

FEWEEK

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Queen's Birthday Honours 2020: Who received what in FE?



Page 22



End-point assessments to be scrapped for some standards

Page 15



The most qualified are shielded from mass youth unemployment, the least qualified are left to compete

Page 29



Government must rethink reskilling and reboot short courses - and do it quickly

Page 30

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DfE goes soft on apprenticeship public sector reporting rule

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Exclusive

The Department for Education looks to have relaxed the requirement for public bodies to publish their progress towards the 2.3 per cent apprenticeship target, claiming it is merely "good practice".

It comes after *FE Week* found scores of multi-academy trusts, councils and hospital trusts had failed to publicise what percentage of their staff had started an apprenticeship in 2019-20 on their websites by the deadline set by government.

Since the apprenticeship levy was introduced in 2017, public sector bodies with 250 or more staff in England have had a target to employ an average of at least 2.3 per cent of their staff as new apprentice starts over the period of April 1, 2017 to March 31, 2021.

Under statutory guidance, the bodies must report their annual progress to government and make the information "easily accessible to the public", for example, on their website. The data for how many apprentices start at each body is due on September 30 each year.

Chair of the education select committee Robert Halfon, who implemented the target when he was skills minister, called on public bodies to be "wholly transparent" and to comply with the regulations.

Where they do not, the Department for Education should hold them "fully accountable", he demanded.

However, representative bodies have called on the government to ease off enforcing the rule owing to the pressures the public sector is facing from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Despite its own rules, the Department for Education told *FE Week* that while public bodies "must" report the data to central government so that overall performance against the target can be published, it was simply "good practice" for the bodies to publish their own data on their website.

Recognising the challenges organisations are facing this year, the department also



said that where data is submitted after September 30, "we will endeavour to take account of it when we publish annual performance data in November".

Every government department published their data on the Civil Service website towards the end of last month, revealing that one of them had recruited zero apprentices in 2019-20.

Out of the 20 largest academy trusts in England, *FE Week* could only find the data for one trust in the first week of October.

United Learning, the largest multi-academy trust, which has 72 academies and even has a former Department for Education director general – Jon Coles – as its chief executive, was one of the trusts not complying with the DfE's rules. A spokesperson said the trust makes the information available "on request" and reports the data annually to the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

The general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders union, Geoff Barton, said he imagines MATs have not hit the deadline as "they are having to spin so many plates at the moment to manage Covid safety measures, keep their schools open, and reintegrate children back into the classroom".

He would expect the government to be conscious of these "huge pressures", and called on the DfE, which enforces the data publication rules, "not to insist upon fairly arcane accountability measures being met to

the letter".

The one trust that did publish its data, Delta Academies Trust, had a workforce of 3,208 as of March 31, 2020 and 0.56 per cent of those were apprentices. A spokesperson said that while they were able to publish the data on time, this "clearly continues to be an exceptionally busy period for everyone working in schools" so it was "inevitable" that some work would be delayed.

Aside from MATs, *FE Week* also looked at a random sample of local councils in the first week of October and could only find up-to-date apprenticeship target data for one of them, Cornwall Council.

A spokesperson for the Local Government Association, which represents councils nationally, said it encourages councils to publish their progress, and while the LGA does not have a position on whether the rules should be relaxed during the crisis, "we do recognise councils have competing priorities at the moment".

A random sample of five hospital trusts again only turned up figures on apprenticeships for one organisation, University College London Hospitals.

Health Education England, which commissions apprenticeship training in the health service, said it "does encourage trusts to publish their figures, but clearly there could be delays given current circumstances".

Flagship retraining service scrapped after pilot flopped

BILLY CAMDEN
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From front **Exclusive**

A multi-million-pound flagship national retraining service has been scrapped by the Department for Education after several mayors, including London's, declined the opportunity to take part, *FE Week* can reveal.

The Get Help to Retrain website was the first of several "products" planned to make up the national retraining scheme pilot, which was announced to much fanfare in the 2017 budget with the backing of £100 million.

In early April the DfE cancelled all national retraining scheme tender activities for all products, and this week the skills minister, Gillian Keegan, announced the scheme was to be "integrated".

The Get Help to Retrain website, which acted as a course and job directory, took two years to get off the ground and then was only piloted in six areas of England.

On October 15, the DfE added a note to the website that reads: "This service will no longer be available from November 11, 2020. You can continue to access services for

support with skills and training through the National Careers Service."

Tender documents suggest the firm chosen to pilot the Get Help to Retrain website held a nine-month contract for £1.8 million, which started in May 2019.

Around 3,600 people used the website, according to the government, but their outcomes, such as enrolling on a maths or English course, are not known because the site does not capture contact information.

The DfE confirmed to *FE Week* the service would now cease to exist following a move to merge the national retraining scheme with the £2.5 billion national skills fund to "reduce complexity" in the skills system.

The news comes just weeks after prime minister Boris Johnson announced major plans for a Lifetime Skills Guarantee to help adults retrain.

But it appears the writing was on the wall for Get Help to Retrain six months ago.

Tender documents seen by this publication show that plans were afoot to roll out the Get Help to Retrain nationally as well as to develop a "find and apply for a job" service at a cost of between £5 million and £6 million.

The tender received 28 applications before it



Boris Johnson

was "cancelled" in April.

And according to the national retraining scheme timeline (pictured left) there would be further tenders for the remaining products, which never materialised, at a total cost of £20 million over the next 24 months.

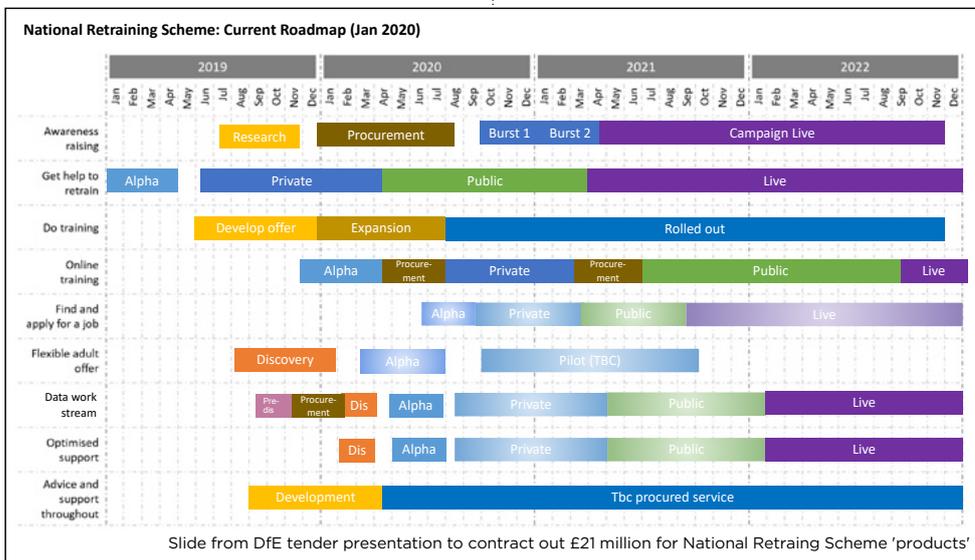
FE Week has spoken to insiders close to Get Help to Retrain who said the DfE had approached various regions of the country asking them to sign up to the service, but relevant authorities rejected the pleas after hearing that it had faltered in pilot areas.

The Greater London Authority is one of those areas and confirmed that "we didn't feel the pilot would add value beyond the important [adult education] work already being done in the capital".

The DfE said it chose to pause the further rollout of Get Help to Retrain at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic but that it remained open to users in the six existing locations.

The department would not say how much funding has been spent on the service overall.

A spokesperson said the digital tool was developed to "support individuals who may be at risk of losing their job as a result of



CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

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automation” and that while this is “still a challenge”, DfE needed to “refocus” its efforts following Covid-19 to “make sure as many adults as possible are supported to gain the skills that we know employers value and that will in turn help our economy to recover”.

Sector leaders have hit out at the government over the fiasco, insisting the funding would have been better spent on existing and proven provision.

Labour’s shadow apprenticeships and lifelong learning minister Toby Perkins said this is “another example of the government devoting a great deal of time and resources to a scheme that has been made available to a tiny minority of individuals, whilst largely neglecting the rest of the sector”.

Association of Employment and Learning Providers managing director Jane Hickie said that after the “disastrous” employer ownership pilots under the coalition government, there were “always going to be serious questions about repeating something similar, and AELP is not at all surprised that a line has been drawn on another sorry chapter for skills initiatives”.

Susan Pember, a former director of FE at the DfE and now policy director of adult education network HOLEX, added: “Although I can appreciate why DfE were keen to establish a new targeted education programme to reach the adult learners who most needed support, it would have been more effective and a better use of public funds to go through the established routes, such as the adult education budget.”

Get Help to Retrain allowed users to identify and input their current skills and then based on those skills, offer suggestions for training and alternative employment. The service then directed users to vacancies in their area based on the suggestions provided.

It was trialled in the West Midlands, the north-east, Liverpool City Region, Leeds City Region, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough combined authority,



London mayor Sadiq Khan

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL nrs-ghtr.org.uk. The page header includes the GOV.UK logo and the title 'Get help to retrain'. A prominent yellow banner at the top states: 'This service will no longer be available from 11 November 2020. You can continue to access services for support with skills and training through the National Careers Service.' Below this, the main heading is 'Get help to retrain'. The text explains the service's purpose: 'Use this service to find out other types of work you can do with your current skills. You'll then build an action plan to fill any skill gaps you have and change jobs.' It lists criteria for who the service is designed to help: 'you're employed', 'you don't have a degree', 'you're aged 24 or over', and 'you're earning below £35,000 a year'. A 'Start now' button is visible. On the right, there is a 'Return to saved progress' button. A footer note says: 'Get Help to Retrain website updated on October 15 to announce closure'.

and the Heart of the South West LEP.

But a “question and answer” pack with the tender documents for expanding the service from earlier this year suggested the government did not have a tight grip on its plans.

“Products are not yet very clearly defined. We have a theory of change we are developing, which involves a lot of assumption testing throughout the lifecycle to get the outcome we want,” it said.

“In terms of departmental digital maturity, we are more reliant on suppliers than we would like at this point... The department is open to what the solutions look like.”

The Confederation of British Industry and Trades Union Congress were key partners in the development of Get Help to Retrain and the national retraining scheme more generally. But neither would shed more light on the decision to scrap the service.

Matthew Percival, CBI people and skills director, said: “The government’s engagement with businesses and trade unions provided key insight into individual retraining needs.

The National Skills Fund must

build on the National Retraining Scheme pilots, adding investment in skills provision as well as helping learners to navigate the system.”

TUC head of organising and services, Kevin Rowan, said: “A crucial part of the design of the National Retraining Scheme was the partnership between government, business and unions. This must be continued through the National Skills Fund.”

The DfE said they are considering how they can provide further details of how else the £100 million earmarked for the national retraining scheme has been spent.

A spokesperson told FE Week that the “valuable insights and evidence we have gathered, and the engagement we have had with employers and stakeholders” from the scheme has “already helped inform the development of new initiatives” including The Skills Toolkit (a page on the National Careers Service website that signposts visitors to existing free courses) and “digital bootcamps” announced by the prime minister last month (see page 11-12).

“We now have an opportunity to build on this further by using the evidence and insights to help shape the National Skills Fund and make sure everyone can get the skills they need, at every stage of their life,” they added.

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Functional skills reprieve for apprentices 'stuck in limbo'

BILLY CAMDEN
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Exclusive

A flexibility that allows apprentices to take their end-point assessment before their functional skills exam is set to be reintroduced, *FE Week* understands.

It follows an investigation by this publication that found thousands of apprentices "stuck in limbo" as awarding bodies struggle to adapt their functional skills assessments in the face of Covid-19.

Ministers are understood to be sympathetic to the situation and are looking at ways to mitigate this impact.

While there is currently no suggestion that Ofqual will return to centre-assessed grades for functional skills – as many training providers have called for – flexibilities are expected to be extended to apprenticeship rules.

In May, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education announced a temporary flexibility that enabled apprentices who would otherwise be stuck at gateway to take EPA ahead of receiving their functional skills qualification, which was calculated following the cancellation of exams due to Covid-19, later on in the summer.

The rule applied to all apprentices due to take a functional skills test and receive a result between March 20 and July 31.

FE Week understands minister Gillian Keegan has now ordered the IfATE to partly reintroduce this flexibility – allowing apprentices to sit their end-point assessment before their functional skills exam.

A timeframe for implementing this is not yet known.

On Wednesday, the Education and Skills Funding Agency announced it would extend the regulation end date for legacy functional skills qualifications, from the current deadline of December 31, 2020 to July 31, 2021. The ESFA has also suspended the requirement within the apprenticeship funding rules for level 2 apprentices to study towards and attempt level 2 functional skills assessments until

March 31, 2021.

Both of these are ESFA issues, while EPA is a matter for the IfATE.

Since August 1, 2020, Ofqual has banned the use of centre-assessed grades for all vocational and technical qualifications, including functional skills.

All functional skills exams must now either be sat in the traditional manner, or awarding bodies must adapt their assessment arrangements to mitigate any impact of the pandemic.

But coming up with an adapted assessment solution for all affected learners has been an issue for most awarding bodies, with remote or "at-home" assessments some way off being made available. Many apprentices are being instructed to work from home in line with government guidelines and are being instructed not to travel to centres for exams due to risk of spreading Covid-19.

Workplaces that are open will not allow assessors to visit as their employees are having to use all available space which is restricted because of social distancing and safety measures. This is a particular issue in the health and care sectors.

The Association of Employment and Learning Providers estimates that tens of thousands of functional skills exams, mostly for apprentices but also for some learners funded by the adult education budget, could be delayed from now

until Christmas as a result.

City & Guilds is one major awarding body struggling to launch remote functional skills assessments. The organisation had announced it was set to roll out functional skills tests to be sat at home prior to lockdown but it was forced to divert its resource into dealing with the exams fiasco throughout the summer. The at-home tests are still being worked on, but there is no date for their rollout.

Some awarding bodies have, however, been successful in rolling out remote or "at-home" functional skills tests.

One of them is Open Awards, which told *FE Week* it has included an option for remotely invigilated online assessments as part of its "controlled assessment policy" for a number of years.

"Our centres are able to apply to deliver remotely invigilated online functional skills at levels 1 and 2 on a one-to-one ratio using our existing assessment platform integrated with remote video-call software," a spokesperson explained.

"Feedback so far has been positive and it is proving to be a flexible and robust alternative to classroom-based assessments."

Highfield is another awarding body that successfully offers remote assessment. It launched a "Qualify at Home" service in April 2020 and over 9,000 exams have since been invigilated via the service.

The assessments are taken online and Highfield invigilators "remotely monitor candidates ensuring their compliance with all of our examination conditions", a spokesperson told *FE Week*.

"We achieve this by using four pieces of technology which we believe to be the most robust available in the market: screen share; webcam; digital audio; and a tethered smart device (usually a mobile phone).

"We're extremely proud that we've successfully demonstrated our ability to adapt to changing circumstances and that we've created change within the industry during the biggest challenge we have all faced in decades."



Second wave of IoTs will feature 'strengthened' criteria

BILLY CAMDEN

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Exclusive

New Institutes of Technology (IoT) will require greater collaboration between colleges and set more ambitious student recruitment targets, *FE Week* can reveal.

A bidding process for wave two, to open a further eight IoTs, on top of the 12 existing institutes, was launched by education secretary Gavin Williamson last week with the backing of £120 million.

The goal is to ensure every area of the country has an IoT, after *FE Week* revealed that wave one had left a number of cold spots. The Department for Education plans to announce winners of the current two-stage procurement in summer 2021, with the rollout of the successful bids to get under way that autumn.

Tender documents, not available in the public domain but obtained by this publication, show that eligibility criteria have been bolstered this time round.

One of the most notable changes is that all bids must now have at least two FE and three employer "core" partners, along with one university. Wave one applications only required one FE provider and two employers to be what the DfE then called "anchor" partners.

Four successful bids in wave one involved only one FE partner. These were bids led by: Barking and Dagenham College; Dudley College; HCUC (Harrow College and Uxbridge College); and Queen Mary University of London.

Student number targets have also been increased, from a goal of achieving 1,000 learners by the end of the fifth academic year for wave one IoTs, to 1,500 for wave two. Last week, *FE Week* revealed that Covid-19 was being blamed for recruitment concerns among wave one IoTs.



Gavin Williamson

Other changes to eligibility criteria include setting a target of 85 per cent of provision at level 4 and above by the end of year five of each IoT's operation (up from 80 per cent in wave one), and only allowing bids from areas of the country that do not currently have an IoT.

As with wave one, each FE core partner must be rated at least 'good' by Ofsted, and they will also need to meet the DfE's definition of being "financially credible" – which will be detailed in stage two of the bidding process.

A DfE spokesperson confirmed that the eligibility requirements "have been strengthened" and developed "based on the typical wave one IoT performance and wider lessons learnt".

"We have developed the guidance in close consultation with the sector, including the eligibility conditions," the spokesperson added. "They have raised no significant concerns around meeting the wave two eligibility conditions."

Julian Gravatt, deputy chief executive at the Association of Colleges, said it is "too early to tell" if these additional requirements will cause a problem.

He told *FE Week*: "Colleges have made a good start with the first wave of IoTs but

the DfE requirements were already quite complicated and this contributed to the long period of time between the invitations to bid in 2018 and the launch in 2020.

"It's too early to say that these additional requirements are a problem, particularly as the latest prospectus provides more detail on other issues, but let's hope that the DfE can stick to the newer timetable to get the wave two institutes up and running by 2021/22."

IoT are a flagship government programme. They involve collaboration between colleges, universities and employers, and specialise in delivering higher level technical training at level 4 and 5 in STEM subjects, including digital, advanced manufacturing and engineering.

The decision to open up a further eight was announced at the Conservative Party conference last year after *FE Week* revealed geographical issues with the first 12 IoTs – there were none planned for the north-west and the east of England.

Bids for wave two will only be open to parts of the country without an IoT, including the north-west, Midlands, east of England and parts of the south-east.

The deadline for applications is noon on December 14, 2020.

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Digital skills bootcamps: What are they and how will they work?

FRASER WHIELDON
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The digital skills bootcamps announced with the prime minister's Lifetime Skills Guarantee could lead to adult education budget provision being elbowed aside by training paid for through the National Skills Fund.

A total of £8 million is being spent on the short courses in IT subjects such as cloud services, digital for advanced manufacturing and cyber security with links to job interviews to help people aged 19 and over gain employment in the digital sector.

Boris Johnson, announcing the bootcamps at a speech on the Lifetime Skills Guarantee last month, hammered existing programmes for adults: "We have seen a haemorrhage, in the past 20 years, in adult education – a million fewer [learners] than there were.

"We are going to change that right now," he promised, saying that at the bootcamps, "you can learn IT whatever your age".

At first, bootcamps will be funded through the Department for Education's (DfE) unallocated resources; with a further expansion, which will include sectors such as construction and engineering, being paid for using the National Skills Fund from April.

The bootcamps build on pilot programmes run by the West Midlands and Greater Manchester combined authorities with established providers such as Dudley College and QA.

The first wave will be run by those two authorities as well as Lancashire Digital Skills Partnership and Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, and will shortly be joined by a second wave of providers in west Yorkshire, the south-west, and Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire.

Speaking this week at an *FE Week* roundtable on the Lifetime Skills Guarantee, skills minister Gillian Keegan emphasised the employability, rather than educational,



purpose of the bootcamps: "It's 12 to 16 weeks, so it's quite intensive training, and is really trying to get people to get some quite valuable skills, which will lead them to employment in the digital sector and digital-based roles in particular."

Bootcamps are just one of the already announced programmes being paid for over five years by the £2.5 billion National Skills Fund, which will also cover an entitlement to a first, full level 3 qualification for every adult, and now the National Retraining Scheme.

That is on top of a series of initiatives to triple traineeship starts in 2021. A tender went out last week from the DfE inviting bids for providers to start delivering traineeships for 19-to-24-year-olds.

Unlike adult education budget provision, the DfE has set much stricter stipulations on how these bootcamps ought to be run, mandating the length, linked job interview and subject focus. Bootcamps could also be subject to quality checks as stringent as those for AEB courses, as Ofsted has said it will be reviewing, with the DfE, "whether such programmes would fall into our

inspection scope in future".

The DfE will be using information the bootcamps gather to inform the design and delivery of the National Skills Fund, and *FE Week* understands the bootcamps have been divided into a first wave for local authorities, and a second wave, where the DfE tendered for providers directly, to test which model works better, ahead of the expansion next year.

Recruitment for the bootcamps started on September 29 and the courses must be completed by the end of March.

The pilot project West Midlands Combined Authority's (WMCA) bootcamps are building on was called the Beat The Bot fund, run with £5 million from the National Retraining Fund.

This programme involves 20 providers training local people to move into tech jobs, or to retrain if they are at threat from redundancy due to automation.

One of the participating providers was Dudley College, which delivered tutelage in

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

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areas such as coding and digital media to over 140 people.

Running from March to July, it was delivered in a number of ways: across four weeks for full-time learners, and 16 weeks for part-time learners.

"Early evaluation indicates the programme was highly valued by learners," a college spokesperson said, but "a full review is now taking place so lessons learned can inform future activity".

The WMCA has been given £1.5 million by the DfE to run these new bootcamps, which the authority says will reach "hundreds" of people.

How intensive the bootcamp will be will vary between each of its 20 component courses, which include full-time, part-time and remote training, with a mix of face-to-face and online sessions – adapted for Covid-19.

The GMCA, meanwhile, has said it will announce the funded projects for the next bootcamps by mid- to late October, and they will be paid for with £1.5 million from the DfE.

Their key requirements, a spokesperson said, will be to deliver the skills and wider competencies that employers require to recruit to specialist digital roles and that a learner gets a job at the end.

Training does not need to be qualification-based or accredited, though it can be if that is important to enter employment.

The bootcamps will have a mix of online and face-to-face learning and will be taught in smaller groups than those for AEB-funded provision as the new courses will be much more focused on work-readiness.

GMCA's original programme, the Fast-Track Digital Workforce Fund, was run in partnership with the Lancashire Digital Skills Partnership, and was funded with £3 million from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

Although Covid-19 has created "significant and widespread challenges in the employment market", the spokesperson said around one-fifth of learners have progressed into employment from the course.

Technical skills training provider QA was one of those involved in delivering GMCA's pilot. Sales director Adam Jones told *FE Week* said it was a 12-week programme which taught participants, for example, how to work on operating systems such as Linux and the software development tool Jenkins.

"These are all really specific technologies with established skill shortages within the Lancashire and Greater Manchester region."

He stressed the importance of attracting and recruiting candidates as "just as important a part of meeting the digital skills gap need as the training intervention itself".

The Lancashire Skills Partnership, which is delivering the bootcamp for their county, worked with GMCA on its pilot, but said they are "excited to work with the DfE digital

bootcamp programme to extend this work and support even more residents".

The development and running of their bootcamps will run along the same lines as GMCA, and the DfE has said Lancashire will share the funds allocated to Manchester, but would not say how much they would be given.

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority will be running bootcamps with £1 million in funding, and providers can register their interest in taking part via the Digital Skills for the Workplace website.

"We are very keen to hear from creative and proactive providers who can work with us to provide training content that will meet the needs of our regional employers and the individuals seeking to re-enter the workplace," a spokesperson said.

Once they believe they have the supply to meet employer demand, the registration process will be closed.

What is required by employers will dictate many aspects of their course, including the intensity and the delivery method of the course, even down to the number of people who take part: if employer demands are quite expensive, fewer people can take part.

The DfE has said it will announce which providers will deliver the second wave of digital skills bootcamps early next month. Employers, local authorities and providers had to bid as a group for the £4 million contract by October 2.

Successful bidders have to design and deliver training courses of around 12 weeks to "provide a pipeline of individuals" to guaranteed interviews with employers.

The DfE "expects" at least 75 per cent of learners will move into a new job or role, the document states.

One organisation which took part in a bid, for the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire leg, was the D2N2 local enterprise partnership.

Head of people and skills Rachel Quinn said the bid they are part of has 20 providers lined up to deliver a 12-week course, which they hope will reach up to 800 people.

She added: "There is a clear steer that this should absolutely focus on identified skills shortages, thereby maximising the impact the funding can make in securing progressions. In D2N2 we are specifically including aims to increase female participation."



Adam Jones

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AoC survey reveals SME gloom on employee skills

FRASER WHIELDON
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A college representative body has marked the start of an annual celebration of the sector with a survey highlighting the plight of small-to-medium enterprises trying to access skilled personnel and training for employees.

A survey of 503 such businesses by the Association of Colleges (AoC) comes ahead of Colleges Week on Monday, and as education secretary Gavin Williamson thanked college leaders and staff “for their dedicated efforts during these unprecedented times”.

Forty per cent of SMEs were found by the survey, conducted by Opinium, to believe it is more difficult to find employees with the right skills now than it was five years ago.

Meanwhile, 53 per cent do not think enough is being done to help their businesses skill and reskill their workforce as Britain nears the end of Brexit transition period in December.

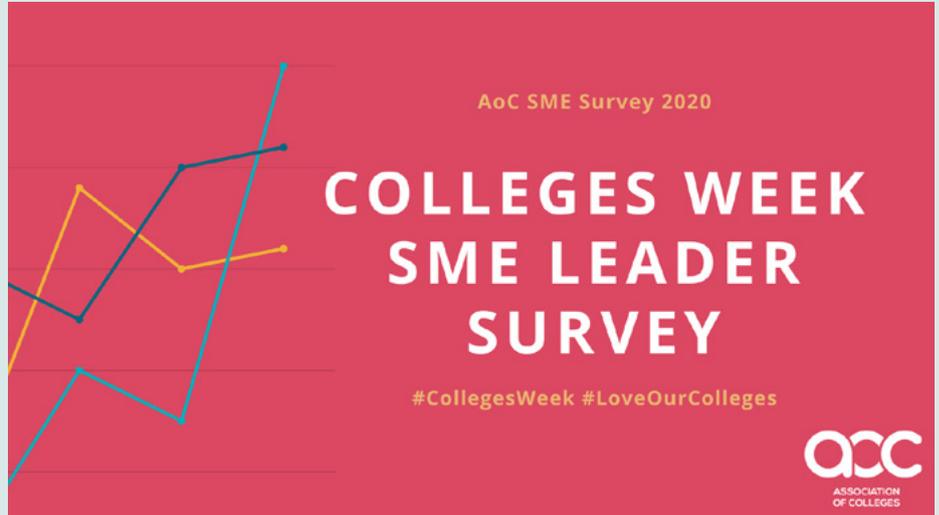
Once that transition period ends, 45 per cent believe it will become even more difficult to hire people with the right skills.

But Brexit has been supplanted as businesses’ greatest worry by Covid-19, with 53 per cent citing the virus as most present on their minds.

“Skills gaps did not emerge in this pandemic,” says AoC chief executive David Hughes, “they are long-standing challenges that have been exacerbated by Covid-19 and the UK nearing the end of the transition period”.

Forty-four per cent say the skills gap in their sector is likely to increase because of threats like the virus, and 54 per cent believe they will need to train workers to adapt to it.

This need has been reinforced by the British Chambers of Commerce head of



people policy Jane Gratten, who said employers will need to invest in upskilling and reskilling their workforce “to remain competitive in a global business environment”.

She added that the business communities want to see a “more agile” skills system, which is “more responsive” to their training needs.

Colleges are “key to boosting skills levels,” she said and the SMEs agree: more of them would turn to colleges to train their staff than would turn to universities or online learning.

Hughes commended the government for committing to prioritising skills, following announcements of £1.5 billion in college capital funding and the £2.5 billion National Skills Fund, but said:

“We need the investment to flow quickly to the right people and places. People and businesses need skills and training as an urgent priority if they are going to survive the coming months and thrive in the coming years.”

Williamson acknowledged it had been a “difficult and uncertain time for businesses, particularly SMEs”.

“We need to make sure we can

unlock talent in every corner of the country, which is why the prime minister announced the Lifetime Skills Guarantee.”

Colleges Week, a national celebration of the college sector, is this year running between October 19 and 23.

Each day of the week will revolve around a theme, including rebuilding the economy and responding to Covid-19.

To mark it, Williamson has said the sector has “gone above and beyond to make sure their students are supported, can continue learning and return to onsite delivery”.

Colleges, he added, would be at the “centre” of the effort to “teach the skills that learners and communities need, while also matching businesses with the talent they need for the future”.

As well as local events colleges will be running, there will be a debate in the House of Commons on “the role of colleges in a skills-led recovery”, hosted by Peter Aldous MP, vice chair of the all-party parliamentary group for further education and lifelong learning.

The chair of the education select committee Robert Halfon has also put forward a motion for the House to “recognise the unique role that colleges play in supporting people, employers and communities”.



David Hughes

End-point assessments to be scrapped for some standards

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End-point assessments for around 30 apprenticeship standards could be scrapped under new plans announced this week.

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education said it is preparing to “simplify and strengthen” apprenticeships that have a “statutory regulator” and an “established professional competency test”.

It would mean that in situations where an apprentice has met a statutory regulator’s requirements to practice, this will be counted as that apprentice’s end-point assessment (EPA) in the future.

Currently, just 28 standards out of a possible 500 that are approved for delivery could be impacted, most of which are in the healthcare sector.

The move is likely to lead to making permanent some of the EPA flexibilities that were introduced as a result of Covid-19, particularly in nursing.

In April, the institute announced that registered nurse degree apprentices and nursing associate apprentices who have been assessed by the Nursing and Midwifery Council as having permanently met the requirements for professional registration and have passed through the gateway “will be regarded to have met the end-point assessment requirements and have achieved their apprenticeship”.

The IfATE explained that “statutory regulators” are those that admit professionals into occupations that parliament has said must be regulated. In such instances, entry into the profession can only occur when an individual is added to the regulator’s register.

Any statutory regulators delivering the integrated assessments will need to be admitted to the register of end-point assessment organisations, held by the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

Tom Bewick, chief executive of the



Federation of Awarding Bodies, warned that “we can’t allow those with a material interest in the outcome of an apprenticeship to mark their own homework” if this move is implemented.

The IfATE said that going forward, it will be working with employers to consider how integrated assessment could be extended to other statutory regulators, but added that there will be “no blanket approach”.

“Integrated EPA will only be considered where a statutory regulator, which admits professionals into occupations that parliament has said must be regulated, sets established tests of professional competency,” a spokesperson added.

A consultation will take place on each standard this applies to before any change. Where the decision is taken to integrate the EPA with professional competency tests, there will be at least three months’ notice given to end-point assessment organisations.

The institute told end-point assessment organisations for nursing and other relevant apprenticeships on October 14 that work will start on introducing the changes in the coming weeks.

Jennifer Coupland, chief executive of the IfATE, said: “This innovative new approach will build on lessons learned from the assessment flexibilities introduced around Covid-19. This will simplify the system and make it work better for both employers and apprentices, particularly in professions such as nursing.”

Bewick said: “Federation members were only briefed on these changes recently, so we think three months to implement the changes is unrealistic.”

“We understand the need to avoid duplication in the assessment of apprentice competence. However, we also believe it is vital that a level regulatory playing field, from a quality assurance perspective, is maintained. It’s worth recalling the whole point of these reforms: to give greater public confidence in the quality of apprenticeships, which is why we can’t allow those with a material interest in the outcome of an apprenticeship to mark their own homework.”

“We can see how regulatory alignment between IfATE and statutory bodies is both pragmatic and sensible, but the timescales should be revisited.”

IfATE hires two new board members but diversity stalls

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Two new members have been appointed to the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's (IfATE) board.

John Cope and Dayle Bayliss will serve as non-executive board members for three years starting from next month, the government's apprenticeship quango announced on Thursday.

Bayliss has worked in the construction sector for over 20 years and is currently a chartered surveyor, director and project manager for Dayle Bayliss Ltd construction consultancy, based in Ipswich.

She is a former member of the IfATE's construction route panel, which oversees approvals of new apprenticeships, and was chair of its construction: design, surveying and planning T-level development panel.

Bayliss, who is also a board member of the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership Skills Advisory Panel and a member of the Suffolk Chamber of Commerce Business Women Board, said her new role at the IfATE "feels like a natural progression".

Cope is a former head of education and skills policy at the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and deputy director of education practice at the thinktank Public First. He joined the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) as director of strategy, policy and public affairs in September this year.

Cope, who is also a non-executive director of the Activate Learning Group and an advisory member of the board of the Education Policy Institute, said: "I want to use my experience at the CBI to help engage employers more effectively. My day job at UCAS will help better link the two organisations to ensure all education options are promoted, not just higher education."

Each will be paid £15,000 a year for a commitment of two days a month.

The number of people on the IfATE's board is now up to 12, but it continues to have no black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) representation. The institute's last BAME board member left in October 2018.

FE Week asked the institute to comment on its board's lack of diversity but it pointed us to the Department for Education, which officially makes the appointments.

A DfE spokesperson said: "These appointments have been made as a result of an open competition which was conducted in accordance with the Governance Code on Public Appointments.

"Diversity is a principle of the public appointments process and the code require that all appointments are made on merit.

"The DfE particularly welcomed applications from women, people with disabilities, LGBT candidates and those from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds."

Increasing diversity in apprenticeships is a key goal for the DfE, which set up the Apprenticeship Diversity Champions

Network three years ago, setting a target of increasing the proportion of apprentices from BAME communities by 20 per cent.

The proportion of BAME apprentices sat at 10.7 per cent in 2015/16. This increased in 2018/19 to 11.8 per cent, compared to 30.1 per cent for other FE programmes excluding apprenticeships. The latest figures for 2019/20 currently only comprise August to January, at which point 12.1 per cent of apprentices were BAME.

New groups to tackle discrimination in the FE sector have been set up recently, including the Association of Colleges' Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) steering group, and the Black Further Education Leadership Group (BFELG) – created by a number of existing and former college leaders.

The BFELG wrote to prime minister Boris Johnson and education secretary Gavin Williamson in August to warn that racism was undermining FE. Skills minister Gillian Keegan replied to the letter this month and pledged "to eliminate racism and to address racial inequalities in our further education sector", as reported by FE News.



Top row: Antony Jenkins, Jennifer Coupland, Dr Kate Barclay, Bev Robinson OBE, Paul Cadman, Dame Fiona Kendrick
Bottom row: Robin Millar CBE, Toby Peyton-Jones, Jessica Leigh Jones, Professor Malcolm Press, John Cope and Dayle Bayliss

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Backlog of FE Commissioner reports finally published

**BILLY CAMDEN
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Last Friday, the Department for Education published eight intervention reports based on FE Commissioner visits that in some cases took place more than a year ago.

The reports were accompanied by a letter from skills minister Gillian Keegan, many of which were dated July 15, 2020.

FE Week reported on July 7, 2020 that the FE Commissioner, Richard Atkins, had written to college bosses on June 16 to inform them that his team has recommenced work on a virtual basis, following a Covid-19 related pause.

The eight published reports all include a page which summarises a follow-up visit carried out by Atkins' team over the summer to check on progress.

A summary of each report and the relevant college's response is below.



Richard Atkins

Gateshead College

Further light has been shed on the cause of Gateshead College's shock £6 million deficit in its newly released FE Commissioner report.

In a report based on visits last December and January, Atkins writes that the underpinning cause of the shortfall was "a failure by the board and the senior leaders at the college to address the very significant reduction in income that was the result of the loss of the European Social Fund (ESF) contract".

FE Week first reported last December that Gateshead's governors had called in independent investigators to explain why the deficit had come about. The principal and chair of governors both left during the ensuing controversy.

Large short-term contracts like ESF had provided a "significant" financial contribution to the college's bottom line, Atkins explained.

An otherwise "successful" ESF project concluded in January, but the

senior leaders reported there were "no significant financial concerns" to the board, despite losing the ESF contract.

The commissioner found the college had in fact been in deficit for years, but this had been disguised by a misstatement of certain bills. Other factors behind the shortfall include "incorrect" budgeting of around 40 per cent for subcontracting costs, which was a "major" cause of the size of the deficit.

The college said that, since the visit, a structure and prospect appraisal has been completed and is awaiting sign-off from ministers. One option being explored is a merger.

A spokesperson said: "Our focus remains on making sure that the good work to date continues and that we keep to the agreed targets in our recovery plan, including the appointment of a permanent principal, while delivering the very best education and training for our local community, strengthening financial health and maintaining the confidence of our stakeholders."

Highbury College

There has been a "significant step-change in openness and trust" at the scandal-hit college where staff previously felt "undervalued" and "too scared to challenge", the FE Commissioner's report said.

Atkins visited Highbury College in October 2019 after *FE Week* revealed how its long-standing principal, Stella Mbubaegbu, had spent £150,000 on expenses in four years, which included one-off lavish items such as a £434 pair of designer headphones and a lobster dinner.

The commissioner found that governance and leadership were "seriously dysfunctional", namely because the relationship and trust between the chair, Tim Mason, and principal had "broken down".

Mason admitted that the board had "not operated with sufficient scrutiny and challenge".

Atkins said he found a number of "significant leadership and management" issues, including the "very high" turnover of new staff in their first year, low staff

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

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morale and an "expressed lack of trust by staff in their leaders".

Staff who filled out an Investors in People survey also reported that "people are too scared to challenge, or feel nothing will come of it".

Mbubaegbu, who joined in 2001 and officially retired in April 2020, actually left her position as accounting officer in December – a month before new interim principal Penny Wycherley and interim chair Martin Doel discovered Highbury was running out of cash and had to secure a £1.5 million emergency bailout, as previously reported by *FE Week*.

In Atkins' follow-up visit over the summer he commended a new "positive culture across the college with managers more empowered and engaged, and staff now working well together".



Penny Wycherley

The report reads: "Effective leadership and communication from the interim principal/chief executive have improved staff morale and the culture of the college. The staff survey, and staff and trade union feedback, all reflect a significant step-change in openness and trust."

Wycherley said: "Staff have shown real 'blitz spirit' throughout the pandemic and their passion and commitment for teaching has shone through."

RNN Group

This college group suffered "serious decline" in enrolments, quality and financial health following multiple mergers, the FE commissioner reported.

RNN Group was created from a merger of Rotherham College of Arts and Technology (RCAT) and North Nottinghamshire College in February 2016. In February 2017, there was another merger with Dearne Valley College, on the recommendation of the Sheffield City Region Area Review, which the commissioner was involved with.

However, Atkins has now identified that the mergers led to a decline in finance and Ofsted grades – for RCAT – from 'good' to 'requires improvement'.

Income had fallen "steadily", owing to fewer student enrolments. RNN part-financing its University Centre Rotherham had also "eroded" its reserves, while higher education student recruitment was down.

There was also a "steep" reduction in 16-to-18-year-old student numbers since the merger, though that has largely stabilised in 2019-20.

Mergers had also created what Atkins

called a "substantial" college estate, stretching across south Yorkshire and north Nottinghamshire. He recommended a "rationalisation" of the estate and the college has since removed all provision from one of its sites, Dinnington. It is looking at renting or selling some or all of the buildings and land.

At the time of the commissioner's assessment last December, RNN had subcontracted out adult education budget provision to 22 subcontractors, seven for apprenticeships, and four for 16-to-18 study programmes. This level, the commissioner wrote, presented a "risk" to RNN. The college said it now has just 11 subcontractors.

Atkins raised concerns about RNN's governance during his assessment, including the lack of a finance committee despite the "significant financial challenges", and the seven vacancies for independent governors, leaving the board "severely depleted".

Principal Jason Scott said "significant" progress has been made since then: "Strong governance is in place, and important progress has been made with financial recovery, quality improvement, rationalisation of surplus estate capacity and reduced staff costs."

Coventry College

A lack of "clear post-merger strategy" and "robust scrutiny" led to a "substantial deterioration of financial stability" for this college, which almost went insolvent this year.

Henley College Coventry and City College Coventry merged to become Coventry College in August 2017. City College had achieved three 'requires improvement' and two 'inadequate' ratings from full Ofsted inspections prior to merger.

The merged college was inspected for the first time in September 2019 and achieved a grade three.

Atkins visited in November 2019 and found that governors had allowed the college to "drift" since the merger, without developing and directing a "clear post-merger strategy and harmonisation plan".



"Whilst this work has gathered pace since January 2020, the financial and curriculum performance of the college has deteriorated, and its future is now challenging," he added.

An "overly optimistic" merger plan was developed, which contained significant income growth that the college has not delivered. In 2019, the college finances "have suffered from weak financial controls, poor strategic financial leadership and a lack of strong governance challenge".

The report warns that Coventry College breached bank covenants during the year which made a £10 million loan with Barclays liable by August 1, 2020. Atkins said if the college was not able to reclassify the loan, it would go insolvent. The college confirmed to *FE Week* it was able to secure an extension on the loan.

Keegan's letter said that following the formation of Coventry College in 2017, the "lack of a clear post-merger strategy or robust scrutiny have contributed to the

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

News

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substantial deterioration of financial stability and curriculum performance, to the point that the college now faces a challenging future”.

Atkins revisited Coventry in September 2020 and said the college’s newly appointed principal, Carol Thomas, has made an “immediate impact despite only being in post for a short time”.

A Coventry College spokesperson said: “In the intervening six months [since the commissioner’s original visit] the college has worked hard to address the specific recommendations and all of those that had a September or earlier deadline have now been completed.

“The FE Commissioner team has undertaken a ‘stocktake’ visit during September 2020 and has recognised the significant progress made against their original set of recommendations.

“The college’s financial accounts for 2019/20 will show a circa £1 million improvement on the figures shown in the March FEC report, as a result of the implementation of its recovery plan.”

Birmingham Metropolitan College

BMet received a highly positive report from the FE Commissioner which skills minister Gillian Keegan said showed “remarkable improvements” since the group first entered formal intervention in 2015.

Principal Cliff Hall told *FE Week*, following the report’s publication, that they have met all of the commissioner’s recommendations “due to the hard work and dedication of staff”.

This marks a rare upturn for the college, which has received three consecutive ‘requires improvement’ ratings from Ofsted, and was said to be on the “brink of insolvency” as late as last August.

The commissioner reported that the chair, school ‘superhead’ Sir Dexter Hutt, appointed in January 2019, is “confident and capable and has

led a period of rapid and significant cultural change in partnership with the principal”.

Staff, the commissioner wrote, have a “greater level of confidence” in the future and are “complimentary” about Hall and his “clear, open and honest approach”.

In a letter attached to the report dated July this year, Keegan said the report “describes the college as having made remarkable improvements”, and it was clear governors and leaders “have been working diligently and effectively to implement rigorous and focused strategies for improvement”.

Atkins, who assessed BMet in October 2019, also praised the “timely manner” in which BMet responded to concerns from the community about the controversial removal of provision from its Stourbridge campus, as part of a structure and prospects appraisal (SPA) led by Atkins’ team.

East Sussex College Group

The college was visited by Atkins’ team in December 2019 during which he found various reasons for its ‘inadequate’ financial health: unstable and poor leadership; a downward trend in 16-to-18 recruitment; £1.1 million government clawback relating to ineligible apprenticeship provision delivered by a former subcontractor at Sussex Coast College Hastings in 2011/12 and 2012/13; and inaccurate data reporting.

The college was also rapped for its “wholly inadequate” preparations for T Levels that were set for rollout in September 2020 but presented a “high risk of failure” and concern over the “quantity of subcontracted activity”.

Keegan’s letter said the college’s governance and leadership arrangements were “weak and unsuited to the size and complexity of the college”.

“It is clear from the report that current management structures have failed to provide clear strategic direction for the college and have not adequately addressed



ongoing and emerging issues following merger,” she added.

Atkins made a follow-up visit in July and said the college has made “progress despite the turbulent circumstances during which existing challenges, including financial ones, have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic”.

Commenting this week on the report, an East Sussex College Group said they feel that the college has made “significant progress in resolving the financial leadership concerns via the appointment of an experienced turnaround chief financial officer and new finance director.

“Alongside a review of our financial processes and controls we anticipate a steady improvement in financial health, even in a Covid-affected climate, in 2020/21.”

They added that the college has “successfully launched our first three T Levels”, with 45 students engaging in the new qualifications, and have “reduced our reliance on subcontracted provision”.

The interim leadership team has been supported by national leaders in FE, and a new-look governing body is completing the recruitment process for a new chief executive this month.

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Hull College Group

FE Week was leaked a copy of Hull College's FE Commissioner report in January and revealed how it would show that leaders employed "close family members" and created a culture where staff would not speak out for "fear of being exited at short notice".

It came after this publication reported in December – a month after Atkins' visit – that Hull's chief executive, Michelle Swithenbank, and vice principal for HR, Julie Milad, had been suspended and then quit.

The commissioner's report published last week includes the same findings, such as "clerking arrangements have not been sufficiently independent from the executive and have fallen below acceptable standards" and "many staff felt reluctant to voice their concerns to senior leaders because of a lack of trust".

Keegan wrote that it was "clear that the college leadership has experienced significant turbulence" and that she was "concerned with the weakness of governance arrangements on".

Derek O'Toole took over as interim chief executive at Hull College at the end of 2019, and Atkins' follow-up visit over the summer said he had "already made a positive impact".

A spokesperson for Hull College said the college has "made rapid and effective progress against a report from a specific point in time nearly a year ago".

"The college has not only completed all 11 recommendations detailed in the report at that time, but has focused on making many other improvements for our learners and staff to give the city a college it so richly deserves," they added.



Derek O'Toole



Stoke-on-Trent College

The college received a £20 million taxpayer bailout two years ago and was warned it faced "significant challenges" following its FE Commissioner report, but said it is now on a "strong trajectory of improvement".

Stoke-on-Trent narrowly avoided insolvency, according to the FE Commissioner's assessment from March, and only escaped thanks to exceptional financial support between January 2016 and September 2017.

The college later received £21.9 million from the Department for Education's restructuring facility in September 2018.

This all came after income declined by more than one-third between 2004 and 2014, so commercial loans agreed at the start of that period were no longer affordable by the end.

Following the bailouts and redundancies for 5 per cent of its workforce, Stoke-on-Trent is now on track for 'good' financial health in the 2019-20 financial year.

A spokesperson said the college is "working well to progress the recommendations of the FE Commissioner, despite the disruption of Covid-19".

However, Atkins has warned that the Education and Skills Funding Agency

would be writing to Stoke-on-Trent to refresh its financial health notice to improve following his visit.

An "urgent" investment in IT equipment was also recommended in the report, after students commented on its "poor" quality and owing to the Covid-19 pandemic placing a much greater importance on online learning.

The college has said it has recruited for the vacant finance positions, and the curriculum job will be filled by the end of 2020. It also stated that it had made a "considerable" investment in its IT facilities since the commissioner's visit.

Skills minister Gillian Keegan, in a letter accompanying the report, said while "significant challenges remain, the college has adopted a positive approach towards implementing various improvement initiatives to address both historic and recent concerns".



Gillian Keegan

Queen's Birthday Honours 2020: Who received what in FE?

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A former college principal who championed further education and skills as a member of parliament has been knighted in the 2020 Queen's birthday honours.

Nic Dakin, who represented Scunthorpe from 2010 to 2019 after having run Sir John Leggott College in the city, is one of 20 FE and skills figures to have been recognised.

Others honoured include the principals of Derby College Group, Nelson and Colne College, Harlow College and the Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education, as well as three medallists from WorldSkills Kazan 2019.

The honours list was originally due to be published in June but was pushed back until the autumn, so that it could recognise people who helped tackle the Covid-19 pandemic.

Speaking to *FE Week*, Dakin said when he was first told in June that he had received the honour, he thought it was a hoax.

"It's a surprise. I'm really pleased to be recognised for my work in further education, as well as my work politically.

"Standing up for further education has been an important part of my work, championing issues around post-16 funding and adult learning during my time in parliament."

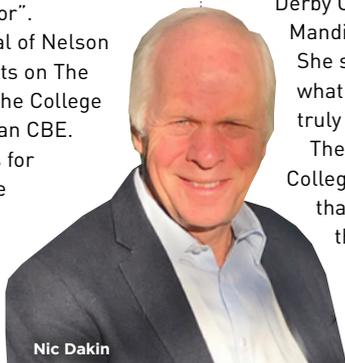
During his time as a Labour MP, Dakin served as shadow schools minister, on the education select committee and has regularly spoken out in favour of increased funding for FE.

He says he kept "banging on" about FE, so by the time he left, "I wasn't a lone voice, you heard voices from the Conservative and Labour benches".

Dakin, who only told his wife the day before it was made public, called it "humbling to be picked out when there are so many great people working in the FE sector".

Amanda Melton, the principal of Nelson and Colne College who also sits on The Independent Commission on the College of the Future, has been given an CBE.

She said working in colleges for 26 years has been a "complete privilege" and she owes the honour "directly" to the roles she has had to "shout out for FE" and "most importantly the



Nic Dakin

Name	Role	Honour
Nic Dakin	Former MP for Scunthorpe	Knighthood
Mike Green	Chief Operating Officer, Department for Education. For services to Education	CB
Mary Curnock Cook	Chair, Dyson Institute of Engineering and Technology	CBE
Amanda Melton	Principal, Nelson and Colne College	CBE
Tobias Peyton-Jones	Education and Skills Ambassador, Siemens UK	OBE
Tanja Smith	Technical Director, Gradon Architecture	OBE
Mandie Stravino	Chief executive, Derby College	OBE
Francis Costello	Lately Chair, Wigan and Leigh College	MBE
Karen Spencer	Principal, Harlow College	MBE
Debra Gray	Principal, Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education	MBE
Nigel Fenn	Senior HR Manager, Pennon Group Plc	MBE
Alison Cresswell	Lately Head of Participation and Education Services, Stockport Borough Council	MBE
Clair Davies	Principal, Appletree Treatment Centre	MBE
Rebecca West	Team Member, WorldSkills UK 2019	MBE
Haydn Jakes	Team Member, WorldSkills UK 2019	MBE
Martin Yates	Training Manager, WorldSkills UK	MBE
Richard Hamer	Human Resources Director, Education and Skills, BAE Systems	MBE
Simon Charleton	Chief Executive Officer, St John's College	BEM
Conor McKeivitt	Team Member, WorldSkills UK 2019	BEM
Phoebe McLavy	Team Member, WorldSkills UK 2019	BEM

College of the Future Commission".

Melton said her dad, who died three years ago, would have been "completely blown away that his little girl was honoured in this way".

The principal of Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education Debra Gray has been made an MBE for services to education, which she said belongs instead to the "amazing" staff and "wonderful" students she has worked with.

Harlow College principal Karen Spencer has also received that honour, for services to further education and aviation.

Her college set up Stansted Airport College in 2018, and she chairs a working group on STEM aviation jobs and skills for the all-party parliamentary group on general aviation.

Spencer said she was "extremely proud" of the honour, which was a "real testament" to the sector, her staff, students and the governors.

Derby College Group's chief executive Mandie Stravino has been made an OBE. She said to receive the award "for doing what I am privileged to do every day is truly overwhelming".

The former chair of Wigan and Leigh College, Frank Costello, who served in that role for three of his 20 years on the college board, is a recipient of the MBE.

The chair of the South West Apprenticeship Ambassador

Network Nigel Fenn has also received an MBE. The network acts as a representative body for apprentice employers in the area.

In his other role in human resources at Pennon Group, he started the apprenticeship programme at subsidiary company South West Water, which now has 120 learners and are looking at a target of 500 starts over the next five years.

Fenn said he feels "fantastic" about the "huge honour", and while he does not see himself as a figurehead for apprenticeships, he is "passionate" about it: "Seeing them move into our permanent workforce is so refreshing."

Another of those recognised is Haydn Jakes MBE, who won a gold medal in aircraft maintenance at WorldSkills Kazan.

Jakes said, "Winning the gold medal was such a fantastic experience, so to be recognised is just brilliant".

Rebecca West, who won gold in beauty therapy, has received the same honour, as has Jakes' training manager Martin Yates.

Conor McKeivitt, who won silver in car painting, and Phoebe McLavy, who won bronze in hairdressing, have been awarded British Empire Medals.

McLavy said to know that "someone quite young from somewhere quite small" can achieve something like this is a "good eye-opener" for young people to realise there is a lot more they can achieve in their careers.



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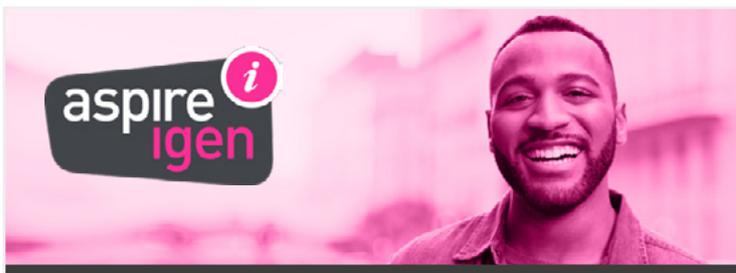
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Introducing...

KATE GREEN

Shadow education secretary



**'I don't like
stupid policy,
so I got annoyed'**

JESS STAUFENBERG
@STAUFENBERGJ

Three months into the job of shadow education secretary, Kate Green explains why she is a 'policy geek' who sees 'inclusion' as crucial.

In many ways, the boots Kate Green must fill as shadow education secretary are big ones. Both her immediate predecessors have powerful personal stories about social mobility that appealed to many. Angela Rayner, now deputy leader of the

Labour Party, left school early, had a mum who couldn't read or write, and went on to earn a seat in parliament against the odds. Her successor, Rebecca Long-Bailey, worked in a pawn shop and furniture factory before she became a solicitor. Both are northern women who were relatively young when they took the shadow education brief – Rayner was just 36 years old – and with their large personal followings, were touted for bigger things.

You could see Edinburgh-born Green as their opposite. With parents who attended university, she doesn't at first hand appear to have that

compelling backstory of triumphing against the odds that politicians seem to crave (alternatively, that voters crave in politicians). And, as a former chief executive of Child Poverty Action, she already has the swathe of her career behind her – rather than appearing to be a new rising "star".

But this may have big hidden advantages for the law graduate. A self-professed "policy geek" (much like shadow chancellor Anneliese Dodds, another native Scot), Green holds an opportunity to win over colleges with a grasp of detail that perhaps neither of her predecessors, who were arguably better at talking in broad brush strokes

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about helping the next generation of Rayners or scrapping academies, were best known for (although to be fair to Long-Bailey, she didn't have long to prove otherwise).

Green has worked with children and families for years – she's a former director of the National Council for One Parent Families – so the role is likely to mean more than just the next stepping stone of her political career. Were Labour to win the next election, Green's character may set her up well to bed down and tackle the nitty gritty policy issues others have ignored.

But that's potentially a long way off, and some problems are more immediate. At the end of last month, Green herself was in hot water when she said the Covid-19 pandemic was a "good crisis" which Labour shouldn't let "go to waste", leading to Boris Johnson claiming her words revealed "the real approach of the Labour Party". Green is total in her self-condemnation.

"You know, if you want to be a politician operating at this level, it's incumbent on you to do it really, really well. And on that day I slipped up, I made a mistake, and there is no room for mistakes at this level, there just isn't. Of course everyone is human, but you have to do this job really, really well."

Green seems to be a values- and details-oriented woman who is not out to amass a big personal following, but to nail her brief. She skirts over home life beyond childhood, and can't lay hands on childhood photographs – suggesting she's a private person. In that regard, she probably reflects her Scottish upbringing, one in which hard work and privacy were the norm ("I had no idea how my parents voted," says Green). Her parents were from poorer backgrounds in west Scotland and had managed to become teachers, so education was seen as crucial. But a streak of rebellion grew in Green during that time, too.

One incident she remembers was her father, who was leaving his primary school



Kate with students from Stretford High

headship for a teacher training college post, in conversation with a friend. "The friend asked, 'Will your deputy [whom Green describes as an "amazing, formidable woman"] get your job when you leave?' And my dad said, 'Oh, they'd never give a school this big to a woman.' I was sitting there thinking, 'You have spent my entire life telling me I can be anything I want, and I've just heard you say to somebody else that actually I can't.'" Green never told her father the impression the moment made on her, but says it and the lack of opportunity for women has stuck with her for decades. "I guess I've spent a lot of my career kicking back against that."

First off, she left Scotland and arrived during the 1981 recession in London, where she would do 15 years at Barclays Bank. Her assessment is concise. "Banking wasn't it, I didn't enjoy it, and I wasn't any good at it." Why do it? Her parents recalled their own parents being jobless, including her grandfather, who would pick up work on the docks. Job security "was burned into my psyche". Green now worries that in the upcoming recession,

like her, young people could spend years just trying to find work they enjoy.

"Teenage single mums had been demonised... but this is the parent who stayed"

But a future direction began to form as the young Green reacted to homelessness in the capital under the Thatcher government by attending Labour Party meetings, which she "found a bit depressing". But she persevered and eventually another party member, a teacher, suggested she stand for parliament. "I said, 'Don't be ridiculous, people like me don't do something like that.' But the idea stuck." She stood for parliament in Tony Blair's landslide 1997 election for the Cities of London and Westminster, a Conservative stronghold, and lost. That experience, however, "changed everything" and she left banking. "I went to work in the Home Office for a couple of years. I learnt more in those two years in the Home Office about how the country is really run



Kate with students from Moss Park

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than I had ever understood before.” Her main policy interest at this point was criminal justice, since her degree was in law and she’d been a magistrate.

Green then left the civil service to stand and lose an election again, this time for the Greater London Assembly in 2000. “By this time I’m 40 and I’m thinking, ‘Look, what are you going to do with your life now? You can’t spend the next ten years going around losing elections – get a grip.’” What did her parents think of this career move? “They hadn’t particularly wanted me to stand for election, they were nervous.” But when Green was elected in 2010 from an all-women shortlist to Stretford and Urmston in Greater Manchester, they were excited. The level of privacy at home is evident when she adds with a wide smile: “My mum came out to me as a Labour Party voter!”

“I’m absolutely not interested in lowering standards”

The delay to becoming an MP may have been fortuitous. By 2010, Green had racked up significant experience in two top social policy roles. Labour leader Keir Starmer has pointed out her role as former chief executive of Child Poverty Action (during the years when the Labour Party pulled almost one million children

out of poverty) but less has been made of the job Green says was her “happiest”. As director of the National Council for One Parent Families, she got to support some of the most undervalued women in society. Clearly Green is highly irritated by people stereotyping vulnerable groups without checking their facts first. “Teenage single mums had been demonised... but this is the parent who stayed, not the parent who walked away. They are desperate to be role models for their kids.”

The role also gave her a unique insight into the struggles faced by many wanting to return to workplace or education. Green was appointed to the then-National Employment Panel, which brought together industry leaders, FE providers and advocacy groups like hers to advise government ministers on labour market and skills policy. It led her to think hard about the advantages of devolution, which she says allows local policymakers “to link your social policies, your industrial and economic policies, and your skills and education policies together”. For instance, she calls the £300 million underspend of apprenticeship levy fund “absolutely ridiculous” and suggests again that greater devolution could allow for a more planned approach to training and skills strategy, “to build closer, purposively designed relationships between local employers and local colleges”.

The same advocacy drive Green had for single parents is also evident in her support for Roma, gypsy and traveller children (she chaired



Kate at the Houses of Parliament

the all-party parliamentary group). She recalls being elected when Eric Pickles was secretary of state for communities. “He was announcing a cut in funding for traveller sites, and at the same time wanted to tighten up planning laws. And I thought that was stupid policy, and I don’t like stupid policy, so I got annoyed.” She started “asking questions” and has been trying to tackle prejudice against the community since.

The most telling line here is “I don’t like stupid policy”. Green largely speaks with confidence about FE policies, which is likely to be, at least in part, because she’s well briefed. One of her closest advisers is Nick Wright, who was by Gordon Marsden’s side throughout his time as shadow FE minister.

It’s also why when I press Green for details of her policy plans on contentious issues, such as scrapping Ofsted, she takes a cautious and pragmatic tone, saying these will be “reviewed”. Labour needs someone who can present policy-tight answers to big visions lacking clear plans, such as its proposed “National Education Service”. But as a geek officially annoyed by stupid policy, she won’t be drawn before she’s done the research. “I’m in listening mode.” She does share, however, that a big interest of hers is “inclusion” and reducing inequitable outcomes for disadvantaged learners.

In a sense, Green is a shadow education secretary who is most naturally at home with being an advocate for the vulnerable. Her challenge now will be to combine that with detailed policy plans that have perhaps been lacking in recent years.



Visiting Coventry School in July 2020

MARK
CORNEYEducation policy
consultant

The most qualified are shielded from mass youth unemployment, the least qualified are left to compete

Ministers must come up with a new policy to allow 18- to 24-year-olds on universal credit to access free full-time education, writes Mark Corney

During the last great recession – the financial crash of 2008 – many young people shielded themselves from a collapsing jobs market through participating in full-time education. The same is happening in the Covid recession of 2020.

About 42 per cent of 16- to 24-year-olds were in full-time education, according to data for March and May this year from the Office for National Statistics. Between April and July, the proportion had risen to 45 per cent. And we can assume the share could be higher when we get the data for this September.

Data on enrolments for 16- and 17-year-olds are sketchy but some evidence is emerging for 18- to 24-year-olds.

There has been a slight increase compared to last year in the proportion of 18-year-olds who have enrolled on to full-time level 4 to 6 degrees, at 41 per cent by the end of September.

More graduates aged 22 and over have entered full-time teacher training courses than usual, while applications for full-time MBAs have risen dramatically and we expect numbers on full-time one-year master level degrees also to rise significantly.

Therefore, one of the few positives of this awful recession is increasing participation in full-



time education.

Inspect a little closer, however, and it is only one group of 18- to 24-year-olds who have been able to shield themselves from unemployment.

These will be young people who achieved a level 3 at age 18 or 19, who have gone into full-time undergraduate higher education and then upon graduation enrolled on to full-time post-graduate courses.

The picture looks very different for young adults who did not achieve a level 3 at age 18 or 19.

Although unemployed 19- to 24-year-olds might wish to study full-time to achieve a first full level 3, they can't. Why not? Unlike full-time higher education learners, they have no access to living costs support, such as maintenance loans. At the same time, they can't study full-time and claim universal credit.

If they did enter full-time education, the Department for Work and Pensions would suspend

their universal credit, the very thing that would permit them to live and study full-time.

The number of unemployed 18- to 24-year-olds claiming universal credit in July was 530,000 in England and this will rise as job losses mount in the winter.

“Only one group of 18- to 24-year-olds have been able to shield themselves from unemployment”

So what does the government say to an unemployed 20-year-old wishing to access free full-time education for a first level 3 when the DWP informs them this would end their universal credit?

Of course, the same unemployed 20-year-old could say they are willing to take out a full-time maintenance loan. But the answer is essentially: “Sorry,

maintenance loans are not for the likes of young people without a level 3 in further education. They are reserved for those on level 4 to 6 degrees in higher education.”

No doubt the government would tell the unemployed 20-year-old that the chancellor has introduced a comprehensive active labour market strategy to get them a job, not more full-time study. Employers have been given generous wage subsidies to offer apprenticeships, kickstart jobs and traineeships.

But the second wave of Covid-19 is stalling the economy. There will be no V-shaped recovery in the youth labour market from January. Active labour market policies work during the upswing, not the downswing.

The government has a one-size-fits-all policy for youth unemployment: wage subsidies to employers.

A second policy is urgently needed alongside it, which is to expand participation in full-time level 3 vocational training for 18- to 24-year-olds, supported by access to either universal credit or maintenance loans.

In England we have an education system for 18- to 24-year-olds that helps the most qualified to shield from mass youth unemployment, but expects the least qualified to compete.

There is still time for the government to help less-well-qualified young adults get through this terrible recession – but it must act quickly.

KURT HINTZ

Interim executive principal of Capital City College Group



Government must rethink reskilling and reboot short courses - and do it quickly

Those of us who have been offering free partial qualifications and short courses for years know how crucial they are, writes Kurt Hintz

Not all of Boris Johnson's "radical" changes to further education are that new. They're welcome – but let's get them right.

His biggest announcement was that adults over the age of 23 in England without a full level 3 qualification can get one for free from April.

However, the announcement does not include partial qualifications or unitised provision used on short courses. This is a huge missed opportunity.

We at Capital City College Group (CCCG) know how important this is, because we already offer all our courses for free up to level 2 for adults and free short courses up to level 3 at our three colleges across London. We've learned a few things.

When I was vice principal of the College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London (CONEL), we saw the number of adults entering education dropping every year from 2014.

For people on the lowest incomes having to pay for their education, the choice was stark – either pay the rent or pay for a course. This is no choice at all. Our adult enrolments kept falling.

By 2016, the most common search term on our website was "free course" so it was clear the appetite for learning was as strong as ever, but cost was the barrier.

A small but important change in funding rules for adults in August 2018 meant that anyone below the minimum wage could get a fully funded course. That was the catalyst we needed.

With many of our learners on low incomes, we did the maths and took the decision to offer all courses up to level 2 for free regardless of people's circumstances, even if they weren't on the minimum wage.

In September 2018, CONEL announced itself as London's first free college. Later that academic year we also began running hundreds of free short evening, daytime and weekend courses.

Thousands applied for free courses in the first year, from accounting and engineering to healthcare and science, and the college's enrolments increased by one-third.

I used to despair when I walked down our empty corridors in the evening, but suddenly the life of the community returned and the corridors were as busy at 6pm as they were at 9am.

"For many learners, a free short course acts as a springboard to higher levels"

The huge success of our free courses has seen them extended to the other two colleges in the group, City and Islington College and Westminster Kingsway College.

For many learners, a free short course is just the start. Nearly half of ours have used them as a springboard for higher level courses. Meanwhile, more than two-thirds of short course enrolments have been in STEM subjects.

One of those formerly on a

short level 3 free course with us is now running her own plumbing business and has even returned to CONEL to help teach the course!

So in a way, the government's decision to offer fully funded courses up to level 3 is a vindication of the work we have been doing locally for several years.

It is more urgent than ever now, with universal credit claims in some of the boroughs that our colleges work in up by 300 per cent.

But many adults will now want something short and sharp to get them into a 'lifeboat job' before committing to a more significant qualification for full reskilling.

That makes it critical that Boris Johnson includes partial qualifications or short courses in his full-funding pledge. Otherwise he could seriously fail to hit the mark.

We'd also like the funding to be allocated to the local adult education budget (which in London is devolved to the mayor) and not the National Skills Fund. This would offer more local accountability and make it easier for colleges to access the money.

Meanwhile, the funds must be urgently made available – much sooner than April.

A focus on removing financial barriers is a very welcome shift from government. But let's learn from where this is already happening and get this right.



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READER'S REPLY

Dig beneath the surface of the government's skills announcement and it's unambitious

... Kirstie Donnelly is quite right to highlight the ridiculous proposal that the Lifetime Skills Guarantee is limited to those without a level 3 qualification already. This tells you all you need to know about the government's true understanding of the adult labour market going forward.

Richard Moore, website

DfE launches tender for 8 new Institutes of Technology

... This is a great incentive and honestly believe this is needed. The only point I would like to make is to call it something else than IoT as this will get tech people confused with the "Internet of Things".

Mo Hussain, website

DfE publishes 8 college intervention reports on a Friday after lengthy delay

... Yet more great examples of historic and stubborn poor performance by awful leaders who simply take ever-increasing amounts of money under false pretences. Why does the taxpayer keep propping up these colleges? They thwart the potential of students. Any bailout should be subject to a complete cull of 'senior' leaders. No college with a 'requires improvement' grade for three consecutive inspections should receive taxpayer funding. They are clearly not fit for purpose.

David, website

REPLY OF THE WEEK

Covid blamed as targets revised at flagship Institutes of Technology



Little wonder, with all of the Covid confusion and the subsequent initiative overload. Then add to that the withering reputation(!!) of the so-called National Colleges; inconsistent (at best) careers information and confused funding. How can kids be expected to make informed choices???

Paul Butler, Twitter

I hope more government departments follow our lead by employing apprentices



A good thing for a government department to employ apprentices — one of those things that you might have assumed had been going on for ages. Good work that can be scaled fast across.

Ty Goddard, Twitter

Young people hit hardest in full-year apprenticeship figures



Credit to Nick Linford and *FE Week* for continuing to bang the drum of falling apprenticeship starts. Many of the challenges with the apprenticeship levy are issues we and many others have been raising long before Covid-19 struck.

Bhavina Bharkhada, Twitter

Popular apprenticeship scrapped by government could be revived



It is an important grounding that supports learning into employment, with skills that businesses need.

Maria Parker, Facebook

Movers & Shakers

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



Jane Ide

Chief executive,
Creative &
Cultural Skills

Start date November 2020

Current job
Chief executive, NAVCA

Interesting fact
Formerly a registrar of births, deaths, and marriages, she oversaw the marriages of a reformed bigamist, a Catholic priest, and the lead singer of Def Leppard (though not all on the same day)



Jim Sharpe

Principal,
Dv8 Sussex

Start date September 2020

Previous job
Principal, East Sussex College Hastings

Interesting fact
He is a keen south coast surfer



**Air Commodore
Suzanne Natalie
Perkins CBE**

Principal,
Brockenhurst
College

Start date January 2021

Current job
Deputy commander and chief of staff,
British Forces Cyprus

Interesting fact
She has recently been awarded a CBE in the delayed Queen's Birthday Honours for her contribution in Cyprus and to the RAF over more than 30 years

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