy to call West Sussex his home

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

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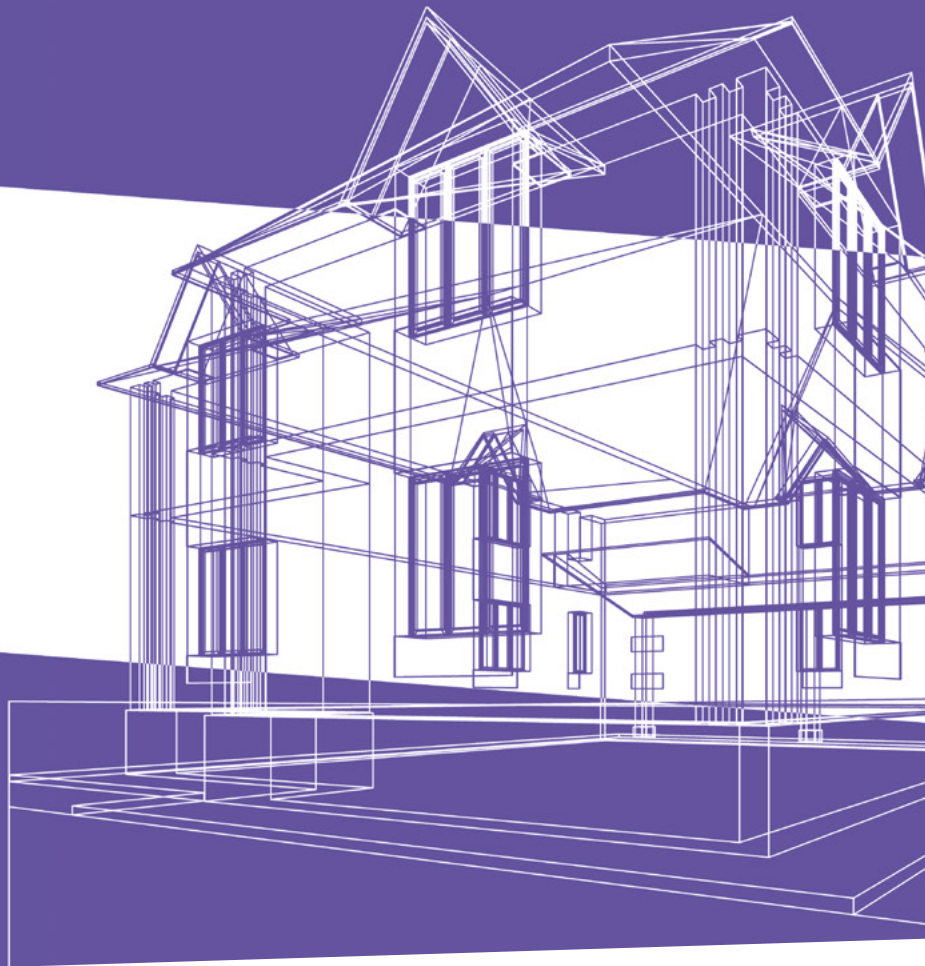
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FEWEEK

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