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## COPING WITH COVID BEFORE CHRISTMAS



INVESTIGATION

Pages 21-23

## £125M PROMISED FUNDING DELAYED

- National Skills Fund next year just £375m as consultation and white paper delayed
- DfE says spending review prioritised responding to Covid-19 with 'Plan for Jobs'
- Questions remain over why £50m of fund for training to be spent on capital

EXCLUSIVE

Page 4

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## FEWEEK

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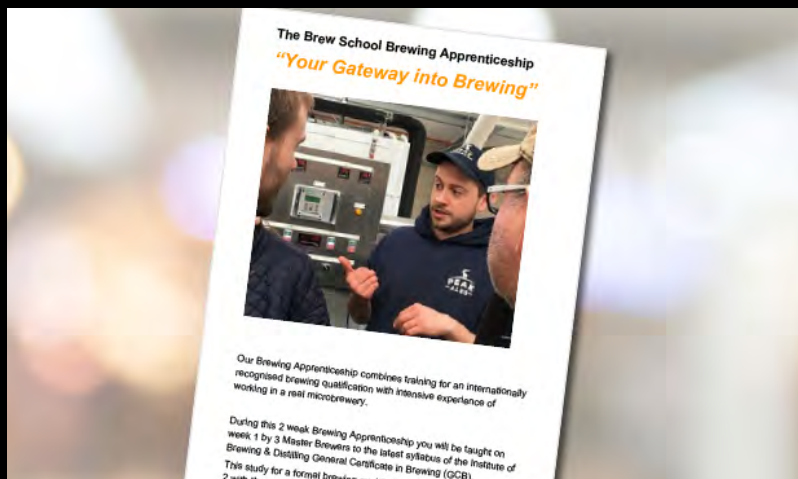
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### How a company illegally marketed a 14-day 'apprenticeship', and what happened next



Page 6



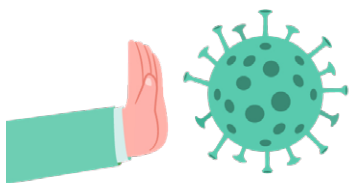
### DfE reveals why college bailout deals are kept secret

Page 12



### Former exams firm boss set to be new Ofqual chief

Page 8



### Christmas contact tracing rules revealed

Page 13

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# Skills fund will get only three-quarters of the promised £500m for 2021/22

BILLY CAMDEN

BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

From front

Exclusive

Promised investment in skills training has been questioned after FE Week discovered £125 million of FE funding has been delayed by at least a year.

The Conservative Party manifesto pledged a new National Skills Fund (NSF) with £500 million being made available in each of the next five years in England from 2021/22, but last month's spending review only committed three-quarters of that amount for next year.

The Department for Education has now confirmed that just £375 million of the promised £500 million will be used in 2021/22, following a reprioritisation of funds to "support the government's response to Covid-19".

The DfE did, however, make clear that the £125 million underspend will be used as part of the National Skills Fund in future years, and it remains committed to spending the full £2.5 billion.

But it seems there are even questions over the £2.5 billion figure, as £50 million of the dedicated £375 million for next year has been allocated to a capital budget.

Shadow skills minister Toby Perkins was shocked to hear the spending delay decision, saying it was a "remarkable thing at a time when the need for this money is greater than ever before" in the face of Covid-19.

He told FE Week: "There is a particular need for this funding at this moment because there are huge numbers of people who are being laid off in one sector who need to be retrained in new sectors. We have got fast-rising youth unemployment and there is a real need for investment in skills."

"The government rhetoric acknowledges that but their actual spending commitments are even less than what they committed to in their manifesto a year ago, long before anybody had ever heard of coronavirus."

Policies that the NSF will be used to fund in future years are not yet known, as the DfE is yet



Rishi Sunak

to launch its promised consultation.

Of the NSF funding being used in 2021/22, £95 million will fund the prime minister's level 3 entitlement in his 'lifetime skills guarantee' (see page 9), and £43 million has been set aside to expand the employer-led boot camp training model (see page 14).

Meanwhile, £127 million will be used to continue the chancellor Rishi Sunak's summer Plan for Jobs, including funding for traineeships, sector-based work academy placements and the National Careers Service.

And £110 million, including £50 million of capital investment, will be used to "drive up higher technical provision in support of the future rollout of a Flexible Loan Entitlement to test and develop innovative models for local collaboration between skills providers and employers".

When FE Week asked why the NSF was being used to fund capital investment rather than its capital spending budget, the DfE would only say the decision was "taken as part of the spending review".

University and College Union head of further education Andrew Harden echoed Perkins' concern about the delay to NSF spending in 2021/22.

"Questions must be asked as to why we yet again see an underspend on a key government policy designed to address a chronic skills shortage when there is a looming need to re-equip the nation's workforce for a post-Covid-19

economy," he said.

Harden added that the funding could, for example, be used to fund a college staff pay rise in an effort to rebuild further education's capacity to deliver the courses needed.

Last week, the Association of Colleges recommended its members give staff a one per cent pay rise owing to a lack of government investment – a decision that outraged trade unions.

Commenting on the NSF, AoC deputy chief executive Julian Gravatt said: "The extra money in the spending review for 16-to-18 education, for skills and for capital is a good start. With a lack of details or allocations yet, colleges won't be able to make firm spending decisions, including on pay, until this happens."

"It would be useful to know where the £125 million top-sliced from the skills fund has gone. The £375 million allocated for 2021/22 will be a useful addition to the £2 billion spent on adult education and apprenticeships but it's worth noting the Institute for Fiscal Studies' estimate that spending halved in the last decade, so there is still some way to go to reach the levels needed to catch up."

He added: "The need for capital investment is still very real – but there is a risk that Treasury and DfE have divided it up among a lot of budgets."

The DfE would not be drawn on where the £125 million has been reprioritised to.



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## BEHIND THE NEWS

## How a company illegally marketed a 14-day 'apprenticeship', and what happened next

BILLY CAMDEN  
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## Exclusive

As most in the sector will know, calling a training programme an "apprenticeship" if it is not government-backed became illegal under the Enterprise Act 2016.

Then skills minister Nick Boles said at the time it would give officials power to take action in such cases as "we don't want their status to be undermined by those unscrupulously passing off short courses as apprenticeships".

So when FE Week was tipped off that a commercial training provider in the brewing industry was calling a two-week course an apprenticeship – just the 50 weeks off what is needed to meet the government's minimum duration for a statutory apprenticeship – we began investigating and asked the Department for Education what action it would take.

But, as ever with the DfE, things were not simple or very transparent.

We were informed on Wednesday December 2 that the Brew-School, a firm that runs commercial beer-brewing courses, had been advertising plans to launch the "Brew-School's Brewing Apprenticeship" which would last for 14 days at a cost of £2,500 per learner, from 2021.

The course would "combine the best of internationally recognised brewing qualifications with intensive experience of working in a real microbrewery".

And "during the two-week brewing apprenticeship you will be taught by three master brewers to the latest syllabus of the Institute of Brewing and Distilling general certificate in brewing," it added.

The advert pitches the course against the government-backed level 4 brewing apprenticeship, saying that "unfortunately" it takes 18 months to complete "and you still will not have an internationally recognised brewing qualification".

"The beauty with the new Brew-School Brewing Apprenticeship is that this intensive

two-week apprenticeship will lead you to obtain several formal brewing- and beer-related qualifications as well as practical brewing training," it said.

The advert even came with a syllabus for the "apprenticeship".

FE Week initially tried calling the company, which is also not on the government's register of apprenticeship training providers, but the number provided on its website goes straight to voicemail. We emailed asking for comment about how this two-week course qualifies as an apprenticeship, and informed them that it is an offence under the Enterprise Act 2016, which includes the following clause: "Only statutory apprenticeships to be described as apprenticeships".

In 2017, the same clause was added to the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 – the relevant legislation under which powers to intervene now fall.

At the same time we enquired with the DfE and received a response just hours later saying the department will "consider the information provided to us in relation to this enquiry and take action as appropriate". However, it added that enforcement duties actually rest with the relevant "local weights and measures authority" (trading standards) and it would be for them to decide whether or not legal proceedings are appropriate.

Next stop, then, was to contact the local trading standards – a service typically found in each local authority to whom illegal trading can be reported and acted upon. In this case it was Sheffield City Council.

Days went by before the council called to say it could find no evidence of the Brew-School's 14-day apprenticeship.

Upon checking back on the firm's website, it transpired that the "apprenticeship" had since been changed and is now called a "Trainee Brewer Course".

The DfE called that same day to say it too could see no evidence of a bogus apprenticeship.

Of course, FE Week had screen-shots and the

The Brew School Brewing Apprenticeship  
"Your Gateway into Brewing"

Our Brewing Apprenticeship combines training for an internationally recognised brewing qualification with intensive experience of working in a real microbrewery.

During this 2 week Brewing Apprenticeship you will be taught on week 1 by 3 Master Brewers to the latest syllabus of the Institute of Brewing & Distilling General Certificate in Brewing (GCB).

This study for a formal brewing qualification will be followed in week 2 with "hands on" brewing training in a microbrewery using a state of the art 1.5 bbl Moeschle pilot brewing kit.

previous syllabus saved to show the council and government what the advert had previously stated.

But it turns out the DfE's Education and Skills Funding Agency had actually contacted the Brew-School last Thursday, the day after FE Week's initial enquiry, and told the firm to "ensure that all references to apprenticeships are removed immediately" and to confirm that this action has been taken within ten working days.

FE Week was not – and still has not – been informed of this action by the DfE, but the Brew-School finally responded one week after our initial enquiry to tell us about the department's communication.

A director of the Brew-School responded to the DfE to say: "Thank you for bringing this to our attention which we were totally unaware of. We have now changed the description of our course and renamed it as a Trainee Brewer Course."

The council has since not responded to FE Week's request for comment – so the extent of any legal action that could be taken in such cases remains unclear.

# New polling shows Gen Z and adults want a choice of learning options

**CINDY RAMPERSAUD**

**SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT FOR BTEC  
AND APPRENTICESHIPS AT PEARSON**

The careers and skills landscapes were changing before 2020 – and, as with so many things, the pandemic has accelerated this. The make-up of the workforce will continue to evolve in the coming months and years with greater automation, a shift to digital enabled roles and growth, contraction and transformation happening across many business sectors. This all has a knock-on impact on the demand for skills and education, and the sector needs to flex and adapt so we can support both young people and adults to make progress in their lives. We recently conducted some polling (with 3000 young people and their parents, as well as those already in employment) to hear first-hand what they want this support to look like.

## Keeping options open

It is clear that they want to be able to keep their educational options open, in a bid to prepare themselves for their future careers. Over 9 in 10 (93%) of young learners, and 84% of adults felt it was important to have a range of learning choices available to them in order to succeed in their careers. In a similar trend, just over 95% of parents agreed with this, and a further 4 in 5 (81%) stated that their child's course should provide them with practical skills as well as theory-based learning.

## Need for broad courses and a focus on transferable skills

The results also show the continuing need for broader courses that can take learners on a variety of career pathways. The importance placed on preparation for the future and the changing job landscape is further cemented in the fact that only 27% of 16-18-year-olds surveyed and their parents (20%) agreed that young people should have to choose a specific occupation to study for, as opposed to also being able to choose a route that

prepares them for a range of careers.

## Flexible and accessible bite-sized learning for adults

There is also the desire for flexible and accessible bite-size learning for busy adults looking to upskill to meet changing demand. 83% of 25-44-year-olds want a choice of courses available to them, including bite size learning and short courses so they can continue to upskill while they work.

When asked to think about their future employment, over 4 in 5 (86%) young learners agreed that they will have to continue learning new skills throughout their life to be prepared for the world of work. Likewise, over two thirds (66.3%) of adults believed that they will have to keep learning throughout their lives to have the relevant skills and knowledge that are valuable to employers.

The role of education and learning remains crucial as the nation continues to respond to changes both at an individual, community and wider economic level. Further education and career focused education has always responded with a talent and skills strategy to support the evolving needs of employers, and we'll need to be as nimble as ever to adapt to the huge transformations in technology, industries, careers, learning and lifestyles.

Find out more about Pearson's Your Future Your Choice campaign: [go.pearson.com/yourBTEC](https://go.pearson.com/yourBTEC)

**93%**  
of students believe it's  
important to have a wide  
range of options available  
to help prepare them for  
their futures (Censuswide, 2020)

 **Pearson | BTEC**



Image © Nathalie Leal



# Former exams firm boss set to be new Ofqual chief

**BILLY CAMDEN**  
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## Exclusive

A former exams company chief executive is set to replace Dame Glenys Stacey as the chief regulator at Ofqual, FE Week understands.

Simon Lebus is being lined up to take over the top position at the exams regulator as Stacey's interim period comes to end on December 31.

Lebus served as the group chief executive at Cambridge Assessment, which runs exam board OCR, for 15 years before leaving in 2018.

FE Week understands the appointment is set to be another interim role, though, and has yet to be fully ratified.

Stacey, who previously served as chief regulator from 2011 to 2016, took up the role in August after Sally Collier left following the exams fiasco.

It was announced this week that she is the preferred candidate for chair of the Office for Environmental Protection.

Asked by the education select committee on Tuesday what advice she would give her successor, Stacey said they should make sure they've "got the stamina for it" and should "really get into the technical detail".

She urged the successor to "learn from 2020", adding: "For example, I don't think Ofqual was particularly visible in 2020. It had a rather established way of sort of communicating.

"We need to be much more visible and much more interested in listening to others' ideas and working them through with them... they may be valuable, they may not... but really listening and engaging."

Lebus was said to have driven Cambridge Assessment through "major organisational and industry change", including technology advances such as the introduction of on-

screen marking and computer-based testing.

His roles since include becoming a non-executive chairman at Sparx, an AI online platform for secondary school maths teaching, and a visiting fellow at the University of Cambridge Judge Business School, according to his LinkedIn page.

The decision to make another interim appointment is likely to be controversial, particularly given the huge task ahead of ensuring next year's exam series doesn't become another fiasco.

The Department for Education said a replacement for Stacey will be announced in due course.



Simon Lebus

## Campaign launched to encourage learners to respond to DfE post-16 review

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The awarding body that runs BTECs has launched a campaign to encourage students to respond to the government's level 3 and below technical qualifications consultation.

Backed by former skills minister Anne Milton, "Your Future, Your Choice" has gone live today on Pearson's website, aiming to give young and adult learners the "opportunity to voice their opinions on what they want for their future education".

It comes amid a Department for Education review that plans to limit funding for applied general qualifications, such as BTECs, that compete with T Levels and A-levels by 2023.

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".

As well as Milton, who was in post when the DfE first announced the review in March 2019, "Your Future, Your Choice" is backed by five-time Olympic medallist gymnast Max Whitlock.

A Pearson spokesperson explained that the campaign will be giving students, educators and employers the "chance to read more about the government's proposals for post-16 qualifications, encouraging them to respond directly to the DfE consultation running until January 15 in the case of educators and employers, and encouraging students to share their BTEC success stories with us on social media with #YourFutureYourChoice or submit longer ones on our website".

They added that while Pearson supports the introduction of T Levels and shares the government's vision for "outstanding outcomes for every learner", the awarding body also thinks "offering learners a choice in what qualification suits their career aspirations best is the right way to support them and the UK economy – both now and in the future.

"BTECs have been at the heart of national need for many years and continue to transform lives and careers. We're encouraging young or adult learners to have their say on their future education options."

To mark the launch of their campaign, Pearson has also published research (see page 7) that found nine in ten young students believe it's important for there to be a wide choice of options available to help prepare them for their futures.



# Confirmed: Level 3 'lifetime skills guarantee' qualification list excludes major economic sectors

BILLY CAMDEN

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Almost 400 level 3 qualifications have been chosen for the prime minister's lifetime skills guarantee – but major sectors, including hospitality, tourism and media, have been excluded as FE Week previously revealed.

The Department for Education this week published the list of qualifications that will be fully funded for adults without a full qualification at level 3 – equivalent to two full A-levels.

In total, there are 379 qualifications on the list, although some (for example, A-levels in subjects such as physics) are the same qualification simply with a different awarding organisation; and others that are not A-levels, such as the Advanced Certificate in Bookkeeping, are too small to be counted as a full level 3 qualification.

Backed with £95 million from the National Skills Fund and available from April 2021, the sectors involved include the likes of engineering, public services, construction and nursing.

However, as FE Week exclusively reported last month, key parts of the economy have been left out. Those excluded are deemed by the DfE to be a low priority with low wages, and include hospitality, media and arts, travel and tourism, sport and retail.

The government said the courses chosen for the offer are those that are “valued by employers”, with prime minister Boris Johnson adding that the lifetime skills guarantee will give “thousands of adults across the country the chance to do exactly that – as we build back better after the pandemic”.

But Tom Bewick, chief executive of the Federation of Awarding Bodies, hit out at this “top-down driven list cooked up in Whitehall”, which shows the DfE has gone for a “convoluted way of trying to ration limited public funds from the get-go, while dressing the whole policy up as being an absolute free learning entitlement like access to the NHS.

“Indeed, this is increasingly looking like neither lifetime skills nor a guarantee, with some of the qualifications listed, like A-level physics, looking more like the government's ideological

obsession with science subjects rather than a focus on what a post-Covid economy many need,” he added.

Following the announcement, many people took to Twitter to condemn the exclusion of some sectors from the “guarantee”. Sacha Corcoran, the principal of London-based provider Big Creative Education, said: “I’m livid about the exclusion of creative and arts-based qualifications.

“As a sector worth over 90 billion we should be investing in training and the skills of the workforce. A sector that is also 94 per cent white needs to diversify and this is through access to creative qualifications and jobs.”

The DfE has said the list will be kept under review to “ensure that it continues to respond to changing labour market needs”, and there will be a “facility” for awarding organisations and mayoral combined authorities to suggest additions to the list.

The lifetime skills guarantee builds on a policy that has been in place since 2013, which allows adults up to the age of 23 to be fully funded for their first full level 3 qualification from the adult education budget. Those aged 24 and over have since had to take out an advanced learner loan to pay for the course.

The current entitlement for those aged 23 and below spans nearly 1,200 qualifications, which is almost four times as many as those being made available under the lifetime skills guarantee.

The DfE said any qualifications included in this new level 3 adult offer, which are not included in the existing 19-to-23 statutory entitlement, will be made available for 19-to-23 learners. Any level 3 qualifications not currently included in this offer will continue to be eligible for advanced learner loans.

Funding for the new level 3 adult offer will be delivered through the Education and Skills Funding Agency in non-devolved areas, and delivered through Mayoral Combined Authorities and the Greater London Authority through a “separate grant”, on the “strict condition that funding is used for its intended purpose”.

FE Week asked how the funding would be dished out to providers, presumed to be through the adult education budget, but the DfE declined to comment beyond saying further information about these arrangements “will be made in due course”.

Association of Employment and Learning Providers managing director Jane Hickie said the announcement is a “positive step” but while the inclusion of sectors such as adult care is welcomed,

“we can’t fail to hide our disappointment that hospitality and retail have been left off when these sectors are being hit so hard by the effects of the pandemic”.

Association of Colleges chief executive David Hughes praised the list, saying its “breadth of courses” is “vital in supporting rural and urban economies to build back better”.

Visit <https://bit.ly/37QcGTd> to view the full list.

## SECTOR SUBJECT AREAS INCLUDED:

Accounting and Finance  
Agriculture  
Building and construction  
Business management  
Child development and well-being  
Engineering  
Environmental conservation  
Health and social care  
Horticulture and forestry  
ICT for users  
ICT Practitioners  
Manufacturing technologies  
Mathematics and statistics  
Medicine and Dentistry  
Nursing and Subjects and Vocations Allied to Medicine  
Public services  
Science  
Teaching and Lecturing  
Transportation operations and maintenance  
Warehousing and distribution

## SECTOR SUBJECT AREAS EXCLUDED:

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Architecture  
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Direct Learning Support  
Economics  
Geography  
History  
History, Philosophy and Theology  
Hospitality and catering  
Languages, literature and culture of the British Isles  
Law and Legal Services  
Marketing and Sales  
Media and communication  
Other languages, literature and culture  
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Boris Johnson

# Leaked document reveals how the DfE chose 'lifetime skills guarantee' qualification list

BILLY CAMDEN  
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## Exclusive

A confidential document that shows the criteria the government used to choose the level 3 courses in the prime minister's lifetime skills guarantee has been leaked to FE Week.

It shows that the methodology adopted by the Department for Education involved wage outcomes, alignment with government "priorities" and the "ability to address labour market need".

The list of nearly 400 qualifications that made the cut, which will be available to adults to study from April for free if they do not already hold a full level 3 qualification – equivalent to two A-levels – was unveiled this week but controversially excludes major economic sectors, such as hospitality, tourism, media and arts (see page 9).

So how did the government decide which courses were in and which were out? The documents show a two-step approach was used. Here are the details.

### Step 1 – wage outcomes

Firstly, the DfE analysed the existing sector subject areas (SSAs) to "understand the strength of their average wage outcomes, which is the most robust source of evidence we have to indicate the labour market value of approved qualifications".

The data sources used were as follows:

- "Median earnings per SSA five years after study for full level 3 achieved in 2011/12. This is our lead criterion, as this gives the most robust sense of long-term earnings potential.
- "Median earnings per SSA three years after study for full L3 achieved in 2013/14. This was included to sense-check earnings data five years post-achievement.
- "Median earnings per SSA one year after

#### Methodology for L3 sector subject area (SSA) selection [1]

Strictly confidential - not for onward circulation

##### Step 1 – wage outcomes

- We have analysed all [tier 2 SSAs](#) to understand the strength of their average wage outcomes, which is the most robust source of evidence we have to indicate the labour market value of approved qualifications. The data sources used were as follows:
  - Median earnings per SSA five years after study for Full L3 achieved in 2011/12. This is our lead criterion, as this gives the most robust sense of long-term earnings potential.
  - Median earnings per SSA three years after study for Full L3 achieved in 2013/14. This was included to sense-check earnings data five years post-achievement.
  - Median earnings per SSA one year after study for Full L3 achieved in 2016/17. This was also included to sense-check earnings data five years post-achievement.
- We set a sensible minimum threshold for wage outcomes of £19,000, which is broadly equivalent to the median wage for all L3 SSAs considered when looking at wage outcomes five years after completion. We then sifted through filtered qualifications data to understand which SSAs included 100 or more learning aims for certificates or diplomas amongst adult learners with prior attainment below level 3 in 2018/19. This is to ensure that the evidence base for our wage outcome data was large enough, and to ensure that there will be sufficient learner demand to make delivery viable from 2021 (however, on the next slide we have outlined the steps we have been taking to ensure we did not unduly limit the scope of the offer on the basis of low existing learner numbers).

However, we acknowledge that **wage outcomes should not be the only determinant for inclusion** – see next slide for further detail

DfE's confidential lifetime  
skills guarantee briefing  
document slide 1

#### Methodology for L3 sector subject area (SSA) selection [2]

Strictly confidential - not for onward circulation

##### Step 2 – expanding scope to include government priorities and areas of labour market need

We recognise that wage data alone is not an appropriate means of identifying qualifications with labour market value across the country – relying solely on this may not result in a list that is inclusive enough to generate strong uptake and good labour market outcomes. Similarly, using at job vacancy data alone is too backwards-looking to be the sole determinant of courses in this offer (especially given current labour market uncertainty). We also recognise that it may be appropriate to include SSAs in which we would like to see growth, despite low current uptake amongst adults – we have therefore ensured qualifications with under 100 19+ learning aims in 18/19, alongside those with potentially lower wage outcomes, were included in this evaluation.

We have therefore taken the below steps to widen the scope of SSAs, which gave us an assessment of each SSA's alignment with government priorities and ability to address economic need. This methodology seeks to apply transparent criteria to the process:

- We performed a qualitative evaluation of all SSAs regardless of the number of existing learning aims and wage outcomes. To do this, we assessed each SSA's alignment with the 2017 Industrial Strategy in the first instance (as per the existing [High Value Course Premium](#) (HVCP) methodology).
- However, using the Industrial Strategy alone may not produce an inclusive list of qualifications, and is not necessarily reflective of more recent government priorities. We therefore expanded the scope of 'government priorities' to include sectors referenced in more recent government announcements.\*
- We then scrutinised the list of SSAs against published analysis of current and future labour market need (such as the Migration Advisory Committee's Shortage Occupation List at RQF level 3-5), which factored in impacts of Covid-19. **DfE's confidential lifetime skills guarantee briefing document slide 2**

\*E.g. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-adult-social-care-action-plan/covid-19-adult-social-care-action-plan-for-adult-social-care-supporting-the-workforce>

study for full L3 achieved in 2016/17. This was also included to sense-check earnings data five years post-achievement."

The DfE says it then set a "sensible minimum threshold" for wage outcomes of £19,000, which is "broadly equivalent to the median wage for all level 3 SSAs considered when looking at wage outcomes five years after completion".

"We then sifted through filtered qualifications data to understand which SSAs included 100 or more learning aims for certificates or diplomas amongst adult

learners with prior attainment below level 3 in 2018/19," the document continues.

"This is to ensure that the evidence base for our wage outcome data was large enough, and to ensure that there will be sufficient learner demand to make delivery viable from 2021."

### Step 2 – expanding scope to include government priorities and areas of labour

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

## CONTINUED

### market need

The DfE says it acknowledged that wage data alone is “not an appropriate means of identifying qualifications with labour market value across the country” and that relying solely on this “may not result in a list that is inclusive enough to generate strong uptake and good labour market outcomes”.

Recognising that it may also be “appropriate” to include SSAs in which the government would like to see growth (despite low current uptake among adults), the department ensured that qualifications with under 100 19+ learning aims in 2018/19, alongside those with potentially lower wage outcomes, were included in

this evaluation.

“We have therefore taken the below steps to widen the scope of SSAs, which gave us an assessment of each SSA’s alignment with government priorities and ability to address economic need,” the document explains.

1. “We performed a qualitative evaluation of all SSAs regardless of the number of existing learning aims and wage outcomes. To do this, we assessed each SSA’s alignment with the 2017 Industrial Strategy in the first instance (as per the existing High Value Course Premium (HVCP) methodology).
2. “However, using the Industrial Strategy alone may not produce an inclusive list of qualifications, and is not necessarily reflective of more recent government priorities. We therefore expanded the

scope of ‘government priorities’ to include sectors referenced in more recent government announcements.

3. “We then scrutinised the list of SSAs against published analysis of current and future labour market need (such as the Migration Advisory Committee’s Shortage Occupation List at RQF level 3-5), which factored in impacts of Covid-19 and Brexit. We should note that measures of labour market demand are imperfect and difficult to predict accurately in the current economic climate.”

### So what qualifications are included?

By carrying out both of the above steps, the DfE identified those SSAs for inclusion in the targeted level 3 entitlement.

The department adds that it believes these SSAs have the “strongest wage outcomes, alignment with government priorities and ability to address labour market need”.

In total there are 379 qualifications on the list (visit <https://bit.ly/37QcGTd> to view in full), which includes a mix of existing vocational and technical qualifications and A-levels.

There are 76 A-levels in total, including ten A-levels in physics which are offered by different awarding organisations.

Others, like the Advanced Certificate in Bookkeeping, are too small to be counted as a full level 3 qualification.

Meanwhile, all Access to HE qualifications have been excluded as these are eligible for advanced learner loans that are written off upon entry to HE and are “not primarily aimed at facilitating immediate labour market outcomes”.

The DfE concludes that it believes the qualifications in scope for the level 3 targeted entitlement extension should focus on “providing the skills that will have immediate labour market value (i.e. they should not be primarily focused on gaining access to higher qualifications)”.

### Can the list change?

Yes. The DfE says it will keep the list under review and used its confidential briefing to ask awarding bodies to provide evidence for why other qualifications should be added, or why those included should be removed.

#### Provisional list of SSAs for the targeted level 3 entitlement extension

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By carrying out the steps outlined in slides 2-3, we identified the following SSAs for inclusion in the targeted level 3 entitlement. We believe these SSAs have the strongest wage outcomes, alignment with government priorities and ability to address labour market need. Those SSAs that are not included in the provisional list have not met the criteria outlined in slides 2-3.

SSAs included in the provisional list:	SSAs not included in the provisional list*:
<p>SSAs identified in step 1, which met the £19k threshold:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engineering (HVCP)</li> <li>• Building and Construction (HVCP)</li> <li>• Manufacturing Technologies (HVCP)</li> <li>• Transportation Operations and Maintenance (HVCP)</li> <li>• Business Management</li> <li>• Public Services</li> <li>• Accounting and Finance</li> <li>• Medicine and Dentistry</li> <li>• Horticulture and Forestry</li> </ul> <p>SSAs identified in step 2, which are aligned with government priorities and/or reflect labour market need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and Social Care</li> <li>• ICT Practitioners (HVCP)</li> <li>• ICT for Users</li> <li>• Mathematics and statistics</li> <li>• Science</li> <li>• Agriculture</li> <li>• Nursing and Vocations and Subjects Allied to Medicine</li> <li>• Child Development and Wellbeing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administration</li> <li>• Law and Legal Services</li> <li>• Retailing and Wholesaling</li> <li>• Hospitality and Catering</li> <li>• Media and Communication</li> <li>• Publishing and Information</li> <li>• Economics</li> <li>• Marketing and Sales</li> <li>• Geography</li> <li>• History, Philosophy and Theology</li> <li>• Animal Care and Veterinary</li> <li>• Performing Arts</li> <li>• Travel and Tourism</li> <li>• Sociology and Social Policy</li> <li>• Languages, Literature and Culture of the British Isles</li> <li>• History</li> <li>• Social Sciences</li> <li>• Politics</li> <li>• Other Languages, Literature and Culture</li> <li>• Crafts, Creative Arts and Design</li> <li>• Direct Learning Support</li> <li>• Service Enterprises</li> <li>• Theology and Religious Studies</li> </ul>

DfE's confidential lifetime skills guarantee briefing document slide 3 and distribution

\*Note that "vocational" and "vocational and regional planning" SSAs do not appear in the data analysed, and we believe these could be unused categories at level 3.

#### Criteria for refining the list of qualification within the selected SSAs

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The SSAs outlined in the previous slides contain a large number of qualifications, not all of which will meet the needs of learners this policy is intended to support. In the long-term, the ongoing qualifications review will ensure that every qualification approved for public funding has a distinct purpose, is high quality and supports progression to positive outcomes for students – the criteria outlined on this slide in no way pre-empt the outcomes of this review, and the level 3 entitlement extension will fully align with these outcomes as they are implemented.

We believe the qualifications in scope for the level 3 targeted entitlement extension should focus on providing the skills that will have immediate labour market value (i.e. they should not be primarily focused on gaining access to higher qualifications). We are using the following criteria as we develop and refine the list of qualifications for the targeted L3 entitlement for delivery from April 2021:

- Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQs) are in the SSAs outlined in previous slides
- Include AS Level, A Levels if they fall within the SSAs outlined in previous slides and meet the relevant criteria below
- Exclude Access to HE qualifications, as these are eligible for Advanced Learner Loans that are written off upon entry to HE and are not primarily aimed at facilitating immediate labour market outcomes.
- VTQs, AS levels and A levels are already approved for ESFA funding for adults (AEB Level 3 19 to 23 entitlement, Advanced Learner Loans, European Social Fund) for 2020/21
- VTQs, AS levels and A levels which will continue to be operationally available from April onwards (and, from when we produce the list not have an operational end date before end July 2021)
- VTQs, AS levels and A levels which may be newly regulated and which may be added to the list up to 31 July 2021 where they meet all other criteria, where they are also approved for another ESFA offer (e.g. AEB or ESF)
- VTQs which can be delivered and assessed outside of the workplace (e.g. they do not require the learner to be employed, and they are not linked to upskilling in the same role or CPD)
- VTQs with a primary purpose of supporting entry into a clear job role (rather than broad introduction to a sector) as set out by the

DfE's confidential lifetime skills guarantee briefing document slide 4 and distribution

...for the ESFA's no or low enrolment process

...is in the SSAs identified where the majority of the qualification's content must be in the SSA (this requires a

document slide 4 and distribution



# DfE reveals why college bailout deals are kept secret

FRASER WHIELDON  
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Exclusive

The government has said the names of colleges receiving emergency cash support must be kept a secret so as to avoid “disadvantaged learners” missing out on being educated.

The Department for Education included this claim in a host of reasons why it will not name five colleges that received emergency funding earlier this year, in response to an FE Week freedom of information request.

The response to the request said identifying the colleges could lead to a “loss of confidence in their ability to provide sustained education, and this would be likely to result in fewer students applying to the college for their courses.

“Given the additional travel required to study elsewhere, some disadvantaged learners would be likely to choose not to undertake any education at all.”

Essentially, the DfE is conceding that disadvantaged learners would have no alternative education provider were the college to stop delivering courses.

Despite their reticence in publishing the names of colleges that receive bailouts, the DfE regularly publishes the FE commissioner’s intervention reports and Education and Skills Funding Agency financial notices to improve for individual colleges, which include details of their financial situations alongside recommendations.

The DfE also claimed, in the response to the FOI request, that revealing the colleges’ names “might jeopardise any negotiations of



upcoming contracts with their suppliers” and “would likely result in significant additional burdens being placed upon their resources, with the need to manage media attention, parental concerns and the potential loss of/difficulties in recruiting staff.

“This would limit their ability to effectively provide further education, harming the outcomes of learners, which would not be in the public interest.”

FE Week submitted the FOI after skills minister Gillian Keegan told parliament in September that five colleges had needed “financial assistance”. In its response, the DfE did reveal that the colleges had been handed a total of £9.6 million between April and August, with one college receiving £5.3 million over June and July.

The ESFA’s director of provider market oversight, Matthew Atkinson, told the Commons’ Public Accounts Committee last month that 64 colleges were currently at risk of running out of

cash, and the government was likely to spend £70 million on emergency funding for colleges in total this year – which he said was “more than we thought”.

College leaders were themselves “staggered” when another FE Week FOI request revealed in January how four colleges had spent £111 million they had received as part of secretive “Fresh Start” deals with the government, with money going towards IT equipment and writing off government loans.

An increasing number of college bailouts have been handed out in recent years and have ultimately led to the introduction of the college insolvency regime, which was used for the first time when the Hadlow Group of colleges collapsed last year.

But Atkinson admitted to the education committee these insolvencies will still cost the taxpayer over £60 million, with £6 million going to accountants alone – a figure DfE permanent secretary Susan Acland-Hood called “gut-wrenching”.

Yet the government has actively worked to stop the names of colleges that receive bailouts coming to light, changing its oversight policy in October so colleges that apply for emergency funding will not automatically fall into formal intervention.

The DfE withheld the information under section 43 (commercial interest) and section 36(2) (c) (would be likely otherwise to prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

FE Week will be referring the decision to withhold the college names to the Information Commissioner’s Office.

Note to assist in the interpretation of the redactions	College name	Posting/payment dates	Amount
College 1	<REDACTED>	4/22/20 5/27/20 7/15/20 8/25/20	£783,000.00
College 2	<REDACTED>	5/18/20 8/5/20 7/7/20	£956,000.00
College 3	<REDACTED>	6/17/20 7/16/20	£1,381,000.00
College 4	<REDACTED>	7/24/20 6/22/20	£5,362,000.00
College 5	<REDACTED>	7/15/20	£1,166,135.00

Total: £9,648,135.00

The DfE response received from FE Week’s FOI

## News

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# Christmas contact tracing rules revealed

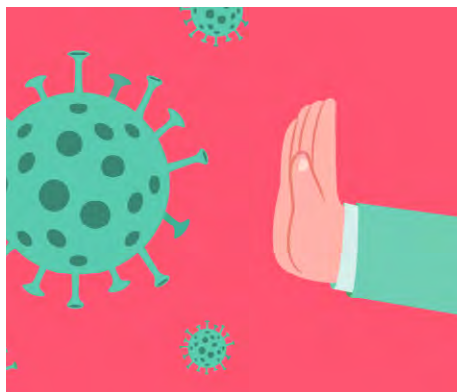
FRASER WHIELDON

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Further education providers are being asked to remain "on-call" up to the day before Christmas Eve to assist with contact tracing, but will be able to decide when they can be contacted.

New guidance sent out to providers by the Department for Education this week, seen by FE Week, says it has agreed with Public Health England a six-day window after the final day of teaching in which FE providers and schools will be asked to remain contactable.

This is in order to help with tracing people who have been in contact with positive Covid-19 cases, with the guidance reading: "This will allow enough time for positive coronavirus cases to be identified and



confirmed by a test and for relevant contacts in the education setting to be traced."

Although providers have flexibility to set their own term dates, the department has advised them to finish face-to-face teaching on December 17, to give a cut-off date for the six-day window of December 23.

"This change does not diminish our view that colleges should continue to maximise access to face-to-face teaching, supplemented by some remote education," the guidance continues, adding: "If the amount of face-to-face planned hours for students are reduced before the end of term, we expect that additional face-to-face planned hours will be provided before the end of the study programme."

After those six days, further education providers will not be reached by NHS Test and Trace for contact tracing.

The guidance also says that during those six days, staff are not being asked to be on-call at all times, and may set a limited period in the day to receive notification of positive cases so they can advise contacts of that case to self-isolate.

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# Second pilot phase of skills boot camps launched ahead of national rollout

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The government's skills "boot camps" have moved into their second pilot phase ahead of plans for a countrywide rollout backed by £43 million from the new National Skills Fund.

Colleges and training providers began recruiting earlier this month for the next set of the 12- to 16-week courses, which have been expanded to tackle not only digital skills but also industries including welding, engineering and construction.

Following a £4 million tender by the Department for Education, the Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire (D2N2) local enterprise partnership (LEP) was chosen to commission boot camp providers in their area, with a budget of £996,419; while Devon County Council will oversee courses in the heart of the south-west LEP area, with £1.7 million; and the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) will do so for Leeds, with £1.3 million.

## "This is only the start for this innovative approach to adult training"

They have a strict deadline to recruit learners, who must be aged 19 or over, put them through the boot camps, and provide them with job interviews where appropriate, by the end of March, before the National Skills Fund is rolled out.

The first phase of boot camps started



recruiting learners in September with a budget of £4 million and built off existing digital skills-only schemes in the West Midlands and Greater Manchester, before expanding to Liverpool and Lancashire.

Both phases must be completed by the end of this financial year in March 2021, and are being funded through the DfE's unallocated resources.

Education secretary Gavin Williamson announced the second wave last week and called the pilots "only the start for this innovative approach to adult training".

In a tender ahead of the national rollout of skills boot camps published last Friday, the DfE said it would welcome bids by consortiums of organisations with employers and providers lined up and ready to deliver training.

Plans for the national rollout reflect much of what was put in place for the second phase of pilots, where the bidders also bid with supporting organisations, employers and providers ready to deliver already made courses.

Organisations involved in the second pilot

phase told FE Week there was no formal procurement process. Instead, providers and employers attended engagement webinars and then the training organisations submitted an interest in taking part in the boot camps with D2N2, Devon County Council or WYCA.

The providers had to include in their submission what programmes they could deliver and how much it would cost, and the three authorities assessed them against criteria, then put their bids to the DfE, with the providers' programmes.

The three had from July this year until August to put in their bids.

Exeter College's director of adult and higher education Lucinda Sanders said they attended a webinar for south-west employers and providers in July and then worked on their proposal over the next few weeks before submitting it to Devon County Council in August. They put in a bid for £150,000 and received that amount for a course in digital insights – covering a range

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



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## CONTINUED

of skills, including how to do a social media advert and develop simple software.

Rachel Quinn, head of people and skills for D2N2, said: “We didn’t ask providers to tender as much as to be part of our consortium. But they did submit proposals, which we assessed. If there had been strong competition, then we would have run a formal process, but in the end, the partnership built quite naturally.”

## “We didn’t ask providers to tender as much as to be part of our consortium”

Devon County Council said the Heart of the South West LEP ran a similar process and “received expressions of interest to join, which were then assessed against strategic fit, value for money, quality of provision and deliverability”.

West Yorkshire Combined Authority said: “Due to the timescales involved in delivering the project and the requirements of DfE’s tender process”, its four providers were directly commissioned – but they refused to elaborate.

Employers also became involved with the

boot camps through the webinars, or through existing links with boot camp providers, and have to contribute to the programme by guaranteeing job interviews, providing in-work mentoring, or allowing the use of facilities for learners.

Quinn said D2N2 will also charge their employers a ten per cent cash match. For example, if a course was allocated £30,000, the employer involved would have to pay £3,000.

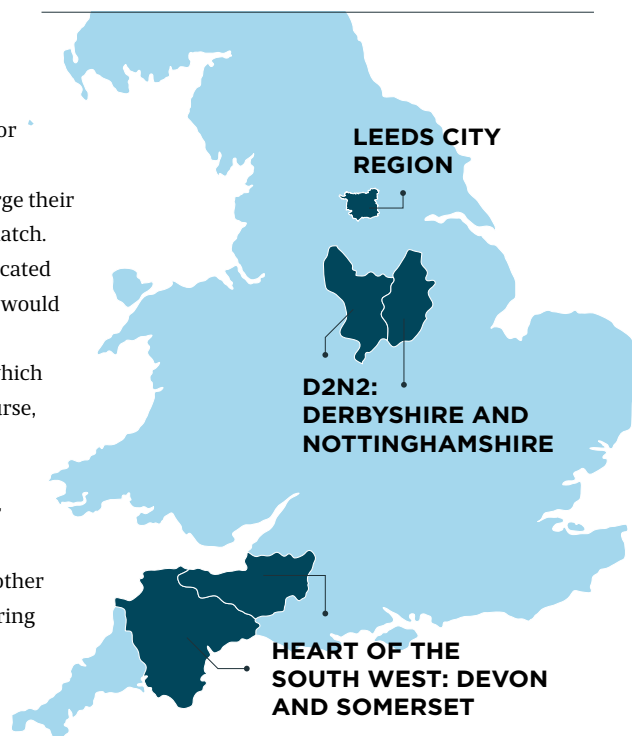
Employers also impact upon which learners are put through the course, with Allan Allison, director of client engagement for D2N2 provider Babington, saying their role would be “more focused on the employed than some of the other providers”. Their boot camp offering covers courses such as digital leadership – combining digital skills with leadership training – and data analysis.

Sanders, meanwhile, said Exeter’s course was looking to help people find new careers.

For Quinn, “It’s all about testing how we deliver skills faster and more responsive to employer need, with a quicker turnaround.” She continued, “If it’s shown to work, then it could pave quite a different model of roll-out of the National Skills Fund.”

Unlike courses funded from the adult education budget and apprenticeships, the

### WHERE IS THE SECOND PHASE OF SKILLS BOOTCAMP PILOTS TAKING PLACE?



boot camp courses will not be recorded through individualised learner records (ILR), and the commissioning organisations said they will instead be monitoring providers’ performance against metrics such as completions and destinations.

One outcome the DfE is keen on is to have a diverse range of learners come through the boot camps. Quinn said each of their providers has targets for characteristics such as gender mix and unemployed vs employed participants.

Crispin Read, director of one of the providers for Leeds, Coders Guild, said there is “a big appetite for using this pilot to further our work in diversity”. His provider is delivering several boot camps, including in software testing and web development.

On learner targets, Sanders said her college, for example, had a target of 100 learners for its course in digital skills, while regionally, D2N2 is aiming to have 520 learners on its boot camps overall.



Rachel Quinn



Crispin Read

# Third apprenticeship rate consultation as ESFA considers changes to eligible cost rules

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The current apprenticeships rate review is set to undergo its third consultation as the Education and Skills Funding Agency steps in to consider changes to its eligible costs policy.

The agency this week said it planned to launch a review of its rules that decide what costs count towards apprenticeship training – inviting 600 organisations to take part.

It comes after the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education announced last week that it would delay the outcome of its funding rate review until the agency's work in this area is complete.

The IfATE's funding band consultation was first launched in February and proposes a controversial new model that could see rates cut by over 40 per cent.

The institute then opened a second consultation on a revised "rates-based variable model" in August, but concerns were raised that apprenticeships would become unprofitable if current ineligible costs are excluded from the new model.

Ineligible costs for apprenticeships, under current ESFA policy, include "enrolment, induction, initial assessment, initial diagnostic testing, or similar activity".

Writing for FE Week at the time of the IfATE's second consultation, Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief policy officer Simon Ashworth questioned how these costs can be deemed ineligible "when these are activities mandated by the ESFA and/or an expectation of what Ofsted would expect to see during inspection".

He said: "It is too easy for IfATE to pass the buck to the ESFA and argue that their hands are tied by the agency's funding rules on eligible and ineligible costs.

"Both the institute and the ESFA need to work together to develop a solution; in AELP's view, this means ESFA reviewing their funding rules on ineligible costs and the institute properly accounting for key mandated activity in the form of a general overhead input as part of their new funding band methodology model."

Announcing the delay to its rate consultation



last week, the IfATE said: "Many respondents noted that the model did not take account of those costs associated with the delivery of an apprenticeship which are not eligible for government funding.

"It is worth reiterating that eligible costs policy is outside the scope of this consultation, and there has been no change in this policy. Nevertheless, the ESFA have agreed in parallel to review current policy on eligible costs."

The institute added that as the ESFA's review of eligible costs may have an impact on the final funding model, "we need to ensure we understand these outcomes before we publish the full response to the consultation.

"We plan therefore to publish a full consultation response in parallel with the outputs from the testing work and the conclusion of ESFA's review."

Those organisations being invited to the ESFA's review include provider representative bodies; apprenticeship trailblazer groups; employer providers; and the "top 30 main providers" funded by ESFA.

If an organisation does not receive a direct invite they can contact their representative body or trailblazer contact and ask for their comments to be included in their response, the agency said.

No deadline for when the eligible costs review will conclude has been provided at this stage.

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## Feature

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# "We will not be the same because of this"

JESS STAUFENBERG  
@STAUFENBERGJ

## From front

**After a gruelling - and inspiring - first term, college staff tell Jess Staufenberg how they have dealt with a period in education like no other, due to Covid**

It has been a time like no other for college staff. Since the first lockdown in March they have stayed open for vulnerable learners, "bubbled" students, coped with their own health anxieties, ramped up cleaning procedures, moved their entire practice online and dealt with ever-changing government guidance and tier restrictions. What in February was "rumours about something happening in China", as Anita Lall, vice principal of Craven College in Yorkshire, puts it, was to become a global pandemic with consequences for learners and educators that few could foresee.

Now on the home straight to the Christmas

break – one of the most exhausting terms in normal times – college leaders openly acknowledge that, as Ali Hadawi at Central Bedfordshire College notes, hard-working staff are "counting the days, the hours" until they can take a breather. At the same time, many are clear their colleges "will never be the same" again. The coronavirus has wrought great changes in further education institutions, with some surprising consequences.

The scale of the challenge faced by college staff cannot be understated. Unlike schools, the further education sector delivers vocational and technical qualifications with strongly practical elements, which do not lend themselves easily to online lessons. In many cases learners are either younger and already at risk of disengaging from education altogether, or older and responsible for children at home or who must shield. It's also easy to forget that at some institutions, the college is literally home.

"We're 52-week provision, remember," explains Simon Welch, principal at

National Star College for learners with special educational needs and disabilities in Cheltenham. During both lockdowns, 88 of the college's usual 115 residential learners remained on site at all times. Even over Christmas, staff will stay to support them. The same is true at numerous land-based colleges – at Askham Bryan College in York, 300 residential learners have "needed to be kept safe" throughout the pandemic, explains vice principal Sandra Burnhill. Many of her agriculture students also counted as essential workers, supervised by staff as they continued to pick fruit, milk cows and lamb sheep throughout lockdown "to keep the nation fed".

Meanwhile, for other lecturers, the requirement to stay at home rather than in classrooms was itself a challenge. Malcolm Goodwin, principal at Capel Manor College in north London, explains "we went from a completely face-to-face college to online in a handful of days. It was extraordinary."

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## CONTINUED

Staff training for Zoom, Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, breakout chats, video lessons and virtual homework were rapidly put on, in some cases for staff who had never used a single of those applications in their lives. When lockdown eased, more students were brought back in June. By September, many staff were starting the new term without having had a real summer break.

Soon, a new issue rapidly emerged the yawning learning gap among fresh recruits, resulting from the long period of "homeschooling", an absence of summer schools and the A-level results debacle placing some learners on higher-level courses than they should be. "The big challenge of this first term has been engaging students that haven't been in learning," says Christine Ricketts, principal at Brooklands College in Surrey. Another problem then soon became apparent. "Our existing students who had already had a lot of online learning since March were getting a bit fatigued with it." Construction, engineering, hospitality and catering students had patiently endured lots of theory learning since lockdown, but the desire to get back on site for practical learning was growing, she says. "Some staff were seeing more students who were there in online lessons, but the camera and mikes were off. We needed to sort it quickly."

A similar picture was emerging at Coventry College in the West Midlands, where students in bricklaying, performing arts and motor engineering also wanted



Students with learning disabilities at City Lit adult education college in socially distanced learning this term

to return. Assistant principal Gemma Knott explains: "We'd been very inventive with the timetable, having half of the learners in college and half out. But then lecturers said, 'Actually, it's not working to teach some of the learners remotely.'" The college reviewed its plans and prioritised bringing more students on practical courses back in. The need for staff to be resilient and adaptable has clearly been intense.

The term "digital poverty" then also quickly became common parlance, as staff ran up against the issue. Dr Robert Rees, vice principal at City College Southampton, says "The main tricky bit this term has been straddling provision for those learners in college and those who are away, to ensure they are learning at the same pace." Like many colleges, he surveyed students for the first time about digital accessibility – revealing that 40 per cent didn't have "sole access" to their own laptop and prompting the college to hand out 400. "But we still can't get them good enough broadband," continues Burnhill, many of whose learners live in rural Yorkshire. "The government must approve

broadband services. There's only so much colleges can do."

But what colleges have been able to do is worthy of note. Faced with these challenges, the range of strategies and solutions deployed to tackle them are admirable.

Faced with the challenge of virtual lessons, florist and saddler practitioners at Capel Manor College sent fresh flowers, leather and tools home to students so they could practise together over video link, while horticulture teachers "have gone into their allotments to film practicals", according to the principal, Goodwin. At National Star College, Welch explains teachers wore extra protective gear to continue "desperately needed" hydrotherapy in the swimming pool with vulnerable learners.

**"We went from a completely face-to-face college to online in a handful of days. It was extraordinary"**

In many cases, it is clear that staff have acted on their own initiative rather than wait for college instruction. Hadawi explains that lecturers "devised learning parcels, so they could drop them off at students' houses and then meet them online. That's beyond the call of duty." He particularly praises office



LSEC Greenwich students created hampers to be donated to a local foodbank



Level 3 health and social care students at City College Southampton delivering gifts to care home residents

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



## Feature

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## CONTINUED

staff whose roles have rapidly changed. "The student services team have stayed in contact with every single vulnerable learner, delivering laptops, sending lunch vouchers. They've worked around the clock, including weekends." Meanwhile at National Star, the "lettings team" found their diaries empty without events and instead "skillfully" reinvented themselves as "Covid test coordinators", smiles Welch.

Other workarounds to keep learning on track were rolled out. When business apprenticeships were cancelled by SME employers, staff at Buxton & Leek College in Derbyshire invited learners to run a country fair and Christmas fair, according to assistant principal Alison Loxton. Similarly at Craven College in North Yorkshire, which was surrounded by tier 3 areas, apprenticeships were cancelled so the college put on mock interview practice and careers advice with employers online. Lall, assistant principal, notes this move had an upside. "Because it was online, actually so many more employers could meet the learners. We doubled the number of employers usually engaging with us."

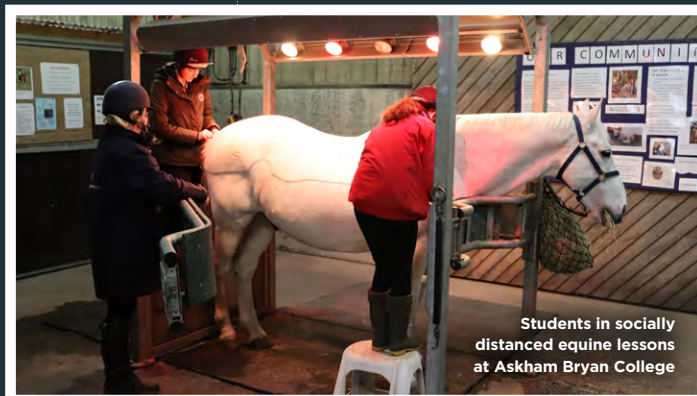
She is not the only senior leader to point towards the positive outcomes of the pandemic. Time and again, staff tell FE Week about an increased sense of closeness with one each other, students and families. A greater insight into learners has emerged, explains Dan Cundy, principal of South Bank Engineering UTC in London. "We've now got individualised student work

accounts, so for the first time we can see on one platform all their learning, how much homework they've done, what lessons they've been in. It's all there in one place."

Danny Brett, assistant principal at Bishop Burton College in Yorkshire, explains "we didn't have this kind of information to this level of depth before. We were conscious of connectivity issues for students before, but this has made us think differently and accelerated our want for information about that."

## "Because it was online, actually so many more employers could meet the learners"

In a way, the pandemic has caused the authorities to confront the long-standing problem of digital poverty at last. At the London & South East Education Group, for instance, £198,000 was provided by the Greater London Authority and £142,000 by the Department for Education. Louise Wolsey, chief transformation officer at the group, explains how



the coronavirus has also "accelerated the work we are doing with the NHS", with a training programme starting this week for roles needed in hospitals, such as "Covid immuno-nurses", "Covid programme admin support" and "seasonal flu immunisers". "We're seeing more partnerships like that spring up," she says.

College leaders are candidly clear that without the impetus of coronavirus, a great deal of upskilling, adaptability and community feel would not have happened. Weekly quizzes, WhatsApp groups packed with memes and supportive colleagues have all had an impact. Knott at Coventry College even says the pandemic has finally cemented a community spirit across several campuses that merged a few years ago. "You would never have been able to do all this when everything was normal," says Mark Malcomson, principal of City Lit College in central London. "If someone had said, 'right, we're going to move thousands of courses online with a few weeks' notice,' I'd have had a small-scale riot."

Yet the warnings about staff exhaustion remain. Hadawi explains that "pressure" on the sector is at risk of becoming a permanent "stress" if the government doesn't help more. "How we are currently working is not sustainable for long. Staff either need remunerating more, or I need to be able to hire more staff." The calls for greater funding, better broadband connectivity and clear guidance on assessment have not gone away.

But, reflects Malcomson, "We will not be the same because of this. There were many challenges initially, but opportunities too. I wouldn't have wished it, but it's made us a better institution."





JANET  
CURTIS-BRONI

Group chief people officer,  
London and South East  
Education Group



## Decade-long projects can truly make changes for BAME staff and learners

**Funding projects with long-term goals have a better chance of improving diversity and inclusion, writes Janet Curtis-Broni**

As we draw to the end of our first term of this year, it's worth reflecting on one of the biggest events that happened during the first lockdown in May.

Black Lives Matter movements exploded across the world in response to police brutality in America, causing even the smallest, most rural college to think about its diversity and inclusion strategies.

But the question was, how best to do this? And as we look back on the first term, have we succeeded?

At our colleges, we encouraged staff and students to talk openly about equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) issues. We invited them to share their own experiences and personal journeys.

We held whole-organisation discussions on Zoom about the use of appropriate language and acronyms. Together we actively sought ideas on what we could do to bring about real change.

Throughout this consultative process, I knew that we couldn't just "write another strategy". Yes, we had consulted, yes, we had listened. But none of this would matter if we didn't take genuine, impactful action with specific measurable targets.

So we agreed to create an EDI grants programme called

"Enough is Enough – Tackling Racial Inequality". The idea behind the programme is to enable our students and staff to develop their own projects to tackle issues and areas that are important to them.

Meanwhile, the college group would commit to funding the projects over a ten-year period – a sufficient amount of time to bring about real, lasting change.

Proposals were submitted by both staff and students and an internal committee was set up to assess and select them.

So far three projects have been chosen for funding, with £70,000 granted in total.

They include a mentoring "empower" scheme aimed specifically at black and minority ethnic (BAME) learners, proposed by a member of staff.

This aims to raise aspirations by offering one-to-one mentoring on self-esteem, teamwork and leadership for individuals as well as a programme of workshops, events and speakers.

The second project is a football coaching programme

with younger learners. We are also funding a "positive changes" project, which will offer enrichment opportunities including trips and inspirational speakers for BAME learners with special educational needs or who are at risk of becoming NEET.

Central to this initiative is that action is being driven by the people most affected by the issues.

**"As we know from previous experience, we will not be able to affect change overnight"**

However, to ensure true cultural change throughout an organisation, you need buy-in from the top. All our senior leaders and governing boards have committed to the equality, diversity and inclusion grants programme across the colleges.

They've encouraged the

appointment of EDI champions throughout the group. These are staff representatives who lead staff support groups, encourage open discussion and share feedback with senior teams.

We've tweaked our recruitment processes at all levels – including our boards, on to which we have recently appointed two female governors from BAME backgrounds.

Meanwhile, we've launched a new talent management programme that includes specific training schemes (such as our "aspiring leaders" programme).

We also fully support the sector-led Black FE Leadership Group and its ten-point plan, which focuses on addressing systemic racism and driving through meaningful and lasting change.

As we know from previous experience, we will not be able to affect change overnight.

Over the years, the government has introduced various strategies (certainly since the Stephen Lawrence inquiry in 1999) and although this is clearly positive, much more needs to be done.

It's too early yet to say what impact our own ten-year strategies are having.

But by modelling best practice at every level and empowering our students and staff, we can ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion stays firmly on leadership agendas and that our impact will be long-lasting.



LINSEY  
TAYLOR

National head of online learning, Education and Training Foundation



## Staff must share their new resources with the whole sector

**We need to identify and pool the 'gems' that staff have drummed up under lockdown, writes Lindsey Taylor**

Prior to the pandemic, in my experience it was not unusual to find teaching staff who were reluctant to upload their materials to their institution's virtual learning environment, and who rebelled at the suggestion of putting up recordings of their classes.

They cited reasons such as students not turning up if all the resources were online, or that it would threaten their job – as if the materials being online removed the need for an educator.

But current circumstances have forced everyone's hand and the big push has resulted in thousands of people creating and uploading hours' worth of content.

It is time to acknowledge that materials being online, even lessons, do not in the slightest bit remove the need for the teacher or educator.

If it were so easy to learn remotely from pre-prepared materials, people would not have been attending educational establishments for years – and I am sure that the Department for Education would have revised its funding model quite dramatically.

So now that educators can be recognised as being a key component in a student's learning journey, hopefully there can

also be an acceptance of posting excellent-quality materials online.

Even better, it should now be clear that uploading content is crucial so students have access to both content online and their educator. One does not replace the other, but together they can undoubtedly give students more opportunities to learn.

Even once face-to-face learning is the norm again, we must remember that providing high-quality, easy-to-share resources can significantly improve learners' experience of education.

As we have also found out, online learning can be used to enhance inclusivity and support learning for those who have found lockdown improved their chances.

But there is also an opportunity to enhance the quality of content, also known as "learning objects", across the sector. By this I mean that there will be amazing videos, quizzes and slide presentations that have worked really well in a session.

These resources could benefit

so many more learners if shared more widely. The challenge is to uncover the gems, find an appropriate place to upload them and develop a method of identifying content to guide educators to find them.

Providing this quality content will need time, resources and an ongoing quality monitoring process.

**"These resources could benefit so many more learners if shared more widely"**

These are serious challenges in the commercialised, time-poor and money-strapped environment that providers from across the further education sector operate in.

But – necessity being the mother of invention – this year has most definitely forced the issue. There must be a whole

range of "learning objects" and different kinds of content in organisations across the country that have been developed and trialled, which are just asking to be re-used out in the sector.

I have been involved in meetings with the Department for Education and College Collaboration Fund (CCF) participants over the past few months, and see exciting prospects of their materials being shared in the near future – which I encourage those interested to keep an eye on via the CCF website.

In the long-term as a sector, we must reach a point where educators can smoothly and effectively not only plan their year ahead and map out their scheme of work, but also identify the extra resources they can access and utilise those to enrich learning.

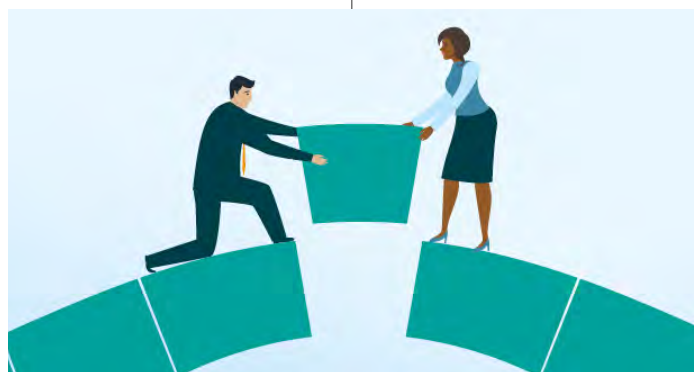
To achieve this there will need to be a lead from the top and buy-in from the whole workforce.

I will leave you with two questions.

Firstly, do you have learning objects of which you are justly proud, and that you know have made a positive impact on your learners? More importantly, if given the chance, would you share them?

And secondly if there were a bank of learning objects on which you could call – would you?

As we go forward, I very much hope the answer to both those questions is increasingly "yes".



## Opinion

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## DAVID CORKE

Director of education and skills policy, Association of Colleges



## We must not confuse competition with choice. They are not the same

**For most other European countries, education is deemed too important to leave to market forces, writes David Corke**

On Tuesday we published a report showing that excessive competition has led to worse outcomes in 16-19 provision in terms of Ofsted grades, financial health and course choice.

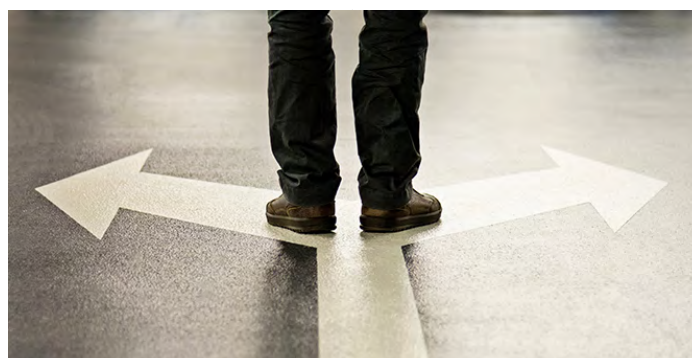
We used various data sets, including performance and participation data, and matched this with the individualised learner records, to find out how competition is affecting outcomes, subject choice, finance and quality.

While there was no clear impact shown on educational outcomes, those areas with high levels of competition saw their scores drop for inspection outcomes, their financial situation worsen and the range of academic and vocational courses available to learners significantly narrow.

To be clear, we at the Association of Colleges are not anti-competition. We think competition can be a good thing, where it is regulated and working.

The UK happens to be one of the few nations in Europe that has a highly marketised system, and it shows.

At CEDEFOP (the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training), the 2018 European Skills Index places the UK 23rd out of 28 countries for



matching skills education with the needs of employers and the economy.

The UK system isn't working properly. What's clear is that for most other countries, education is too important to leave to market forces.

**“For now, we particularly need the FE commissioner and regional schools commissioners to work closely together”**

When governments do not carefully coordinate and oversee provision as part of a whole system, the system becomes fragmented. This means some providers will offer what is popular, and not too costly, leading to a homogenised local offer and with too little specialist provision that employers are

urgently calling for. This is just one of the reasons why the UK has a poor skills match score.

It means sufficiency in our system is poor. Sufficiency is defined by the Department for Education as the extent to which the full range of approved options is available and accessible to all those who qualify for them, regardless of geography.

We must not confuse competition with choice – they are not the same thing. What our report shows is the more competitive a market, the less choice you have.

It also makes lots of provision unviable, meaning each provider simply cannot attract enough learner numbers. This is especially true of small providers – who happen to be both uneconomic and the worst performers from a quality perspective.

So we need a better approach.

One of the biggest problems is the confusing and complex array of regulators of our system, with no overarching rationale or duty

of care for FE, HE and schools.

For now, we particularly need the FE commissioner and regional schools commissioners to work closely together when deciding if new provision can open up in any given location – especially as we are facing a demographic up-turn in the next few years.

That's despite the fact that our research shows that where school sixth-forms are dominant, colleges are smaller, and as a result there is a reduced choice of courses available in that area – resulting in there being fewer vocational and technical courses around.

A whole place-based market approach is required. Even the area-based reviews didn't take into account school sixth-forms and other provider types. If they did, it would be such a complex landscape for them to assess, the reviews would probably still be going on now!

But this can be changed. Again, to be clear, we are not calling for a single commissioner, but instead for a duty or requirement on commissioners to ensure that different kinds of provider do not destabilise each other.

There are encouraging signs the DfE is listening to the issues related to excessive competition.

If they are serious about the levelling-up agenda, and skills education post-Covid, policy makers need to make sure this is reflected in the white paper.





## READER'S REPLY

### AoC recommends 'disappointing' 1 per cent college staff pay rise

No one would argue with the rationale for pay increases for our sector, especially after a year like 2020 and the work we've put in to keep our sector moving forward – but where from? Starts across the range are significantly down and money is definitely tight. If a college has the money, great, pay more, but if you're running out of cash, where would this come from? Nobody wants to hear this but no matter how hard we're finding things at the moment, it could be significantly worse. Outgoings, including salaries, can only be covered by income. That must be the starting point!

Noel Johnson, website

How can the AoC recommend a paltry one per cent pay rise for front-line staff whilst turning a blind eye to inflation-busting executive pay in the sector?

Tony, website

### Ofsted annual report highlights 'inadequate' apprenticeships as private provider grades fall for 4th year

I guess a headline of "independent providers achieve 74 per cent and colleges achieve 75 per cent" isn't quite as exciting as "'inadequate' apprenticeships as private provider grades fall for fourth year" with all the implications thereof. Given the amount of (ESFA encouraged) new entry into the industry, a ten per cent or so drop in quality rates over a few years is not a very surprising outcome. I suspect that if you were

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## REPLY OF THE WEEK

### This is why we should delay the white paper even longer



Agreed. The consultation period is too short and over much of the Christmas break, impacting the number of educators who will be able to respond. The main issue is the 'alternatives' to A-levels and T Levels. If we do not retain Extended Diplomas and Post A-level Prep Degree in Foundation in creative subjects, the creative industries will be significantly impacted at a time when the country needs industry to thrive.

Sarah Clark, website

to compare experienced providers with five or ten years' experience, then the percentage would be much higher perhaps?

Richard Goodwin, website

More focus on learners is needed, not spreadsheets and data, because the true value of a great learning experience cannot be expressed as simply as numbers on a spreadsheet. We deal with different levels of learning on a daily basis.

Paul Hesketh, website

### Little known skills-based work academy programme given major funding boost



The real skill is to help all to understand when to choose each option – SWAP, kickstart, boot camps, traineeships, apprenticeships, lifetime skills guarantee or full-time FE programmes. There is a common theme of skills bridges that can be applied to all.

Patrick Craven, Twitter

# Bulletin

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## 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](mailto:news@feweek.co.uk)



**Olivia Bussey**

Board member,  
Federation of  
Awarding Bodies

**Start date** December 2020

**Concurrent job**

Head of quality and compliance, Ofqual responsible officer, NCC Education

**Interesting fact**

She enjoys long runs on Saturdays, and a cool down straight after by working on random dance routines



**David Gallagher**

Board member,  
Federation of  
Awarding Bodies

**Start date** December 2020

**Concurrent job**

Chief executive, NCFE

**Interesting fact**

He once appeared on a "dodgy" Channel 4 game show called CrossFire – described as Crystal Maze with paintball guns – and was the only team member to survive the full episode



**James Russell**

Executive director  
for funding and  
performance,  
Barnsley College

**Start date** December 2020

**Previous job**

Director, Omnia Information Management (education consultancy)

**Interesting fact**

As a rare record collector, he regularly contributes to magazines, websites and fan publications



**Shaïd Mahmood**

Chair, Association  
of Colleges

**Start date** December 2020

**Concurrent job**

Chief officer for communities, Leeds City Council; Chair, Luminate Education Group

**Interesting fact**

He's been a football coach for 15 years



**Andy Dobson**

Principal,  
Halesowen College

**Start date** January 2021

**Previous Job**

Principal, Kidderminster College

**Interesting fact**

He once came second in an international mountain race; he says because the Russian team went up in a cable car

Got a story?



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FEWEEK