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FRIDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2020 | EDITION 331



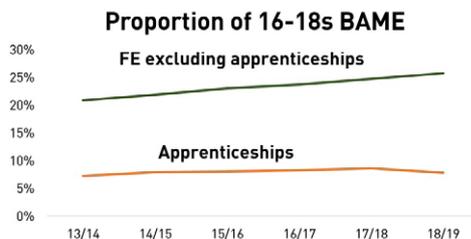
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'NATIONAL DISGRACE'

- Just 8% of young apprentices are BAME compared to 26% on other FE courses
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Unspent NRS cash will go back to Treasury



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DfE consults on scrapping quals competing with T Levels by 2023

BILLY CAMDEN
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The government has moved a step closer to removing funding for applied general qualifications, such as BTECs, that compete with T Levels and A-levels by autumn 2023.

The Department for Education will today (Friday) launch the second stage of its consultation on the future of vocational and technical qualifications at level 3 and below, which will run for 12 weeks.

The DfE claims there is currently a “confusing landscape” of over 12,000 courses on offer to young people at level 3 and below, with multiple qualifications in the same subject areas available – many of which are “poor quality and offer little value to students or employers”.

Today’s consultation will set out “detailed measures” that the education secretary Gavin Williamson will tackle this, including removing funding for the “majority” of qualifications that “overlap” with A-levels and T Levels by 2023.

It will also include plans to open T Levels up to adults from 2023, as reported by *FE Week* earlier this month.

Williamson said the measures will “ensure that whether a student opts to study A-levels, a T-level or any other qualification, they can be confident that it will be high quality and will set them on a clear path to a job, further education or training”.

A briefing document, seen by *FE Week* ahead of the consultation launch, shows that for 16-to-19-year-olds, the DfE will propose to fund two groups of level 3 technical qualifications alongside T Levels.

The first will be qualifications that “give people the knowledge, skills and behaviours described in an employer-led standard that is not covered by a T-level”.

The second will be “additional specialist” qualifications that develop “more specialist skills and knowledge than could be acquired through a T-level alone” such as a course in marine engineering, which “builds on the technical qualifications in the maintenance,

installation and repair T-level”.

The DfE will also propose to approve for funding two groups of “small academic qualifications” to be taken alongside, or as an alternative to, A-levels where there is a “clear need for skills and knowledge that A-levels alone cannot deliver”.

The first group includes qualifications that would “complement A-levels, for example, if they have more of a practical component, such as health and social care or engineering”. It will also include those that are designed to “enable progression to more specialist HE courses”, such as arts institutions.

The second group will be a “specific, limited group of well-recognised, small qualifications that develop wider skills to support study at higher education, such as core maths, performing arts graded qualifications and extended project qualifications”.

The DfE also plans to fund “large” qualifications that would “typically make up a student’s full programme of study and could be taken as an alternative to A-levels if they give access to specialist HE courses, such as those with high levels of practical content”. Examples might include sports or performing arts courses. The International Baccalaureate diploma will also continue to be funded.

For those aged 19 and over, the DfE says they will “generally need greater flexibility than

16-to-19-year-olds and will also tend to have greater prior experience”. So the department’s starting point for adults is that they “have available to them a similar offer as 16-to-19-year-olds but with some additional technical qualifications to meet their needs and more flexibility built into the design”.

The DfE will also propose three “key principles” for level 3 technical qualifications for adults: “Modular delivery of content; recognition of prior learning and experience; and assessing a student’s competence at the end of a course.”

The level 3 and below review includes applied generals, tech levels and technical certificates. While these cover a wide range of courses, BTECs, awarded by Pearson, are the most popular.

The DfE said it will also shortly publish a call for evidence inviting views on qualifications at level 2 and below, including basic skills qualifications (English, maths, ESOL and digital), to find out “what is working well”.

Bill Watkin, chief executive of the Sixth Form Colleges Association, said there is a “place for both T Levels and applied generals” to “happily and usefully coexist”.

He warned that to remove “too many” applied generals would “significantly impoverish the curriculum, damage social mobility and do nothing to reduce the skills gap”.



Gavin Williamson

Anger and dismay as BAME apprenticeship figures fall

FRASER WHIELDON
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From front

Exclusive

Government efforts to increase apprenticeship take-up by black, Asian and minority ethnic young people have been slammed as a “national disgrace”.

New FE Week analysis shows that the proportion of BAME 16- to 18-year-old apprentices is falling and made up just 7.7 per cent of starts in the first three-quarters of 2019/20, compared to over 20 per cent for other further education courses.

City of Bristol College principal Andy Forbes, who co-founded the former BAME Principals Group, said the under-representation of BAME apprentices at all levels and in most sectors is a “long-standing issue”.

“The fact that we have made so little progress in addressing it is a national disgrace,” he added.

Analysis of the government’s National Achievement Rate Tables shows the proportion of apprenticeship starts for BAME 16- to 18-year-olds was 7.8 per cent in 2018/19, down from 8.6 per cent in 2017/18.

This low and falling figure is in stark contrast to other FE courses, where BAME 16- to 18-year-olds have risen from 20.9 per cent in 2013/14 to 25.8 per cent per cent in 2018/19.

The analysis comes after the Department for Education claimed 12.5 per cent of all



age apprentice starts were BAME in 2018/19, exceeding their target of 11.9 per cent.

One of the government’s leading initiatives to boost BAME participation, the Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network, has not met since February, as meetings were paused by the pandemic.

Meanwhile, funding for the 5 Cities Project, which aimed to use local authorities to drive up BAME starts, ended this month with no renewal.

A DfE spokesperson confirmed that a new target for increasing BAME apprenticeships has not been set and was unable to point to any new initiatives to increase BAME apprenticeship participation.

On the lack of BAME apprentices, the spokesperson insisted the department is “very keen to increase awareness of apprenticeship opportunities” so they have been reviewing advice and guidance and using their Apprentice Support

and Knowledge service to target schools in high BAME population areas.

“We have also ensured that young BAME role models are visible in campaigns such as ‘Fire It Up’, and that we are hearing the voices of young apprentices (including BAME) through apprentice networks such as the Young Apprentice Ambassador Network, and the Apprentice Panel.”

Forbes said that in his experience, most modern businesses are keen to recruit a more diverse workforce. The problem is “simply that not enough is being done to talk to young people – and crucially to their parents – about the advantages and value of apprenticeships.

“This has to be done on the ground and face to face, not through glossy advertising campaigns.”

Forbes called for a “step change” from the Department for Education and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, which was criticised last week for having no BAME representation on its board.

The IfATE’s indicators of a quality apprenticeship do not include improving diversity, but a spokesperson said they are “committed to playing a full part” in improving BAME participation in apprenticeships.

“Going forward, we will continue work on the manner in which apprenticeships and technical education qualifications are issued to ensure they are equally accessible to all communities and that we continue to promote wide participation by all groups in the work of the institute.”

Jeremy Crook, chief executive of the Black

BAME apprenticeship starts

Academic year	BAME apprentices by age and level	Starts				Achievements			
		All age	16-18	19-24	25+	All age	16-18	19-24	25+
17/18	Intermediate Apprenticeship	10.8%	6.8%	11.2%	15.1%	10.5%	7.1%	9.6%	13.6%
	Advanced Apprenticeship	11.5%	9.0%	10.9%	13.3%	10.7%	9.2%	8.6%	13.2%
	Higher Apprenticeship	13.5%	12.3%	14.4%	13.2%	14.3%	10.5%	10.4%	15.8%
	Totals	11.4%	7.8%	11.5%	13.9%	10.8%	7.9%	9.2%	13.7%
18/19	Intermediate Apprenticeship	11.7%	6.9%	12.1%	16.9%	9.7%	6.3%	10.0%	13.7%
	Advanced Apprenticeship	12.1%	8.8%	11.8%	14.0%	10.5%	8.0%	8.9%	13.8%
	Higher Apprenticeship	15.0%	13.3%	15.9%	14.7%	13.5%	11.7%	10.0%	15.3%
	Totals	12.5%	7.9%	12.6%	15.0%	10.4%	7.0%	9.4%	13.9%
19/20 to Q3	Intermediate Apprenticeship	11.6%	6.5%	13.4%	16.9%	10.1%	6.1%	11.0%	14.9%
	Advanced Apprenticeship	12.4%	8.3%	12.4%	14.8%	9.4%	6.4%	9.4%	11.4%
	Higher Apprenticeship	16.1%	14.4%	17.2%	15.8%	12.4%	11.7%	12.6%	12.4%
	Totals	13.1%	7.7%	13.8%	15.7%	10.0%	6.4%	10.4%	12.8%

Source: ESFA Apprenticeship demographic, sector subject area and local authority district PivotTable tool
Analysis by FE Week

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Investigates

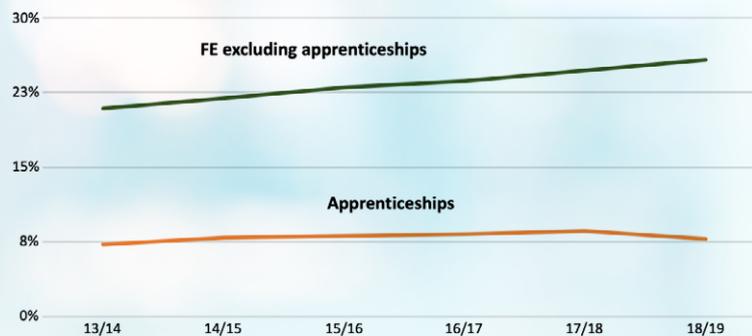
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Achievement rates, by ethnicity

FE excluding appren NARTs 2018/19	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19
All	2,006,470	1,969,700	1,822,380	1,667,710	1,521,080	1,506,620
Not known	28,790	18,860	32,290	16,570	23,070	22,530
All excl not known	1,977,680	1,950,840	1,790,090	1,651,140	1,498,010	1,484,090
White	1,564,640	1,523,340	1,378,200	1,260,750	1,127,830	1,101,670
White %	79%	78%	77%	76%	75%	74%
BAME %	20.9%	21.9%	23.0%	23.6%	24.7%	25.8%

Appren 16-18 NARTs 2018/19	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19
All	92,650	97,250	106,390	109,160	104,720	86,250
Not known	870	640	940	850	1,020	720
All excl not known	91,780	96,610	105,450	108,310	103,700	85,530
White	85,150	88,980	96,930	99,370	94,810	78,880
White %	93%	92%	92%	92%	91%	92%
BAME %	7.2%	7.9%	8.1%	8.3%	8.6%	7.8%

Proportion of 16-18s BAME



Source: ESFA National Achievement Rate Tables
Analysis by FE Week

CONTINUED

Training and Enterprise Group, a charity that runs courses on diversity in the workplace and compiles statistics on ethnic minority groups, said the lack of BAME apprentices “extremely concerning”.

Crook added that “progress on increasing BAME participation in apprenticeships has been disappointingly slow” and urged the DfE to create a “targeted plan to open pipelines to employers that still have opportunities”.

One of the initiatives the DfE has been using to try and increase BAME participation in training is the Apprenticeships Diversity Champions Network.

The network of 80 leaders from across different sectors of industry is intended to “champion apprenticeships and diversity amongst employers and encourages more people from under-represented groups to consider apprenticeships”.

One of the champions is Jill Whittaker, managing director of apprenticeship provider HIT Training, who told FE Week: “The key thing the network has been trying to do is generating ideas and sharing best practice.”

“There are some very big employers who have done some really far-reaching programmes, so to be able to share that expertise is very valuable.”

One of the lessons learned led HIT to include a more diverse array of people in its marketing materials after an engineering degree apprentice told Whittaker: “You don’t see people like me doing that kind of job.”

She added that the government is looking to resume meetings of the network in the next few weeks.

BAME representative groups in the FE and skills sector independent of government have begun to regenerate after a number of them – including the BAME Principals Group – shut down several years ago.

These new groups include the Association of Colleges’ Equality, Diversity and Inclusion steering group, and the Black FE Leadership Group (BFELG).

In reply to a letter from BFELG last month, skills minister Gillian Keegan said it was their “ambition for our FE providers to offer an inclusive, welcoming environment for students, teachers and leaders from all backgrounds”.

She also spoke of how she was “committed to our new mandatory annual data collection in FE, which will uncover the full range



Andy Forbes

of characteristics of the workforce, including ethnicity” from summer 2021.

Someone with intimate knowledge of what the DfE has done to improve BAME participation in apprenticeships is former skills minister Anne Milton.

She said when she was in office “we knew there was a problem”, and she has impressed upon her former department the importance of working quickly, saying: “This is urgent stuff.”

The 5 Cities Project was launched at the DfE while Milton was in office to try and improve BAME apprenticeship participation. A total of £20,000 was given to each of the Greater London Authority, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership, Leicester City Council, and Bristol City Council.

Its aim was to improve apprenticeship diversity in their area, and although latest figures from the five has shown the proportion of BAME apprentices has risen over the past few years, the authorities pointed out apprenticeship starts nationally have dropped, which has meant the number of people from BAME backgrounds starting apprenticeships has not necessarily risen.

In Manchester, for example, 11 per cent of starts in 2014/15 were by people from BAME backgrounds, equating to 3,240 people. In 2018/19, it was 15 per cent, but just 3,116 people.

Funding for the project has now come to an end, but the authorities have pledged to continue attempting to improve BAME apprenticeship participation.

The Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP has said it will be launching a marketing campaign aimed at BAME-owned businesses to highlight the benefits of apprenticeships.

The 5 Cities Project has been received warmly by BAME leaders, with Crook saying his organisation wants to see the project “continued and enhanced with better funding”.

The chief executive of the BAME Apprenticeship Alliance Isa Mutlib said the project “has created regional stakeholders to build capacity for boosting BAME apprenticeship diversity backed with local government funding”.

The DfE spokesperson said: “The lessons learned from this partnership are helping to inform how we shape policy, and what interventions have more impact.”

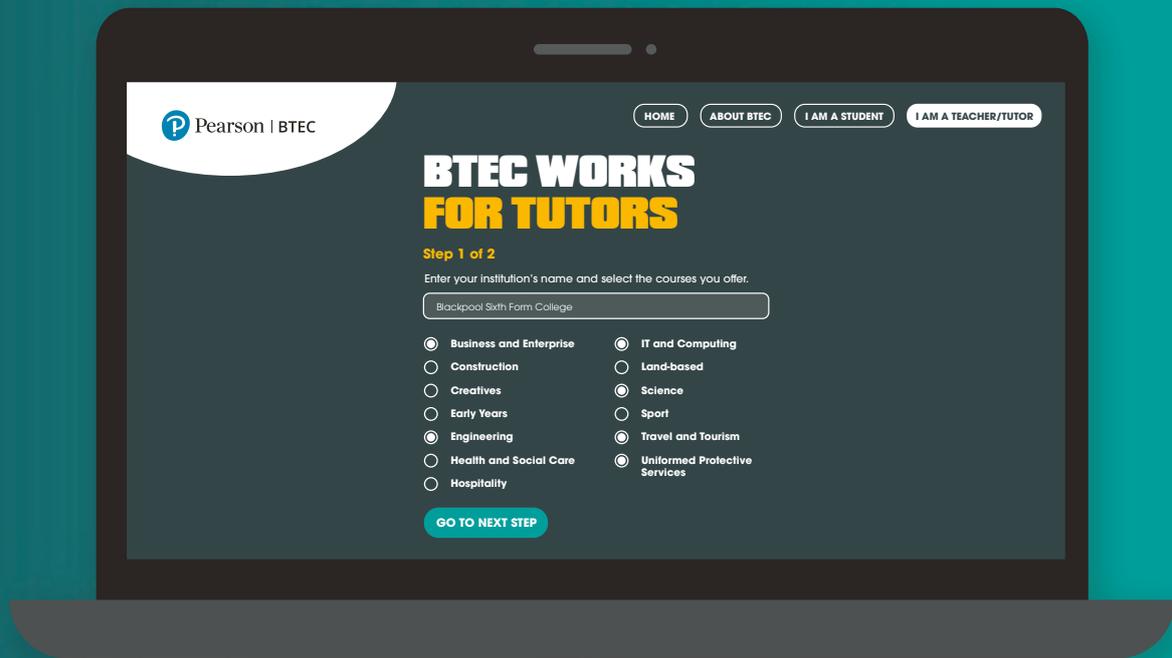
Mutlib spoke favourably of the government’s actions to increase participation, saying the Fire It Up campaign featured a diverse array of apprentices.

In addition, he said, the BAME Apprenticeship Awards, which he directs, receives support from government, and IfATE has a diverse apprentice panel “to boost diverse apprenticeship representation”.

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Share the Love award-winner announced as Colleges Week celebrates the sector

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From front

The winner of the Share the Love (Our Colleges) competition has been announced by the Association of Colleges as a jam-packed Colleges Week 2020 draws to a close.

A heart made of scrap metal, forged at Cornwall College, was picked to win the £500 prize because it "stood out and it was really clear how much time and effort went into creating it," association chief executive David Hughes said.

The competition was sponsored by law firm Irwin Mitchell and called on colleges to produce or perform creations themed around the message "Love Our Colleges".

It drew submissions from around the country, including a Love Our Colleges sign made out of willow and flowers by Wigan and Leigh College, a TikTok dance video from Craven College, and a massive Love Our Colleges made out of sports equipment laid out in Blackburn College's gym.

Cornwall College told *FE Week*, before being announced as the winner, that study programme lead for engineering Darren Reski and his students were "excited" by the task and "quickly" came up with the idea of making a heart from the recycled metal on which they had been practising welding earlier in the week.

"We are always so impressed with our learners when they are set a task or



Emma Thornton and William Davison, Level 2 Engineering at Cornwall College

challenge," the spokesperson said.

"This metal heart symbolises people using new skills, creativity, art, resourcefulness and ultimately, it represents people training for rewarding careers."

This is the third Colleges Week to have taken place, and education Secretary Gavin Williamson took the opportunity to say: "I want to thank college leaders and staff across the country for their dedicated efforts during these unprecedented times. The sector has gone above and beyond to make sure their students are supported, can continue learning and return to onsite delivery."

Shadow education secretary Kate Green used her message for Colleges Week to pay tribute to her local college, Trafford College, sending them her "good wishes" and saying she has had a "great time" visiting them "over the years".

Colleges Week 2020 was also marked with a debate in the House of Commons on "the role of colleges in a skills-led recovery", organised by the chair of the all-party parliamentary group for further education and

lifelong learning, Peter Aldous MP.

"College education is something that we do well in the UK, but at times we unintentionally undervalue our colleges, which are at the heart of so many communities right across the country," Aldous said.

"In 2020, more than ever, colleges have demonstrated their value in supporting learners and businesses to deliver quality learning and training, despite the challenges raised by the Covid-19 pandemic."

MPs from across the political spectrum contributed to the debate, with education select committee chair Robert Halfon heralding this as "a potential golden age for further education", as education secretary Gavin Williamson himself attended a college and made a "ground-breaking" speech on further education.

Halfon also put a motion before the Commons to "recognise the unique role colleges play in supporting people, employers and communities to thrive, and their central role in rebuilding the economy". At the time of writing this motion has been signed by 17 MPs.



Principal Lindsey Johnson featuring in Craven College's TikTok video

Lindsey Johnson
Principal

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News

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Boston College catering student creation



Bedford College principal Ian Pryce



A heart of bricks, made by academy pupils on a taster session at Derwentside College



Bury college patisserie students



Wigan & Leigh College

We cannot lose sight of the long-term unemployed



By Dan Howard, Managing Director, Skills Forward and Operations Director – Learning for Work, NCFE

In October, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) revealed that [the unemployment rate in the UK continues to increase and is at its highest level in three years](#). Many are bracing themselves for a further increase in these figures come 31st October onwards, with the end of the furlough scheme and ongoing local lockdown measures.

Much has been said about the emerging challenge of youth unemployment, the demographic that is the largest and fastest growing. As we now enter the eighth month since the first UK-wide lockdown, there are many who are moving towards the next unwelcome milestone in their unemployment journey: 12 months in and officially part of the 'long-term unemployed'.

I draw this parallel to illustrate that supporting those young people and supporting the long-term unemployed can be clearly interrelated. Long-term unemployment is only 12 months away for anyone, and, if this crisis has taught us anything, there are very few for whom employment is a guarantee.

The impact of long-term unemployment

Long-term unemployment, of course, brings with it other challenges. It has a [negative impact on mental health and self-esteem](#), adding further complexity to the support required. Additionally, studies have shown that unemployment can have intergenerational domino effect with [children from jobless households more likely to experience poverty and be out of work as adults](#). Furthermore, [unemployment has a wider social impact](#) such as the breakdown of family arrangements, debt, homelessness and riskier health behaviour.

Long-term unemployment is a threat to physical and mental health, therefore a threat to our overburdened NHS. It's a threat to our economic recovery and it's a threat to future generations and their own successful outcomes. And, most worryingly, this threat is growing.

The impact of Covid-19 on the existing long-term unemployed

The barriers to employment are increasing as many businesses teeter precariously on the edge meaning fewer job opportunities. On top of this, the pool of unemployed has seen an influx of those who would not otherwise find themselves there. Capable and motivated, with recent experience of the workplace, a fresh appetite and, in some cases, the resources and networks to help them find and obtain employment.

Without the luxury of choice, the newly unemployed are taking roles for which they may be overqualified; an understandable, if not admirable, consequence of the difficulties we're all facing.

Supporting employment professionals

For those who are working on the frontline, my empathy knows no bounds. Having started my own career in the education and skills sector as an Employment Advisor, I understand this intense pressure. You feel as if your advice and support is the crux upon which that person's future is hinged. However, I know that there is no better feeling than the satisfaction you can get from helping someone fulfil their potential and seeing them succeed.

Looking to solutions

As the ability to claim funding is dependent on results, many providers are financially reliant on the success of welfare to work programmes. With this in mind, we need to address what is within the direct control of the provider: the elevation of employability and meta skills within the long-term unemployed through targeted, data-driven interventions. [These transferable skills support jobseekers, regardless of which sector they find themselves in now, and in the future.](#)

Skills Work is an online employability skills test which allows employment professionals to assess an individual's current employability skills and develop these skills with focused eLearning modules. It also forms a key part of NCFE and Skills Forward's Go the Distance initiative – helping people train, find, stay, and progress in work despite the current economic context.

As a sector, together, we can work together to take direct action, to increase positive outcomes and to mitigate the growing threat of long-term unemployment.

Find out more about [Skills Work](#) on the [Skills Forward website](#) and read more about the [Go the Distance employability initiative](#). You can also contact skillswork@skillsforward.co.uk.

Unspent NRS cash will go back to Treasury

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Exclusive

The Department for Education could be forced to hand back up to £80 million to the Treasury after closing the national retraining scheme pilot, *FE Week* has learned.

Skills minister Gillian Keegan last week announced that the retraining scheme would be “integrated” into the new £2.5 billion national skills fund to “reduce complexity” in the skills system.

This publication later revealed how the centrepiece of the national retraining scheme – Get Help to Retrain – would be scrapped as part of the move after a number of mayors, including London’s, declined the opportunity to take part.

FE Week has now discovered that any leftover cash from the £100 million earmarked for the retraining scheme will not be added to the skills fund.

Instead, the DfE Education has confirmed it will go back to HM Treasury.

The DfE refused to say how much of the £100 million remained unspent but the 2018 Budget suggests around £80 million was due to be spent in the next financial year.

The document, published by the Treasury, stated that the retraining scheme’s funding would be spent over a number of years: £10 million in 2019/20, £25 million in 2020/21 and £80 million in 2021/22.

Toby Perkins, Labour’s shadow apprenticeships and lifelong learning minister, said the government continually claims to be wanting a skills-led recovery, but its actions and performance “always achieve the opposite”.

“Like the £300 million of unspent apprenticeship levy money that they sent back to the Treasury, here is another failing government scheme retreating back into its shell whilst the numbers requiring support from the government continue to soar,” he added.



Gillian Keegan

“It’s hardly surprising that so few in the sector have any confidence in their ability to deliver on their rhetoric.”

Perkins quizzed Keegan on the decision to bin the Get Help to Retrain service during a Westminster Hall debate on Tuesday.

She said the “learnings” from the service’s pilot would be brought into the national skills fund but then claimed that it “will be called something else but the learnings will not be lost”.

This is despite the DfE adding a note to the Get Help to Retrain website on October 15 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.”

Perkins told *FE Week* he was “surprised” to hear Keegan suggest that the service was simply changing its name, adding that she “needs to explain whether she deliberately misled the house to cover up the department’s failure, or whether she didn’t realise what was happening to the centrepiece programme under the national retraining scheme”.

Not much is known about how the national retraining scheme funding was spent, aside from research and the Get Help



Toby Perkins

to Retrain 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.

Further 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 was “cancelled” in April.

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

The DfE said it is considering how it can provide further details of the NRS spend in “due course”.

A spokesperson added that it is “normal procedure” for any department-level underspends to be returned to Treasury.

The national skills fund will dish out £600 million a year from 2021/22. The DfE is expected to launch a consultation on how the fund will be spent in the coming months.

DfE researchers call for financial incentive to assess apprentices' prior learning

BILLY CAMDEN
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The government has been urged by its own researchers to stump up funding for assessing prior learning in apprenticeships after providers were found to be struggling with the financial viability of complying with the rule.

It comes as the Department for Education launches a recruitment drive for three new apprenticeship compliance officers, who will focus on specific "key" funding rules, such as recognition of prior learning.

"It may not be in providers' and employers' interests to make adaptations that could lower the price"

Prior learning refers to relevant skills, knowledge and behaviours gained before starting an apprenticeship, and must be taken into account by providers when negotiating a price with an employer to ensure cash is not being claimed unnecessarily.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency, which warns it may "recover funding" where this does not happen, audited a series of providers last year and found the rule was the "main issue causing funding errors".

The approval and funding committee at the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education has also previously "flagged concerns about how best to ensure that prices for apprenticeship training were being appropriately adjusted to take account of

prior learning".

The DfE commissioned the Learning and Work Institute to research the issue last year, the report of which was published on Thursday.

It highlighted two key issues that affect the extent to which prior learning is assessed "consistently and robustly", the first being the "financial viability" for providers to carry out "pre-programme assessments" for which they receive no funding – and "no financial benefit if an individual is found to be ineligible".

The second was that it "may not be in providers' and employers' interests to make adaptations that could lower the price because employers are motivated to use up their levy pot, and providers want to maximise income".

Providers also reported that there was a lack of guidance about how much the apprenticeship cost should be reduced in relation to an apprentice's identified prior learning.

To combat this, the researchers said the DfE "could consider how it can incentivise providers and employers to ensure that assessment of prior learning is carried out properly, for example, by making funding available for this".

In addition, or alternatively, the department "could consider how to improve compliance with funding rules, for example, through more visible audit of proof of assessment and adjustments from the ESFA".

FE Week reported in September 2019 how the ESFA was bolstering its compliance and prevention teams by hiring almost 30 individuals to work in the agency's provider market oversight division, led by Matthew Atkinson.

Three new apprenticeship compliance officer posts are currently being advertised by the ESFA, the adverts for which state their specific "areas of focus" will include "thematic reviews" of off-the-job training and recognition of prior learning. They will also "increase oversight of employer compliance".

The Learning and Work Institute's research involved qualitative interviews with 30 levy-paying employers, 25 apprenticeship providers and 25 apprentices.

A DfE spokesperson said: "Assessment of prior learning is an important part of an apprenticeship, ensuring that the training is relevant and valuable to the apprentice and their employer. We continue to consider options that strengthen the assessment process."



What Ofsted found in the first 10 'interim visits' of FE providers

BILLY CAMDEN

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Virtual work placements, redesigned curriculums for practical courses and borrowing prosthetic limbs are among the creative adjustments made by FE providers to continue education in the midst of a pandemic, Ofsted has found.

The inspectorate this week published letters from the first ten "interim visits" of colleges and training providers that are taking place this autumn ahead of the watchdog's return to normal inspections, currently set for January.

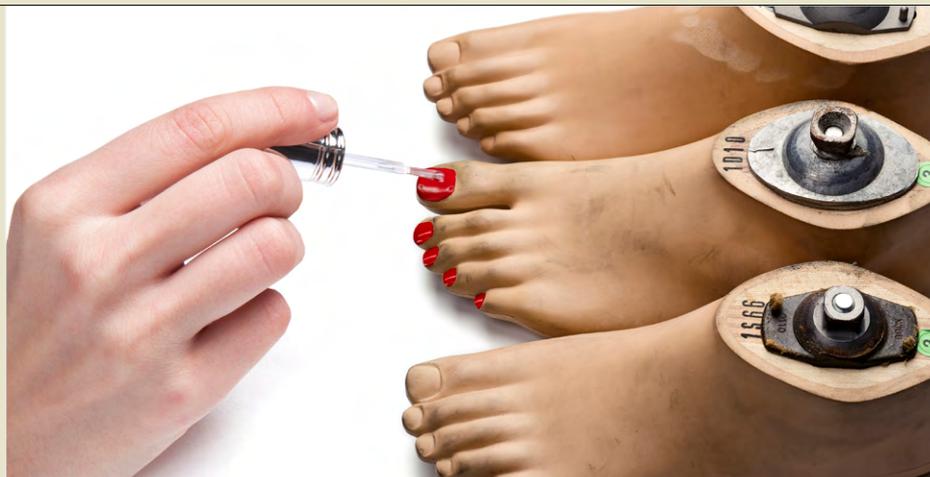
The five-page letters include inspectors' findings from interviews with both leaders and learners about the provider's response to Covid-19, but do not include a judgment grade.

Mental health has reportedly deteriorated among young people during lockdown, according to various pieces of research conducted across the country, and this was a key area of focus found by Ofsted among the ten providers.

Inspectors said this was a "high priority" at Blackpool and the Fylde College, for example, which introduced "online social time" so that students and staff do not suffer from social isolation, while counselling support was increased at Birmingham Metropolitan College.

Private provider Intuitions Limited, based in north Yorkshire, conducted "wellbeing meetings in between reviews to identify those who were most vulnerable in terms of mental health, and they offered support by telephone". Meanwhile, staff at London-based independent specialist college The Autism Project – CareTrade organised a "variety of online wellbeing support for learners who struggle with being stuck at home" such as "quizzes and social gatherings via computers or mobile phones".

In terms of the curriculum, Ofsted found leaders at most providers had modified sequencing due to restrictions, such as by reordering practical elements to be taken at the end of a course in anticipation for local lockdowns where theory can be delivered



online.

At Blackburn College, which this week moved into tier three (the top level of England's Covid restrictions), inspectors said: "In anticipation of further local restrictions, managers and teachers have amended the sequencing of the curriculum to ensure that the practical skills are delivered early in the programme.

"This is as a result of lessons learned during the summer term Covid-19 restrictions, where learners studying sports were unable to complete their practical assessments in sports halls and gyms because they were closed."

Ofsted said the college is "confident" that it has a "variety of flexible approaches" to enable it to continue to deliver practical curriculums. For example, teachers have provided prosthetic limbs for beauty therapy learners so that they can practise manicures and pedicures at home.

Work placements have also been heavily impacted by the pandemic, with many sectors, particularly health and social care, not allowing visitors except their own employees.

To tackle this issue, a number of the providers that Ofsted visited introduced virtual placements.

For example, managers and staff at WS Training Ltd, a Suffolk-based independent training provider, explained how they had been "running an online shop, rather than a physical one".

At Catch 22 Charity Limited, a provider based in London, staff now "make use of a virtual

work experience arrangement provided by an employment agency, where students complete work-related tasks that they can do from home".

At The Autism Project – CareTrade, where a "high proportion" of learners' time is normally spent on work placements at local hospitals, leaders and staff have "adapted the curriculum by adding lessons in business enterprise, through which learners develop their ability to work in a team and use their knowledge of English and mathematics".

Ofsted also quizzed the providers on their work to keep students safe online following the switch to remote delivery.

All ten providers were praised for their work in this area, with inspectors finding bolstered training for staff and a range of safety software being introduced to protect learners from online fraud, cyber bullying and extremism.

Inspectors found that Beacon Education Partnership Limited, a private provider in London, had introduced a new video conferencing package which has "improved safeguarding" by, for example, only allowing learners to access online lessons "with an identification code for the session".

At Catch 22, leaders said "organisations, such as Social Switch, were useful in training teachers, trainers and students how to share text and images safely when learning through digital media".

You can find links to all ten reports by visiting <https://bit.ly/3m5YZEU>.

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DfE seeks Parliamentary Bill team ahead of FE white paper

FRASER WHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The Department for Education is assembling a new team of legislators to implement education secretary Gavin Williamson's "ambitious vision" for reform in the upcoming FE white paper.

Job adverts went out earlier this month for two officers, one senior officer, one lead and one manager for a parliamentary team to work on the new bill that has been labelled Williamson's "top priority" and one that will have "a lot" of interest from Downing Street.

Under the auspices of the department's Higher and Further Education Group, successful applicants, the adverts read, will have an "exciting, challenging and high-profile new role" working with senior leaders "on an ambitious reform programme".

"You will work with and support the department, special advisers and ministers through the parliamentary handling of a bill with a lot of interest from No 10," it continues.

Salaries will range from £29,363 for bill officers to £61,014 for the bill manager. All the roles are on fixed-term contracts, set to end in August 2022.

Responsibilities for the roles will include briefing ministers to take the bill through parliament, overseeing parliamentary intelligence and communications, and coordinating the FE Reform Parliamentary Ambassadors – MPs who were appointed by education secretary Gavin Williamson earlier this year to champion his reform plans.

Criteria for the bill team ranges between roles, but the lead and manager adverts are looking for applicants "adept in influencing colleagues and negotiating solutions to

problems" and with "expertise in building influential and trusted relationships across Whitehall and parliament".

The much-anticipated FE white paper is set to launch this autumn and is expected to include major changes to government powers over colleges and to how provision is arranged across the sector.

The Department for Education confirmed this week that the white paper will be published "later this year", despite concerns it could be delayed following the Treasury's decision to hold a one-year, rather than multi-year, spending review in November.

Prime minister Boris Johnson has often highlighted further education reform as one his government's top priorities and brought in sector expert Professor Alison Wolf earlier this year from King's College to advise Number 10 on FE policy for three days a week.

Federation of Awarding Bodies appoints a pair of chairs

BILLY CAMDEN
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Exclusive

Two well-known sector leaders have been appointed co-chairs of the Federation of Awarding Bodies.

Kirstie Donnelly, chief executive of the City & Guilds Group, and Alan Woods, chief executive of the Vocational Training Charitable Trust (VTCT), will take up the posts at the membership organisation's next annual general meeting on December 8.

They will replace Paul Eeles and Terry Fennell, the current chair and vice-chair of FAB respectively, who are retiring from the roles, having each served two terms spanning the past seven years.

A joint letter to members from Donnelly and Woods said the decision by FAB's board to appoint co-chairs was "innovative" and one that was taken because the "breadth of engagement required as we face the future is probably beyond what is possible for one

chair and a vice chair".

The co-chairs, along with chief executive Tom Bewick, will spearhead FAB's input in the upcoming FE white paper, level 3 and below reviews, T Levels, apprenticeships, higher technical qualification expansion, as well as the organisation's "highly complex" relationship with regulators such as Ofqual.

A joint statement from Donnelly and Woods said their appointment comes at a time when further education is "at last centre-stage in our national story about how we build a more prosperous, productive and inclusive economy in future" and their task is to "listen to and work with FAB's entire membership to chart the best way forward."

"We're already planning a series of virtual 'Town Halls' with members and key

stakeholders in the New Year."

Donnelly, who is a frequent keynote speaker at various FE conferences including *FE Week's* Annual Apprenticeship Conference, stepped up to the role of chief executive of City & Guilds in January after eight years as managing director.

She was awarded an MBE in 2011 – the same year she joined City & Guilds from the now-defunct Learndirect – for services to e-learning.

Woods joined VTCT in 2016 as chief executive after running his own company consulting on apprenticeships and learning,

and previously, leading Skills for Justice – a sector skills council.

He was appointed OBE in 2004 for services to sustainable development and is currently also the vice-chair of Walsall College.



Alan Woods and Kirstie Donnelly

Gateshead College to remain standalone after merger snub

FRASER WHIELDON
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Exclusive

Bids from two north-east colleges to merge with an embattled neighbour have been snubbed by the FE commissioner.

FE Week understands that Newcastle College and Tyne Coast College were both in the frame to amalgamate with Gateshead College, which has been undergoing a structure and prospects appraisal with the FE commissioner after a £6 million black hole was found in its books.

But the FE commissioner has now recommended to the government that a merger is taken off the table and the appraisal has instead concluded that Gateshead should remain standalone.

Following the news, NCG, which runs Newcastle College, said it wants to see Gateshead "go from strength to strength" and that it looks forward to "being able to work with Gateshead, both as a respected neighbour and as a community of excellent FE practitioners".

Tyne Coast refused to comment.

A Department for Education spokesperson said the recommendation awaits ministerial sign-off and is subject to a series of conditions – which

they would not disclose.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency and the FE commissioner, Richard Atkins, would "continue to work closely with the college to monitor progress and support a long-term sustainable solution to provide high-quality opportunities for learners," the spokesperson added.

Gateshead said it was "delighted" with the recommendation, which "is not only good news for all our staff and students but also our regional partners, who wanted us to remain an independent college.

"Whilst we don't underestimate the hard work that lies ahead, this shows confidence in our ability to deliver the recovery plan and recognises everyone's efforts to maintain a high-quality teaching and learning experience for all of our students throughout this challenging time."

Gateshead College had to call in forensic auditors after discovering in October 2019 that it would have a £6 million deficit in its 2018/19 financial statements.

The FE commissioner conducted an assessment of the college in December 2019 and found 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 contract".

Gateshead had, in fact, been in deficit for years, but this had been disguised by a misstatement of certain bills, reads the commissioner's report.

The deficit had been worsened by "incorrect" budgeting of around 40 per cent for subcontracting costs, which was a "major" cause of the size of the deficit.

The DfE delayed the publication of FE commissioner report because of the Covid-19 pandemic, so the assessment of Gateshead was only published earlier this month.

In a letter accompanying Atkins' report dated from July, skills minister Gillian Keegan said:

"It is clear that significant failures in leadership and governance have allowed for the serious deterioration of the college's financial position."

Principal Judith Doyle, once the highest-paid in the country, resigned from the college in January, followed by the chair, John McCabe, that same month.

Trouble-shooter Andy Cole is now running the college, with former Middlesbrough College principal John Hogg as chair, and a financial recovery plan has been developed.

Atkins' report shone a light on how remuneration for senior leaders and postholders had included an annual pay award "significantly" in excess of that paid to college staff, and that pay rises for senior management were given without regular performance review or appraisals.

GB Met plans manager clear-out

BILLY CAMDEN
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Exclusive

A college surviving on bailout funding is seeking to balance the books with a management clear-out.

Twenty managers who currently cover ten roles at Greater Brighton Metropolitan College (GB Met) were informed this week that they are at risk of redundancy.

No teaching or back office jobs are currently affected.

GB Met triggered formal FE commissioner

intervention earlier this year after it was granted an undisclosed amount of emergency funding from the government and its then-chief executive, Nick Juba, quit.

The college, which was formed by the merger of City College Brighton and Northbrook College in 2017, said its income has fallen "significantly" in the period post-merger and this has then been exacerbated by the impact of Covid-19.

Andy Green has been seconded from Chichester College Group to lead GB Met while a new permanent chief executive is found and is attempting to find savings through a restructure.

A spokesperson told FE Week: "The college has launched a consultation to restructure the leadership of the organisation to save significant

costs and align its resources with the needs of a college of this size.

"The proposed structure is in line with the college's aspirations both to recover its financial position and to improve the quality of the student experience.

"GB MET needs a strong and agile leadership team to lead it through the period of recovery. This is a difficult time for staff at risk but GB Met is committed to securing its future as a provider of outstanding education, meeting the needs of its local communities. To reach this goal, costs need to be saved and this is why a leadership restructure is required and being implemented."

The spokesperson said there was "no specific planned saving amount" from this restructure.

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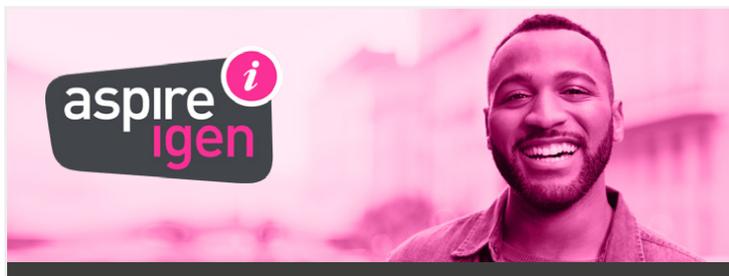
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Assessment/interviews 6 November 2020

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Interview

MARK DAWE

Chief executive officer,
The Skills Network



**'I have a view on how
I can stay on in a role.
If not, I move on'**

JL DUTAUT
JL.DUTAUT@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The new head of the Skills Network reveals the family and personal influences behind his career to JL Dutaut

Mark Dawe is a hard man to pin down. Just 18 months ago, the then boss of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) was opening the FE Week apprenticeships

conference with critical comments about subcontracting. "Its use as an income source for the lead provider with little benefit to the employer or learner certainly shouldn't be accepted," he then said.

Since this August though, Dawe finds himself at the head a large and well-established subcontractor. The Skills Network works, he tells me, with over 300 colleges, some 40 of them on subcontracting terms. The rest are buying in blended learning solutions, among other services.

But there is no dissonance in that for Dawe. He still holds his long-standing policy positions, advocating for a national cap of 20 per cent on management fees and clear sector guidelines. "I'm a great believer that if what's expected is clearly defined – the quality mechanisms that should be in place, the monitoring, as much for the prime [the college] as the subcontractor – you can get really, really good delivery for those learners."

But Dawe stops short of calling for regulation beyond the management fee cap. "When we've

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had issues like Brooklands College, that absolutely shouldn't have happened, but under any rules, it should never have got to that place."

“Under any rules, Brooklands should never have got to that place”

Brooklands was placed in “supervised college status” by the ESFA and underwent an FE commissioner review a year ago after it was revealed by FE Week that it had handed over £20 million to shadowy subcontractors who had failed to deliver the goods. For Dawe though, it seems, supply and demand should bring about the improvements needed to prevent another Brooklands-type scandal.

“I worked with The Skills Network when I was at AELP, helping put together what good practice looks like in subcontracting.” He goes on to list a number of ways the organisation holds itself accountable to the colleges it works with. It’s clear from his answer that he feels that if more subcontractors held themselves to higher standards, an element of self-regulation would make providers such as SCL Security Ltd, the company that

received the £20 million from Brooklands, unmarketable to colleges.

But that’s the system as it is, and Dawe is more inclined to push for a substantial rethink of that system – one that sees colleges hold the purse strings and relies on their procurement acuity to deliver for students. Picking up on Boris Johnson’s announcement last month of a lifetime skills guarantee, extending to all adults the free first level three qualification that was previously restricted to under-23s, Dawe says: “If there was a more flexible approach to the funding, you wouldn’t need subcontracting. Something like 80 to 90 per cent of the national AEB [adult education budget] is grant-funded. Boris’s announcement is the beginning of skills accounts, as far as I can see. That puts the purchasing power in the individual’s hands, and then lets them choose which provider gives them what’s best.”

Two months into his new role, Dawe is already looking past the status quo – not just to a realignment of its priorities but of the sector as a whole. No doubt, his far-sightedness about the sector’s direction of travel was an attractive proposition for The Skills Network. So must his track record have been. Yet his appointment surely involved a calculated risk too; the very traits that make him a leader with vision also make him something of a non-conformist.

Raised in Bromley in Kent and educated at the private Trinity School in Croydon, Dawe had a privileged upbringing. From Trinity, he hopped to Cambridge for a degree in economics and then to KPMG. Already, the choice of degree and profession was something of an



Hosting the AAC Apprenticeships Awards earlier this year

act of rebellion. Dawe’s grandfather was a headteacher. His father was a senior civil servant with the DfE and Harold Wilson’s private secretary at Number 10. His uncle was a lecturer in FE. And if education hadn’t percolated, his mother was a nurse who today still volunteers in hospices. The family was ostensibly well embedded in the public sector, an ethos that can’t have failed to permeate the home environment.

But another influence came to bear on Dawe’s teenage years. Washing cars and gardening for pocket money, one day a neighbour and family friend invited him in to help him with his tax return instead. “And so I went indoors, was given a cup of tea and a Kit Kat, with Big Daddy wrestling on the telly, with a calculator doing these VAT returns for him. That was the moment I thought ‘This is it. This is me.’”

Warmth, tea and a pay rise helped, but Dawe still says he was “destined to be an accountant”. He remembers with evident excitement when his new employer got one of the first spreadsheet programmes to run on a personal computer – SuperCalc. “I learned how to use it and taught him, but then I used to do all his projections for all his clients when I was aged 14



Mark in his school days



Mark and his dad at an event in Portcullis House

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and even then earning £5 an hour!"

But the family influence ran deeper than perhaps the rebellious young Dawe had realised, and it wasn't long after joining KPMG that he changed tack. "I had a look up above

“When I joined, the employer was king and the provider was pushed to one side”

me and it was ten years of tedious work to become a partner and I thought 'Time to get out.'" It was 1993. Colleges were being incorporated and looking for accountants. Dawe made the jump. "I cut my teeth down at Canterbury College for seven years working for Sue Pember. We did all sorts of exciting stuff: building new colleges and prison education and a whole range of things like that." Ironically, it wasn't until he received a funding letter for Canterbury with his dad's signature at the bottom that he realised the import of the work he did. "I genuinely had no idea. That was the first time I realised the connection between the job I just got and what my dad was doing."

From Canterbury, Dawe moved on to his first dalliance with e-learning as group education director for eGS, a company founded by Labour MP Liam Byrne. Three years later, he

found himself working with Pember again, this time at the DfES on the adult basic skills and further education strategies. Another three years later, he turned his back on national strategy to get stuck into local implementation as the principal and chief executive of Oaklands College in Hertfordshire.

"To be fair to the governors, they took a risk with me," he says. "I think I was against four other existing principals." That risk paid off. Within five years, Oaklands had gone from 'unsatisfactory' to "solid 'good'". That mission accomplished, Dawe sat down with the governors to talk about his vision for the next phase. "I wanted to bring Hertfordshire together as one college. We had very open discussions, but they weren't really up for it."

A pattern emerges, and Dawe is frank about his "five-year cycle". He joins with a vision, delivers the goods, stays long enough to be held accountable and then: "I have a view on how I could stay on in a role," he says, "and if not, I agree to move on."

Five years at Oaklands were followed by five years as chief executive of OCR at the time Ofqual was being created and "sharpening its teeth and claws". Of the current exam travails, he says: "You can never do an excellent job in the exam board, because everyone just expects you to perform well. But anything that goes wrong is a massive negative because it affects people's lives."

After OCR, a short stint working with the



Mark and Boris Johnson, then shadow HE minister, at Oaklands

FE commissioner's office under Sir David Collins led him to the AELP job. "When I joined, membership was down about 500. AELP was known but not listened to as much as it should be. It was just a year before the levy was being introduced and the board was very keen to have someone to drive the AELP agenda." He describes a period when "the employer was king and the provider was pushed to one side" and "public battles because we weren't getting anywhere in private conversations".

In August, he left an organisation with a renewed membership and a reinvigorated voice in the sector. But for all the battles over that period, the real breakthrough, he says, came with Covid. "It was like a 180-degree shift almost overnight. I had people calling me who had refused to take my calls for the previous four years."

The calls came because AELP had grown into its position and was ready to receive them, testament to another transformative half-decade.

It's a truism to say that nobody knows what the sector will look like post-Covid and post-Brexit. And it's probably not even all that true. Taking Dawe's far-sightedness and his move to The Skills Network into account, it's clear that blended learning and independent provision are likely to be key battlegrounds.

And Dawe is ready for those fights. You won't pin him to a clear career trajectory, but you can certainly pin him to that.



Mark and his family in 2009

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SARAH STANNARD

Principal and chief executive, City College Southampton



The DfE's college merger process seriously 'requires improvement'

These are three steps the government could take to ensure no other college has to endure the protracted process we have, writes Sarah Stannard

As you may expect of the principal of a college on the road to merger for five years now, I have strong views about mergers.

You may suppose that after such prolonged uncertainty I would think mergers are a bad thing - but that's not the case.

I have worked in colleges (and companies) during and after mergers. Although there are challenges to doing the process well and making the new organisation effective, I think mergers are a positive way to resolve many issues.

That's particularly true when policy and funding changes mean colleges become too small to exist as individual institutions. Mergers can allow further education colleges to respond to changing circumstances and continue to meet the needs of the communities we serve.

In Southampton and the surrounding area, it has been clear for a long time that the existing further education eco-system is unsustainable.

When I took up my post in 2013, it was in the knowledge that there were a lot of small and medium-size colleges competing in the same area. In fact, there are eight colleges within 15 miles of the city centre.

Local stakeholders (governors,



MPs, the city council and the local enterprise partnership) all agree that so many colleges close together have an overall negative effect - with destructive competition resulting in too many financially weak institutions.

Totton College was the first institution to need significant intervention and since then, City College Southampton and others have needed financial support or FE commissioner intervention.

So the case for City College's merger within this local ecosystem is understood and supported by stakeholders, the ESFA and the FE commissioner.

Why, then, after five years has it not happened? And how could the situation be improved, so that no other college has to suffer such a protracted process as we have?

To summarise, we have undergone three separate merger proposals. First was a proposal from Solent University, which was refused by the Department for Education because of concerns about the suggested governance

model and not being value for money. Second came a proposal from Eastleigh College which was refused as also not being value for money. Most recently a proposal from Itchen College was refused due to concern that it would not create a financially viable college.

“Why, after five years, has a merger still not happened?”

A major issue for us has been the very slow pace of the proposal process and decision-making. It was 18 months from the local area review's recommendation for the first merger to the DfE's final refusal, eight months from the second and 12 months from the third.

This has resulted in years of uncertainty for staff and students. Will they be here next year, they

wonder? Governors, leaders and staff have been astonishingly resilient and in a recent survey, 97 per cent said they are proud to work at the college. But it must not be assumed that this precariousness hasn't had an impact on us.

Clearly, deciding about merger proposals is complex, but here is what I would do to improve the situation:

1. Ensure strong project management of merger proposals through them being owned by a single DfE team that would be accountable for progress and bringing processes to a timely conclusion.
2. Second a DfE expert full-time (perhaps from the FE commissioner's team) to the merging colleges to work with them on the proposal. This would ensure the DfE's success criteria are fully understood by all parties and that there should be no nasty late surprises. More capacity and merger expertise would also be available to the bidding colleges, which they may not otherwise have.
3. Set a clear timeline for the proposal's submission, with deadlines along the way so all concerned know what progress has been made and can address issues as they arise, not at the last minute.

In the meantime... I look forward to our next merger being swift and positive.

TERESA CARROLL

National head of inclusion, the Education and Training Foundation (ETF)



After Black Lives Matter, it's time FE led the way on inclusion

FE has some of the most diverse classrooms around and should be setting an example when it comes to representation, writes Teresa Carroll

Teaching and learning at its best should reflect the diversity of our learners' worlds. Covid-19 has brought into focus the disparity in learners' experiences from a social and economic perspective. Meanwhile, movements such as Black Lives Matter have highlighted that systems in Britain (sometimes unintentionally) can default to a white, middle-class, heterosexual, ableist norm that fails to acknowledge the full range of our society.

We want learners in FE to see themselves in the curriculum and in the workforce too. Learning is about enriching lives so that learners can become the people they want to be. A learning experience underpinned by "if you can see it, you can be it" makes this much more likely.

That means that we want our learners to be taught more often by people who look and sound like them. But our most recent staff individualised record report, which brought together findings from 186 FE providers, outlines that the 84 per cent of the staff workforce identify as white British; 81 per cent reporting having no disability and 81 per cent identify as heterosexual.

Meanwhile, the workforce is predominantly female, at 64 per

cent, and the average age is 46 years old.

That's before we even consider FE staff who experience intersectionality of identities, such as being both black and disabled.

Only by fully acknowledging and embracing diversity in all its forms can the FE sector go some way to narrowing the achievement gap in the classroom.

FE is especially well placed to do this, as many colleges have some of the most diverse classrooms in the education system – across age, socio-economic background and ethnicity.

According to the Association of Colleges, 16 per cent of 16- to 18-year-olds claimed free school meals at age 15 last year, compared with just eight per cent in maintained school and academy sixth forms.

Meanwhile, about 17 per cent of college learners have a learning difficulty, disability or difference, compared with about 15 per cent in schools.

We also know that more than

30 per cent of people who enter the prison system have a learning disability or difficulty. This isn't good enough.

"An inclusive learning experience is one that is emotionally nurturing"

Much more needs to be done. For instance, in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM), there is evidence that inequity begins early and becomes more pronounced along the educational journey. Male learners outnumber female learners in STEM apprenticeships by 9:1.

Meanwhile, around 27 per cent of young carers experience educational difficulties, including disrupted school or college attendance – a figure that rises to 40 per cent where children care for a relative with drug or

alcohol problems.

At the other end of the age spectrum, 99,000 college students are aged 60 and over and we want to make sure that there are opportunities to harness their skills. What are we doing to support them in their next career move?

Finally, almost one-third of adults in FE colleges are from an ethnic minority background, and about a quarter of students aged 16 to 18 are.

So serious work still needs to be done to help teachers challenge stereotypes and avoid reinforcing inequity.

An inclusive learning experience is one that is emotionally nurturing, where learners feel they belong and are valued for who they are, including through the way we listen to them.

We want teaching and learning to be a truly positive experience where learners and staff recognise that learning is about so much more than qualification attainment.

A curriculum that reflects the diversity of modern Britain, and particularly draws on theory and practice from a diverse range of academics, will go some way to engage learners with content that is relevant to their lives.

And remember, it's important to remember that every learner is different and learns differently. Get to know your learners – if we take the time to listen we have so much to learn from them.



CLARE HATTON

Head of skills and delivery, West Midlands combined authority



Here's what we learnt from running digital bootcamps

Bootcamps are a step in the right direction – but lessons need to be learned from pilots like ours, writes Clare Hatton

The prime minister's recent funding announcement for digital skills "bootcamps", which will deliver short IT courses to boost employability, forms part of the government's commitment to improve the UK's digital capabilities and to "build back better" from coronavirus.

These bootcamps are being built on pilot programmes run in my combined authority, which represents 12 local authorities and three local enterprise partnerships, as well as in Greater Manchester and other established providers.

But there are lessons that should be learned from our "Beat the Bots" programme in the West Midlands Combined Authority, especially around responding to regional demands.

Introduced in 2019, Beat the Bots was designed for two groups: unemployed people in need of skills and training, and employed people in low-wage markets and at risk of automation.

We have worked with 20 providers, including colleges, training providers and new organisations such as School of Code and refugee help organisation ACH.

Through full- and part-time bootcamps we covered everything from coding, software development, data engineering, web design and infrastructure with learners.



The first bootcamps have engaged 800 residents, of whom about half were unemployed when they came to us. The majority are still in training, with the aim of getting 70 per cent into jobs upon completion.

So far we have supported 100 of the 107 previously unemployed people who finished the bootcamps into meaningful employment and directed more women and people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds into the sector.

We are now considering how to use the additional £1.5 million funding to expand our offer and hopefully share what we have learnt.

For those authorities introducing bootcamps, here are some words of wisdom:

1. Work with diverse organisations to attract different groups of people. This will enable you to engage more people with special educational needs, BAME communities, refugees, older people and women.
2. Develop an employer-based approach. Employer-led projects and masterclasses allowed us

to look beyond qualifications to develop the training to deliver the skills employers actually need. The result is a programme that employers can reliably recruit from.

3. Focus on your region. Co-designed programmes aren't feasible if you use a national one-size-fits-all approach. Working with local employers provides a clearer route to employment and reflects

"We are calling for the devolution of the National Skills Fund"

regional nuances.

4. Warm the market. Leverage existing relationships by involving both training providers and employers in conversations about the programme's development to create a more cohesive offering. But also take care to avoid conflicts of interest, given the competitive procurement landscape.

5. Attract expertise. Trainers must be experts in their field and have up-to-date market experience. The additional money to hire these trainers may pose a challenge for some colleges.

More broadly, we would also recommend undertaking reviews of contracting models used. Because we were in a pilot phase, we were able to experiment with smaller grants rather than contract for service and sub-contracting models, in order to minimise and share delivery risk.

But the recently announced funding is limited to using a more standard contracting model, so it would be worthwhile considering joint ventures to provide a degree of flexibility for providers.

At the WMCA, meanwhile, we need to roll the bootcamp into our education budget, to ensure these bootcamps don't end with the pilot.

Finally, these bootcamps can only be successful through a regional and skills-based approach – and that's why we are calling for the devolution of the National Skills Fund.

Rather than funding being distributed nationally through the DfE, we believe it needs to go directly to combined authorities in the same way as the adult education budget.

The digital bootcamps are a step in the right direction, but the bootcamps must be managed and funded at a regional level. Then they can really help create a talent pipeline for the 21st century.

MARGUERITE HOGG

Policy Development Adviser, Association of Colleges

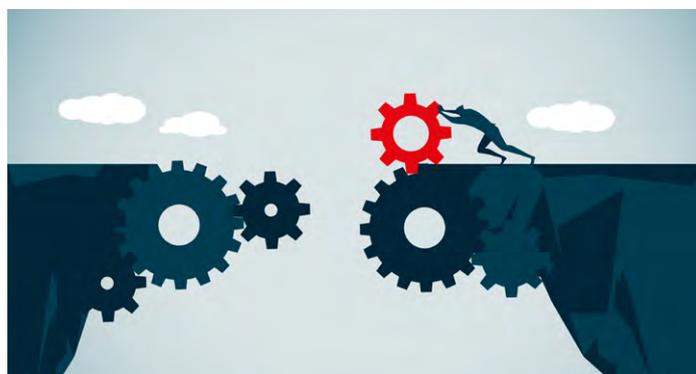


Colleges have key role to play in maximising SME innovation

The post-Covid business recovery is going to rely on innovation as never before. And this is where FE colleges will prove crucial, says Marguerite Hogg

Earlier this year during lockdown, the Association of Colleges ran the first home learning webinars, where colleges and technology providers shared advice and ideas about online teaching and learning. What was apparent was not only how quickly the sector adapted to partial closure but how much excellent and innovative online practice was already in place. Colleges find ways to innovate every day. As the UK continues to grapple with Covid-19, never has there been a more crucial time to cement the link between colleges, innovation and business.

During the summer the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) released the results of its UK Innovation Survey 2019. It is impossible to read the survey findings without thinking about how productivity, skills and the labour market run in parallel. The results showed an 11 percentage point decrease in innovation activity within UK businesses, down to 38 per cent, and the perhaps unsurprising outcome that large businesses are more likely to have innovated than small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs). The average college works with hundreds of local SMEs and trains 1,300 apprentices. While the



BEIS survey reported that there is some collaboration with higher education institutions, there is an untapped resource available in colleges.

We ran our own survey in the summer to gauge what colleges are doing to support innovation growth and development with SMEs and businesses in their local areas. Colleges are well-placed to help their network of local SMEs, who do not always have the connections or capacity to adopt and benefit from new technology and business practices in order to improve their own productivity. There are mutual benefits of innovation activity with SMEs as shared knowledge can be brought into the curriculum to directly support and improve the employability skills of students and apprentices.

Currently, a lack of capital funding limits colleges from developing specific innovation spaces within colleges and a lack of financial support stops them from being able to fund business innovation account managers to work with SMEs along with time

constraints.

If, in the FE Reform white paper, the government sets out a national remit for colleges to lead in this space, along with the provision of support in capital and revenue funding, this will be a significant leap forward. We would also recommend that better collaboration between further education colleges in local areas should be encouraged in order to share best practice. Equally important, colleges need to secure resources to enable time alleviation, giving college staff the time and space to engage in innovation development and research activities.

The BEIS report reveals that one of the success factors for those businesses that actively innovate is the higher number of employees who hold a degree or higher-level qualification in comparison to those non-innovating businesses. In fact, according to the survey results, the ratio of higher skilled/qualified employees to lower skilled employees is slightly higher for SMEs than it is for large businesses. There's huge

opportunity to look at skills at levels 3 to 5 and how they may be equally useful, and the role colleges play in training at these levels and at higher levels.

Prior to the Covid-19 outbreak, the UK government was turning towards its ambitious "levelling-up" agenda. Colleges, as community hubs, play a central role in ensuring that no one is left behind. The AoC's recently published bi-annual research shows that 68 per cent of SMEs have said that to both "thrive and survive", skills must be a top priority.

"Currently, a lack of capital funding limits colleges from developing specific innovation spaces"

We've already seen colleges innovating swiftly in response to Covid-19, for example, by producing 3D printed face shields for the NHS. Time and time again colleges prove themselves to be responsive, innovative and resilient. A national innovation remit for FE, appropriately resourced, won't help the country just in times of crisis but in times of stability, growth and opportunity, enabling colleges to lead in this space to initiate a place-based business and skills innovation revolution.

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READER'S REPLY

Flagship retraining service scrapped after pilot flopped

Looks like the DfE retraining service needs to errrr...retrain

Aidan Worsley, Twitter

Yet another example of monumental govt waste on politicians' vanity projects. Other than .gov.uk can we ban future taxpayer expenditure on these hopeless skills websites please? They never work.

Tom Bewick, Twitter

CBI calls time on 'failed' apprenticeship levy

In industries that are heavily production focused with a commitment to vocational and technical qualifications, the 20 per cent off-job training killed it dead. Made it a complete non-starter as many companies have reduced headcount to the bare minimum, [so] there was simply no way they had the resources to cover the number of hours an apprentice would be paid for but not working.

Gavin Brain, website

End-point assessments could be scrapped for up to 30 apprenticeships

Common sense at last – there was always a risk a nurse apprentice could finish their degree, which then permits them to register with the Nursing and Midwifery Council and not do the EPA. These apprentices are on a

REPLY OF THE WEEK

Flagship retraining service scrapped after pilot flopped



Quite disgraceful and another shambles from the Department for Education. And what will be the independent mechanisms to ensure the money from this failed initiative is actually used to boost the trumpeted National Skills Fund, as opposed to quietly being absorbed, giving no extra funding for retraining?

Gordon Marsden, Twitter

heavily regulated pathways that have external examiner quality assurance processes at every assessment period (not just at the end of the programme) three times a year, plus progression boards to move from one year to the next.

Deb, website



Once again, government spending too much time and money on something assessors have been doing for years

Jo Aylward, Facebook



Good news. A money spinner. Would like the external verifier system back.

Maria Parker, Facebook

Bulletin

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John Cope

Non-executive board member, Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education

Start date November 2020

Concurrent job

Director of strategy, policy and public affairs, UCAS

Interesting fact

He once backpacked from one side of Mexico to the other

Movers & Shakers

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

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



Nigel Smalley

Director of learning for construction and engineering, Bournemouth & Poole College

Start date October 2020

Previous role

Curriculum manager for construction and engineering, Newbury College

Interesting fact

While serving in the army he took part in campaigns such as Bosnia and Northern Ireland



Dayle Bayliss

Non-executive board member, Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education

Start date November 2020

Concurrent job

Chartered building surveyor and director, Dayle Bayliss Ltd

Interesting fact

She enjoys growing and cooking her own food with her family



Kirstie Donnelly

Co-chair, Federation of Awarding Bodies

Start date December 2020

Concurrent job

Chief executive, City & Guilds Group

Interesting fact

She once gate-crashed a Gloria Estefan birthday party in Miami (by accident) many years ago and managed to stay the whole evening!



Alan Woods

Co-chair, Federation of Awarding Bodies

Start date December 2020

Concurrent job

Chief executive, Vocational Training Charitable Trust

Interesting fact

He delivered five babies while working for the London Ambulance Service

Got a story?



Get in touch.

FEWEEK

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