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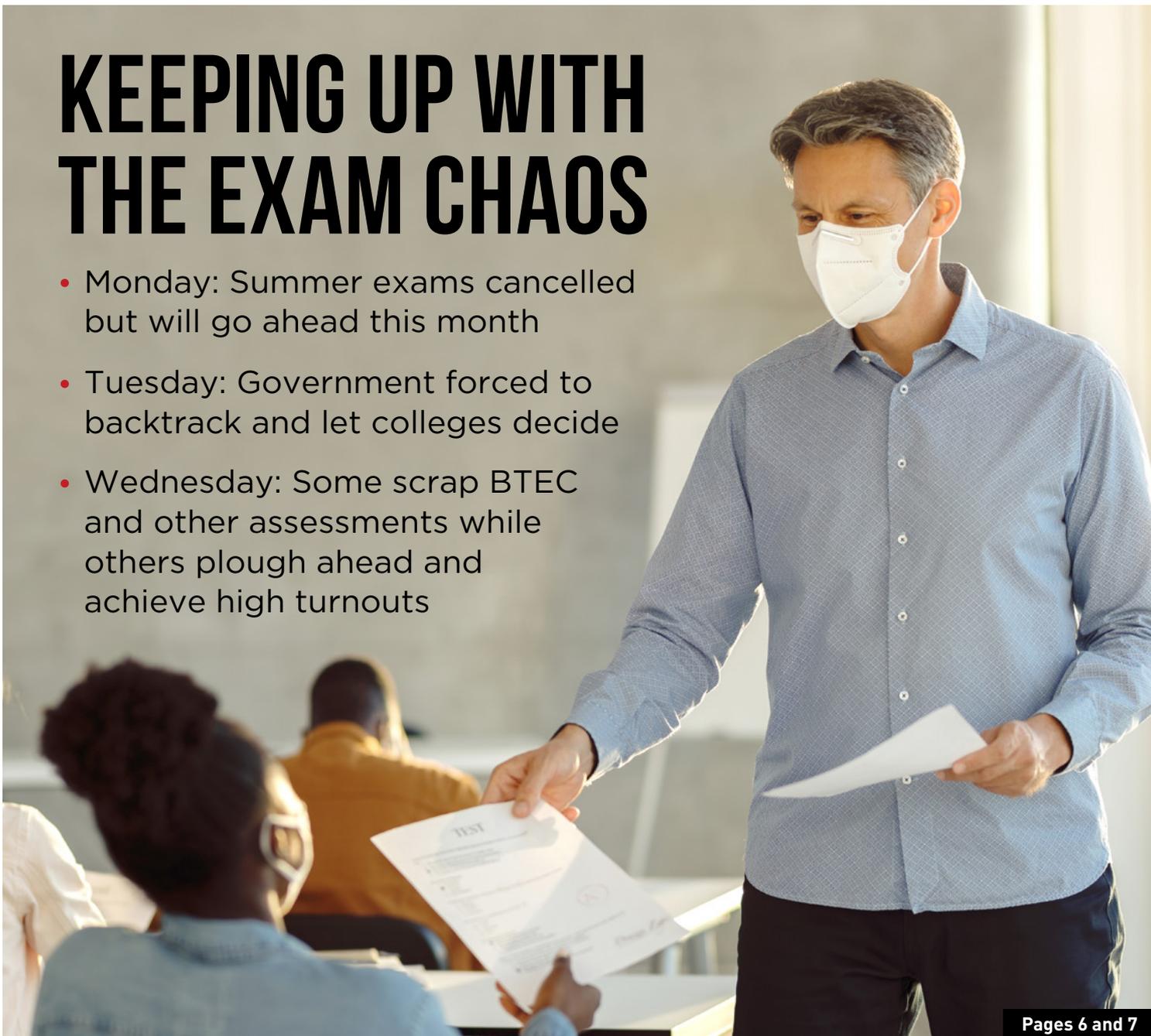
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FRIDAY, JANUARY 8, 2020 | EDITION 338

KEEPING UP WITH THE EXAM CHAOS

- Monday: Summer exams cancelled but will go ahead this month
- Tuesday: Government forced to backtrack and let colleges decide
- Wednesday: Some scrap BTEC and other assessments while others plough ahead and achieve high turnouts



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GCSE and A-level exams to be replaced by teacher assessments this summer

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GCSE and A-level students are set to receive teacher-assessed grades in 2021 following the partial closure of schools, colleges and training providers – but the grades won't be adjusted by an algorithm.

Gavin Williamson, the education secretary, confirmed in the House of Commons on Wednesday that GCSE, AS and A-level exams will not go ahead this year, and that the government is "going to put our trust in teachers rather than algorithms".

He said he wished "to use a form of teacher-assessment grades, with training and support provided to ensure these are awarded fairly and consistently across the country".

It was announced on Monday that schools and FE providers in England will move to online learning for all students except those classed as vulnerable, a category that now also includes those who may have "difficulty engaging with remote education at home" and the children of key workers.

Prime minister Boris Johnson acknowledged at the time it would not be "fair" for exams to go ahead as normal.

Last year, the government was forced to abandon its system of calculated grades after around 40 per cent of centre-assessed A-level grades were downgraded by exam boards, prompting uproar.

Williamson said this week that the government had "learned lessons" on exams after last year's fiasco, during which the arrangements "did not deliver what they needed", with the impact felt "painfully by students and their parents".

"Although exams are the fairest way we have of accessing what a student knows, the impact of this pandemic now means it is not possible



Gavin Williamson

to have these exams this year.

"I can confirm that GCSEs, A-levels and AS level exams will not go ahead this summer. This year we are going to put our trust in teachers rather than algorithms.

"The department and Ofqual had already worked up a range of contingency options. While the details will need to be fine-tuned in consultation with Ofqual, the exam boards and teaching representative organisations, I can confirm now that I wish to use a form of teacher-assessment grades, with training and support provided to ensure these are awarded fairly and consistently across the country."

Ofqual will launch a "detailed" consultation on the plans next week, Williamson added. It will run for two weeks.

Following Williamson's statement the regulator said that they "are not starting from scratch", adding: "We have been considering different scenarios for some time and we have, of course, learned lessons from last summer."

A spokesperson said Ofqual is "mindful" of Williamson's preference for teacher assessment to "play its part".

They added: "We are aware of teacher workload and how teacher assessment of

students will have an impact on that."

Questions remain over whether BTEC and other vocational qualifications will receive the same treatment as GCSEs and A-levels, but Ofqual's new interim chief has suggested the solutions "may not be the same" (see page 11).

Bill Watkin, chief executive of the Sixth Form Colleges Association, said replacing this year's exams with teacher-assessed grades is the "best way to ensure that all students get the grades they deserve".

"The Secretary of State said today that he is putting his trust in teachers rather than algorithms. But this will require the Department for Education to involve teachers at every stage of the implementation of these proposals," he added.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said it was "frustrating" that there is not an "off-the-shelf Plan B ready to go".

"We have repeatedly called on the government and the regulator to prepare such a plan in the event of exams being cancelled, and have repeatedly offered to work with them in doing so."

Investigates

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January exams on or off? How colleges have responded

BILLY CAMDEN BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

From front

The January vocational exam series descended into chaos at the start of the week as the government passed the buck to colleges to decide whether they go ahead...

In a live TV broadcast on Monday, prime minister Boris Johnson announced a third national lockdown and that schools, colleges and training providers in England will now be closed to most students until at least mid-February...

But in a move that caused outrage across the FE sector, the Department for Education swiftly confirmed that BTEC and other vocational exams planned for the next three weeks and which involve around 135,000 students would still go ahead.

While college leaders scrambled to try and make sense of the decision, membership and awarding bodies were lobbying behind the scenes for ministers to cancel the exams altogether amid safety fears.

But they were only met with further confusion on Tuesday night when the DfE backtracked and said that schools and colleges can now cancel



the assessments, but left it up to leaders to decide.

"In light of the evolving public health measures, schools and colleges can continue with the vocational and technical exams that are due to take place in January, where they judge it right to do so," was the official line.

While the education secretary Gavin Williamson was slammed in parliament for the move, with MPs accusing him of "failing to show leadership", college bosses were left with decisions to make in the most difficult of circumstances.

After speaking with many of them, FE Week has found that leaders have taken a variety of decisions: cancel all exams; cancel some but not all; continue with all exams as planned, with some offering students the choice. The majority cancelled, and some even had students sitting exams on Tuesday before scrapping the rest following the DfE's half U-turn that night.

Here are some examples of colleges in each of the categories and their reasons for the decision they made.

All exams cancelled

The Sheffield College made the decision to postpone all of its January exams on Monday, ahead of the DfE's backtrack, insisting that this was "not a decision we have made lightly, but

student and staff safety must come first".

Around 950 students were due to sit exams at the college over the next two weeks in curriculum areas such as animal care, aviation, science, carpentry, hairdressing, health and social care, information technology, motor vehicle, and painting and decorating.

Principal Angela Foulkes said that in stopping the assessments during this national lockdown she is calling for them to be "postponed and rescheduled to a later date which would be safer for our students and staff", rather than being scrapped altogether.

Loughborough College made the same call, explaining that with a surge in local infection rates and due to the volume of learners who "travel from outside our area to sit exams", postponing is the "safest option".

Capital City College Group, which has campuses scattered across the Covid-19 hotspot of London, said that it also took this decision as cases in the capital worsen.

"To continue with these exams would disadvantage students who, for whatever reason, can't come to college to sit an exam, and would place those students who do come in - and the members of our staff who must be present at exams - at a greater risk of infection,"



Angela Foulkes

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Investigates

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CONTINUED

a spokesperson said.

"We know that our students have worked so hard to prepare for their exams. We are very sorry for the distress and annoyance caused by cancelling them at short notice."

A spokesperson for Harlow College, meanwhile, said Covid-19 case rates in young people and adults in its area are "high" and, given the prime minister's instruction to "stay at home as much as possible", they "felt it was only safe and fair, to both our students and staff, to cancel the exams in order to protect our community's health and safety".

NCG chief executive Liz Bromley, who runs seven colleges across England, added that while her group "recognises that there are many benefits to continuing with exams" they "do not feel it is right to ask students to travel to attend exams" in light of the "national lockdown, a new strain of Covid-19 and high transmission rates across the localities of our colleges".

All of those that have cancelled the exams have promised that students will not be disadvantaged, and they will work with Ofqual and the relevant awarding bodies to implement "fair" solutions.

Some but not all exams cancelled

Central Bedfordshire College has decided to cancel the majority of its exams but to go ahead with some where it would be "advantageous" for students.

Principal Ali Hadawi said his team "considered in detail whether it is possible to run these exams safely for students, invigilators and teachers and whether any student or a group of students would be disadvantaged by not completing them".



Ali Hadawi

"The guiding principle for the college is that students must not be disadvantaged, including the considerable additional emotional and mental pressure as well as the safety of students and staff," he added.

Exams that will not go ahead include, for example, BTECs in engineering, where students missed a chunk of learning last month owing to either student or staff self-isolation and still had some way to go to complete the course.

But BTECs in IT, for example, will go ahead in "enhanced safety arrangements" as learners had already completed some modules and needed to sit this month's exams to complete. All exams offered by exam board AAT will also go ahead.

Dudley College is taking a similar approach. A spokesperson said they have cancelled "any BTEC exams in favour of delivering these later in the year once the awarding body confirms arrangements" but they will continue to offer "other exams, such as AAT and electrical".

The assessments continuing to be on offer involve those that need to be sat because they lead to immediate career options.

"The college has safe arrangements in place and is therefore happy to offer exams in January, but will focus these on priority areas where it supports students due to achieve," a spokesperson said.

They added that the college does however "recognise that some students may be unable or unwilling to attend at this stage due to issues with travel, concerns about Covid-19 or family vulnerabilities".

So anyone who does not attend exams in January will be "entered for a future date as soon as we are advised of these by the awarding body".

All exams continue (but giving students the choice)

East Kent College said it has already supported around 500 students to sit their exams this week after receiving "overwhelming feedback" from students who were keen to attend.

They told their students it was up to them if they attended and have achieved an average turnout of around 80 per cent so far this week.

For those who choose not to sit the exams, the college has pledged to do "everything to ensure that future opportunities for sitting the examination are made available" and that "alternatively, the government may offer alternative forms of assessment".

A spokesperson said it was important to allow students, who have been preparing for the exams for years in some cases, the opportunity



Liz Bromley

to sit them in order to progress.

London South East Colleges, which has campuses across the capital and is also in a Covid-19 hotspot area, has made the same decision. Deputy chief executive David Lambert told FE Week the college group had a 50 to 60 per cent turnout on Thursday – its first day of exams. Around 800 exams are scheduled to take place over the coming weeks.

In a letter to students, the college said: "After very detailed consideration, we have decided to let our students have a choice.

"We know how hard so many of you have worked for these exams, that you will be disappointed not to take them and that you would like the exams to take place."

Weston College, based in Weston-super-Mare, has taken a similar approach. "We appreciate that some learners are reliant on completing exams to secure licence-to-practice status or a professional status that is important to their career or advancement in work. Where our learners are able and want to take the exam they have prepared for, we will allow them the opportunity to do so. The college will therefore continue with the agreed timetable of exams in January," a spokesperson said.

FE Week asked the college what the turnout had been like for the exams that had already taken place this week, but the college did not respond at the time of going to press.

Additionally, Telford College has around 20 different vocational exams taking place over the next fortnight. Construction exams went ahead on Wednesday and saw nearly 90 per cent attendance, while music assessments ran on Thursday and had a 100 per cent turnout, according to a spokesperson.

Principal Graham Guest said: "We recognise that it is going to be particularly important to press ahead where we can with exams for vocational training qualifications which can only be fulfilled through practical assessment."

How exam boards will proceed: a one-stop shop of what we know so far

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Following the government's decision to let providers decide whether to cancel exams this month, awarding bodies have been outlining how they plan to award grades for vocational qualifications if any exams do not go ahead.

All of the media attention has unsurprisingly been on what will happen with BTECs, so *FE Week* has spoken with a number of other leading exam bodies to create this one-stop shop for what we know so far.

Pearson

The awarding body for BTECs has said it will award a grade for any student who is unable to take this month's exams and has "enough evidence to receive a certificate that they need for progression".

Those unable to take their assessment this month may also "be able to" take it at a later date. "If that is not possible, we will put in place arrangements to ensure you are not disadvantaged," Pearson said.

A statement from the company added: "We are working closely with the DfE and Ofqual on all of this and we will share more detail with you in the coming days."

OCR Oxford Cambridge and RSA

In addition to BTECs, exams for Cambridge Nationals and Cambridge Technicals are also running this month.

The qualifications' awarding body, OCR, has said there may be an opportunity for students to take their

assessment in the future if their exams are cancelled.

But if this is not possible, depending on the arrangements the government makes for the summer exam series, OCR has promised: "We will work with the Department for Education and Ofqual to make sure students are treated fairly."

However, if a student was going to earn their certificate this month, and if there is enough evidence, OCR will award the learner a grade "to help them progress".

There has also been an extension to the deadline for submitting Cambridge National coursework for moderation. OCR has said the original date of January 10 has now been moved by two weeks, to January 24.

This means the results day in spring will be impacted, and OCR says it will be providing an updated timetable as soon as it can.

The awarding body has urged colleges to submit coursework as soon as possible "so we have evidence of your students' work".

VTCT

VTCT has said the January series of exams will go ahead as planned, but it has set up an additional assessment series in March for its technical award and applied general qualifications if a centre decides that learners will not take examinations in this month.

The additional dates for both qualifications' exams will be between March 8 and March 12.

This will not change the existing dates in March for assessments for VTCT's technical qualifications and technical level qualifications.

aat

The Association of Accounting Technicians has not announced extra measures for students due to sit their qualifications in January, instead telling students who are due to sit assessments in the near future to contact their training provider.

They have encouraged providers to contact students as soon as possible about their "intentions and plans" and guidance has been put together for assessment centres to become Covid-secure.

While AAT is pressing ahead with exams in January, the awarding body said: "This is an ongoing situation, and we will continue to review our approach regularly as it evolves, along with providing updated information and guidance."

City & Guilds A City & Guilds Group Business

The number of students sitting the January exam series for City & Guilds and ILM is "very small", according to managing director David Phillips.

He added that they have already been in touch with each centre with learners registered for an exam, to discuss options if they decide not to proceed; but decisions for what would happen in such a situation have not yet been made.

As for spring and summer exams, Phillips said: "We are working with our regulators and government departments on how to proceed and will communicate with all of our centres and customers as soon as possible."

Exploring the Chief Inspector's Report

Preparing for the resumption of inspections

STILL TIME TO BOOK!

Great line-up for AELP's "A Day with Ofsted" event - online on 18 January

We have a terrific mix of Ofsted officials, training providers and employer providers lined up to contribute to our annual "A Day with Ofsted" event on Monday, 18 January, sponsored by The Skills Network. As usual, Ofsted's Paul Joyce will take delegates through key findings in the Chief Inspector's annual report 2019/20 and he will provide an update on the planned resumption of inspections and monitoring visits. Paul's colleagues, Richard Pemble HMI and Richard Beynon SHMI, will be running sessions before and after lunch on key issues.

A top group of providers will hold a roundtable discussion on the lessons learned from delivering learning during a pandemic and will look forward to what we can expect in 2021. In the afternoon, there will be further perspectives offered by training providers, employer providers and a long-standing university provider of higher level and degree apprenticeships. The full day's draft agenda is now available to view on the event website. So why not take a look at it today and take advantage of the fantastic value which "A Day with Ofsted" will offer online here.

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Feedback from some previous A Day with Ofsted events include...

- “As usual, an excellent event with many areas covered by Ofsted staff to help and support providers pre, during and post-inspection.”
- “Direct honest answers are very helpful. The employer panel was great and should be repeated.”
- “An excellent day. All contributors provided real food for thought and excellent guidance.”



Book your place now for what is set to be a fantastic online event!

EPA flexibilities extended until late summer

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Temporary flexibilities that help apprentices complete their end-point assessment during the pandemic will be extended until at least August 2021.

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education has made the announcement following the new national lockdown restrictions.

Chief executive Jennifer Coupland said: "We are all too aware that the escalation of Covid-19 and resulting lockdown restrictions are hugely distressing for our sector and beyond.

"It is also hugely important that we do all we can to help apprentices continue their training and complete wherever possible."

She added that there are now flexibilities in place for over 130 apprenticeships and it would be "wrong to disrupt them at this time. That is why we have made the decision to extend."

Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief policy officer Simon Ashworth said this is an "extremely positive development and has demonstrated an ability of a key sector regulator to respond quickly in the light of the latest lockdown announcement".

This is the third extension of the flexibilities (set to end in March 2021) since they were launched in March 2020.

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.



Jennifer Coupland



The institute said it will not consider the withdrawal of any flexibilities before May 1 and will provide at least three months' notice of any decision to terminate.

Coupland added: "As we've said before, our aim with the extension of these special measures is to provide everyone involved with much-needed stability.

"We continue to be open to requests to new or revised flexibilities and are monitoring closely the overall performance of standards to identify where new flexibilities might be required."

Government guidance for how FE providers should operate during the new national lockdown had still not been published at the time of going to press.

But following conversations with skills minister Gillian Keegan and the Education and Skills Funding Agency's director of apprenticeships Peter Mucklow, the Association of Employment and Learning Providers has advised that providers are "required to repeat what they did during the first lockdown and conduct as much learning online as possible".

Like schools and colleges, providers should only offer onsite training to vulnerable learners and the children of key workers.

However, the DfE said that those students on programmes that require access to specialist equipment "may continue to spend some time on site, although it is expected their broader programme will be delivered remotely as far as possible".

The DfE also said that face-to-face assessment "can continue – either in colleges and training providers' premises, or in employers' Covid-secure settings – for vulnerable younger apprentices, those who need access to specialist equipment, and those whose learning cannot be delivered remotely".

The department added that where they are able to do so in line with Covid-19 guidance, apprentices can "continue to make use of the existing flexibilities and discretions approved through the process set out by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education to undertake their end-point assessment".

But the use of technology for remote assessment is "encouraged where it is appropriate".

Ofqual warns this summer's grading solution is unlikely to be consistent

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Ofqual's new interim chief has warned that the solution to replacing this summer's exams "won't be the same for all" qualifications.

Simon Lebus, the former Cambridge Assessment group chief executive, offered a message to students to continue to engage "as fully as you can" in education on Wednesday morning ahead of the education secretary's speech that outlined his plans for grades this summer.

Gavin Williamson (see page 5) announced that it was his desire for teacher-assessed grades to replace GCSE and A-level exams again in 2021, but questions remain about whether the same approach will be adopted for vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs).

Lebus, who only took over from his predecessor Dame Glenys Stacey on Friday, suggested the approaches will differ: "The way ahead is not straightforward: exams and standardised assessments are the fairest way of determining what a student knows and can do," he said.

"We need to consider a wide range of qualifications – from A-levels and GCSEs to many different vocational and technical qualifications – and the solution won't be the same for all."

Centre-assessed grades were introduced for some VTQ learners last year to replace exams, while others were allowed to have their assessments adapted



by, for example, using online tests, and the rest had their assessments delayed.

Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief policy officer Simon Ashworth has urged Ofqual not to create a two-tier grading system again.

"Instead of the government and Ofqual talking about different types of solutions for different forms of qualifications, we need a fair and consistent approach between academic and vocational pathways," he told *FE Week*.

"Otherwise there's a danger of reopening a big divide and undoing all the work to bring better parity between the two as part of the levelling up agenda."

Association of Colleges chief executive

David Hughes echoed Ashworth's view: "It is vital that the proposed way forward is consistent and fair to every student because of the worry and confusion that abounds currently, particularly following the mixed message that January exams are going ahead while this summer's exams are cancelled."

He added: "As well as young people, there are around 250,000 apprentices and one million adult students studying for qualifications in colleges. Decisions for all

qualification types need to be made and communicated as soon as possible, so we welcome the speed at which the government has committed to work on this.

"Not only do the plans need to be fair, comprehensive, inclusive and robust; they also need to be agreed quickly, communicated clearly and be flexible enough to work in practice."



Simon Lebus



Simon Ashworth

Former DfE director rails against 'insensitive' Skills Toolkit campaign timing

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Exclusive

A former top skills civil servant has criticised the launch of a government-funded campaign to promote free online education content at a time when the third national lockdown shuts the doors to adult education providers.

'An Hour to Skill' was launched on Thursday and aims to "inspire people to set aside just one hour a week for online learning" by taking a free online course through the 'Skills Toolkit'.

The toolkit is a "platform" which offers more than 70 "high-quality" courses, according to officials, and was created by the Department for Education in April 2019 to help teach out-of-work people new skills during the first lockdown.

It consists of a web page on the National Careers Service with short course descriptions and links to the external websites for organisations such as Amazon, Microsoft, Google and the Open University. A previous *FE Week* investigation found that many of the courses are simply short video tutorials or PDF documents that people can stop and start, with no tuition and no external quality assurance from the likes of Ofqual and Ofsted.

The new campaign will involve the "one-hour" message being promoted through businesses' channels as well as social media, and "demonstrates that making the time for online learning can feel simple and achievable, overcoming some of the key psychological barriers faced by the people we need to reach". The DfE is also partnering with well-known psychologist Honey Langcaster-James to elevate the message.

The campaign has been set up as the government urges the public to "stay at home" during the national lockdown, which is due to run until at least mid-February and includes the closure of



FE providers to all but vulnerable students and the children of key workers.

Sue Pember, a former director of FE funding in the DfE who is now the policy director of adult education network HOLEX, said the move was "disappointing".

"I really can't believe how insensitive this is," she told *FE Week*. "Adult education providers and colleges were told to shut by the DfE and then the DfE starts and pays for a national advertising campaign for a set of commercial competitor providers."

She added that the providers "are all private sector and I am not clear why they are giving them a business advantage over the providers they fund. Where is the national advertising for their provision?"

Pember also questioned the DfE's claim that the courses on the Skills Toolkit are "high quality, as not one of them has been inspected by Ofsted".

In response to Pember's criticism, a spokesperson for the DfE said: "The campaign is backed by all the providers on The Skills Toolkit, including FutureLearn, Institute of Coding, University of Leeds and The Open University, to offer a range of high quality courses.

"The competition was open to all providers and those who applied were subject to a competitive and

rigorous quality assurance process in order to have their courses featured on the platform.

"An Hour to Skill is designed to signpost people to these courses to help them develop their skills and to change attitudes to lifelong learning that will benefit all providers."

In a statement accompanying the campaign's launch, skills minister Gillian Keegan said the courses can "help boost the nation's skills and job prospects at such an important time for our economy" and that she is "confident that learning through the Skills Toolkit can give you the skills employers are looking for".

This follows an *FE Week* investigation last month in which the government was urged to withdraw claims about the take-up of courses on the toolkit.

This publication found that significant over-counting had already led to revised estimates, and that "course start" and "registration" claims in official statistics will continue to include web hits.

The DfE claims there have been more than 130,000 "registrations" for courses on the platform to date but admits these are "experimental statistics and rely on website analytics submitted by providers".

More than £1 million had been spent to develop and promote the Skills Toolkit at the time of *FE Week's* investigation. The DfE did not say how much extra funding is going towards the 'An Hour to Skill' campaign at the time of going to press.



Sue Pember

Second national college set to 'dissolve'

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Another flagship national college is set to dissolve after facing insolvency and requiring government bailouts to stay afloat.

The National College for Advanced Transport and Infrastructure (NCATI), formerly known as the National College of High Speed Rail, is consulting on plans to dissolve its FE corporation and reform as a subsidiary company of the University of Birmingham.

The college's two campuses, in Birmingham and Doncaster, will transfer if the greenlight is given to the proposal. This is being led by the university but supported by partner organisations, including City & Guilds, Trafford College Group and railway training overseers the National Skills Academy for Rail.

A consultation document published on the college's website says this new model is "expected to enable financial sustainability to be achieved in order to meet the future needs for the rail, transport and infrastructure sectors".

It would be the second of the five national colleges to dissolve, following the National College Creative Industries.

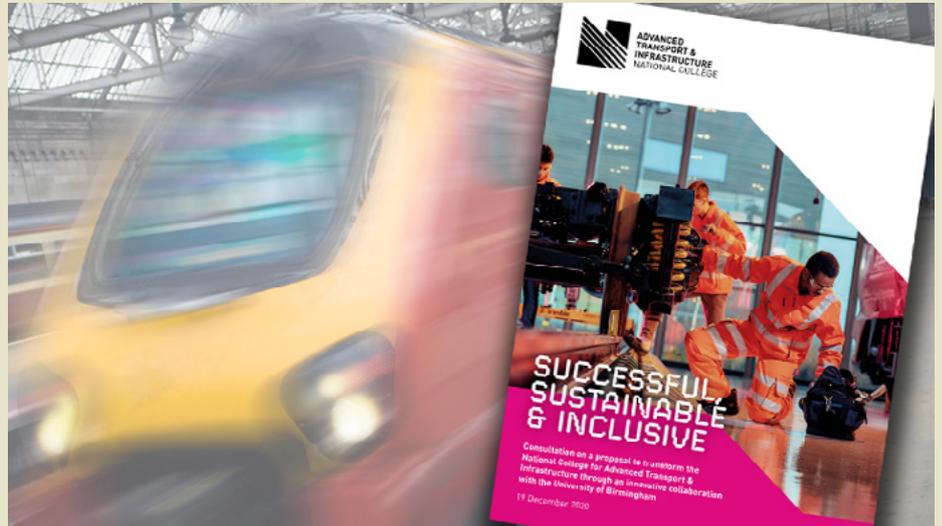
NCATI needed £4.55 million from the Department for Education to sign off its 2017-18 accounts and was placed in formal intervention in December 2019.

An FE Commissioner report published last February told how NCATI's board had been advised on how to operate while facing a "potential insolvency" and that "radical change" was "urgently required".

The college, the report said, needed a commitment of 12 months of continued emergency funding for the board to sign off their 2018-19 financial statements as a going concern.

The college's 2018-19 accounts are yet to be published. A spokesperson told *FE Week* this week that the financial statements are currently with the auditors.

When the FE Commissioner's report was published, DfE ministers placed NCATI in supervised status and a structure and



prospects appraisal was launched to find organisations to partner with NCATI, which led to the proposal to become part of the University of Birmingham.

The consultation document also confirms NCATI has lost its place on the register of apprenticeship training providers (RoATP), meaning it cannot start any new apprentices.

An Ofsted inspection in November 2019 rated the college as 'inadequate' and slapped the same grade on its apprenticeship provision. According to Education and Skills Funding Agency rules this usually means that a provider is removed from the register.

This has had an impact on the college's attempts to improve its finances, with the consultation document admitting the removal from RoATP was one of the reasons "it has been unable to secure the growth in income that it needed to be sustainable".

NCATI is planning to resume recruiting apprentices by regaining its position of RoATP but says it will be able to do so "in the meantime via the university's registration".

NCATI has had a torrid time since being opened by then-education secretary Justine Greening in 2017 as the National College for High Speed Rail. It has struggled to recruit learners due to delays in announcing contractors for the High Speed 2 railway project, which meant employers were unable

to commit to the apprentice volumes they had originally anticipated.

FE Week exclusively revealed in February 2020 that NCATI had taken Ofsted to court over the grade four report, blowing £73,000 on the legal challenge, which it eventually abandoned.

What is now being proposed by NCATI and the university, whose bid was announced in August as the preferred one for taking over the college, is very similar to what happened to the National College Creative Industries.

The college dissolved having only made it through 2017-18 as a going concern thanks to a £600,000 bailout from the DfE.

After dissolving, the National College Creative Industries reformed last year as a limited company, NCCI Ltd, which licensed provision to Access Creative College and South Essex College.

This process was overseen by NCCI's interim principal, Sue Dare – who now works as interim principal of NCATI.

A spokesperson for NCATI told *FE Week* any potential job losses will not be decided until at least mid-February, after the public consultation has ended and NCATI's board has approved its outcome.

The consultation is running until 5pm on Friday January 29, and more information is available at www.nchsr.ac.uk/consultation

Labour Party calls for appren wage subsidy

FRASER WHIELDON
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The Labour Party has called for the wages of 85,000 young apprentices to be subsidised this year, by using the £330 million apprenticeship budget underspend handed to the Treasury in 2019.

The opposition party has put forward the policy in order to boost apprenticeship starts, following a drop of a quarter over the past decade, and the rise of competing skills initiatives.

It is hoped paying the wages of apprentices will "incentivise employers to create new opportunities despite the impacts of the pandemic".

Under the proposal, subsidy would operate on a sliding scale, so employers would receive a full wage grant for employing a new apprentice aged 16 to 24 for the first three months.

The subsidy would then drop to 50 per cent for the next six months, then 25 per cent for the final three months.

Money would be dealt out on a first come, first served basis, and Labour estimates it would save each employer around £3,500 per apprentice hired.

The scheme would be funded through the underspend of the Department for Education's apprenticeship budget in 2019-20, which, as *FE Week* revealed last July, totalled £330 million and was quietly handed back to the Treasury.

Toby Perkins, Labour's shadow apprenticeships and lifelong learning minister, told *FE Week* the 85,000 figure is based on the number of starts by 16- to 24-year-olds in 2018-19, of which there were around 210,000, according to official government statistics. It takes into account a decrease in starts owing to the pandemic, then taking half of the annual number as the proposal will cover recruitment over six months.

"Our initial proposal is based on a six-month incentive, which would need to be reviewed based on the developing health situation and its impact on employment numbers."

He said the wage subsidy should be in addition to the long-standing £1,000 incentive that employers receive when they take on a new 16-to-18 apprentice, but not in addition to the other



Toby Perkins

bonus incentives announced in chancellor Rishi Sunak's Plan For Jobs which end in March so as not to blow the underspend pot.

Perkins added that the wage subsidy would also mean employers look more in favour of hiring apprentices, rather than using the new Kickstart incentive, by which businesses can receive grants of around £6,500 but which do not lead to a qualification.

"Apprenticeships offer longer term employment, have a far greater learning input than the alternatives, last longer, offer a recognised qualification at the end of it and have more established delivery networks," Perkins argued.

Association of Employment and Learning Providers managing director Jane Hickie said providers have been calling for wage subsidies since the start of the first lockdown, so her organisation has "no hesitation" in supporting Labour's proposal.

She said apprenticeships offer skills for sustainable employment, but are being displaced by the Kickstart scheme, which does not require any training.

"We need a level playing field and the government should seriously consider what Labour is proposing today."

Jon, Graham, chief executive of training provider JTL, supports Labour's proposal, as he believes "action is needed now" to reverse the decline in apprenticeship starts, as the "thousands" of apprentices his company trains across the country are "vital for supporting a long-term economic recovery".

A Department for Education spokesperson

did not directly respond to the call for wage subsidies but said: "Apprenticeships will continue to play a vital role in growing our economy and as we build back better after the pandemic. In recognition of the benefits apprentices bring to businesses across the country, we're offering payments of up to £2,000 to employers who hire new apprentices."

"More than 10,000 employers have already taken up this offer, which has now been extended until March 2021, giving more people the chance to get ahead in a range of exciting industries, from cyber security to accounting."

Under rules for the apprenticeship levy, businesses with a payroll of £3 million or more pay each month into the pot and have a rolling 24-month deadline to spend the funds.

The levy was designed so large employers would not spend all of their funds, and unspent money could be made available to small, non-levy-paying businesses to train apprentices. Unspent funds also provide a ten per cent top-up to levy funds, and they pay for English and maths teaching for relevant apprentices, among other things.

Yet *FE Week* reported in July that the Department for Education had handed back £330 million from the apprenticeship budget to the Treasury, to allow it to be "used for other government priorities".

Perkins said the subsidy proposal is a "specific approach" to the issue of the drop-off in starts, but would look at the situation nearer to the next general election to see if it should be brought in as a permanent policy by a Labour government.

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'I keep having to pinch myself to make sure it's really happening': the Queen's New Year's honours

FRASER WHIELDON
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The outgoing FE Commissioner Richard Atkins has been knighted in the 2021 Queen's New Year Honours.

Around 30 people from the further education and skills sector have been recognised, including various top college leaders, a former chair of the Association of Colleges and a vice chair of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers.

Atkins is stepping down from the role he has held for two consecutive two-year terms in March, after his second term was extended from last October. He previously served as principal of Exeter College.

He told FE Week he was "honoured" to receive the knighthood which "recognises the importance and success of all further education colleges, as well as my own contributions.

"I am thinking about all of the staff and governors who have supported my professional and personal development, as well as about the huge challenges that colleges face this coming term."

A damehood has been awarded to Department for Education non-executive director Irene Lucas-Hays, who also chairs Hays Travel Group. She said the honour was "really" for Hays Travel's apprentices, "who have been part of our business lives over the past 41 years".

Exeter College principal John Laramy has been made a Commander of the Order of the British

Empire (CBE) for services to education, about which he is "thrilled, delighted and honoured", adding: "I am fortunate that I work in a sector that exists to try and make everyone's tomorrow better than today."

Education Partnership North East (EPNE) college group is celebrating after chief executive Ellen Thinnesen and chair Rob Lawson were both made Officers of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for services to education, and for services to education in Sunderland, respectively.

Thinnesen said she felt "incredibly humbled" by the honour and paid tribute to the "inspirational" people she works with, including her "brilliant" leadership team, wider college staff and the national, regional and local partners and supporters.

Lawson said of his own award: "It was a real shock to receive the email about the honour and I was amazed to have been put forward."

Oldham College principal Alun Francis has also been made an OBE for services to education, having run the college for ten years.

"This award isn't something I would ever have sought or expected - but I'm delighted to accept it on behalf of Oldham College," he said.

Another long-serving principal, David Walrond, who retired from Truro and Penwith College in August, has been made an OBE for services to further education, saying it was "wonderful" to be honoured for his work as principal and as Callywith College's chair.

"What is being recognised of course is the vital work for Cornwall of two remarkable institutions and the many outstanding colleagues who have made them what they are."

Herefordshire, Ludlow and North Shropshire College's principal Ian Peake and Sally Challis-Manning, principal of Brinsbury College, have been made Members of the



Rob Lawson



Ellen Thinnesen

Order of the British Empire (MBE).

Adult education has also been recognised, with an OBE for Sutton College principal and HOLEX board member Dipa Ganguli, for services to adult education in London.

Ganguli told FE Week she felt "honoured" to receive her OBE as well as "really humbled" that her work has been recognised after 25 years in the sector.

Rosalyn Parker, principal of Southend Adult Community College, and Dawn Hall, an adult, family and community learning manager in Doncaster, also received OBEs.

Bath College chair and non-executive director of Ofsted Carole Stott has also been made an OBE for services to education

Stott, who was already made an MBE in 2012, said she was "pleased" her honour recognised her work as former chair of the Association of Colleges and WorldSkills as "it kind of feels like it's for the whole sector, as both those organisations work for the whole sector".

The Education and Skills Funding Agency's head of NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and youth engagement Carolyn Savage has been made an OBE for services to apprenticeships and skills and is "absolutely thrilled, amazed and humbled to be receiving this honour".

"I keep having to pinch myself to make sure it is really happening."

The agency's former director of employer and employee engagement, Sue Husband, has also been made an OBE; as has Susan McVeigh,



John Laramy



Richard Atkins

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who leads on tax apprenticeships for HM Revenue & Customs.

Husband said she owed her honour “to everyone who has inspired and motivated me along the way”, including WorldSkills UK competitors, from when she was the UK’s official designate at the international WorldSkills competition in Russia last year.

The chair of the ESFA’s audit and risk committee, Hunada Nouss, has also been made an OBE, for public service.

A number of figures from the apprenticeships and skills sector have been made MBEs, including Nichola Hay, chief operating officer of apprenticeship provider Estio Training, vice chair of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers board and member of the Greater London Authority’s Skills for Londoners Board.

She said she could not have been made an MBE “without all the help and support of my colleagues, past and present, and partner organisations who help improve the lives and career prospects of young people to build better futures”.

Specialist provision has also been recognised, with the principal of Aurora Foxes Academy in Somerset, Emma Cobley, receiving an MBE for service for young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

She said: “I am privileged to lead a dedicated team at Aurora Foxes Academy which is giving students with learning disabilities the skills and opportunities they deserve to become work and life ready.”

MBEs have also been bestowed upon Sharon Robbie, managing director of Devon and Cornwall Training Providers Network; Sue Tipton, managing director and owner of Birmingham-based Protocol Consultancy Services; Gerard Donnelly, who leads the apprenticeship team at the Department for Work and Pensions; York College’s former chair Shirley Collier; John Godden, chief executive of Salutem Care and Education; David Crosby, chair of Hugh Baird College; Dr Katherine Hewlett, a glass tutor at Working Men’s College; and Neil Weller, chairman of the London Apprenticeship Ambassador Network.

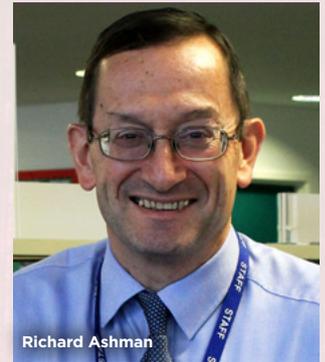
The programme coordinator for science at South Devon College, Janet Ellis, and Richard Ashman, library co-ordinator for City College Southampton, have both been awarded British Empire Medals.



Dipa Ganguli



Emma Cobley



Richard Ashman

**New Year Honours List 2021 –
Recipients from FE and skills**



Knighthood

- Richard Atkins, Further Education Commissioner

Damehood

- Irene Lucas-Hays, Non-executive board member, Department for Education

CBE

- John Laramy, Principal, Exeter College

OBE

- Susan Husband, Director, Business in the Community, Cymru and lately Director, employer and employee engagement, Education and Skills Funding Agency
- Ellen Thinnesen, Chief executive, Education Partnership North East
- Carole Stott, Lately Chair, Association of Colleges and Find a Future
- Dipanwita Ganguli, Principal, Sutton College
- Robert Lawson, Chair of Governors, Education Partnership North East
- Alun Francis, Principal and Chief Executive Officer, Oldham College
- Rosalyn Parker, Principal, Southend Adult Community College
- Dawn Hall, Adult, family and community learning Manager, Doncaster
- David Walrond, Principal and chair, Truro and Penwith College and Callywith College
- Susan Jessica McVeigh, Head, tax apprenticeship employer-provider, HM Revenue and Customs
- Carolyn Savage, Head, Apprentice

- Engagement, Education and Skills Funding Agency
- Hunada Nouss, Chair, Audit and Risk Committee, Education and Skills Funding Agency

MBE

- Gerard Donnelly, Team Leader, Apprenticeship Team, People and Capability Group, Department for Work and Pensions
- Emma Cobley, Principal, Foxes Academy Residential SEN College
- Sally Challis-Manning, Principal, Brinsbury College, Pulborough
- Shirley Collier, Lately Chair of Governors, York College
- John Godden, Chief Executive Officer, Salutem Care and Education
- David Crosby, Chair of the Corporation, Hugh Baird College
- Katherine Hewlett, Glass tutor, Working Men’s College
- Nichola Hay, Chief Operating Officer, Estio Training
- Sharron Robbie, Managing Director, Devon and Cornwall Training Providers Network
- Sue Tipton, Managing Director, Protocol Consultancy Services
- Neil Weller, Chairman, London Apprenticeship Ambassador Network
- Ian Peake, Principal and Chief Executive, Herefordshire, Ludlow and North Shropshire College

BEM

- Janet Ellis, Programme Co-ordinator, Science, South Devon College
- Richard Ashman, Library Co-ordinator, City College Southampton



PRINCIPAL

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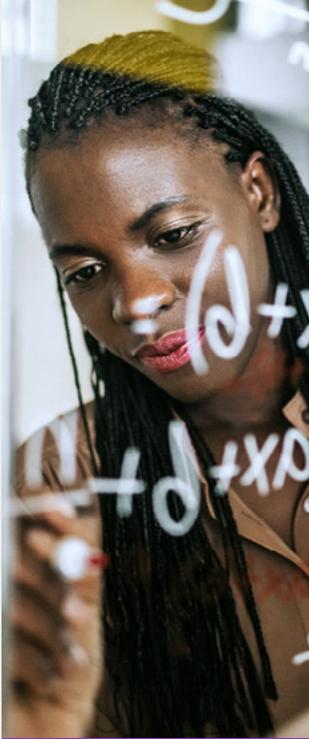
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Introducing...

POLLY LOVELL

Principal,
UTC Plymouth



'If it's a smaller town like ours, recruiting earlier makes sense'

JESS STAUFENBERG
@STAUFENBERGJ

Jess Staufenberg meets a leader bending the UTC model to build the pipeline of post-16 technical learners

In March 2016, Polly Lovell was standing in front of 20 people pleading for the life of UTC Plymouth. It wasn't even officially hers yet – the leader had departed, she'd only been in the

place for three years and was now “caretaker principal” of an institution that had just got the worst exam results in the city. Sat in front of her were representatives from the Department for Education, the Baker Dearing Trust and the Royal Navy, a big employer in the port city. Nothing like a rear admiral staring at you to focus the mind.

The challenge facing Lovell, an English and drama teacher from near Liverpool, will be familiar to FE Week readers. One-third of learners at the UTC had behavioural issues,

with many nearby schools using the institution as “an opportunity to move on challenging students”, she explains. There had been changes of leadership, the 2015 exam results were a “disaster” and the pressure from the DfE to close was growing. The student roll – that anxiety-inducing measure for all UTCs – was dropping. “I had to present what I was going to do with this school,” laughs Lovell, who is a mass of glorious hair and dark eyebrows. “There was me, the drama girl from the Wirral, surrounded by all these STEM people...”

Profile

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After her presentation, then-national schools commissioner David Carter took Lovell outside. “We went for a little walk around the UTC, and he asked, ‘What do you need?’” she says. “And I said, ‘Well, I really need to know if I’m going to be head, because I’m happy to do this and I’ve got ideas for it. But I just need to know.’” Carter went back to the governors and called for her to be made the substantive head.

“My parents were very aspirational. That’s influenced the way I am and my values.”

Two weeks later Ofsted rolled up and promptly awarded a grade 4, placing the UTC in special measures. By 2018, Lovell was again facing a cliff edge. Since 2015, when there were 220 students, following the Ofsted report she was down to just 70. Looming large nearby was City College Plymouth, also offering an engineering- and technical- focused education.

“At that point, it looked like the DfE was going to close us. We didn’t take in a year 10 group because I thought it was going to shut.” But Lovell did not give up. After speaking to her local MP, she secured an appointment with schools minister Nick Gibb and travelled to see him. “We did a begging meeting with him,” she laughs. “We explained, we’re in Plymouth – this

is the home of STEM! We worked tirelessly.”

The UTC remained open and, extraordinarily, today has 320 learners on roll. Given the timeframe, it’s nothing short of a miracle. Of course, the UTC has capacity for 650 students and so remains significantly under capacity, and Ofsted has yet to return – but it’s a rise from the ashes nevertheless. How has Lovell done it?

To understand, it’s worth understanding Lovell. The daughter of a travelling salesman, she appears to know how to take risks, pull them off and sell them to others.

“My parents had missed out on their education because of the Second World War, but they were very aspirational. My dad in particular was a big influence on me around my work ethic,” explains Lovell. “He was really determined for me and my sisters to be independent and have a profession. I’d go on work experience with my dad, helping out with sales.” Her mum, meanwhile, was a “taskmaster – you went to school even if you were sick or didn’t want to. That’s influenced the way I am and my values.”

Lovell is that rare mix of creative, curious and restless – she says she’s lived in about “56 places” – alongside a disciplined, tightly organised approach, qualities that together have likely got her to where she is. Having got poor GCSEs, she attended an FE college in Cheshire and blossomed under good lecturers within the drama department. During her degree Lovell spent a year in Portland, Oregon, enjoying “the freedom of America” so much that after graduating she “bought a one-way ticket to New York” aged 22 and didn’t look back. She moved to Chicago to work in music festivals and for a theatre company. But aged 29, it could have looked a bleak scene. Her father had passed away and she returned home from the US with two young children, disillusioned with the “life of a starving artist”, some sales experience and no maths GCSE.

Again, Lovell turned to FE colleges. “I did night school courses, in A-level psychology and computer courses, and I did my maths GCSE, whilst working a full-time job with two children.” An application to a primary school PGCE was turned down on the



Lovell at home in the Wirral, 1966

basis her degree was not in a “core” subject; but undaunted, Lovell used the Monday she had off from her retail job to volunteer in a school. She was eventually accepted on to a secondary PGCE, going on to work under Dame Sue John in west London, became head of year at a secondary in Exeter, a deputy head at an emotional and behavioural difficulties school in Devon and an assistant head at a pupil referral unit. At the same time, she trained as a special educational needs co-ordinator. Then, just when everything was getting “very parochial”, Lovell moved back to Chicago with her teenage children to take a role with publishing company Pearson, setting up online learning for schools, years before Covid-19 arrived and when everyone was still using Webex. Did she know much about online learning, I ask?

“I had no experience in online learning. It was scary at first!”

Time and again, Lovell has taken risks. She speaks often about making a “sales” pitch to convince others to get on board with her, whether it’s the importance of drama studies for all students (in one school she increased uptake from 40 per cent to 90 per cent); or, as with the UTC, the case for its continued existence. Despite having had her Scouse accent elocutioned out of her in her drama degree, she retains all the charm of a Liverpudlian. Also, it turns out, all the no-nonsense.

I blink rapidly when Lovell tells me, only half-jokingly, that she believes in the “militarisation of the UTC” – a smart,



Lovell and her husband with her Italian greyhound

Profile

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disciplined workforce of learners who are expecting to meet their prospective employer any minute. "I gained a lot from the Royal Navy on ideas of how to turn around a school. If you look at recruits in a passing out parade, there's three sets: the ones who have just arrived, the ones in training and the ones passing out. The ones passing out present themselves and stand differently." She looks at me. "What I want to know is, what did the Royal Navy do that we can do?"

"I had no experience in online learning. It was scary at first!"

Now Lovell has applied this mix of entrepreneurialism, risk-taking and strategic focus to the very model of the UTC itself. To start with, in October 2018 UTC Plymouth joined the Reach South Academy Trust. This was the very same year in which Lord Baker said he didn't want UTCs "watered down, and that is the danger if they get into a MAT". But just a year later Baker had revisited his position, saying instead that "membership of a MAT is an important way to help UTCs succeed". The interesting point is that Lovell and her headteacher, Jo Ware, now have a



Lovell and staff in the UTC's uniform

direct line of access to other schools in the same group. As Lovell puts it, "I've got eight Reach primaries around Plymouth."

Her second move was to begin accepting year 7s for the first time in 2020, breaking with the UTC model of accepting entrants in year 10, aged 14. There are currently 94 year 7s, and 96 are expected next year for a year group with capacity for 120 – fairly healthy numbers. Her student roll today reads like a history of the UTC's fortunes: year 9 has 92, year 10 has 50, year 11 has 42, year 12 has 30 and year 13 has just 17. But if Lovell and Ware can keep it up with the younger years, they're developing a formidable pipeline for post-16 technical and vocational education. These are learners who, by the time they reach year 12, will have

been embedded in the industry-focused, skills-based ethos of UTCs since they were 11 years old.

And although Lovell was not the first to do this (Leigh UTC in Kent was an early pioneer), others are following. Engineering UTC Northern Lincolnshire, for instance, welcomed year 7s this September.

In many ways, Lovell herself encompasses the UTC model – having failed GCSEs, taken unusual paths, been career- rather than academically focused and suiting FE more than school life, she understands these learners. She breathes pride in the model, describing how one of her most challenging students has just been taken on as an apprentice technician at the UTC, or how other students developed an app that is now in regular use by the Royal Navy.

But to prove the model, Lovell has also had to change it – she is in a multi-academy trust of schools, and the pretence that recruiting at 14 works has been dropped. When I ask if year 7 recruitment is the future for UTCs, she says, "If you're in a large area where you've got a number of students who can come to you, it's fine. But if it's a smaller town like ours, it makes sense." I suspect more UTCs will follow her example, and recruit in year 7.

In which case, won't UTCs arguably be schools rather than colleges? The way they have evolved is unlikely to be what Lord Baker anticipated when he proposed them in 2010.

But as a route to technical education post-16, it's got legs. Lovell is seeing to that.



Lovell's headshot for theatre roles, in Chicago, 1988



Lovell with senior leader Jo Ware at UTC Plymouth

DAVID HUGHES

Chief executive,
Association of Colleges



We must steady the ship after the government's half U-turn this week

After a week at sea like no other, the next big challenge is teacher-assessed grades, writes David Hughes

This week we've seen another lockdown, confusion, dismay and anxieties raised – and that's just in education.

The prime minister's third lockdown announcement on Monday night incorporated the surprising decision to go ahead with the January series of vocational and technical exams while cancelling the summer exams.

For colleges that meant 135,000 students sitting in exam halls at the peak of the pandemic.

Our immediate public call for those exams to be cancelled was based on a simple assessment that too many students would be nervous about sitting exams – for their health and because of the risk of transmitting the virus to their own families.

That anxiety is not conducive to good performance in any exam and we believed it should have been enough to convince government to cancel. On top of that, the challenge of finding staff to invigilate and steward the exams felt like the clincher.

The response from Department for Education was to make half a U-turn, giving the responsibility to each college and school to decide whether to cancel or not. Many cancelled immediately, others did so after low turnout on the first



day of exams, while others still are going ahead.

On Wednesday, education secretary Gavin Williamson confirmed that Ofqual will consult next week on how teacher-assessed grades can be used to replace exams.

The work to pull together that consultation is burning up the midnight oil of lots of officials this week, to hit tight deadlines.

One of the big challenges now is how to take into account the disruptions in learning that students have already experienced. This differs across different institutions, areas and qualification types – but it is also impacted by digital poverty, with around 100,000 16- to 19-year olds in colleges alone lacking digital devices and broadband. And of course, it differs because some students have been ill, had to self-isolate or shield, while others have not.

This is not easy to assess, but those who already faced the biggest barriers to success will be

the most affected. The pandemic has widened and deepened the educational disadvantage gaps. How will the promised moderation account for this?

We are working hard to ensure that the consultation offers a coherent, consistent and fair approach to all qualifications for all ages, types of learning and students. The complexity of vocational and technical qualifications will make this harder than for A-levels and GCSEs which are relatively straightforward.

“We now need clear and transparent decision-making”

Half a million 16- to 18-year-old students across 239 colleges are taking vocational and technical qualifications.

Meanwhile, 155,000 16 to 18-year-olds are taking A-levels or programmes that combine vocational qualifications and

A-levels.

Then there are 200,000 16-to-18-year-olds taking GCSEs in English and or maths and 130,000 taking Functional Skills.

This is in addition to one million adult learners and 250,000 apprentices.

We owe it to all these students to ensure that they know as soon as possible how their hard work over the past year or two will be recognised. Being “fair” to students requires making judgments about what knowledge and skills they have acquired, as well as their achievements in relation to national benchmarks and other students.

For those on licence to practice courses, there will have to be face-to-face assessments of competency before it is safe for students to go into the workplace. For other qualifications there will be banked assessments already.

So fairness is not about the same approach for everyone, it is a consistent approach designed for the specific circumstances – tricky to get right and even harder to communicate.

The prime minister said that by the middle of February and with “a fair wind in our sails” the progress of the vaccination programme would hopefully mean restrictions could begin to be lifted.

But we need to steady the ship now, with rapid, clear and transparent decisions based on trust in those who know students best.

PHIL BROOKS

FE lecturer of the year in the Pearson National Teaching Awards 2020



Erasmus was not just some exclusive middle-class scheme

After Covid, it's vital staff take students out into the world to explore and experience risk, writes Phil Brooks

I've been a photography lecturer at Dudley College of Technology for eight years. Dudley, like most British towns, has a diverse population. Many of my students do not have the opportunity for regular holidays abroad, or even day trips to areas of outstanding natural beauty.

Often students present with mental health issues or complications with home life. Many are afraid of public failure and are therefore naturally averse to taking risks. Now more than ever, we need to continue to think big, challenge students' perceived limitations and break their barriers to success.

But just when they need horizon-widening, real-life experiences to push them out of their comfort zones and propel them towards opportunity, those too young to vote in the referendum are the ones penalised yet again. The Erasmus scheme has been axed.

The government should have attached much greater importance and significance to the Erasmus programme. "The Deal" shouldn't have been all about fish and trade. What about the dreams of young people?

Scottish first minister Nicola Sturgeon described the decision to axe the scheme as "cultural

vandalism".

Erasmus was conceived back when I was a young college student in 1987, to promote cultural, social and academic exchanges between European students. It was a way to discover new cultures, study other languages and make lifelong connections.

The planned replacement for Erasmus, the Turing Scheme, was hurriedly announced by Boris Johnson on Christmas Eve and is scheduled to begin in September 2021, with less funding.

But Erasmus has over 30 years' valuable experience. Can a budget version starting afresh, proclaiming to be more inclusive, actually hope to match up? Will colleges really still be able to take part?

Erasmus programmes transformed the life chances of thousands of young British people, many from disadvantaged backgrounds like those in Dudley. It's just not true that this was mainly a middle-class scheme that young people "from low-income

families" did not take part in, as suggested in The Spectator and elsewhere on social media.

It allowed for a depth of engagement with other countries that no amount of caravanning or backpacking can equal.

In 2019, I sent my students for three months' work experience in Germany, Italy and Spain through Erasmus. It was life changing for them.

"Can a budget version of Erasmus actually hope to match up?"

Take Callum and Kane, both from low-income backgrounds. They headed off to Berlin. Before the scheme, they were pass level learners who were occasionally disruptive, certainly disorganised. While in Berlin, they made life-long friends, learned to cook, swam in lakes and had work published.

On their return, I met them

outside college where they were radiating confidence. The following September, they announced they were going to apply to university and volunteered themselves as class representatives.

They are now studying for a BA away from home at Staffordshire University. Callum even wants to be a teacher now! Other students I took to India before the last lockdown afterwards declared they wanted to study a degree abroad. It's trips like these that show that if we begin to treat them like adults, they'll behave like adults.

I even involve my students in refining risk assessments and drafting trip letters to their parents, encouraging them to take ownership for their own risks.

FE is where we can change lives. It's about lighting a spark, turning a light on for people. Teenagers who move from school to FE rather than sixth form need to feel valued, not second class.

On return to a new normal we need to look forward with a new creative daring. In the meantime, let's take some learning outdoors in our classroom bubble.

This generation of teens are expected to take fewer physical risks than any other generation before them. We need to get them outside! They are only going to learn to evaluate risk if they are exposed to risk.

The government may have axed Erasmus – but we must not turn inwards.



DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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READER'S REPLY

High-profile FE figure sees companies go bust amid ESFA investigations

I can't believe they didn't tell anything to the learner, like me. I completed my course and just waited to receive my certificates, and this has happened. I am lost and have no clue if I will get certificates or not.

Isle of Wight, website

It's a shame for those affected – MiddletonMurray had a lot going for it that should have made it a positive and effective provider for learners. A big asset compared to other providers [and] a relatively high-profile figurehead able to attract business opportunities. However, what was needed was the figurehead to leave the running of the business to some good people in the organisation. Good luck to all those negatively impacted by this, and hopefully there will be support behind the scenes for them.

Anonymous, website

Bring back individual learning accounts, say influential MPs

They were great but they were abused to hell, so need very big changes.

Martin Waller, Facebook

To be fair, it's been pretty much demand-led for years. However, demand has been "steered" by providers and funding, to maximise income. There is little to suggest that will change with accounts. To see true demand-led, we need to see proper

REPLY OF THE WEEK

London mayor to increase AEB funding rates by 10 per cent – but will the ESFA follow?

Probably worth pointing out that increasing rates is not the same as increasing funding. It will make it easier for providers to reach their allocation with fewer learners, but will ultimately mean lower participation.

Anon, website

investment in community learning.

Paul Butler, Twitter

Could it also be that there isn't as much demand as we would hope?

Louise Doyle, Twitter

New Ofqual chief promises to work with sector for 'smooth-running' exams next year

Let's hope he starts with functional skills, which his predecessor failed to address miserably.

Amy Ealing, website

£78m Covid mass-testing support revealed

What about training providers, who also have hundreds of students? Are we to be left out yet again? Second-class education?

Gail, website

Bulletin

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Arv Kaushal

Equality, diversity and inclusion manager, Milton Keynes College

Start date January 2021

Concurrent job

Trustee and steering committee member, BAMEed Network

Interesting fact

He is a "massive foodie," and writes a blog on traditional Indian vegetarian recipes



Ian Bauckham

Interim chair, Ofqual

Start date January 2021

Concurrent job

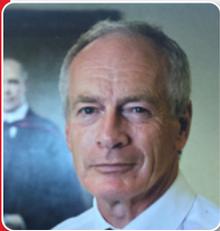
Chair, Oak National Academy

Interesting fact

He enjoys visiting medieval churches

Movers & Shakers

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



Ian Pryce

Chair, UTC Silverstone

Start date December 2020

Concurrent job

Chief executive, The Bedford College Group

Interesting fact

His first job out of university was ensuring Liverpool remained solvent, as part of his work on the city council's finance team in the 1980s



Simon Lebus

Interim chief regulator, Ofqual

Start date January 2021

Concurrent job

Visiting fellow, University of Cambridge Judge Business School

Interesting fact

He is a great enthusiast for Chinese food, the spicier the better

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

FEWEEK

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