

FEWEEK

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Colleges exempt from new Covid rules on adult indoor sport

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New restrictions on adult indoor sports and five-a-side football will not apply to colleges if the activity is part of “education or training provision”, the government has confirmed.

However, colleges have been told that indoor student-led sport during lunchtime, break or free periods “should be limited to groups of six or less”.

All adult indoor games with more than six players were banned on Thursday as the government steps up its efforts to combat the huge surge in coronavirus infections.

When announcing a new list of Covid-19 restrictions for England in the House of Commons on Tuesday, prime minister Boris Johnson said: “We will also have to extend the rule of six to all adult indoor team sports.”

The Department for Education told FE Week that organised indoor college sport, for groups of more than six, is permitted in further education settings “where it is part of an education or training provision, or as part of college teams”.

This applies to all age groups. However, the DfE said that sport should take place outside where possible.

“Nothing is more important than the education, health and wellbeing of our young people”

The DfE added that “indoor student-led sporting activity, where it is not in line with any education or training provision, should be limited to groups of six or less.

“This includes where students have free



time such as lunch time, breaks and free periods.”

Colleges have also been reminded that at “all times, participants should comply with Covid-19 secure measures including the ‘system of controls’ for their setting and limit social interaction outside of the sporting activity”.

The government’s guidance for indoor sport that is not in an education setting states: “From September 24, organised indoor sport and indoor exercise classes can continue to take place with larger numbers present, provided groups of more than six do not mix. If groups of six are likely to mix, these indoor activities must not go ahead.

“There is an exemption for organised indoor team sports for disabled people.”

Other restrictions announced this week include an enforced 10pm closing time for

pubs, restaurants and takeaways from today. All workers are also being told to again work from home if they can with immediate effect.

People who break the rules and meet for social gatherings in groups larger than six or do not wear face coverings on public transport face fines of £200.

The education sector is currently exempt from the measures, with Johnson insisting that “we will ensure that schools, colleges and universities stay open”.

He told the Commons: “I want to stress that this is by no means a return to the full lockdown of March.

“We’re not issuing a general instruction to stay at home. We will ensure that schools, colleges and universities stay open because nothing is more important than the education, health and wellbeing of our young people.”

'Worrying': University groups voice concerns over Ofsted inspections

BILLY CAMDEN

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Exclusive

Handing Ofsted powers to inspect degree apprenticeships is “worrying and unnecessary”, a university membership organisation has said.

MillionPlus, which represents 24 “modern” universities, has expressed concern at the watchdog’s expertise to inspect the provision and called for inspectors to have mandatory HE academic employment experience in order to review university-based provision.

It comes after FE Week revealed government plans for Ofsted to take on responsibility for overseeing all apprenticeships, including those at the degree levels of 6 and 7, for the first time.

Writing for FE Week (see page 24), chief executive Greg Walker said that degree apprenticeships, which launched in 2015, have “such exciting potential” but it is “extremely disappointing to see the government clipping the wings of this policy before it has a chance to really fly”.

He said that while Ofsted has a “great deal” of experience in its field of school and college inspections, that “does not mean it is suitable to regulate the complex, diverse educational provision in higher education”.

Walker claims his members have “already seen some issues with Ofsted oversight of university provision” at levels 4 and 5.

He said: “A tricky compromise between Ofsted and the OfS meant the former reviews some elements of level 4 and 5

apprenticeships offered by universities. This has been a challenging experience for universities, dealing with a significant lack of understanding and a desire by Ofsted to simply overlay a wider inspection framework on to university learning.

“This has led to worrying assumptions that did not match reality – including seeing drastically different judgements about teaching excellence from the OfS’s TEF [Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework] evaluation and from Ofsted inspectors, despite both organisations reviewing the same provision.”

Walker recommends that if the proposal for Ofsted to inspect all apprenticeships becomes policy, the watchdog’s criteria to become an inspector for degree apprenticeships should be amended so that it is “obligatory to have had HE academic employment experience in order to review university-based provision”.

Adrian Anderson, chief executive of the

University Vocational Awards Council, has also questioned Ofsted’s HE experience (see page 25), saying the inspectorate should urgently outline “what plans it has to recruit senior managers with higher education experience and expertise”.

Ofsted declined to comment.

Last week, the Russell Group, which represents the 24 “leading” universities in the UK including Cambridge, did not pour cold water over the plan for Ofsted to inspect their members.

A spokesperson said the group will continue to work with government on delivery and expansion of the apprenticeship route, including how to avoid “overburdensome or disproportionate regulation”.

The Department for Education said it will “provide further updates in due course” about the future regulation of level 6 and 7 apprenticeships.

Making Ofsted the sole regulator for all apprenticeships was a recommendation in Philip Augar’s review of post-18 education.

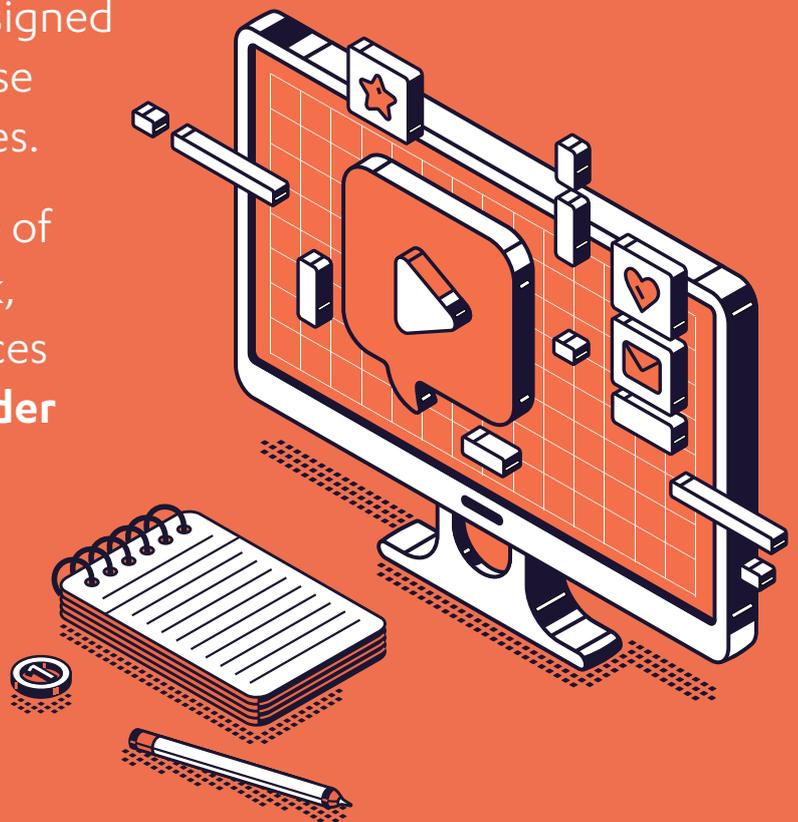


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Investigates

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Colleges and ITPs become gateway providers to Kickstart the economy

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Colleges and independent FE providers have been flocking to support the government's new Kickstart initiative by helping employers who could otherwise not take part get onto the placement scheme.

FE Week spoke with the leaders of colleges and training providers to find out how they have got involved, and what benefits it holds for the further education and skill sector

The Kickstart scheme, announced by chancellor of the exchequer Rishi Sunak in his summer statement in July, offers 16 to 24-year-olds on Universal Credit who are at risk of long-term unemployment a six-month work placement – with the government picking up their wage bill.

Employers must be able to offer a minimum of 30 placements to be allowed to apply for the scheme, which is being run by the Department for Work and Pensions, otherwise they have to apply to join through a gateway provider.

Gateway providers are where FE and



skills providers come in: they club employers together so the group, as a whole, can apply with 30 placements on offer.

For each placement, gateway providers receive £300 to support administrative costs, while employers receive £1,500 per placement for help with setup costs. According to the DWP, gateway providers must have experience of managing partnership agreements with third parties, and have “robust” financial and governance processes to manage applications – those processes are due to be set out in coming weeks.

Minister for employment Mims Davies MP told FE Week gateway providers are “crucial” in helping smaller businesses take advantage of Kickstart.

She said the response from organisations to becoming gateway providers has been “hugely encouraging” with more than 500

organisations stepping up.

However, she has called for more organisations to step forward to “support this national effort and get behind the career ambitions of the next generation”.

Approved Kickstart gateway providers are listed on the DWP website and at the time of going to press 26 colleges were listed, along with around a dozen independent training providers.

Such is the enthusiasm for Kickstart that gateway provider Cornwall College Group says it already has 30 placements ready for the November start, having only been approved as a gateway provider this month.

Assistant principal for external engagement and business innovation Justin Olosunde said they were “really well-



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placed” to be intermediaries: “Provision for us has always been about matching the right individual to their chosen career and supporting them into employment and working with our employer network of over 2,000 employers across the region.

“So it really, for me, is almost an extension of the day job.”

He said the gateway role “should be something that will come naturally to colleges”.

“The larger apprenticeship provider colleges like ourselves will always be better placed to do it, because they will have the employer engagement links which will be key to the placements, and they’ll have more experience of working with young people that want employment now as opposed to going into a full-time college course, and a big bank of employers that they’ve worked with for a lot of years.”

It is not just colleges getting involved: independent providers have also signed up, with Association of Employment and Learning Providers managing director Jane Hickie saying it is “no surprise” considering their links to small and medium-sized enterprises.

Managing director of provider the Education and Skills Partnership Jason Hargreaves told FE Week he saw Kickstart as an opportunity to grow partnerships with employers, while improving their relationships with existing clients during the Covid-19 crisis: “If we can help young people to develop and to grow, from a commercial perspective, it’s helping businesses while also providing a nurturing environment” for learners.

But he warned: “We have got to be very clear learners are embarking on this for the right reasons, that we’re not just training for the sake of it: It’s got to be impactful, it’s got to add value, and it’s got to help learners reach their full potential, as well as linking into the businesses’ needs and requirements.”

Fellow independent training provider Catch22 has also pushed the importance

of avoiding “meaningless” placements, with chief development officer Mat Illic saying: “For Kickstart to benefit the employees, employers, and our society, these placements must have a real chance of career progression.”

Cornwall and ESP are two of a number of providers which, as well as helping other employers onto the scheme, have been looking at setting up their own work placements.

Hargreaves says ESP has to “lead by example”, and is looking at taking on two placements at this time, while Cornwall is looking at hosting six placements, filling roles such as campus support officer – ensuring students and visitors observe guidelines to guard against Covid-19.

Loughborough College principal Jo Maher told FE Week her college is looking to host 35 placements, in addition to those placements they will support as a gateway provider.

“One of the main benefits for employers,” Maher said, “is that our team will take the heavy lifting away from them by making funding applications on their behalf, guiding them through the process and by working with DWP to find the workforce”.

“Shaping the future careers and prospects for local people is at the core of Loughborough College,” she continued, “so we hope our involvement will create some amazing opportunities and potential new career paths for people.”

Chichester College Group’s managing



Education and Skills Partnership managing director Jason Hargreaves

director Julie Kapsalis said they have become a gateway provider as: “While large organisations which can support 30 job placements are able to apply directly to the scheme, we are very conscious that there are many smaller employers who need to use an intermediary to be able to participate.”

“That’s really where we come in,” she explained, saying Chichester’s gateway work will support small-to-medium enterprises and micro-businesses onto the scheme.

Aside from the £300, an advantage of the scheme for providers is they can use it to funnel Kickstart participants onto their apprenticeship, study or other training programmes.

Weston College principal Paul Phillips, who has already seen 15 employers sign up with the college, highlighted how: “We can also offer further training to the candidates once the scheme has finished, through apprenticeships or other bespoke training.”

And as an employer, Weston is also looking at how it can offer its own placements, as Phillips says he saw the scheme “as a potential pipeline for the college’s own apprentices in 2021”.

Not all is well though: Hickie highlighted with approval how young people on Kickstart can move onto an apprenticeship at any time during their six-month placement, but said employers ought to be able to keep using the wage subsidies once a person moves off the scheme.

There has also been some concern from the FE and skills sector that Kickstart’s wage subsidy and £1,500 employer incentive will dampen down apprenticeship starts.

Labour’s shadow apprenticeships and lifelong learning minister Toby Perkins has told FE Week he still has concerns about the scheme, after hearing about employers pulling out of apprenticeships and opting to do Kickstart instead.

“Employers are choosing to go for the lower-cost option, and in terms of the difference between six months with the wages paid, or a £2,000 incentive at the end of the apprenticeship – there is not a huge amount of comparison.”

Provider disputes £2.6m clawback following ESFA investigation

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The parent company of a recently-purchased apprenticeship training provider is disputing a £2.6 million clawback and remains suspended from recruiting apprentices, FE Week can reveal.

Prospects Training International, which trades as Geason Training and was bought by the Speedy group in December 2018, is challenging an Education and Skills Funding Agency investigation over alleged overpayments.

Following Speedy's buyout, Geason was found to have made 'insufficient progress' in two areas of an early monitoring visit by Ofsted, conducted in April 2019.

Receiving an 'insufficient progress' rating means apprenticeship providers like Geason, which at the time had 1,017 apprentices, are banned from taking on new starts until they score a grade three at a full Ofsted inspection.

Geason passed this threshold this year, when an inspection report published in May graded it as 'requires improvement'.

“The Speedy group is in discussions with the funding agency to resolve the matter”

Inspectors credited a newly-appointed leadership team with overhauling the “not fit for purpose” curriculum, and reported employers could see apprentices were now “swiftly improving and developing their skills”.

However, at the time of going to press



Geason was still listed as “not currently starting new apprentices” on the government's Find Apprenticeship Training website and register of apprenticeship training providers.

When asked why Geason was still suspended from new starts, the ESFA said it does not comment on “individual cases”.

Speedy would not be drawn on why their subsidiary company was still suspended.

However, it comes after Speedy's accounts for 2019-20 reported that they were notified in April that the ESFA was suspending payments and seeking to claw back £2.6 million from Geason.

This was after an analysis of a small sample of learner documents over a three-year period brought up errors.

At the time the accounts were published, Speedy said it was “not possible to make an accurate estimate of the timing or amount that may be repayable from this, or other potential claims we may receive”.

Speedy engaged lawyers to respond to the agency and set aside £3 million for costs

associated with the investigation, including legal fees.

Geason had performed below expectations that year, due to lower-than-expected learner enrolments and the set-up of a number of regional training centres “which have yet to reach critical mass”, the accounts also said.

When asked for comment on the investigation, the company pointed FE Week to an investors' update from earlier this month, which said Geason: “Received a claim from a funding agency in late April 2020 alleging poor financial controls and overpayments of up to £2.6 million for the three-year period commencing August 2017.”

“The Speedy group is in discussions with the funding agency to resolve the matter.”

The ESFA said it would not comment on individual investigations.

According to the government's Find Apprenticeship Training site, Geason delivers apprenticeships for such standards as professional accounting/taxation technician, digital marketer and property maintenance operative.

Halfon calls out DfE for breaking apprenticeship promise

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Exclusive

The chair of the education select committee has called for a rethink at the Department for Education after FE Week revealed a broken promise to fill all junior roles with apprentices.

Job adverts for three diary managers, who will work directly with ministers and the DfE's permanent secretary, at executive officer level, are currently live and state the roles can be filled by "non-apprentices".

It comes despite skills minister Gillian Keegan having told education select committee chair Robert Halfon earlier this month that the DfE was changing its recruitment approach to "ensure all executive assistant and executive officer positions are filled using apprenticeships, for a pilot period between September 1 to December 31, 2020".

She repeated the promise when speaking at an Association of Employment and Learning Providers conference on September 9 – declaring that "we practise what we preach" when it comes to boosting the number of apprentices across the country.

After being shown the diary manager adverts, the DfE admitted that in a "small number" of instances an "exemption" to their new recruitment policy may be necessary.

But Robert Halfon, chair of the education select



Gillian Keegan

committee and a former skills minister, said the DfE "must reconsider" this broken pledge.

He told FE Week: "The DfE should be the lead department in recruitment of apprentices – the guiding light for all other departments to follow. They should ensure that every new job offered is an apprenticeship wherever possible."

"The new permanent secretary should transform their apprenticeship recruitment policy"

"They must reconsider and really be the government department that provides a ladder of opportunity for aspiring apprentices. The new permanent secretary should transform their apprenticeship recruitment policy."

Despite having already broken the pledge, a DfE spokesperson said the department "remains committed to ensuring all executive assistant and executive officer positions at the DfE are filled using apprenticeships, for a pilot period between September 1 to December 31, 2020".

The spokesperson added: "We are bringing in three diary managers to work in private offices across the department. The intention is to fill these roles with high-potential apprentices



Robert Halfon

who will be able to manage a fast-paced working environment while keeping on top of their apprenticeship learning. However, it may be necessary to fill one of the roles with a candidate with a higher level of previous experience who would therefore be ineligible to undertake the apprenticeship in business administration.

"We are advertising 28 apprenticeship vacancies and have received a high level of interest from potential candidates."

The DfE is accepting applications to the diary manager roles until September 27. Based in London and paid £28,500 a year, successful candidates will "manage the minister or permanent secretary's time so they are able to attend key meetings, ensure they have the time available to engage with policy and strategic issues and make business critical decisions".

The DfE's recruitment pilot is also being run in the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

Large colleges to snub chancellor's traineeship plea

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From front

Exclusive

More than two-thirds of colleges in England chose not to run any traineeship programmes in 2018/19, FE Week can reveal.

The news comes as some of the largest college groups say they have no intention to deliver the pre-employment scheme despite a significant funding rate increase and an extra £111 million to triple starts this year to over 40,000.

Part of the government's strategy to combat a rise in youth unemployment is to increase traineeship starts but the Department for Education recognises that the current provider base alone will not be sufficient.

A freedom of information request for the latest provider-level data shows that 113, or 68 per cent of all 167 general FE colleges, recruited no traineeships in 2018/19.

The vast majority of traineeships are delivered by around 150 private training providers and Skills Training UK topped the table in 2018/19 with 950 starts.

Of the 54 colleges that did deliver the programme in that year, 21 delivered fewer than 20 starts.

Some colleges subcontract to private training providers and with 330 starts, Eastleigh College saw the most college-funded traineeships in 2018/19.

A tender to bring on board more providers, such as from the apprenticeship sector, was announced in July but has yet to be launched after suffering from delays.

Traineeships are funded for 16 to 18-year-olds from the study programme budget and for 19 to 24-year-olds from the adult education budget.

Introduced in 2013, the funding pays for an unpaid work placement for up to six months and this year the funding rate for 19 to 24-year-olds has risen from £970 to £1,500.

Employers are now entitled to receive up to



£10,000, at a rate of £1,000 per trainee that they take on.

There has also been a change to the eligibility criteria for trainees this year, allowing people with level 3 qualifications, such as A levels, to participate.

Additional flexibilities have also been introduced to encourage take-up, with the minimum work placement hours reduced from 100 to 70 and allowing placements to be split across two employers

FE Week asked the 10 colleges with the largest cohorts of young people in England that did not offer any traineeships if they planned to change this following the chancellor's funding boost. Six said they had no intention of offering the scheme, three declined to comment and just one had plans to start delivering them.

Why are colleges continuing to turn their backs on traineeships?

Capital City College Group, the largest college group in London, said they are not planning to deliver traineeships in 2020/2021 because they have not found the programme to be "beneficial to our students" and it is "too restrictive to support the needs of the individual" even with the new flexibilities.

The group created a number of alternative pre-apprenticeship programmes some years ago which "utilise study programme and

adult education budget funding streams appropriately" and will continue to offer those instead.

Sunderland College said they are "unable to secure employer commitment to traineeships as a model in the north east generally", which has been exacerbated by the impact of Covid-19.

"We found the criteria for traineeships too restrictive"

A spokesperson added that they have also decided not to offer traineeships because there are now multiple government initiatives, such as the Kickstart scheme, which "run the risk of confusing employers and asking too much of them, particularly at this challenging time".

West Herts College in Hertfordshire, Chichester College Group in West Sussex and South Thames College in London all said they would not be expanding into the traineeships

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market this year owing to a lack of demand from employers and potential students.

And Activate Learning, which has seven colleges spread mainly across Oxford, said they would not be applying to the government's tender at this time as "we feel there are other priorities of much greater scale and need".

Nottingham College, EKC Group in Kent and New City College in London all refused to comment.

The one large college that said they would start offering traineeships this year was Harrow College & Uxbridge College.

A spokesperson told FE Week: "We currently have a cohort of high-quality apprenticeship candidates, particularly in the areas of accountancy and construction, where the impact of the coronavirus has resulted in a reduction of paid apprenticeship opportunities in these industries.

"We are therefore looking at traineeships in these areas as a substitute route to increase the chances of the trainees securing an apprenticeship in the future."

"We feel there are other priorities of much greater scale and need"

HCUC's spokesperson added that the "increased flexibility" in access to traineeships, particularly with entry now being allowed up to level 3 as compared to level 2 previously, will "enable broader uptake for both employers and students".

Introduced as a flagship pre-employability programme in 2013, traineeship starts have been on a rapid decline, from a high of 24,100 in 2015/16 down to just 14,900 in 2018/19.

Data for 2019/20 only currently covers the first three quarters of the year and shows 11,000 starts.

Colleges have historically struggled to offer the programme.

Asked if the Association of Colleges is now actively encouraging its members to get more involved in traineeships this year, senior policy manager Teresa Frith said: "We remain



Teresa Frith

optimistic about the funding for traineeships and hope that an expanded and more flexible traineeship branded programme to provide a re- or pre-employment offer will go hand in hand with a renewed effort to offer more apprenticeships, which have been hit hard due to the pandemic.

"AoC continues to work with EFSA to ensure colleges are aware of the procurement opportunities, employer incentives and how the delivery framework will help providers."

A DfE spokesperson said the National Careers Service and Jobcentre Plus are "making sure as many young people as possible are made aware of fantastic opportunities traineeships offer, including how they can help them to get ahead in a range of exciting industries".

She added that the DfE is also working "at pace" on the procurement for traineeships for 19 to 24-year-olds and options for new providers to access 16 to 19 traineeship funding.

The spokesperson insisted the tender has not been delayed but is being run at an "accelerated timetable", explaining that a procurement process of this type requires a "significant amount of due diligence". However, she admitted that the procurement was expected to run over the summer, with the aim of having contracts in place as "early as possible in the academic year".

Some colleges have been able to buck the trend when it comes to offering traineeships in recent years, and told FE Week that they will continue to increase their delivery this year.

How to deliver traineeships successfully as a college

London South East Colleges delivered 100 traineeships in 2018/19 and said it was

working hard with employers to use the government's new incentive payments.

Neil Coates, vice principal for adults, apprenticeships and partnerships at the group, explained that their success in the pre-employment programme can mostly be attributed to the college's "strong employer engagement strategy – employer advantage – which takes a membership approach" and "ensures that we develop strategic relationships rather than transactional ones".

He said the college group's traineeships have also been positively impacted by the decision to put all of their employer-focused teams into one department, which has "ensured that the teams work collaboratively with curriculum colleagues to ensure any student at risk of dropping out is identified quickly".

In addition, LSEC's programme of traineeship starts are profiled across the year – which links directly to their drive on apprenticeship recruitment. "Therefore, when a candidate applies for an apprenticeship vacancy, but is not quite ready for a full apprenticeship, we support them onto a traineeship programme," Coates said.

Weston College in Somerset delivered 150 traineeships in 2018/19 and is "definitely" planning on delivering more this year.

A spokesperson said their traineeship model is delivered in-house by a specialist team, with "extensive experience" working with learners at a "crossroads in their educational journey".

Weston's traineeship delivery is "regularly reviewed using Labour Market Intelligence, in the concept of 'career creation' with bespoke traineeships pathways created around sector, employer and regional need, to ensure recruitment levels are sustainable in sectors with potential for high growth".

Hughes: postpone full Ofsted inspections till April or September

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Full Ofsted inspections shouldn't restart until April 2021 at the earliest, according to the chief executive of the Association of Colleges.

David Hughes said this week that the respite period should possibly even extend to next September while the inspectorate and sector decide "what adaptations might be needed to take into account Covid disruptions".

Ofsted's normal inspection regime was paused in March when lockdown was enforced.

A period of "interim autumn visits", which the education watchdog insists are not routine inspections, commenced this month and will run until the end of December.

The current goal is to resume the full inspection regime in January 2021, but Ofsted

and the Department for Education has said this is being kept under constant review.

An extension to this timeline seems likely following this week's raft of new restrictions announced by prime minister Boris Johnson, which could be in place for the next six months.

While education providers appear exempt from the measures currently, other workers have been told to again work from home if they can with immediate effect, which may impact Ofsted's staff.

Geoff Barton, the Association of School and College Leaders, said earlier this month that he was "not convinced" about Ofsted's "determination to resume routine inspections in January 2021".

"This plan may quickly unravel in the event of local lockdowns over the next few weeks and months," he added.



David Hughes

"We note that this date will be kept under review and we urge the inspectorate to be prepared to change its plans."

The AoC called for Ofsted inspections to be delayed until January 2021 back in April, but Hughes' comments this week, made on Twitter, appear to be the first time he has said he would be keen for an extension beyond the current timeframe.

LEADING FROM THE MIDDLE

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Struggling Gateshead in merger talks

FRASER WHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Exclusive

An embattled college is in merger talks with two neighbouring college groups after a surprise £6 million deficit crippled its finances.

Gateshead College is currently undergoing a structure and prospects appraisal with the FE Commissioner, following an independent investigation into the college's "inaccurate" budget forecast.

Now, FE Week understands the college is in merger talks with Tyne Coast College and the Education Partnership North East.

A spokesperson for Gateshead College would not be drawn on the merger talks, but said: "We can confirm the college is engaged in a strategic prospects appraisal process which has yet to conclude.

"This will assess the options for the best future constitutional structure for the college, including consideration of both remaining standalone and merger."

When approached for comment, Tyne Coast College, which was created from a merger of South Tyneside College and Tyne Metropolitan College in 2017, said it was aware of Gateshead's appraisal, but had no further comment to make at this time.

EPNE, which incorporates Sunderland College, Northumberland College and Hartlepool Sixth Form College, declined to comment.

There remains a high degree of secrecy around the events surrounding Gateshead College's deficit.

Gateshead's accounts for 2018/19, covering the period when the shortfall was uncovered, have yet to be published. A spokesperson told FE Week in March they were expected to be finalised by April.

And FE Commissioner Richard Atkins' intervention report into Gateshead, expected to cover how the deficit came about, is also yet to see the light of day.



Gateshead College

The Department for Education has said the publication of the commissioner's reports were paused due to the Covid-19 pandemic, though they have now been shared with the colleges concerned.

A departmental spokesperson said publication would resume "in due course".

FE Week first reported last December that Gateshead's governors had called in independent investigators to explain why the deficit had come about.

The ensuing forensic audit found the income position had been overstated and the expenditure substantially understated.

However, the college has repeatedly stressed that investigation "did not determine that there has been any misappropriation of college funds".

The discovery of the deficit precipitated an upheaval at the college: principal Judith Doyle, once the highest-paid principal in the country with a salary of up to £350,000 in 2017/18, retired with immediate effect the same month.

The chair John McCabe, who had only been in post for six months, was replaced by former

deputy FE Commissioner John Hogg in January. Gateshead was also handed a financial health notice to improve by the Education and Skills Funding Agency that month after it entered formal intervention.

The college announced a redundancy process as well, with 26 jobs at risk, to address what it called "short-term financial pressures".

Ofsted then busted the college down from a grade one to a grade three following an inspection in January. A report published in February said the "information leaders have provided to governors about the college's finances over recent months has not been sufficiently accurate".

Former Kensington and Chelsea College boss Andy Cole was appointed to replace Doyle on an interim basis in February, after deputy principal Andy Toon filled in for her.

A new three-year financial plan has also been agreed at the college, and it is hoped that will return it to surplus by 2020/2021, after achieving one of £748,000 in 2017-18.



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Introducing...

CAROL THOMAS

CEO and principal,
Coventry College



'There are massive leaps and bounds to take and that's what I thrive on'

JL DUTAUT
JL.DUTAUT@FEWEEK.CO.UK

JL Dutaut meets a new principal and CEO who loves the stage but doesn't make a song and dance of her successes

It takes all sorts to keep an education system performing. Some like the daily grind of incremental improvement. Others like the

long-haul commitment to a community. For Carol Thomas, it's all about the bold change, the big-ticket transformative impact, picking up an organisation that's on its knees and giving it back its fight.

And the new CEO and principal of Coventry college is certainly not one to shy away from a fight. Hot from being on the team that transformed the fortunes of Stafford College after its merger with Newcastle-under-Lyme College, she's taken on her first top job at Coventry, judged

'requires improvement' in September 2019.

Getting to the heart of that judgment while re-opening a college in the midst of a global pandemic when you've only been in post a month is no mean feat. But Thomas has hit the ground running, meeting every member of staff in spite of Covid restrictions. What she's found wasn't entirely unpredictable.

There are obviously some tough challenges. "They've said to me 'we've had five people at the top in the last four years'. They've lost heart,

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they've lost passion, and they've lost confidence in their own ability. This overarching 'requires improvement' just suffocates everybody into a negative bubble."

But there are also grounds for optimism. "There's some excellent provision here and some fantastic staff who are so passionate about their job."

In many ways the story of Coventry isn't a million miles from Newcastle and Stafford College Group's (NSCG). The key difference seems to be the relative success of their respective mergers.

When City College Coventry merged with Henley College Coventry in August 3 years ago, it was arguably on an improvement journey (though the previous decade was really best characterised as bumping along the bottom). Deemed 'inadequate' in 2015, it had clambered back up to 'requires improvement' by 2017. Henley, meanwhile, was travelling in the opposite direction. From 'good' in 2014, it had tumbled a grade to 'requires improvement' in 2016. They met in the middle, and if the aspiration for the merger was to empower both to thrive, the reality seems to be that it has stalled both in their tracks.

Which is also not entirely unpredictable. And this is where Thomas's experience at NSCG comes in handy. No doubt, it was a key aspect



Visiting Machu Picchu in 2017 - "one of the most breath-taking places I have ever been"

of what made her stand out among the other candidates for the job.

Not that she ever got to meet them. Characteristically humourous, she tells me that "[the online interview process] was good in one way, because I was all dressed up and still in my slippers. But," she adds "I'd never seen inside the college." Undeterred, Thomas had her own 'Barnard Castle moment' (in reality, restrictions had been eased by then). She came to Coventry for a sight test. "My husband and I drove down in lockdown. I prowled the buildings and peered through the windows and thought, 'well, they're not falling down. That's a good start!'"

In an age of high expectations, this is a telling joke. There's no doubt that Thomas's expectations of her students and staff are high, but she has me wondering whether we have the same expectations of buildings, facilities and the budgets to pay for those. If there's incongruity there, one rather undermines the other.

Not that Thomas seems fazed by a challenge. She was part of the leadership team at Newcastle-under-Lyme college, which she joined in 2012, when it merged with Stafford College in 2016. The former was deemed 'good' and pushing for better still, while the latter had briefly escaped the 'inadequate' category it had been put into in 2012 only to sink back into it in 2016. By 2019, the merged NSCG was deemed 'outstanding'.

"We had grown men crying. They just could not believe the feeling"

At that time, shortly after the FE area reviews which in many places recommended mergers, few had yet acted on those recommendations, and of those fewer still had succeeded. At Coventry, it led to stagnation and years of leadership turmoil. But NSCG was an early



Age 14 as principal girl in the Audley Theatre Players production of Aladdin

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success for the policy.

For Thomas, the key determinant of that success would be the staff and the new leadership team's ability to "win hearts and minds". And that battle is far from an easy one from a leadership perspective. "As nine interim managers moved out, we moved in. We lost a year of our lives."

But despite Stafford's years in the doldrums, when all else was peeled back, what was left was "a team of staff that were prepared to take on anything that was thrown at them. And we did literally throw everything at them, and they were fantastic."

The strategy paid off, and her take on that success is telling. "When the Ofsted inspector said it was 'outstanding', I said 'It's going to be amazing for Newcastle staff, but I can't tell you the difference this is going to make to Stafford'. We had grown men crying. They just could not believe the feeling."

But Thomas is not the kind to sit back and reap the rewards of a battle won. "If I'd stayed at NSCG, which I could have done quite comfortably because it is a fabulous place to work, the gains would be very small. It's tweaks, you know. You're in the sort of 'sustaining excellence' model there. Here, there are some massive leaps and bounds to take and it's that accelerated approach that I like. Driving that and supporting staff, that's what

I thrive on."

That fighting spirit may have its roots in being raised in a military family, and her success may have a lot to do with the outsider status her childhood seems to have conferred upon her. Born in Nairobi, Kenya, her father was in the British army and her Indian-born mother worked a variety of jobs to support the family.

They were repatriated when Thomas was very young, but it was an experience that would shape the family and her upbringing. "We were put on a tough council estate on the outskirts of Stoke-on-Trent, in a village called Audley. It was very parochial, and we were seen as the outsiders."

She has me thinking again. In education, a lot is made of the importance of knowing your community – and be it Cauldon and Burton-on-Trent colleges where she started her FE career as a sport lecturer, Cannock Chase where she was first promoted, Stoke-on-Trent college where she spent a decade, NSCG or Coventry, Thomas has never strayed very far from the area where she was raised – but less is said about the value of being an outsider.

Somewhat paradoxically, from a policy perspective 'effective leadership' is seen as a transferable skill. Obviously, both Coventry College and Thomas hope that's

the case, but Coventry's experience of the past few years – one that's shared with many other educational institutions and especially those who find themselves on the wrong side of Ofsted's judgments – attests to the fact that it isn't a given.

Yet Thomas is already making it work. "The change I've seen in people in four weeks is immense," she tells me. This, from a staff that ought to be entirely inured to enthusiastic visions from new arrivals at the top.

"If everybody just does their job, I'll be dancing on the tables this time next year"

How, then? The key is authenticity. "Somebody said to me yesterday: 'We've been trying to suss you out, and we've decided you're not a careerist, but you're a doer.'"

"A doer" is exactly how she describes her father, now 83, who has spent his life giving to the Audley community through charity engagement. He even started a football team that went on to send players to Stoke City football club. "He would go off on a Sunday afternoon and the entire street would come," she says with evident pride. His influence clearly runs richly in her.

By her own admission, Thomas "never had a plan" to be a principal, but what she has in spades is faith in others, and that's what really determines whether the entire street will follow. "If everybody in this organisation just does their job to the best of their ability, I'll be dancing on the tables this time next year."

Whether that's a skill she picked up on Pontins holidays in her youth along with acting and singing – she has a passion for it and has played in productions ranging from Aladdin to Calendar Girls – I didn't ask.

But, Covid permitting, here's hoping everyone at Coventry College is dancing on the tables with her soon!



At her son's graduation in 2018. "We've always encouraged him to be the very best version of himself"

DR PAUL PHILLIPS CBE

Principal and chief executive, Weston College



Putting SEND learners at the heart of the college means all my students are back

Whether it's providing farm placements or much-needed structure through digital platforms, putting SEND learners front and centre always makes sense, writes Paul Phillips

Since 2001, my mission has been to place inclusive practice at the centre of Weston College. When offered the chance to run a college "my way" it was daunting – miles from home, failing and in poor financial health. But these circumstances allowed me to fulfil my vision of placing SEND learners at the heart of my strategic plan.

The reason? I believe that if you get teaching right for these learners, then you get it right for everyone. Outstanding teaching and learning is about a "personal individualised" approach, and the best practice we have developed for SEND learners here has gone on to benefit everyone.

I had some inspirational staff ahead of their time regarding SEND strategies. However, it was not easy to convince governors and wider staff of the direction of travel. Back in 2001 the college had eight SEND learners, taught in dilapidated facilities at the back of the site. I placed these learners in the most visible location to set the scene for the new college mission, "creating brighter futures".

To their credit, staff quickly got on board. Since then we've transformed ourselves from an FE provider offering pockets of inclusion to a fully inclusive



organisation delivering FE.

This has been achieved through investing in continuous professional development to degree level, a motivational career structure, SEND support hubs at every campus and about £2.5 million invested in specialist facilities, such as an autism residential training facility and sensory learning base.

"It's crucial that SEND learners are not lost at this critical moment in their education"

Today we have more than 1,300 SEND learners (511 with high needs) on employability, apprenticeship and degree programmes. Progression rates are exceptional (97 per cent) with 33 per cent into employment (compared with six per cent nationally). We've won the Queen's Anniversary Prize for Inclusive

Practice and became one of only three National SEND Centres of Excellence in the country (the others are Derby College and City College Norwich).

The aspirational place that SEND holds within the college's strategic plan has been even more evident during Covid. The senior leadership team designed our lockdown EdTech strategy to focus on "digital inclusion"; the impact of this meant over 90 per cent virtual attendance from SEND learners throughout the pandemic.

We launched a #MyVirtualCollege concept, which meant all learners and especially SEND learners still felt part of the college through digitally accessible courses, timetables, support sessions, tutors and the wider college community. Innovative virtual teaching operated through Microsoft Teams, involving fun team challenges and activities including mindfulness to reduce isolation.

This provided learners with a much-needed structure to establish new routines. In using these real-world technologies,

learners maintained friendship groups and developed wider skills and behaviours that will be transferable to the workplaces of the future. For some, removing the distractions and anxiety of a classroom setting has had an extremely positive impact on achievement and is a lesson learnt for our future curriculum design.

However, coming back to college presented its own challenges. Anxiety has been high – many have not left their home for six months.

To help, we ran transitional programmes throughout the summer. We quickly realised that a "recovery curriculum" focused on mental health and reducing anxiety was needed. In the main, learners have settled into the new environment and are excited to be back. We have been taken aback by their resilience and adaptability.

Even the most anxious learners have finally returned because of our latest innovation. We've invested in Butcombe Farm, a nearby chilli farm, as an alternative classroom to provide a pathway to the "new normal". Here, working with specialist practitioners, we use the concept of "Engagement to Employment" to nurture the talents of SEND learners as employees for the future.

It's crucial that SEND learners are not lost at this critical moment in their education. If colleges prioritise them, these learners have brilliant opportunities ahead of them.

ANN-MARIE SPRY

Vice-principal,
Leeds City College



Media focus on younger learners during Covid-19 overlooks the importance of adult education

As the government rolls out the national retraining scheme, a publicity drive is needed to promote adult learning, writes Ann Marie Spry

The UK education system emphasises younger people, with the majority of funding directed towards pre-18 compulsory education, and the immediate post-18 education the next most supported.

We can see this reflected in the media's coverage of the coronavirus crisis in education, with countless articles on the GCSE and A-levels debacle, university places and young disadvantaged learners. Although these are all important issues, it's not right that there is negligible media coverage of how the crisis has impacted opportunities for adult learners.

We know that adults who left school at 16 or younger are half as likely to take part in learning as those who stayed on in full-time education until at least 21. Adult learning is as much an issue of social mobility and disadvantage as it is for any other age group.

To add to this, in recent years the education sector has not been able to prioritise adult learning. While Downing Street has often said that further education and skills are a priority, lack of investment has left millions in the UK without basic skills and unable to access education and training.

Five years ago, the Association



of Colleges warned that continued cuts to the adult skills budget could risk eliminating adult education and training in England by 2020. Today, we are feeling the effects of the 47 per cent cut in government spending on adult education, excluding apprenticeships.

The number of adult learners continues to fall and adult learning has plummeted by nearly four million since 2010.

Meanwhile, in the first two quarters of 2018-19, participation in government-funded adult further education fell by 3.5 per cent. I think we can all agree that adult education needs to be revitalised. And it will need a great deal of political support.

The introduction of the national retraining scheme, first launched in 2019 and rolled out this year, will be pivotal in helping adults across the country get on the path to a new, more rewarding career.

This scheme will be needed

more than ever, given the rise in unemployment in the past few months as a result of Covid.

However a national campaign to promote adult learning needs to be launched at the same time.

“In reality, only a few courses are available wholly online”

During the lockdown, there was a reduction at Leeds City College in the number of new adults wanting to start learning during the summer term. We are offering more online courses to try to mitigate this.

However, in reality, only a few courses are currently available wholly online and tend to focus on skills needed in “white-collar jobs”.

While the crisis has helped boost remote learning, training for crafts-related occupations or a work-based component remains difficult to deliver online.

At the same time, the current basic skills training tend to be more focused on the qualifications people gain, and less on the outcomes such as whether they secure work, further training or increase their earnings. The government needs to look again at how the success of adult learning programmes is measured.

At Leeds City College, we've also noticed that more learners are opting for longer, more comprehensive and expensive courses. Yet not everyone has the financial capacity to study full-cost courses and the government needs to create a strategy that accounts for this.

Incentives are needed to allow adults with a level 2 or 3 qualification to retrain in certain priority sectors, perhaps through a subsidised offer.

Finally, a national approach is required to ensure that adult learning is not left on the sidelines. There is not enough publicity or coverage on the benefits to adults of lifelong learning. Strategic messaging around the value of adult learning in terms of job prospects, retraining, upskilling and mental health is vital.

The government must have adult and lifelong learning at the forefront of its mind – now more than ever.

LEE PARKER

Director of marketing and communications. Milton Keynes College



Ignore the branding revolution at your peril, FE sector

We have arrived at the 'third revolution' for FE marketing – but colleges will have to make some serious changes, says Lee Parker

With government taking a detailed look at the role and function of FE and with the Covid crisis reshaping our world in every conceivable way, the time is ripe for colleges to rise to the challenge and to recognise that it's more important than ever to power up their brands.

We are the "good guys" and we have to let our communities know that. With the arrival of T Levels and Institutes of Technology, colleges can occupy a different place in the technical skills market.

Viva la brand revolution!

Over 15 years in FE marketing I've seen two fundamental revolutions.

First was the emergence of social media from 2008.

From the days of "but should we have a Facebook page – people can comment and others can see it!" to today's multi-channel engagement strategies, social media allowed us to talk to potential customers directly, without schools or employer gatekeepers barring the way.

The second revolution was the emergence of all the rich content enabled by these platforms.

The college prospectus, once the cornerstone of the campaign, is now relegated to a bit part as we develop a suite of case-study videos, live streams, quizzes, interactive microsites and BAFTA-

worthy promotional films.

These rapid revolutions have required innovation and improvisation but have been largely a marketing thing.

The next revolution – the third revolution – requires the whole organisation to see marketing as a strategic function, not just a way to reach customers with attractive materials.

Brand is inherently strategic. It needs whole organisation buy-in.

I've spent six months



researching brand in education for a masters degree and have found that in many colleges, marketing and comms remain outside key decision making.

Too often, the outcome is that brand suffers.

In mergers, ambiguity is often sought in the group name – after all, an acronym can't offend anyone if no one really knows what it stands for.

In doing this, colleges sacrifice hard-earned brand equity, developed over years of existing within and supporting local communities.

Consumers now have never been more brand conscious. We all use brands to create identity, to define what we stand for and develop how we want to be perceived.

Many of us are justly frustrated by the perception of colleges as a second choice, but what exactly are we doing about it?

By not concentrating on developing brand, setting out what makes us unique – our inclusiveness, our openness

luxurious, than buying the same product from a high street chain.

"We're failing to transform the impression of what FE is"

If colleges focus on making their brand really aspirational and inspirational, they can stand out from competitors and spend less money promoting individual programmes.

If our audiences believe that our core purpose is to use skills to create opportunity and a fairer society, we will be pushing at an open door!

It isn't easy. Developing a corporate brand strategy requires significant work.

Meanwhile, regular research is essential to ensure that consumers are seeing what a brand is intended to represent.

Most importantly, it's crucial to focus on a college's people. Ultimately, if students haven't bought into the cause, it will lack the authenticity required to deliver the brand strategy.

Brand is the new education marketing revolution. Unlike those that preceded it, it will raise fundamental questions about how colleges operate as commercial enterprises.

If embraced, we can ultimately redefine colleges, allowing them to take their rightful place within the education landscape.

to embrace new ideas, our community partnerships, the employers we work with and so much more – we're failing to transform the impression of what FE is and redefining colleges in the public mind.

So, what can be done?

A 2006 study by Jon Hulberg showed how promoting the corporate brand rather than products can allow organisations to show how they differ from the competition without just competing on product merits. This explains why buying something from Harrods feels different, more

DR GREG WALKER

Chief executive,
MillionPlus, the Association
for Modern Universities



A university learning experience is very different to what a typical inspector will be familiar with

Ofsted doesn't "get" higher education, says Greg Walker, and is not the right regulator for degree apprenticeship courses. Inspectors don't understand how they work - or how they are delivered

Degree apprenticeships have been a significant success of the government's aim to improve productivity and skills. They have been embraced by modern universities with long track records in professional, technical and vocational education, and enhanced their strong partnerships with local employers.

Degree apprenticeships sit at the heart of the levelling-up and social mobility agendas. The early nurturing of this provision by modern universities has shown this new and exciting development in learning and earning can play a fundamental role in economic growth, especially in the post-Covid era.

With such exciting potential, it is extremely disappointing to see the government clipping the wings of this policy before it has a chance to really fly. The proposal, based on a recommendation in the Augar review, for all apprenticeship provision, at whatever level, to be regulated by Ofsted is a worrying and unnecessary one.

Ofsted is a school and college inspectorate with a great deal of experience in its field. That does not, however, mean it is suitable to regulate the complex, diverse educational provision in higher



education. Universities have a strong, robust system of regulation and governance, drawing on decades of experience and underpinned by rigorous quality assurance processes. This means a university learning experience, especially one that involves partnerships with employers, is very different to what a typical Ofsted inspector will be familiar with.

We have already seen some issues with Ofsted oversight of university provision. A tricky compromise between Ofsted and the Office for Students (OfS) meant the former reviews some elements of level 4 and 5 apprenticeships offered by universities. This has been a challenging experience for universities, dealing with a significant lack of understanding and a desire by Ofsted to simply overlay a wider inspection framework on to university learning. It has led to worrying assumptions that did not match reality – including seeing drastically different judgments about teaching excellence from the OfS's TEF evaluation and from Ofsted inspectors, despite both

organisations reviewing the same provision.

Ofsted's leadership has not reassured stakeholders in higher education with comments on degree apprenticeships that seem to be based on misconceptions. It has been said that apprenticeship policy should focus on lower skill levels and should fundamentally be about delivering opportunities to young people. This ignores the employer-led nature of apprenticeships, and the benefits to the economy of higher level and degree apprenticeships.

“Ofsted's comments on degree apprenticeships seem to be based on misconceptions”

If this proposal becomes policy, Ofsted should endeavour to engage with the HE sector in a constructive, open fashion to ensure that the inspection framework reflects higher education practice and is fit for purpose in being applied

to levels 6/7 delivered in a university context. Another major improvement would be to amend the criteria to become an Ofsted inspector for degree apprenticeship provision so that it is obligatory to have had HE academic employment experience to review university-based provision. The current specifications make little allowance for this.

The most worrying element of the new proposal is the suggestion that there is nothing to be concerned about because Ofsted will concentrate only on the skills and training element of an apprenticeship. This suggestion itself demonstrates a major flaw in the understanding of how degree apprenticeships work and are delivered. They are designed to be integrated, dovetailing the experiences of theoretical learning in the classroom and the practical application in the workplace. These are not two elements that exist separately. They work seamlessly, and at their best enable the apprentice to see the fundamental links between theory and practice, and combine their experience and understanding to build high-level professional skills and knowledge.

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education recognises this integrated approach as a leading model of good practice for both learning and assessment. The degree is not an optional extra to the apprenticeship standard – it is integral to it.

Opinion

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ADRIAN ANDERSON

Chief executive,
University Vocational
Awards Council



Is Ofsted really ready to inspect all apprenticeships?

Ofsted will need to prove it can handle the higher levels if they are to inspect all apprenticeships, writes Adrian Anderson

Let me start by saying that universities have nothing to fear from an appropriate Ofsted inspection system. Universities are committed to high-quality delivery and have an excellent track record in delivering and accrediting work-based programmes that accredit occupational competence. The best example is a nursing degree, where a degree acts as the licence to practise for what is the most pressing skills shortage occupation in the UK labour market.

UVAC has, for some time, opposed Ofsted inspection of degree apprenticeship. Our reasons are straightforward. Universities already, and will continue to, operate under internationally recognised quality assurance systems, to deliver and accredit programmes that recognise professional occupational competence. We have also questioned Ofsted expertise and ethos. If Ofsted inspection of degree apprenticeship is introduced and is to support the government's apprenticeship reforms, there are three issues that need to be tackled.

Ofsted's expertise

Ofsted's expertise in apprenticeship has been primarily developed on the basis of

levels 2 and 3 apprenticeships. Apprenticeship has changed and quality assuring a level 6 registered nurse (where the Nursing Midwifery Council has already approved the higher education institution to deliver) or level 7 architect degree apprenticeship (fully accredited by the Royal Institute of British Architects and Architects Registration Board) is a very different proposition from inspecting a retail, business administration or customer service apprenticeship followed by a 17-year-old. The Department for Education needs to ask Ofsted to outline, as a matter of urgency, how it intends to review and revise its inspection process, so it is appropriate for degree apprenticeship provision, and what plans it has to recruit senior managers with higher education experience and expertise and, of course, new inspectors.

Ofsted's ethos

Ofsted is going to have to rapidly shed its reputation as an organisation that wants to prioritise lower-level apprenticeships for school leavers and presumably restrict the ability of, say, NHS trusts and police forces to use level 6 and 7 apprenticeships to train the nurses, police constables and managers they need. Post-Covid 19, apprenticeship will increasingly focus on the jobs needed in a high-productivity economy. This will mean far more provision at levels

4 to 7 and less level 2 provision. Ofsted will presumably fully support the secretary of state's desire for universities to expand degree apprenticeship provision. Employers, professional bodies, regulators and, I suspect, some key government departments, in addition to universities, will expect an assurance that Ofsted fully, and without qualification or reservation, embraces the growth of degree apprenticeship.

“Get it wrong and we will have a regulatory nightmare”

Partnership with OfS, QAA and professional and statutory regulatory bodies

While Ofsted may inspect apprenticeship, what is beyond doubt is that the Office for Students will retain the statutory regulator role for the degree in a degree apprenticeship and, indeed, for the university delivering the provision. Given the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's preference for the integrated degree apprenticeship model where the degree delivers, assesses and accredits the required knowledge, skills and behaviours, Ofsted will inspect and OfS will regulate exactly the same programme. Around the table will also often be a regulator or professional body, say the

College of Policing or NMC. Ofsted will be one of several quality assurance players – therefore, it will share responsibility. This will call for innovative approaches to inspection given the range of organisations with a statutory role in assuring quality in degree apprenticeship. Get it wrong and we will have a regulatory nightmare with different quality bodies, often publicly funded, demanding different and possibly contradictory requirements. Ofsted will need to listen, learn and, in many cases, adopt a new way of working.

I will conclude by wishing Ofsted every success. While we would profoundly disagree with a decision to ask Ofsted to inspect degree apprenticeship, we would do all we can to support the introduction of an appropriate inspection approach if this is the government's decision. Degree apprenticeship will be pivotal to training the new police constables, social workers, registered nurses and advanced clinical practitioners (including leaders and managers) our public sector need. Presumably, in this regard the expectations of the home and health secretaries will be high. Elsewhere, the chancellor will be looking for apprenticeship to train individuals in the high-level, high-productivity jobs the post-Covid 19 economy needs. Getting it wrong and hampering the growth of degree apprenticeship will not be an option for Ofsted.

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READER'S REPLY

Strip colleges of autonomy to choose course offer, says report

I remember this being the proposed strategy when local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) were first introduced. It couldn't work then and it will not work now unless the government fund education properly. Health and social care, for example, is probably a key priority in nearly all LEP or mayoral areas, but with apprenticeships in social care at level 2 and 3 and healthcare at level 2 only funded to the time of £3,000 with nearly 20 per cent of that going to the end-point assessment, it is no surprise providers are electing to step away from this or asking employers to contribute additional funds. If they do not address this at the same time skills shortage will just increase.

Barney Willis, website

Another attempt to set up a quango that requires staff with a background that would be hard to find. How many attempts at influencing the curriculum offered by colleges does it take? LEPs Mk7? Evaluating whether courses and qualifications lead to jobs is something inspectorates once did, such as the Further Education Funding Council for England with their 'range and responsiveness' judgement.

Phil Hatton, website

Lockdown learning actually suits some students better

I enjoyed reading this and it reflects our experiences during lockdown too. I worry a little that, even with those who fully engage with remote learning, one of the benefits of being away from the home environment is getting students out of their 'comfort

REPLY OF THE WEEK

Loss of some autonomy for colleges is a step in the right direction



So a solution for college principals to become puppets of bureaucrats is put forward. No mention of quality, no mention of financial probity and total ignorance of the fundamental flaw that FE has not received sufficient investment. One despairs at the short sightedness. The answer is jumping out at us and that is the missing partnership between HE and FE – in my view having met Philip Augar he wanted equity of innovation and learning, not this. I see every day brilliant learning in FE colleges across my area of the south west and principals of calibre and direction.

Dr Paul Phillips CBE, website

zone'. Even to the point that they feel uncomfortable but then learn a lot about themselves as well as the subject.

Len Tildsley, website

Ofsted wins degree apprenticeship battle

Good. An apprenticeship is an apprenticeship regardless of whether it's a college, training provider or university.

James Miller, Facebook

They should inspect non-apprenticeship university courses too. The standards of education and care in some is appalling.

Debi Johnson, Facebook

Movers & Shakers

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



Sue Sturgeon

Chair, Activate Learning

Start date August 2020

Previous job

Managing director, Guildford Borough Council

Interesting fact

She enjoys motorbike adventure touring on the back of her partner's BMW



Ian Wiggins

Operations director, Skillnet Limited

Start date August 2020

Previous job

Operations and programme director, TotalMobile

Interesting Fact

He lived in Canada for three years and enjoyed a range of hobbies including snowmobiling and wakeboarding



James Scott

Principal, Trafford College Group

Start date August 2020

Previous job

Vice principal, Trafford College Group; Campus principal, Stockport College

Interesting fact

He still raves in Ibiza every year - except for this year

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