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£3.5M SAUDI EXIT DIVIDEND FUNDS PAY AWARD AND SETTLES ESFA DEBT AT Highbury College



EXCLUSIVE

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LOCKDOWN LETDOWN

- Health and safety of students and staff being put at risk so colleges should be closed wherever possible, says teaching union
- But principal says colleges are Covid-secure and claims evidence shows emotional impact of isolation is more profound than virus

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UCU slams decision not to close colleges during Lockdown 2

BILLY CAMDEN

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From front

A teaching union has accused the government of putting staff and student safety "at risk" by keeping colleges open during November's national lockdown and called for campuses to close "wherever possible".

But one principal has defended Whitehall's decision, claiming that colleges have now been made Covid-secure and the emotional impact of isolation is more profound than the virus.

On Thursday, the Department for Education published updated guidance for delivering FE on the eve of the new month-long national restrictions that will be in place from November 5 until December 2.

The guidance told colleges and training providers to continue to deliver "the majority of education on site" for 16-to-19-year-olds during the lockdown unless they have had written public health advice to move some of this age group to remote teaching, in which case the department should be informed.

For adults, the DfE has told providers to "consider moving to online teaching where possible to do so while still achieving educational objectives". But, where adult education needs to continue on site to enable access to equipment, or where students cannot access remote delivery, this "can continue in a Covid-secure way".

The University and College Union hit out at the guidance, saying that the 16-to-19 age group has been demonstrated to be "as, if not more" likely to get infected by Covid-19 as other adults and should be "afforded the same protection".

"UCU is now calling for all course delivery for young adults in further education to be moved online wherever possible during the lockdown in England," the union's head of further education Andrew Harden told *FE Week*.

"This has not been an easy decision to take but the health and safety of students and staff and their communities must come first."



He also called on ministers to "match" the commitment of staff to their students by providing colleges with "the extra funding they need to create and resource Covid-safe spaces and extra support for those students who for whatever reason are unable to effectively continue their learning remotely".

In an *FE Week* investigation in June, college leaders warned of spiralling Covid-19 safety costs – with many having to fork out hundreds of thousands of pounds on items such as personal protective equipment, hand sanitiser, signage, shields and temperature guns. The Association of Colleges previously called for a £70 million government fund to ease these budget pressures.

Responding to the UCU's call for colleges to close during the November, Ali Hadawi, the principal of Central Bedfordshire College, said it is "vital to strike a balance between the emotional wellbeing of staff and students and their safety in relation to Covid-19".

"It is critically important to create a safe learning and working environment, which we have done by working collaboratively with staff and student groups," he continued.

"However, the emotional impact of isolation on learners, especially young people and the most vulnerable, and staff, is more profound than the anxiety in relation to Covid-19. Evidence from learner and staff feedback, as well as their attendance and retention, supports this fact."

AoC chief executive David Hughes said

colleges are doing "all that they can" to protect staff and students and are "continuously monitoring and adapting to changes – often at speed, with no precedent, and at great cost".

He concurred with Hadawi's comments that it is "good for students' mental health and for their social wellbeing" to continue learning on site.

Hughes added that the DfE's guidance should give college leaders the "confidence that they are being trusted to make complex judgments and decisions that are best for their students and staff".

The guidance also states that apprenticeships and other training in the workplace will "continue where those sectors remain open" but the DfE expects to see "particular impacts in hospitality and retail".

It adds that face coverings must now be worn in the communal areas of secondary schools and FE providers in an extension of rules that will apply through the new lockdown.

Clinically extremely vulnerable young people, adults and staff have been advised not to attend college or their training provider while the national restrictions are in place.

Education secretary Gavin Williamson said: "We must put the interests of our children and young people first, especially when the benefits of being in the classroom are clear.

"Education is a national priority and we cannot allow it to be disrupted again."

The show must go on: online resources to support delivery during lockdown 2.0



By Mark Dawe,
Chief Executive
The Skills Network

With Boris Johnson announcing a second national lockdown on Saturday, we continue to face much uncertainty and disruption to our delivery of education and it is hard to imagine there will be much change this academic year – a reality Michael Gove reflected over the weekend.

Although schools, colleges, providers, and universities will remain open, everyone will be facing significant ongoing challenges

There will likely be limited face-to-face contact times and reduced class sizes, as fears grow over outbreaks and spread of infection.

For those offering remote learning to students at home, the focus will be how to keep them engaged, and questions over just how effectively you can teach them new content and provide a semblance of a routine in education and training for these students.

But the show must go on and we must continue to adapt to the changing circumstances.

Most of us are looking for online and blended alternatives to help deliver key areas of our curriculum and are considering how to best transition from classroom-based delivery to online learning.

Whilst we continue to strive for quality delivery and maintain momentum, it is crucial that we consider what good online and blended learning looks like as we shift to digital learning.

It is crucial that we don't employ the same 'knee-jerk' reaction this time round.

The lessons learnt?

When the first lockdown was imposed in March, hundreds of colleges and training providers had to quickly find alternative ways to deliver classroom experiences online.

Everyone agrees we will move into a world of "new normal" and education online will not just be a short-term reaction to the pandemic, but as a long-term solution and real opportunity.

Online learning should be a classroom not a library. Relying on Zoom and YouTube, and creating a dump of existing PDFs and PowerPoints, isn't the best way to engage and inspire learners. We can't just replicate face to face on a computer and a "lift and shift" approach (as I am sure we have all realised over the last 6 months). It just doesn't work.

Nor will these methods prove successful in delivering the rigour expected by Ofsted to effectively progress learners through to their final qualifications.

- A report by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) found head teachers believe a third of pupils were not engaged with set work during the first lockdown
- A survey by the National Union of Students found over a quarter of students (27%) struggled to engage with the online learning provided during the first lockdown with many finding online teaching 'boring' and the course content being 'mediocre'

While many learners thrive learning online, for others it is a real challenge, and it requires a range of new resources and tools to keep them engaged and support their progression.

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GO TO NEXT STEP

Free digital skills quals held up by Covid and Ofqual delays

FRASER WHIELDON
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Exclusive

Coronavirus and “unnecessary delays” by the exams regulator have been blamed for disrupting the roll-out of free, government-developed, basic IT qualifications for adults.

Despite the August launch date for the “entitlement”, which covers fully funded digital skills courses at entry and level 1, qualifications watchdog Ofqual revealed last week it had forced all but one awarding organisation to resubmit plans.

It has been four years since the Department for Education first announced, with great fanfare, it would develop and fully fund new Essential Digital Skills Qualifications (EDSQs) through the adult education budget.

But in the past year many awarding organisations, including education giants Pearson and OCR, and the body responsible for standards in the IT industry, BCS The Chartered Institute for IT, have either walked away from the opportunity or failed to gain approval to accredit them.

Skills minister Gillian Keegan stressed to parliament during a debate on Wednesday the importance of basic courses like those under the digital entitlement, which she called “key”.

Yet so far just EDSQs developed by Gateway Qualifications have been signed off for delivery. A further nine are still going back and forth as part of a “technical evaluation process” with Ofqual.

Speaking to FE Week the chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on digital skills, Sunderland Central MP Julie Elliott, urged the government to press ahead on this with speed and to “use every avenue available to it to upskill workers and provide effective and accessible adult education, sooner rather than later.

“As unemployment rises, and more and more jobs require baseline digital skills, they are no longer just key skills, but essential ones,” she said.

Ofqual has argued that the hold-up is not due to them, instead saying that these have been “difficult times for awarding organisations,



some of which have furloughed staff and all of which have had to work incredibly hard, in unprecedented times, to ensure the safe delivery of results this summer; and to plan that for next summer”.

However, one of the awarding organisations, The Learning Machine, has hit out at the watchdog. Managing director Rosemary Lynch said: “It would have been more helpful if we could have had a more open, iterative dialogue with Ofqual.”

Lynch added this would have avoided “many small inconsequential misunderstandings” which could have been “easily answered” during the preliminary technical evaluation, and better dialogue would also have prevented “unnecessary delay in making these much-needed qualifications available at this very important time for those desperately needing improved IT skills”.

Furthermore, major exam board OCR has withdrawn its submission for EDSQs, with a spokesperson saying they have decided to instead focus on supporting existing IT qualifications where “funding has been extended”.

BCS has also hit a few bumps in the EDSQ approval process. Lucy Ireland, managing director for institute member group BCS Learning and Development, said they expect to launch the “for work” set later this autumn, but no timescale for sign-off has been given to “for work”.

NOCN is another awarding organisation working on Ofqual approval but told FE Week it had been “busy for the last few months” with the centre-assessed grading system introduced for assessments

this summer, as well as other matters such as remote invigilation and the reformed functional skills qualifications.

“For this reason, we have had to prioritise our resource elsewhere,” the spokesperson continued.

“We have been looking at developing our Essential Digital Skills offer over the past month and have been working closely with Ofqual to fully understand their requirements and expectations for these qualifications before we resubmit.”

The lack of progress is a blow for the DfE, which has pushed to make digital skills as important as English and maths skills, going so far as to enshrine the entitlement to these fully funded courses in law, with the 2017 Digital Economy Act.

From August the ESFA will pay an unweighted base rate of £300 each for the qualifications funded from the adult education budget.

The demand for these qualifications is expected to be “high”, according to Gateway Qualifications director of business development Paul Saunders.

He told FE Week their qualifications went live on August 1, as planned, and interest in them has been “significant right across England, including all provider types”.

In contrast to The Learning Machine, Saunders said Ofqual had been “very rigorous”, with communication “very good... It was not a painful process; it was a supportive process.”

Things could be looking brighter for the roll-out of more EDSQs, with NCFE saying their qualifications are “very close” to completing the process and they anticipate approval will be “imminent”.

“We are ready to implement our go to market strategy as soon as this happens, with a focus on adults within the communities we operate, addressing the digital generation gap which not only remains wide open but has been exacerbated by the Covid pandemic.”

And Pearson said it would hope to have their qualifications available by the end of the year.

The final awarding organisation still working on approval, OCN London, did not provide a comment.

A DfE spokesperson said Covid-19 has had a “significant impact” on approving these qualifications and they expect other awarding organisations to have qualifications approved “over the coming months”.



Julie Elliott

College paid £3.5m dividend following Saudi venture exit

BILLY CAMDEN

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From front

Exclusive

A college exploring merger options has used a multi-million-pound exit dividend from an international venture to make a staff pay award and to repay a government bailout.

Portsmouth-based Highbury College signed up to the Saudi Arabian Colleges of Excellence programme in 2013 and launched the International Technical Female College in Jeddah, a female vocational training institute run in partnership with Burton and South Derbyshire College.

But Highbury, which parachuted in an interim principal and chair last year after it was hit by an expenses scandal and was placed in formal FE Commissioner intervention, has now “stepped away” from the international project in favour of developing collaborations closer to home.

As part of an agreement that will now see the overseas programme solely managed by Burton and South Derbyshire College, Highbury was handed a £3.5 million financial dividend on October 19.

The amount will go towards repaying the government a £1.5 million emergency bailout that was granted to Highbury earlier this year after its new leaders discovered the college had run out of cash just a month after taking over.

As well as using the remaining funds to invest in the college’s IT resources, staff – excluding interim management – who had not received a pay award for “several” years were given a flat rate and pro-rata £300 “honorarium” payment.

Minutes from a board meeting in July 2020, which said the pay award would only be possible once withdrawal from the Saudi venture was agreed, state that the payment should act to recognise the “hard work of staff” during the Covid-19 pandemic and “considerable turbulence in the past two years, resulting in much adverse publicity”.

Commenting on the decision to withdraw from the Saudi venture, interim principal Penny Wycherley said: “This is an important step for the college and demonstrates our commitment to



investing in our local students and the future of Portsmouth.

“We’d like to thank Burton and South Derbyshire College for their partnership and support and wish them all the best for the future.”

A Burton and South Derbyshire College spokesperson confirmed they will “continue to operate in Saudi Arabia through our highly successful privately registered company, Highbury Burton Saudi Arabia”.

The spokesperson added: “We would like to thank current and, in particular, past leaders of Highbury College, Portsmouth for their insight, leadership and contribution to this excellent example of the UK effectively exporting high-quality technical education.”

Colleges of Excellence was founded seven years ago to boost technical and vocational education and training in Saudi Arabia through partnerships with international providers.

But a number of providers dropped out of the programme early on as challenges with operating in the region became apparent.

An *FE Week* investigation in 2016 uncovered grave financial problems at some of the colleges taking part. Colleges were later warned off overseas ventures following the collapse of AoC India, which fell just four years after launching when 25 UK college members quit.

Highbury also attempted to run a technical education project in Nigeria some years ago, but this failed and the college is still in a legal battle to recover £1.4 million that it claims to be owed.

Earlier this week the college announced that Martin Doel, an ex-chief executive of the Association of Colleges who was appointed interim chair of Highbury almost a year ago, has now been replaced by board member and businessman Paul Quigley on a permanent basis.

Interim principal Wycherley has agreed to stay on until August 2021.

The decisions come as the college continues a structure and prospects appraisal with FE Commissioner Richard Atkins. While there is currently no deadline for the appraisal’s conclusion, the college told *FE Week* that “all options” are being considered, including merger.

Highbury’s former chair Tim Mason and principal Stella Mbubaegbu stepped down in late 2019 after *FE Week* revealed how £150,000 was spent on Mbubaegbu’s corporate college card in four years, including extravagant items such as numerous first-class flights, stays in five-star hotels, a boozy lobster dinner and a £434 pair of designer headphones.

Around the same time the college had to make redundancies, scrap its A-level provision and dropped from Ofsted ‘outstanding’ to ‘requires improvement’.

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Study staff, pastoral care, peer-mentoring: spending the tuition fund

FRASER WHIELDON
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FE Week explores how the government's £96 million tuition fund is being put to use by colleges and whether it is enough to help 16-to-19-year-olds catch up with education that was curtailed by lockdown

Prime minister Boris Johnson and education secretary Gavin Williamson were set to announce to great acclaim on June 18 that colleges would be able to take a share of a £1 billion fund aimed at helping students catch up on the teaching time they have lost because of the coronavirus pandemic.

However, the praise of organisations such as the Association of Colleges was cut short when, just two hours later, the Department for Education removed colleges from the initiative.

This led to a political and sector outcry, with the decision – blamed on the Treasury – branded “indefensible” by Association of Colleges chief executive David Hughes and “unforgivable” by the Labour Party.

The uproar then forced a screeching U-turn from the government, which a month later announced the £96 million 16-to-19 tuition



fund, paid for out of the £350 million National Tutoring Programme.

The fund can be used for small tuition groups of around three to five students to study English, maths and other courses where learning has been disrupted.

The remaining £650 million of the £1 billion is being put towards additional funding for the 2020-21 academic year for school pupils catching up on education missed through the Covid-19 pandemic.

Colleges had to opt in to receive the tuition fund money, which is being allocated at £150 for each student without a grade 4 pass in English and maths.

The Department for Education told *FE Week* it had received requests for £92 million of the catch-up funds at the time of going to press, and providers have flexibility on how to spend it.

Although the DfE has said funding should be prioritised for those students who have not achieved a passing mark, grade 3, in GCSE English and maths, it can be used to support students who achieved grade 4 – meaning students who achieved grades 5 to 9 are not eligible.

Colleges who spoke to *FE Week* said the £96 million 16-to-19 tuition fund has been

spent on hiring extra pastoral and study staff, and in a couple of cases on hiring young people either about to start, or just graduating from, university to make the people delivering this tuition more relatable for students.

“The funds will help our young students recharge their batteries”

Activate Learning, based in Oxfordshire, is one of the providers to hire tutors around their students' own age. It has paid for 20 young people who have recently completed their A-levels, but have deferred university, who can provide online tuition to students resitting GCSE exams in November, with the help of peer-tutoring company Yipiyap.

Each of the tutors created an online profile of themselves so the student could choose who teaches them, based on their personality and availability.



CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Investigates

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CONTINUED

A spokesperson for Activate said: "Having worked on peer tuition before at our City of Oxford campus, we recognised the value that young people brought to our students' learning process."

"By working with Yipiyap we have been able to roll out this innovative approach at scale and in a timeframe where it will benefit those learners going into their GCSE resits in November."

Between 600 and 700 students resitting their maths and English exams this month will "directly" benefit from Yipiyap's provision, the spokesperson added, and roughly 5,000 students across Activate's seven colleges will benefit from other schemes funded under the programme, including subject specific catch-up tuition and performance coaches.

College group NCG is approaching catch-up tuition with a similar tack and has used some of the £1.5 million of funding from the tuition fund on specialist tutoring services, such as educational charity Get Further, which uses graduate students to provide tuition on-site and via the internet.

The 5,000 NCG students this funding covers can also benefit from small group tutoring sessions, including some that ran during half-term, and expansions to the group's English and maths teaching teams and pastoral and learning support teams.

Meanwhile, Birkenhead Sixth Form College has spent the £46,000 it received, which will cover 132 students, on an academic skills tutor to help students' writing skills and a pastoral support worker who helps students

organise their studies and ensures that they have a go-to person for their needs.

Carol Layall, director of quality of education at the Yorkshire-based Luminate Education Group, said the £1.3 million it received from the tuition fund for its colleges is a "good chunk of money", which it is spending on helping nearly 9,000 students.

With the funding, Luminate is putting on breakfast, lunchtime and after-college sessions to provide the catch-up tuition and have recruited "several" English and maths teachers, study support coaches, and English and maths coaches.

"They haven't done any meaningful maths since March they're critically behind"

Layall also said their sixth-form "has got a study support coach, so that's about getting students back into studying, developing study skills, making sure they were at the right level to take on that A-level provision".

But making up for lost learning is not the only objective college leaders have got their eye on for this money.

City of Bristol principal Andy Forbes has placed a heavy emphasis on using the £474,000 the college received to manage students' mental health and classroom performance, saying: "The catch-up funds will help our young students get their batteries re-charged as they come back into education after the lockdown."

"Several hundred" students will benefit from the funding, which will also focus on study skills and improving their English and maths, he said. However, it will partly also go towards a staff development programme to "ensure that we develop the coaching and mentoring skills of our dedicated team of teachers and learning support staff".

Nevertheless, the funding has come in for some criticism from college leaders for being insufficient, ill-targeted and ill-timed.

Mike Kilbride, principal of Birkenhead Sixth Form College, told *FE Week*: "I've got students who were awarded, through the

centre assessment grading process, fives and sixes in maths, who are currently on A-level natural sciences. And they're really struggling.

"So those students who are having to do quite high-level maths, particularly in biology, chemistry, and physics, and haven't done any meaningful maths since March, they're the ones who are critically behind."

But due to the cap on grades, the funds the college received cannot be spent on helping those students.

While Kilbride says the funding is "better than nothing" and shows a "desire to try and help out", he added: "It's not a huge amount when you actually spread it across the sector" and "I don't know anybody who thinks this is the way to solve the problem."

Layall also had a problem with the fund concerning timing: "Because colleges are ahead of the game with timetables, you've got your plans already in place and it was announced in July, so we're playing a bit of catch-up on how we'll use it, when it's supposed to be used, and then looking at adding in those extra hours for the students."

"So that wasn't the best. It would have been much more ideal if we had known this in April or May. But that's just how it is, we're not going to say no."

Following on from his comments about colleges "indefensibly" being excluded from catch-up funding, David Hughes has said the £96 million is a "welcome recognition of the need to address lost learning".

But, echoing Kilbride's comments about the students who have been cut out of funding due to their grades, Hughes said the Association of Colleges would like "wider eligibility to help this resource reach all those students who need extra support", along with extra investment and flexibility.

Deputy chief executive of the Sixth Form Colleges Association James Kewin labelled the initiative "micro interventions" aimed at particular subjects or qualifications which "will only ever have a micro impact".

"These sort of eye-catching, but short-term, funding streams, however well-intended, are no substitute for a sufficient level of core funding."

A Department for Education spokesperson said they provided the funding so that "no student should fall behind as a result of the pandemic".

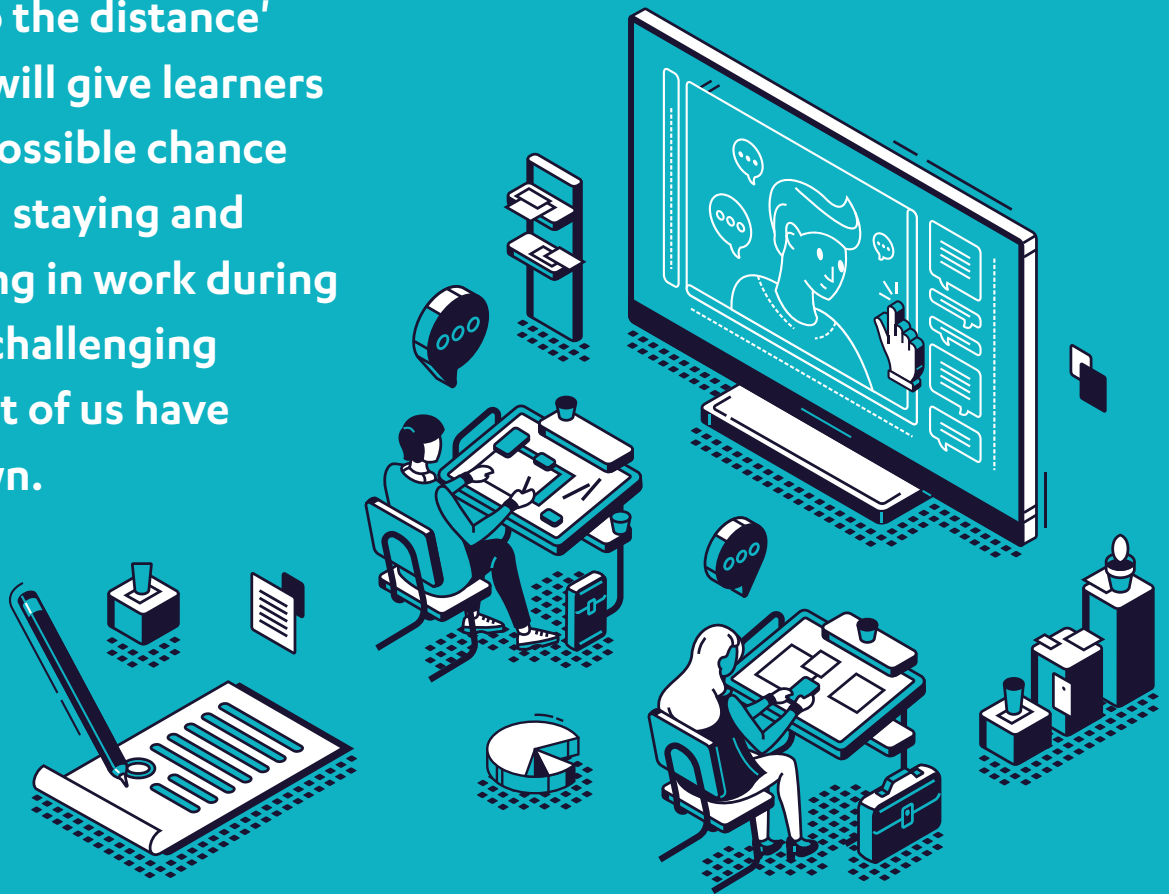


Carol Layall

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Birmingham provider drops its AEB high court fight

BILLY CAMDEN
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Exclusive

The first ever court battle to challenge a failed adult education budget application has been dropped.

East Birmingham Community Forum (EBCF) has withdrawn its case against the West Midlands Combined Authority following "discussions with our legal counsel".

The training provider previously claimed it

was wrongly denied a fair run at securing a slice of £28 million of funding put out by the authority, which took control of the AEB for the region last year.

Lawyers were set to go to battle at the high court in January, but this was then pushed back to November 20.

EBCF told *FE Week* this week that it decided to drop the case altogether over the summer as it could not afford the legal costs of seeing the challenge the whole way through. A spokesperson confirmed that there was no out-of-court settlement.

The West Midlands Combined Authority declined to comment.

In documents seen by *FE Week* ahead of the original January 31 court date, the independent learning provider had alleged the authority's AEB procurement was "flawed" and that WMCA admitted in writing that it had made scoring errors.

The forum also claimed the WMCA did not abide by legislative procurement rules.

If the EBCF challenge had been successful, two parts of the area's AEB provision bid could have had to have been retendered.

WorldSkills Shanghai and Lyon delayed by a year

FRASER WHIELDON
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The next two WorldSkills competitions, set to take place in Shanghai in China in 2021 and Lyon in France in 2023, have both been postponed by a year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Competition organisers WorldSkills International announced this week the competitions will instead take place in 2022 and 2024 respectively.

This comes after the EuroSkills 2020 competition, rescheduled to take place in Graz, Austria, in January 2021, was indefinitely postponed last month due to the "worsening" coronavirus situation in Europe.

Speaking to *FE Week*, WorldSkills International president Chris Humphries said: "This is something we hugely regret, but we knew it was important to give as much clarity and certainty."

Shanghai had been due to include over 1,300 young skilled people from 60 countries competing in 56 competitions between September 22 and 27, 2021.

Humphries said member nations of his organisation had discussed a number of options, including cancelling the Shanghai event altogether, and at the start of discussions last month, members were split

on which option to go for.

But the "significant" financial commitments both China and competing nations would have to make for an event in 2021, along with the risk that the competitors' investment of time and effort may be lost if the event was cancelled, led to the near-unanimous decision to postpone.

To ensure competitors' efforts will not go to waste, WorldSkills has agreed a one-off change to the rules around their eligibility for the tournaments, so the age cap of up to 25 will be increased by a year.

A new date for Shanghai has not been finalised but it is expected the competition will take place between October and November 2022.

Discussions on what will now happen with EuroSkills, whether they change the schedule of their events to fit with WorldSkills, will be taking place "over the next couple of days", says Humphries.

Preparations were already well under way for WorldSkills UK to send a delegation of skilled young people, known as Team UK, to compete in Shanghai.

WorldSkills UK chief executive Neil Bentley-Gockmann has said they will carry on training young people during this month's lockdown over the internet, much as they had to do during the previous one.

He did raise the prospect of a form of



Neil Bentley-Gockmann

competition taking place before Shanghai, saying: "We are talking already with international partners about doing pressure testing, virtually, so our competitors do start to get a sense of competition, in terms of working with other countries, the major economies around the world, to test their skills against their potential peers."

This could include UK hopefuls going up against young people from Australia and Chinese Taipei.

A cycle of competitions is planned for next year, leading up to the national finals which will take place at next year's WorldSkills UK LIVE event.

Revealed: The number of bids in ESFA's traineeships tender

BILLY CAMDEN

BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Exclusive

The government's much-anticipated traineeships tender received 370 bids – a fraction of the number that had been anticipated by some in the sector.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency finally launched the bidding process for 19-to-24 traineeship funding on October 7, which was run on an "accelerated" timetable with a deadline for bids set for just three weeks later.

Up for grabs initially is a slice of £65 million to be spent between February and July 31, 2021,

which will be split across nine regions in England – ranging from £20.8 million for London providers to just £2.6 million for the south-west.

The bidding window closed on October 28 and the ESFA has now told *FE Week* that 370 applications were received. The agency could not provide the total value being asked for at this stage.

Jim Carley, a tender specialist in the FE sector, previously said he expected "in excess of 3,000 bidders" based on the fact that the procurement did not have any provider eligibility criteria and the level of interest and oversubscription seen on previous ESFA procurements, such as the controversial non-levy tender.

Many eligible providers might have been put off applying owing to the minimum tender value,

which was set at £250,000.

While providers were bidding for an initial £65 million in total to fund around 20,000 starts in the latter half of 2020-21, a further £315 million was made available to support continued delivery through to July 2023.

The traineeships tender is one way the government plans to triple the number of traineeships starts this year – as pledged by chancellor Rishi Sunak over the summer as part of his plan to combat youth unemployment following the coronavirus pandemic.

Employer cash incentives of £1,000 have also been made available, as has growth funding for providers to deliver 16-to-19 traineeships.

The ESFA intends to award contracts from the tender in January 2021.

EPA flexibilities to remain in place until March at the earliest

BILLY CAMDEN

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Exclusive

Special measures that have enabled 25,000 apprentices to complete their end-point assessment during the Covid-19 pandemic will be retained until at least March 2021.

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's chief executive Jennifer Coupland told delegates watching the Skills World Live Apprenticeships conference on Thursday that the extension has been granted in light of the new national restrictions that will run during November.

Apprenticeship assessments usually involve an element of face-to-face assessment, which was not possible due to movement and social distancing restrictions during lockdown.

Flexibilities have been introduced to 132 apprenticeship standards since the first lockdown in March 2020. The IfATE announced in July that the measures would remain in place until January 2021.

The flexibilities vary for each standard but can include using technology to conduct observations or professional discussions remotely and reordering assessment methods so that written tests or professional discussions can be taken now and the observation delivered later.

Coupland said that she recognises it will not be "business as usual" for all apprenticeships as many businesses temporarily close during November.

But where training can continue, "we would expect that providers will work as closely as possible with employers to make sure that apprentices who are on their programmes can continue to advance their off-the-job training during the month of lockdown and hopefully progress if they're about to take an end-point assessment.

"They will be able to take advantage of the flexibilities that the institute has put in place to enable those end-point assessments to happen even during lockdown," she added.

"About 25,000 apprentices have managed to complete since lockdown. And we're really



Jennifer Coupland

confident that we've done that in a way that protects quality.

"So in light of this current, new lockdown, we have decided that it's right to extend those flexibilities until the end of March to give people some certainty that the existing regime will continue for the foreseeable future."

Coupland said the institute will review this timeframe again in March.

Winners of the 2020 Festival of Learning awards

FRASER WHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

A mother bullied out of school aged 13 and an agency that fights serious and organised crime nationwide are among those recognised at this year's Festival of Learning awards.

The awards, run by the Learning and Work Institute (LWI) during the inaugural Lifelong Learning Week, recognise the inspiring stories of adult learners and top-notch adult learning providers, tutors and employers.

The ceremony was held over LWI's YouTube and Facebook channels on Tuesday evening.

Skills minister Gillian Keegan spoke at the event, saying the winners "showcase the very best in adult learners" and the dedication to teaching and learning on show was "truly outstanding...Your achievement will serve as an example and inspiration for us all."

One such winner was Wiltshire mother Hannah Wilkins, personally chosen by LWI's patron Princess Anne for the Patron's Award, having completed over 20 different courses after being bullied out of school at the age of 13.

In a pre-recorded video for the awards, Wilkins said it was a "true honour" to be nominated.

She has gone on to further learning with Wiltshire College and intends to work as a support worker, "helping other people who have been in similar positions to myself".

The winner of the President's Award, chosen by LWI president and former Department for Education director-general of lifelong learning Nick Stuart, was Positive People.

A partnership of organisations run by social enterprise Pluss, Positive People helps unemployed adults in the south-west, with a sister programme in West Yorkshire, develop life skills.

Brandon Layton has won this year's Outstanding Individual Award. Having found his potential was limited as an autistic teenager



Top row: Hannah Wilkins, Evripides Evriadiades, Brandon Layton, Health and wellbeing programme.
 Second row: Laura Dunn-Green, Motiv8, Liz Collins, Paul Barnsley
 Third row: National Crime Agency, Positive People Programme, Phil Branigan, Rubi Naz

attending a specialist school, the judges said he has transformed his life at Derwentside College.

Brandon, who is now studying at Durham University, said: "It is an amazing achievement which I hope will be an inspiration to any other adult learner who thinks education isn't right for them and that university isn't a possibility for them."

The Learning for Health Award has been won by Waltham Forest Adult Learning Service's health and wellbeing programme. The project has created a range of creative learning courses focused on improving health, wellbeing and social welfare.

The Employer Award, supported by awarding organisation NOCN, has been won by the National Crime Agency. The law enforcement organisation was recognised for its initial operational training programme, which provides learners with the knowledge, skills and experience to help fight crime through accredited flexible learning.

Derby-based Evripides Evriadiades won the Tutor Award, which is supported by the Education and Training Foundation. Evriadiades has supported many vulnerable and marginalised people through "innovative, creative and functional" English and maths lessons, from entry to level 2.

Warwickshire Police inspector Paul Barnsley received the Learning for Work Award, also supported by NOCN, after taking inspiration from a course with North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire on understanding mental health while signed off work.

He has since set up a number of new workplace initiatives including

a mental health triage car and a disability network within Warwickshire Police.

Laura Dunn-Green overcame severe anxiety by taking part in a health and social care course run by City College Peterborough at a local care home and has now embarked on a career as a healthcare assistant, winning her this year's New Directions Award, supported by the Skills and Education Group.

Rubi Naz has won the English Language Learning Award after having been motivated by her son, who was born with various medical conditions and who has special education needs, to enrol at Tameside Adult and Community Learning Education to learn English.

She is now supporting others in her community to improve their English, and used her acceptance speech to emphasise the importance of learning the language as "it helps you to be proactive in the community".

A project delivered by social housing providers Motiv8 received the Project Award for helping disadvantaged and vulnerable Greater Manchester adults access housing and benefits, as well as employment through CV-writing and job-searching help.

The Return to Learning Award, supported by adult education provider City Lit, went to Liz Collins, who, following a "traumatic" experience of education as a child, enrolled on an Introduction to Adult Social Care course with Islington Adult Community Learning and is now a support worker.

The Social Impact Award, supported by adult learning provider the WEA, was awarded to a volunteer digital champion Phil Branigan, for running regular computer drop-in sessions at a sheltered housing scheme and supporting other volunteers through an online forum.

The full list of winners:

Hannah Wilkins – Patron's Award
Positive People – President's Award
Brandon Layton – Outstanding Individual Award
Health and Wellbeing Programme – Learning for Health Award
National Crime Agency – Employer Award
Evripides Evriadiades – Tutor Award
Paul Barnsley – Learning for Work Award
Laura Dunn-Green – New Directions Award
Rubi Naz – English Language Learning Award
Motiv8 – Project Award
Liz Collins – Return to Learning Award
Phil Branigan – Social Impact Award

News

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Surge in student numbers could undermine FE cash boost

BILLY CAMDEN

BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Fears are growing that the government's FE funding boost for this year will not be sufficient to cover an anticipated surge in 16-to-19-year-old college places.

The government is pumping an additional £400 million into further education in 2020-21, which includes raising the 16-to-19 learner base rate to £4,188 and could, the Institute for Fiscal Studies says, represent the first real-terms increase in spending per student for about a decade.

However, the organisation's annual report on education spending, published this week, warned that because of the way the FE funding system works, exceptional rises in student numbers could still generate a real-terms fall in funding per student.

It explained how student numbers in FE colleges and sixth-forms are likely to increase this year due to rising numbers of young people combined with "unusually high" GCSE results and "significant" reductions in training and

employment opportunities.

The IFS says that responding to these changes in participation will be "challenging" given that providers' funding is set by the Education and Skills Funding Agency based on lagged student numbers.

The IFS recognises that the 16-to-19 funding system does have mechanisms to allow colleges to apply for in-year growth if they have a spike in student numbers. However, it says that this is "subject to affordability" and is "not designed to address significant sector-wide growth".

Imran Tahir, research economist at the IFS and a co-author of the report, said: "If there is no additional funding forthcoming, planned real-terms increases in spending per student could be mostly – if not entirely – eroded."

James Kewin, deputy chief executive at the Sixth Form Colleges Association, shared the IFS concern that, because in-year growth is subject to affordability, not all colleges that need the funding will be able to access it.

Responding to the IFS report, Kewin said: "A combination of demographic trends, this

year's exam results and the lack of work-based opportunities means that more young people than ever could participate in 16-to-19 education.

"However, the lagged funding model means that this will put pressure on the cashflow and finances of some colleges and schools at a time when they are already under strain dealing with the additional costs of Covid."

David Hughes, chief executive of the Association of Colleges, said: "Overall we believe that numbers will be higher, just as the IFS supposes. The commitment to support exceptional growth is always subject to affordability, which is unlike in HE, where it looks as though increased student numbers will attract full funding immediately. That does not feel fair and we hope that ESFA recognises that too."

A government spokesperson said: "We have protected grant-funding for further education, worth over £3 billion for a full year, and increased education and training investment this year for 16-19-year-olds by an additional £400 million."

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Active IQ

Entry Requirements

This qualification is open to all (learners must be 19 years old or over).

Qualification Structure

The learner must complete the one mandatory unit:

- Unit 1: Understanding the development and delivery of End-point Assessment

Assessment

This qualification is assessed by:

- Practical demonstration/ assignment
- eAssessment

Learning Resources

- Manual
- eLearning

Active IQ was one of the first End-point Assessment Organisations (EPAOs) within the physical activity sector to be approved on the Register of End-point Assessment Organisations.

We have a breadth of expertise and experience ensuring the products and services we provide employers, providers and apprentices are of the highest quality design and content.



We are currently offering End-point Assessments for the following apprenticeship standards:

Personal Trainer	Leisure Duty Manager	Teaching Assistant
Community Activator Coach	Business Administrator	Assessor/Coach
Facilities Management Supervisor	Team Leader/Supervisor	Learning Mentor
Customer Service Practitioner	Leisure Team Member	Early Years Educator
Passenger Transport Service Operations Onboard and Station Team Member	Community Sport and Health Officer	

#Beginwithbetter

www.activeiq.co.uk





Department
for Education

Further Education Commissioner

The role of Further Education Commissioner was created in 2013 as an independent adviser to ministers at the Department for Education (DfE). The FE Commissioner, working closely with colleagues in the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) supports improvement in our national network of further education and sixth form colleges, as well as working with local authorities, specialist designated institutions and other organisations to deliver high quality outcomes for learners, and to meet local economic need.

As FE Commissioner, you will take a key role in working with colleges to improve the quality of education for learners, strengthen financial resilience, improve the quality of leadership and reduce the risk of colleges requiring interventions. You will do so as an integrated part of the DfE's overall approach to intervention, within the context of the ESFA case management approach. As such you will work closely with key teams within ESFA, as well as the wider DfE, Ofsted and broader partners within the sector.

Successful candidates for this position will be or will have very recently been an FE sector leader with a national profile and an outstanding track record of college leadership or leadership of major organisations within the sector. You will have generated improvement, including financial improvement, across the sector by working with other colleges and providers. You will have exceptional communication skills and the ability to work with, influence, persuade and engage stakeholders at the highest levels. You will also have the ability to lead a team of highly experienced FE professionals. Remuneration will be £135,000 per annum, for a four day week.

Closing Date: 11am on Friday 20 November.

How to apply: Please visit bit.ly/FE_Commissioner to download a candidate pack

Interviews will take place virtually on Monday 18th January and you will need to make yourself available for this date.

East Durham College
'Where Careers Grow'



East Durham College is looking to appoint to the following role due to the retirement of the current post holder.

Vice Principal – Finance & Business Planning. Salary Competitive

The Vice Principal will support the Principal in providing both strategic and day-to-day leadership for the College, working creatively in order to develop a high performing, supportive and challenging culture for both staff and learners, based upon the core values and College mission and vision.

The Vice Principal Finance & Business Planning will have direct line management of the Director of Estates, Director of Finance and IT Manager.

You should be educated to degree level or hold an equivalent professional qualification. While having extensive Finance and Business Support Management experience at a senior level in a further education and/or land-based college, alongside this experience of delivering large capital projects is advantageous at a Senior Level.

A good understanding of effective curriculum planning and business planning, in support of this excellent leadership and management skills would be advantageous.

Assessment and Interview days will be held on the 2nd & 3rd December 2020

The College is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and vulnerable adults and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.

Please visit East Durham College website to complete the online application form.
www.eastdurham.ac.uk

Closing date: 15th November 2020

The College is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and vulnerable adults and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.

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We are looking to recruit full-time and associate MIS consultants with considerable experience in the post-16 education environment (FE, HE and Training). It is essential to have a comprehensive understanding of funding methodologies, statutory returns, audit / inspection requirements and MIS processes. Additionally desirable to have technical skills in a range of MIS software, SQL/Azure, C++, VLEs, data migration, report-writing and dashboard design and creation.

See our on-line advert for more details or send your CV to
mike.craddock@furthereducationpartnership.com



**Farnborough College
of Technology**

Director of Finance and Corporate Services

Farnborough College of Technology

Are you an experienced finance professional looking for a new challenge?

The Principal CEO and Board are pleased to invite applications from finance professionals for this key role at the College. The successful candidate will play a pivotal role in the strategic leadership of our ambitious college, working with an innovative leadership team that is passionate about developing young people's futures. Farnborough College of Technology is an established and well-respected Further and Higher Education College with a mission to be a Community University. The College has a proud heritage rooted in engineering and aviation, but today teaches a diverse curriculum spanning nearly all industries.

As an outstanding and sustainable organisation, we have met planned objectives and annual projections over the last 4 years:

- Grown income from £15m to a projected level of £18.5m in 2020-21, despite the impact of Covid-19
- Invested £10 million in new and renovated facilities over the past 3 years
- Maintained outstanding standards as a more inclusive College with community needs being at the heart of our responsiveness and delivery

All things being equal, by 2021-22 we will have exceeded our income target of £19m through organic growth and new community provision. We are now seeking to appoint a **Director of Finance and Corporate Services (DFCS)** as we position the College to meet new targets by 2030:

- Remain focused as an outstanding and inclusive Community University
- Achieve further growth of at least £5million to be a £25m+ institution
- Undertake further strategic capital investment in the estate with a vision of having carbon neutral buildings that are both employer and learner centric

About the role:

We are looking for a skilled and highly motivated finance professional to be with us on the next leg of the journey. As a part of the Senior Leadership Team the DFCS will be responsible for providing financial and resource leadership to the College. The Director will ensure the CEO and Board are provided with sound professional advice on developing and implementing financial strategies to safeguard the long-term financial viability and sustainability of the College. The successful candidate will place quality, value for money, learners and communities at the heart of their decision making. The post holder will therefore have significant experience:

- Combining strategic leadership with technical expertise to contribute towards our future ambitions
- Providing high-quality corporate support through interactions with staff and other stakeholders
- Working very closely with Executive Team colleagues to help shape and deliver the organisation's strategy
- Ensuring resources are utilised efficiently, effectively, and economically to ensure continued success in terms of growth, innovative investment, and outstanding performance

RESPONSIBLE FOR:

Finance, Learning Information Systems, and Estates. Other corporate functions may be assigned based on experience.

DIRECT REPORTS:

Head of Finance, Associate Director Learning Information Systems, Estates Manager and other staff, as appropriate.

Reporting to the Principal Chief Executive, the post holder will be one of 4 members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

The successful applicant will be a full time Senior Post Holder with a competitive salary of up to £90,000 dependant on experience plus other benefits including annual discretionary performance bonus, LGPS, and 35 days annual leave.

Farnborough College of Technology is an Equal Opportunities Employer.

The Recruitment pack with full details of the job can be downloaded from our website (www.farn-ct.ac.uk/jobs/). If you have any enquiries with regards to this role, please email Matthew Wilkie, Associate Director of Human Resources (m.wilkie@farn-ct.ac.uk).

Closing date: Sunday 15 November 2020

Interview dates: Wednesday 25 November 2020 (first online interview) and Thursday 26th November 2020 (second on-site interview)



Curriculum Manager – Foundation Learning & ESOL

Salary: Competitive
Start: January 2021

Do you enjoy sharing your knowledge and expertise, have a desire to make a difference and want to be involved in educating young people?

We are seeking to recruit a highly motivated, forward thinking individual as our Curriculum Manager for Foundation Learning and ESOL, joining our Student Support and Services team at Buckinghamshire College Group. The role is based at our Wycombe campus, with regular travel to our Amersham and Aylesbury sites.

By joining our College your expertise will play a real part in shaping young people's development and transforming their lives. We believe that education should inspire and develop our future generations.

What you need to be successful in this role:

- To have drive, determination and a clear focus on high quality teaching and learning, specifically for students with high needs, special educational needs and those with English as a second language.

- To provide leadership and direction, giving team members clear responsibilities and accountabilities that align to college strategies and values
 - To maximise staff utilisation and resources through astute financial management in order to provide a distinctive high quality student experience
 - Although this is a management role you will be expected to lead by example and teach your students to a high calibre
- Benefits include:
- Competitive holiday entitlement
 - Pension scheme
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 - CPD to develop new skills and expand your opportunities
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Location: Waterlooville, Hampshire
Salary: £85k

This is an exciting time to join HSDC. A dynamic FE College that has been created following two mergers and now comprises three campuses at Alton, South Downs (Waterlooville) and Havant. We are a forward-thinking tertiary provider meeting the needs of over 9000 full and part-time students and 500 employers in South and East Hampshire through the commitment and passion of some 900 staff.

HSDC has a vision to be a leading provider for academic, technical and professional training and has clearly stated that our College exists to realise the ambitions of our community – raising aspirations, enabling achievement and fulfilling dreams.

We are looking for a Deputy Principal with proven experience/skills in the following areas:

- Advanced leadership skills;
- Financial acumen;
- The ability to respond in a rapidly changing environment;
- The ability to respond to sector opportunities;

- Advanced communication skills;
- Open management style and most importantly a sense of humour!

More information on the position can be found [here](#).

Benefits

- 37 Days Annual Leave;
- Option for Pension scheme;
- Free on-site gym;
- Staff development opportunities;
- Staff recognition scheme, Employee Recommendation Incentive and access to many more benefits.

Closing Date: Monday 9th November 2020
Interview Dates: 2nd & 3rd December 2020

This position is full time, however, HSDC is proud to support flexible working opportunities and therefore applications for flexible working will be considered.



Safeguarding

The College is committed to safeguarding and promotes the welfare of all learners. It expects all staff to share this commitment. All successful applicants will be required to undertake an enhanced DBS check and to provide proof of their eligibility to work in the UK.

We will not accept applications from agencies.

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Profile

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Introducing...

LISA O'LOUGHLIN

Principal,
The Manchester College



**'Manchester is fantastic
at collaborating to
improve outcomes'**

JL DUTAUT
JL.DUTAUT@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The Manchester College principal Lisa O'Loughlin explains her collaborative strategy to provide the city with routes out of deprivation. By JL Dutaut

When Manchester mayor Andy Burnham called this week for schools to be closed to create a “true circuit break”, it is safe to assume that, as

with so many other politicians' educational announcements, the “and colleges” bit was intended, if silent.

That's a shame at any time, but given the impact of the virus in Manchester and the north-west, and the work that colleges such as The Manchester College, part of LTE Group, have done for their students and communities, it is a doubly frustrating omission. Since the initial lockdown, Manchester has suffered a lengthy period of restrictions higher than the rest of the nation, and as the prime minister

beat a reluctant path to a second lockdown, the region's plight became totemic for the inequalities the pandemic has brought to light and sharpened across the nation.

When I interviewed The Manchester College's principal, Lisa O'Loughlin just days before the second lockdown was announced, her comments already foreshadowed Burnham's fears, expressed this week, for what could happen if Manchester came out on December 2 and straight back into a regional tier 3. “We're concerned that it isn't a level playing field.

Profile

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And yet, at the end of this academic year, our learners will be assessed in the same way as the students in a tier 1 or tier 2 area."

"People described The Manchester College as a soft landing place for our community"

And it isn't just about the academic impact. "What Covid does is it places a set of pressures on communities," she adds. "Overlaid on other fundamental aspects of deprivation, that is creating a situation which is more challenging for our learners. We have students from very, very deprived communities. We have a high proportion of learners without GCSE English or maths. There is a multiplier effect going on in northern towns at the moment."

But if anyone understands the nefarious effects of that regional deprivation and how to go about tackling them, it is surely O'Loughlin. A northerner through and through, she's been at the college since 2013, its principal since

2014, and spent the previous ten years of her career at Blackburn College. She went to school in Wigan, graduated from Manchester University and got her teaching qualification from the University of Central Lancashire.

And O'Loughlin is not unfamiliar with the barriers she is dedicated to helping students overcome. From a modest background, her father a joiner, her mother a seamstress and her two older sisters a secretary and a nurse, she was "very lovingly referred to as the odd one in the family". She attended local Catholic schools and was lucky enough to be academically able – though it did mean she was encouraged to park her artistic interests to pursue academic subjects. She was the first to go to university, where she studied media and business management, and later came back to the arts for a master's degree. Today, a principal and mother, she has little time for the arts herself but, married to artist, Jamie, her life is still steeped in those interests.

After a decade spent in media production, O'Loughlin was asked to cover a class at a local college, and was hooked. She gained her teaching qualification and moved to Blackburn College, which had TV production facilities. "It allowed me to keep a foot in both camps," she says, but she's never looked back since.

A local success story then, but principalship hasn't all been plain sailing for O'Loughlin. Rated 'good' by Ofsted in May 2014 – just six months before she took the top spot from Jack Carney, who had recruited her as vice principal – The Manchester College's climb from its previous 'satisfactory' rating wasn't to be sustained. By 2017, the college was back in category 3, deemed to require improvement in every area except apprenticeships, where it was judged to be 'inadequate'. "When I joined in 2013," O'Loughlin tells me, "people described it as a soft landing place for our community, and that's a really lovely way of describing the college,



On production of East Lancs Cableat Blackburn College

but we lacked the ambition we needed for our learners." But the 2017 Ofsted visit didn't account for a strategy the college had already put in place a year before, that hadn't yet borne fruit. "Accelerating progress, ambitions towards careers, and positive advocacy. Those are the key underpinnings of our strategy for social mobility."

That social mobility strategy came with the formation of LTE Group, to which The Manchester College is central, accounting for some 25,000 of its purported 95,000 learners across the country. LTE Group isn't the result of horizontal integration through college mergers – though The Manchester College is itself the result of a long line of mergers over decades – but rather across a much broader field of education and training. The first such partnership of its kind according to its own literature, today it comprises corporate professional development provider MOL, offender education, training and employability provider Novus, apprenticeships provider Total People, and degree-level course provider UCEN. As well as the college of course, albeit with a re-purposed offer.

The group's shared expertise paid off. By 2019, it was rated 'good' in every area. The previously 'inadequate' apprenticeships provision, now managed by Total People, was no longer in Ofsted's scope for inspection – though it was rated 'good' in its own inspection. Achieving that meant taking a



Lisa graduating from Manchester University

Profile

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long hard look at local provision and zeroing in on the college's place in it. "We have some excellent sixth-form colleges in Manchester, and some of the highest performing in the country. And so what we asked was, 'what is it that we should be providing for our communities?'" and it's very much a route to a technical or professional career. We are The Manchester College. There isn't another big GFEC in Manchester so if anybody's going to do it, it's got to be us."

"Accelerating progress and positive advocacy – those are our key underpinnings"

Just last week, former skills and apprenticeships minister Anne Milton welcomed the publication of the Independent Commission on the College of the Future's final review. Of its 11 recommendations, she particularly highlighted the ineffectiveness and cost of competition and joined calls for greater local collaboration. Based on her LTE experience, O'Loughlin, who is also chair of the Greater Manchester Colleges Group since 2016, has some very clear ideas about that.

For a start, notwithstanding any white

papers and plans to take colleges back into public ownership, balancing collaboration and competition is something she evidently feels Westminster could learn something about from the regions. "Manchester is fantastic at collaborating to improve outcomes. We've been doing a lot of that work for about four or five years, developing that kind of strategic perspective on how skills should develop across the city region, and we've become a really strong strategic senior partner to the combined authority and to the local authorities. That's a real positive and I suppose, ahead of the white paper, is a bit of a model for a way of working."

As everywhere else, Covid has "intensified" that partnership working. Monthly meetings of the group of nine colleges are now more likely to be weekly or fortnightly and bilateral conversations a normal part of life. But balancing that collaboration with a healthy amount of competition – the type that is purported to create the conditions for improvement – is a recipe no policy maker has yet cracked. Again, O'Loughlin has ideas. She's clear that even in Manchester, there is a constant risk that competition will gain the upper hand. "We manage to collaborate in spite of it," she says.

The key, she suggests, is not in regulating competition or enforcing contrived



With husband Jamie at the opening of his British Textiles Biennial residency

collaboration, but in accepting that curriculum itself determines where specialisation is required. "Up to level three, we believe that all colleges should offer a broad-based provision, because that's what our communities need. But at level four or five, there is an opportunity for us to each become specialists. Obviously, capital investments and so on are better invested and better value for money if you're not spreading it across a number of organisations. For us, we feel that is something absolutely we could achieve."

Collaboration, then, not as a vehicle for improvement through partnership working, but as a means of ensuring investment is targeted to ensure all learners across a region have access to the best possible training and facilities for their sector. A simple redefinition of terms, it's an approach that is already unlocking a wealth of opportunities for the learners of Greater Manchester and could do so for other regions.

After all, it was the facilities at Blackburn that gave O'Loughlin her first step to where she is now, advocating for Manchester's students. So as the skills sector faces the continued impact of Covid and the end of the Brexit transition phase in the coming months, here's hoping her words penetrate the Westminster bubble.



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DAVID
HUGHESChief executive,
Association of CollegesColleges and universities
should collaborate, not
fight a 'turf war'

David Hughes responds to vice-chancellor of Nottingham Trent University Edward Peck's call for 'applied universities', not FE colleges, to drive the country's technical skills revolution

There's a lot to like in Edward Peck's essay for Policy Exchange – "Technical Breakthrough, Delivering Britain's Higher-Level Skills" – but there are also a few arguments and conclusions I take issue with. I hope that the flaws don't detract from the constructive and important overall thrust of the essay because we do need to make progress on growing level 4 and 5 higher technical education. That growth will only come about if we can agree how to achieve it, and the essay provides some useful proposals on the steps to do that.

The essay covers lots of familiar ground about the need for growth in levels 4 and 5 which I think are well made by Peck. The author then proposes three challenges, based around demand (how students are supported financially), supply (how to make a coherent local offer) and focus (how the offer meets labour market needs). It's a nice way of unpacking the challenges and reflects a lot of our thinking at the AoC.

It also reflects emerging thinking from the government, the Independent Commission on the College of the Future and many think tanks. All of these, I am sure, would broadly agree with the recommendations to address the demand challenge, with college and university students being able



to access the same funding for fees and maintenance. The PM's announcement of a lifetime skills guarantee looks set to deliver that, with the flexibilities to support modular learning, flexibly over a lifetime.

The third challenge of focus is also supported by sensible recommendations in the essay which again reflect and build on thinking and ideas from other reports, so I won't comment on them here.

That leaves the gnarly issue of the supply challenge. The overall conclusion is once again spot-on, with the challenge of how to join things up in a local labour market to ensure that pathways for students are clear, employers can get what they need and investment is concentrated for maximum impact. I agree with the authors that "opportunities for students, universities, colleges and employers are being missed through a lack of joined-up approaches to both policy and practice", and that this results in a confusing landscape, with duplication of effort and resources.

However, there are generalisations about colleges that

I simply do not recognise and for which no evidence is provided. There are also some false Aunt Sallies knocked down to make the case for universities to dominate the growth in levels 4 and 5. For instance, the essay suggests that "a major argument for enabling FECs to take a much greater role in future level 4/5 provision appears to be that it will support their financial sustainability". I've not seen that argument made anywhere. If it was made, we would not support it.

"There are generalisations about colleges that I simply do not recognise"

The argument we do make is that colleges should be funded properly for what they do, that they are more widespread than universities, exist in all communities and are able to make a local offer everywhere which is vital for people and labour markets. But the authors don't address those arguments.

The case study of Nottingham Trent University working

in Mansfield shows one strong approach to college-university collaboration. But for many, probably most, other parts of the country, collaborations like that will not happen because the interests and priorities of the universities are very different. In places like Weston-super-Mare, Grimsby, Blackpool and others, the college is the only game in town and it delivers high quality from great facilities. Let's not dismiss those case studies please, because for those places, the college simply needs equal access to the student finance and other investment that NTU has, in order to be able to deliver what is needed.

We have always advocated a collaborative approach between colleges and universities, based on a level playing field. While colleges need to go cap in hand to a university for awarding powers at levels 4 and 5, there will always be a power imbalance. This often impedes progress, and that needs to be addressed in the white paper.

The essay has some great proposals, but please let's not get into a turf war about who "owns" the higher technical education space. Not only is there room for colleges and universities, we all owe it to the communities we serve to make sure the pathways are clear for learners, and that employers know who can best help them. That requires local place-based collaboration between colleges and universities, working with employers and others. Not a fight to see who is strongest.

RUTH
GILBERTChair, Career
Colleges Trust

The second government consultation must make currency of qualifications king

The technical qualifications we end up with must have value for employers and universities, writes Ruth Gilbert

As a sector, we have been working hard for many years to raise the parity of esteem between vocational or technical qualifications and academic qualifications.

Progress has undoubtedly been made, with the government recognising the important part that apprenticeships and technical education must play in the country's post-Covid 19 economic recovery and highlighting the vital role of colleges in this.

The development and introduction of T Levels in 2020 has also been a clear nod towards the recognition of the value of high-level technical skills. They are a much-needed addition to the qualification landscape, putting technical skills on a par with the "gold standard" A-level.

But we must never forget that the purpose of education is to give people the skills they need to get a good and meaningful job.

This takes more than simply stripping out qualifications and requires a much more holistic approach aligned with the future of our industry and economy.

Rather than focusing on the quantity of qualifications, the government should recognise that it is the quality of

curriculum content and delivery that is the key thing to get right.

So the question now is what should become of the plethora of other vocational qualifications offered by colleges, learning providers and sixth-forms around the country?

This is, of course, a difficult question and one that the Department for Education is quite rightly consulting on.

Having worked in FE for many years, I strongly believe that giving students a clear line of sight to work must be at the heart of every post-16 course and qualification.

To do this, employers and HE institutions need to recognise the value of the various education pathways – with an understanding of the competencies a particular qualification will develop.

An A-level grade, for instance, is instantly recognisable, providing the

employer or university with an understanding of a student's ability and knowledge.

All vocational qualifications need to carry this same "assumed" value, a value that will ultimately come from impact. Employers must expressly endorse and reference T Level entry to the workplace.

"The question we have to ask is, are there better alternatives to BTECs?"

FE and HE providers must embrace more flexible delivery that is accessible while learners work, including degree apprenticeships and part-time HE options.

We also need universities to recognise T levels, for parity of opportunity with A-levels, on

HE progression.

And industry must also drive the development of new qualifications and modifications. The world of work moves quickly, and qualifications must keep up.

Here at the Career Colleges Trust we have just created a new level 2 and 3 qualification in Logistics and International Supply Chain Management, through a collaboration with seven FE colleges, a Rotterdam-based learning provider and several logistics employers.

A T Level in this area is also needed to provide a clear point of higher entry for young people who know relatively little about this growing sector illustrating exactly how different qualifications can co-exist successfully to meet industry need.

We should not forget BTECs and other awarding body certification, often recognised as "the standard" for specific industries. We have to ask the questions "are they still current, and is there an alternative that better prepares students for work/progression?"

The second government consultation must make currency of qualifications king.

Seeking out new industries and opportunities has never been so important for our economy so this is a perfect time to consider our portfolio of technical qualifications.



Opinion

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JEREMY CROOK OBE

Chief executive,
Black Training and
Enterprise Group



FE colleges have been too reluctant to challenge bias against black and Asian apprentices

Too many colleges and employers have a 'diversity and inclusion' policy but go no further, writes Jeremy Crook

Will 2020 mark a turning point in how employers and the FE sector deal with racial inequalities?

Those of us working with black and Asian young people are still waiting to see.

There has been some progress – black and Asian apprentice numbers have increased. In the past decade the proportion of BAME people starting an apprenticeship has increased from nine per cent to 15 per cent.

But across primary and secondary education in England, BAME groups represent 34 per cent of the student population. It's not enough progress.

Think about this: young black and Asian people are at least twice as likely to be unemployed as young white people, whatever their qualification level. Only eight per cent of apprenticeship starts for 16-19-year-olds are from BAME backgrounds.

The Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG) was set up nearly 30 years ago to influence the new training and enterprise councils (as they were then called) to tackle racial inequalities in skills and employment.

There have been many more initiatives since then, but none has managed to transform the race disparities in apprenticeships.

It seems that many employers, especially in STEM-related sectors,



do not recognise the benefits of ethnic diversity.

It also appears that FE colleges and other organisations that interface with employers have been reluctant to challenge unfair and poor recruitment practices.

Racial bias in recruitment remains conscious, unconscious and widespread. Some employers and their national bodies have avoided facing this issue head on. This has to change.

Too many employers, training providers and colleges are still stuck on the first rung of the race equality ladder: they have an equality or diversity and inclusion policy but go no further.

Not long ago, I facilitated a workshop in Bradford for textile employers, organised by the council and an FE college.

The college had built good relationships with textile employers offering high-tech jobs but struggling to recruit locally. Despite Bradford's ethnically diverse population, the employers said they were unable to recruit talent from Asian communities.

Listening to the employers it was clear that they were ready to reach out to diverse communities. But at the same time it was equally clear that they held stereotyped and outdated views about why Asian people were "not applying" to their firms, although none was conducting any ethnicity monitoring to see what the actual application rates were.

"Racial bias in recruitment remains conscious, unconscious and widespread"

The workshop prompted a council initiative to help employers adopt fair recruitment practices. This is something that should be happening routinely, although perhaps it is difficult for certain stakeholders to play this role because they have not always got their own house in order when it comes to ethnic diversity either.

Regrettably the government no longer publishes application data by ethnicity but previously published data for 2015/16 showed that around 25 per cent of all apprenticeship applications were from ethnic minority people.

Meanwhile, only around 10 per cent of those starting apprenticeships in the same year were from an ethnic minority.

These figures dispel the widely held myths that black and Asian young people and their parents lack awareness of apprenticeships or are reluctant to apply.

Looking forward, employers in growth sectors need practical support to improve recruitment and implement workforce ethnicity monitoring. They could use the Greater London Authority's recently published Inclusive Employers Toolkit for construction and technology.

But BTEG still wants much more to be done to tackle poorer success rates for black and Asian apprenticeship applicants. Application data is important in achieving this and should be shared with employers and colleges.

We are also calling on the Department for Education to set a stretch target (one that requires entirely new ways of working) for the number of 16-18-year-old black and Asian apprenticeship starts in growth sectors over the next four years.

The FE sector should be a catalyst for change. Let's finally make this happen.

Opinion

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ANNE MILTON

Former minister of state for apprenticeships and skills



I'm in no doubt about how to improve our skills education after visiting WorldSkills

Off-the-job training in apprenticeships is clearly critical, while GCSE resits need to be rethought, writes Anne Milton

When I attended WorldSkills Abu Dhabi 2017, I was privileged to be the first government minister to witness WorldSkills on foreign soil. It was an experience I will never forget.

I was left in complete awe of the competitors. They demonstrated an amazing level of skills and had the mental stamina to keep up the intensity of a competition lasting up to four full days.

I soon realised that I was witnessing excellence from those incredibly talented young people. My visit gave me a fantastic opportunity, as a relatively new minister at the time, to learn about other countries' skills systems. It left me in no doubt as to what we must do to improve skills levels in this country.

It is traditional to cite Germany as the gold standard for technical education. But we shouldn't just try and emulate one country, there are many other countries that are also doing some excellent work on technical education.

For instance, Russia has used all that it learnt from WorldSkills as a basis for overhauling the country's entire skills system. Meanwhile, a minister from Singapore was clear that one of the pillars of their successful technical and vocational education system is high English



and maths standards.

This is something we haven't yet got right in England. We want young people to achieve a strong standard in both subjects, but the GCSE resits policy can lead to young people repeatedly sitting exams and repeatedly failing, which can then go on to have a very detrimental impact on their confidence and self-esteem.

Functional skills qualifications help with this, but we need to continue to strive to find a better way of getting young people to develop and improve.

There was a lot of interest in our apprenticeship reforms and the introduction of T Levels. Discussing how apprenticeships work in different parts of the world is always useful. In particular, these conversations hardened my views about the importance of the off-the-job training element of apprenticeships.

Some businesses in the UK were unhappy about our requirement that 20 per cent of an apprenticeship should

consist of off-the-job training. But what I discovered was that this minimum requirement is lower than those in place in almost every other country.

This confirmed my view that there should be no weakening on this requirement if we are to have the world-class apprenticeships our young people deserve.

“There should be no weakening of our requirement for off-the-job training”

What is clear to me is that to raise the esteem in which technical education is held, we must look at what excellence in skills looks like.

WorldSkills UK knows this better than anyone else. It holds the ring on excellence.

It leads the way on best practice because it must achieve exceptionally high standards for

Team UK to win medals when competing against some of the strongest nations.

We also need long-term investment so providers can plan ahead. Further education has long been underfunded; adult education has dropped even further behind. Only by significantly increasing our investment can we achieve parity of esteem. How this funding is spent – and who these decisions are made by – is also critical.

Team UK does very well in the medal tables, consistently placing in and around the top 10. As a nation, we punch well above our weight for every pound spent.

If the government is serious about its stated ambitions on skills and technical education, what better way to do this than bidding to host the WorldSkills competition on UK soil?

If the UK is prepared to back a bid, just think what a message this would send to the country and the world about the importance of skills to the UK economy.

FE Week has been a strong champion of this bid and I look forward to talking further to the paper at the WorldSkills UK International Skills Summit next week.

It is a chance we simply cannot afford to miss as we strive for excellence in our skills systems.

The WorldSkills UK International Skills Summit takes place on November 11 and 12. For more information visit worldskillsuk.org



READER'S REPLY

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Anger and dismay as BAME apprenticeship figures fall

It's easy to pay lip service to addressing inclusion, but the real work is done on the ground.

Roxanne Baptiste, Twitter

[On meetings of the Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network being paused] Strange, most of my meetings have continued – it's called Zoom. Other platforms such as MS teams and Skype are available.

Verity Davidge, Twitter

DfE lifts all provider T Level restrictions from 2024

I doubt that engineers with the knowledge, experience and ability to teach at T Level are likely to work for FE-level salaries that have hardly changed in the past ten years.

Vivian Benest, website

After 40 years in education, once again the government are trying to re-invent the wheel. The work experience element of T Levels is the stumbling block. 80 per cent of companies in the UK are small businesses who will not be able to provide a balanced work experience. What was wrong with the old-fashioned HNC and HND that many of today's leaders of industry studied?

Derek Tilley, website

REPLY OF THE WEEK

Anger and dismay as BAME apprenticeship figures fall



It also means serious work on staff's diversity, inclusion key performance indicators for managers, equality, diversity and inclusion review of practices, courageous listening to BAME staff and students. After Black Lives Matter, it's time FE led the way on inclusion.

Anastassia Parsons, Twitter

Independent Commission on the College of the Future releases final UK-wide report



Whilst I'm always open to new ideas, working in apprenticeships, employers can sometimes "want" something that isn't what they need. Many employers are adamant they want a level 3 when the job description they've provided for the apprentice only has the responsibilities of a level 2. We need cohesion and a full understanding on both sides so that the best decisions can be made for the learner.

Jess Short, Facebook

Ofsted publishes first 10 'interim visit' letters for FE providers



What exactly was the purpose of these visits? They manage to say absolutely nothing in three pages of waffle. "Staff say...", "Tutors believe...", what a waste of everyone's time and public money. Either inspect and evaluate or don't bother. This middle ground is absolutely pointless.

David, website

Bulletin

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Rachael Charmbury

Director of business and community development, Craven College

Start date September 2020

Previous job

Chief executive, Charmbury Consulting

Interesting fact

She met her husband at 5am while competing with him on a road rally



Steve Stanley

Director of evaluation and impact, Access Creative College

Start date October 2020

Previous job

Her Majesty's Inspector, Ofsted

Interesting fact

He once accompanied, on guitar, a performance of a ballet on stilts on national children's TV

Movers & Shakers

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



Ellen Thinessen

Chair, North East Local Enterprise Partnership's Skills Advisory Panel

Start date November 2020

Concurrent job

Chief executive, Education Partnership North East

Interesting fact

Before moving into education she was a coronary care nurse



Paul Quigley

Chair, Highbury College Portsmouth

Start date November 2020

Concurrent job

Business coach, Woodstock Consultants

Interesting fact

He was also the business development manager at a company which manufactures kit cars

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

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