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## APPRENTICESHIP INVESTIGATION

Freight transport firm Logistics.com (UK) Ltd had two employees and successfully joined the government's apprenticeship register last March

In 8 months, encompassing a national lockdown and pandemic, they started over 1,000 care worker and other apprentices worth more than £5m, becoming the fastest growing provider

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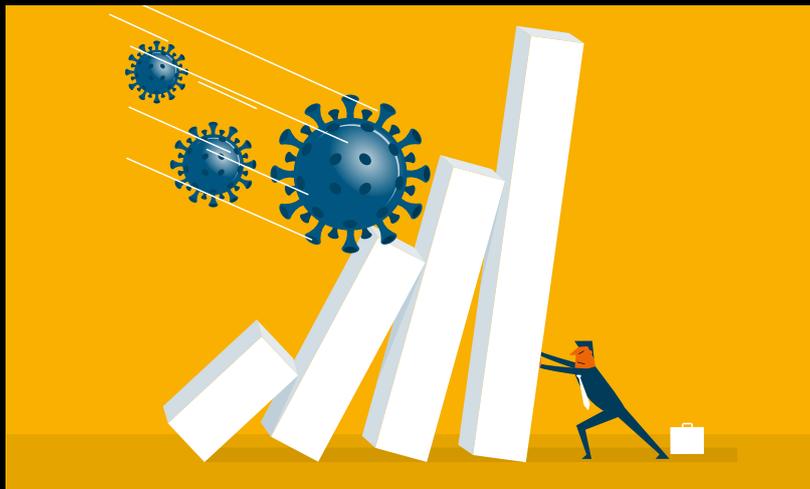
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# Providers complain of ‘impossible timelines’ for skills guarantee offer

NICK LINFORD  
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Exclusive

Training providers are “disappointed”, “extremely frustrated” and predict a “disjointed and likely stuttering start” to the government’s Lifetime Skills Guarantee.

Funding for starts on the new fully funded level 3 offer for 24-year-old learners and above, announced by the prime minister last October, will be allocated to training providers as part of the adult education budget allocation from April 1 to July 31, 2021.

This means providers would need to both start and finish the mostly large full level 3 qualifications in a maximum window of just four months.

Typically, monthly AEB funding would be made available for courses continuing into the next academic year, but there are to be no AEB contract extensions this year.

FE Week understands the highly unusual limitation is a result of the Department for Education funding the scheme from a Treasury-specified National Skill Fund budget that starts in April, but routing payments to providers through AEB contracts that finish just four months later, in July.

And devolved mayoral authorities, such as the Greater London Authority, say they are still waiting for guidance from the government, but will likely have to follow the same policy for the end of this

academic year.

The news was buried in version five of the Education and Skills Funding Agency’s AEB funding rules for this year, published last week.

For “contract for services”, it says in paragraph 403: “Learners must complete their programme by July 31, 2021. Funding will not be allocated beyond July 31, 2021.”

## “It’s a wasted opportunity to have such a great initiative damaged by poor planning”

The guidance goes on to say colleges, funded from a “grant” rather than a “contract for services”, will not face a four-month window for both starts and completions, as they will continue to receive funding for the next academic year.

The Department for Education confirmed colleges will not need to complete delivery of the qualifications by July 2021, but declined to comment on whether this competitive advantage over private training

providers was fair.

Brenda McLeish, chief executive of the training provider Learning Curve Group, said: “We are disappointed to learn that the National Skills Fund funding allocations [routed via the AEB] are only available until July 31, 2021.

“These timelines make it almost impossible for us to be able to deliver under this offer. They are substantial level 3 programmes, for which four months is not enough time. We have huge demand from learners. However, providers will need to be given access to funding for learners beyond July 31.

“It’s a wasted opportunity to have such a great initiative damaged by poor planning and contracting arrangements that will impact on learners.”

Jane Hickie, chief executive at the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, hit out at the way AEB contracts were limiting the access to the level 3 Lifetime Skills Guarantee scheme.

“Training providers and the learners they will be supporting face an unhelpful, disjointed and likely stuttering start through no fault of their own,” she said.

“This is especially disappointing considering the new level 3 adult offer is expected to play a key role in supporting disadvantaged adults without a prior level 3 train for careers in priority sectors such as adult care, construction and engineering.”

The DfE procurement team has yet to launch a promised £65 million tendering round for national AEB funding contracts starting August 2021.



Jane Hickie



Brenda McLeish

# ESFA launches investigation into fastest growing apprenticeship provider

BILLY CAMDEN

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From front

Exclusive

England's fastest growing apprenticeship provider is under investigation by the Education and Skills Funding Agency and faces going bust, *FE Week* can reveal.

Logistics.com (UK) Ltd only became a government-approved apprenticeship provider in March 2020, at which point it swiftly changed ownership. In the following eight months during a pandemic more than 1,100 apprentices, mostly working in nursing homes, were recruited, worth almost £5 million.

*FE Week* understands the provider was forced to pause starts in November while also having payments suspended as the ESFA launched an inquiry amid concerns at the speed and scale of enrolments.

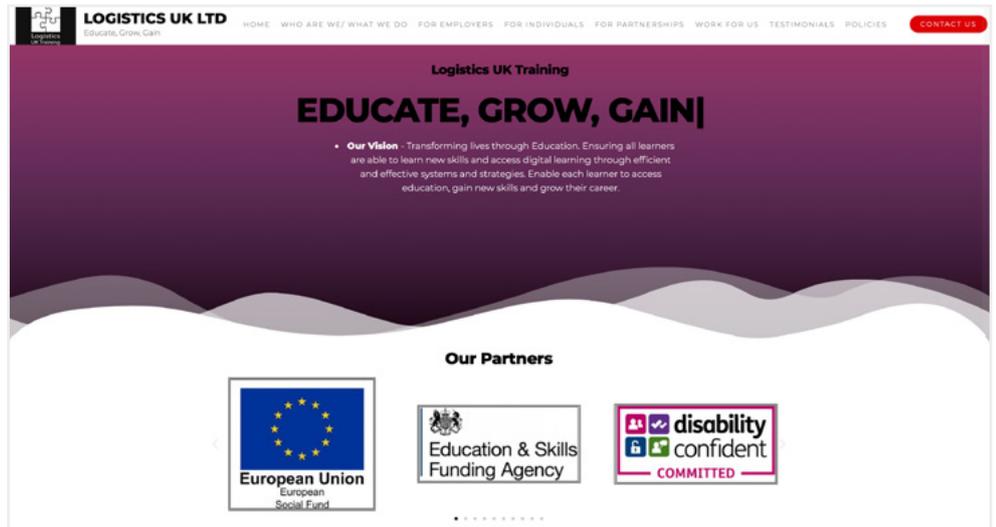
The agency and the provider have remained tight-lipped about the specifics of the investigation, but it is understood the owner is now looking to sell the business or face going into liquidation following the ESFA's decision to stop releasing funding.

A total of 86 staff would be affected.

The managing director of a brokerage company that sold employer contacts and worked with the provider for a period described how learners have now been left "high and dry" because the owners' "eyes were clearly too big for their belly".

Logistics.com (UK), which is rated by five employers as an "excellent" "national" provider on the government's Find Apprenticeship Training website, was incorporated as a small "freight company" in 2014 with no training delivery history and its latest accounts show just £609 of assets, according to Companies House.

Dominic Davies joined as a director



in March 2020 shortly after the provider's acceptance to the register of apprenticeship training providers. His then-business partner, Stephen Banks – who, like Davies, previously worked at the well-known but now-liquidated training provider Middleton Murray – played key roles in its operation.

## “Their eyes were clearly too big for their belly”

The pair incorporated a number of different businesses over the course of last summer.

*FE Week* analysis of the government's published statistics shows that Logistics.com (UK) recruited more apprenticeship starts than any other provider in the country in the eight months it was allowed to recruit.

To achieve this huge volume of enrolments the owners purchased sales leads and established partnerships with at least one NHS Trust to offer free apprenticeship training to

large and small employers, funded from levy transfers.

Government policy is that large employers, such as councils and NHS Trusts, can share up to 25 per cent of their unspent levy funding each year with training providers to deliver the apprenticeships to small employers – administered via the online apprenticeship system.

The use of transferred funding was key to Logistics.com (UK) being fully funded by the ESFA to deliver free courses, as it meant employers would not need to pay the usual five per cent co-investment fee.

Logistics.com (UK), for example, worked with the Humber, Coast and Vale Health and Care Partnership to encourage GPs to take up a level 3 clinical coder apprenticeship.

An email advert seen by *FE Week*, sent last November by the partnership to a Hull University Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust mailing list, states that the usual cost is £5,000 but “working in partnership with Logistics UK Training” they would “look to cover the cost of the qualification from levy transfers from other organisations”.

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News

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CONTINUED

Among the councils from whom *FE Week* is aware that Logistics.com (UK) applied for levy transfer funding include North Yorkshire County Council.

The council and NHS Trust did not respond to requests for comment at the time of going to press.

There is no suggestion of wrongdoing through the use of levy transfers.

Davies explained to *FE Week* that his strategy since taking over Logistics.com (UK) has been to “support the health and social care sector with apprenticeship training throughout the pandemic by utilising levy transfer funding”.

“Our team of 86 employees ensures we have an average caseload of 35 to 40 learners providing good-quality delivery via blended learning allowing us to react to lockdowns,” he said.

“This ensured learners would remain on track with their progression. We have and will continue to support our learners and employers ensuring impact on delivery is minimal.”

Davies added that his provider does have a number of learners on breaks in learning due to the pandemic and that it has “withdrawn learners as appropriate to ensure no funding overclaims have been made”.

*FE Week* spoke to Stephen Banks briefly and he claimed he had cut ties with Logistics.com (UK) in December despite personally seeking buyers for the provider in recent days. He put the phone down when more questions were asked and has not responded to various follow-up requests.

Companies House shows that Banks became the new owner of a single employee firm called 5 Stars Recruitment Ltd in October 2020 – three months after it was added to the apprenticeship providers register on July 29, 2020.

Despite the significant number of apprentices, Ofsted has never paid Logistics.com (UK) a visit.

A spokesperson for the inspectorate said: “Since March 2020, due to the coronavirus pandemic, we have been unable to complete our intended new-provider monitoring visit schedule. We will return to conducting

new-provider monitoring visits as soon as it is possible to do so. We take serious account of any information received that suggests there is a cause for concern about a provider, and this may give rise to an earlier inspection or monitoring visit.”

The ESFA investigation into Logistics.com (UK)

**“We have withdrawn learners as appropriate to ensure no funding overclaims have been made”**

comes as the agency looks to tighten up their register of apprenticeship training providers – a key policy in last month’s FE white paper.

The white paper said the government will undertake a “full refresh” of the register, commencing in April 2021 and will adopt “more

stringent entry criteria for both new and existing providers, to better determine whether providers have the capability and capacity to be able to deliver these higher-quality apprenticeships”.

This will be the second time the register has been “refreshed”, after it was first launched in March 2017, relaunched in January 2019, only to be closed to most new applications since April 2020.

The Department for Education is left with unanswered questions as to why an earnings limit policy has yet to be implemented for new apprenticeship providers and how, given their lack of relevant or significant trading history, both Logistics.com (UK) and 5 Stars Recruitment Ltd successfully applied as ‘main’ providers last year.

When asked what the DfE is doing to protect apprentices during the investigation being led by the ESFA counter-fraud team, a spokesperson said: “We do not comment on investigations ongoing or otherwise.”

LOGISTICS.COM (UK) LTD (UKPRN 10066935)				
Apprenticeship standard name	Level	Starts (8 months. Mar 2020 - Oct 2020)*	Max ESFA £ per start	Max total ESFA funding**
Adult Care Worker	2	347	£3,000	£1,041,000
Lead Adult Care Worker	3	307	£3,000	£921,000
Lead Practitioner in Adult Care	4	29	£7,000	£203,000
Leader in Adult Care	5	142	£7,000	£994,000
Business Administrator	3	22	£5,000	£110,000
Customer Service Practitioner	2	5	£3,500	£17,500
Children, Young People and Families Manager	5	10	£6,000	£60,000
Children, Young People and Families Practitioner	4	18	£6,000	£108,000
Assessor Coach	4	33	£7,000	£231,000
Healthcare Support Worker	2	4	£3,000	£12,000
Hospitality Manager	4	24	£6,000	£144,000
Hospitality Supervisor	3	17	£4,000	£68,000
Senior Production Chef	3	8	£4,000	£32,000
Hospitality Team Member	2	10	£4,000	£40,000
Large Goods Vehicle (LGV) Driver	2	43	£5,000	£215,000
Passenger Transport Driver - Bus, Coach and Tram	2	23	£6,000	£138,000
Team Leader or Supervisor	3	34	£4,500	£153,000
Operations or Departmental Manager	5	27	£7,000	£189,000
Sales Executive	4	12	£6,000	£72,000
Production Chef	2	21	£5,000	£105,000
Healthcare Cleaning Operative	2	18	£4,000	£72,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,154</b>		<b>£4,925,500</b>

\* Source: DfE “Underlying data - Apprenticeship starts” for 2019/20 full year and for 2020/21 quarter 1  
\*\* Excluding additional funding for functional skills and employer and provider incentives

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# Talks under way on threshold rate for college adult education under-delivery

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Exclusive

Intense negotiations are taking place within government to determine the extent to which colleges will again be allowed to keep funding for courses that did not take place amid disruption from the pandemic.

In a typical year, colleges are allowed to keep 100 per cent of the national adult education budget funding if they achieve a threshold of at least 97 per cent of their allocation.

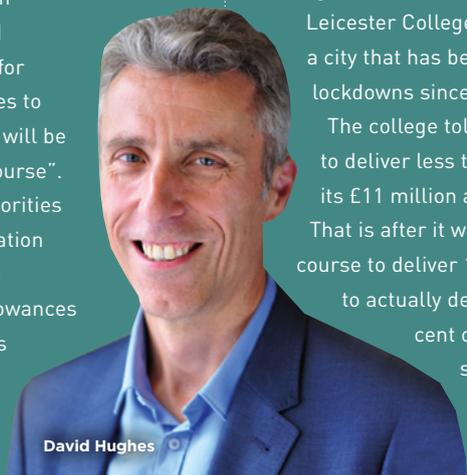
Last year this 97 per cent threshold was lowered to 68 per cent owing to the impact of Covid-19, and with the national lockdown continuing, it could be even lower this year.

FE Week understands the Department for Education is trying to persuade the Treasury to allow for significant under-delivery, which could include a different threshold between March and July, when lockdown is expected to end.

The Association of Colleges chief executive David Hughes told FE Week it is "imperative that colleges find out soon how their AEB budgets will be dealt with".

The ESFA said it is "reviewing their end-of-year reconciliation position for grant-funded adult education budgets for 2020/21", and any changes to published arrangements will be communicated in "due course".

Mayoral combined authorities with devolved adult education budgets will also need to consider what, if any, allowances to make for their colleges and training providers. The Greater London



David Hughes



Authority, for example, was planning to introduce a 90 per cent threshold. This is likely to change as the mayor signed off on the proposal from GLA staff last November before the latest lockdown.

Concerns over colleges' ability to recruit against their AEB allocations have heightened during the third national lockdown, where educational settings have been forced to close to most students since the turn of the new year. The government's current plan is to reopen colleges from March 8 at the earliest.

Leicester College, for example, is in a city that has been under continuous lockdowns since March 2020.

The college told FE Week it is likely to deliver less than 74 per cent of its £11 million allocation this year. That is after it went from being on course to deliver 108 per cent last year, to actually delivering 87.6 per cent once they "lost" the summer term.

Ninety per cent of

their AEB offer comes from ESOL, Skills for Life and re-engagement provision, where it is "not possible for the majority of students to learn online" when they are at lower levels and when outreach centres are closed.

Additionally, the college told FE Week, it has been unable to recruit in the spring term, and moving all enrolment online makes it "more difficult for adult students to access".

Hughes said 100 per cent delivery for colleges in 2020/21 was "extremely unlikely, despite best efforts" as many students cannot take part in remote learning, particularly those on lower-level, ESOL and practical courses, and because workplaces that would recruit learners have shut down.

This "needed to be accepted and comfort given to colleges" by lowering the delivery threshold, he argued, as otherwise, many colleges will need to make redundancies

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“very soon” for staff who will “be needed next year when skills for jobs and for recovery are going to be even more important”.

FE Week has contacted all of the mayoral combined authorities with devolved AEB funding, and while a couple have introduced expanded tolerances for under-delivery, others are holding fire.

For its grant-funded adult education providers (typically colleges), the Greater London Authority has set a 90 per cent performance threshold. However, when asked whether this could change, a spokesperson said mayor Sadiq Khan’s team “will consider the impact an extended lockdown will have on adult education funding later this month”.

Liverpool City Region has said, for 2020/21, it “has relaxed the tolerance levels” to allow providers to “re-profile potential under-delivery”.

West Midlands Combined Authority said it will be “finalising our approach for 2020/21 in the next few weeks”, and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough said it was “currently modelling our reconciliation approach for 2020/21”.

Tees Valley has not made any changes to tolerance levels yet, but is monitoring the situation; and Greater Manchester is meeting its providers to understand where they are with 2020/21 delivery, before coming up with a plan on how to handle reconciliation.

North of Tyne Combined Authority said it is “currently in discussion with its provider base to inform its approach and to ensure people in Newcastle,

North Tyneside and Northumberland have continued access to the courses they need to progress in learning and employment”.

For 2019/20 and following a number of U-turns, the ESFA allowed a 68 per cent performance threshold for grant-funded providers. But 33 colleges still failed to meet that target; 27 faced having funds clawed back, while six submitted business cases to try and reduce or avoid claw-back.

The DfE has said they will publish further details on actual delivery last year, in March.

FE Week understand that unless the Cabinet Office-approved Covid “supplier relief” scheme is utilised, independent training providers will continue to be paid only for their actual delivery each month.



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# FE pay must increase, or government plans 'will remain a pipedream'

FRASER WHIELDON  
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Exclusive

Government aspirations to bolster the FE workforce "will be nothing more than a pipedream" unless colleges are given funding to raise teacher pay, a sector leader has warned.

Anne Murdoch, senior advisor for college leadership at the Association of School and College Leaders and the former general secretary of the Principals' Professional Council, raised concerns after the much-anticipated Skills for Jobs white paper included nothing on increasing pay for staff.

Instead, it promised that 'significant' new investment in the workforce in 2021-22 would include the launch of an 'ambitious' recruitment campaign to attract 'high-calibre teaching staff' and a sweep of professional development measures.

All this comes as new data on the FE workforce released by the Department for Education last month showed teacher pay across the sector has remained stagnant over the past decade, having only increased from a median of £31,620 in 2010-11 to £33,750 in 2019-20.

The research also showed the retention rate has fallen, especially after the first few years of teaching, with just over half (51 per cent) of teachers who started in 2016 still teaching after three years, while 68 per cent who started in 2000 were still teaching after three years.

Additionally, the data revealed that more FE teachers are leaving the profession within two academic years.

While last month's FE white paper failed to back up the commitment to strengthen the workforce with funding for pay, for the schools sector the Conservatives included a promise to increase starting salaries to £30,000 in their last election manifesto.

The current pay gap between school and college teachers sits at around £9,000.

Staff pay in FE is set by individual colleges, although



the Association of Colleges does recommend a pay increase each year. Its recommendation over the past few years has been a one per cent rise, which has often sparked a backlash from the University and College Union.

But funding per student in colleges fell by 12 per cent in real terms between 2010-11 and 2019-20, which has had a knock-on impact on the pay colleges can offer.

Murdoch described the "stagnation in pay" for teachers in FE as "scandalous", adding that it is "hardly a surprise to find low levels of morale and a high percentage of staff leaving the profession as a direct result".

The former Newbury College principal told *FE Week* that it was "difficult to see why" teachers would choose to work in FE when they could earn around £10,000 more working in schools. "Swift action is needed now to stop the yawning pay gap between school and FE teachers from widening even further," she added.

"The minister's aspirations for the future of the FE sector will be nothing more than a pipedream unless the government recognises the importance of the staff who work there and takes genuine steps to fund FE sufficiently so that college leaders can right the wrongs of the past decade on pay."

She is not the only sector leader to highlight the importance of pay in attracting professionals into the FE teaching profession.

During an *FE Week* webcast

last week, Association of Colleges chief executive David Hughes stressed the importance of getting funding through to colleges and providers "so they can pay the right amount to recruit and retain people, particularly those with skills in and experience in those sectors of the economy that are most important".

Education and Training Foundation chief executive David Russell, whose organisation carries out analysis of the FE workforce and also runs several streams of professional development for the sector, concurred with Hughes during the event, saying an element of reward was "missing" from the white paper.

The government is pushing ahead with the efforts to improve recruitment and retention that it did mention in the white paper, however. This week it launched a £3 million tender for delivery partners for the Taking Teaching Further programme.

The white paper also revealed investment in the FE workforce will rise to over £65 million between 2020 and 2022, with part of the extra money going towards a new Workforce Industry Exchange programme, which will develop networks between teachers and industry.

Furthermore, the existing professional development programme for T Levels will be expanded for at least a year beyond March 2021, and a new national online Apprenticeship Workforce Development programme will be made available.

Workforce data collection will also be improved to be on par with that collected for schools and higher education and will include data on ethnicity and disabilities, so the DfE can measure the impact of policies on diversity in further education staffing and leadership.

A DfE spokesperson said the white paper reforms "cannot succeed without outstanding teachers and teaching," and the quality and supply of the workforce is "critical to the vision".

"We recognise the need to provide greater support for, and investment in, the sector's teachers and leaders, and we have taken steps to reverse many years of underfunding of the FE workforce," they added.

"The measures we are setting out in this white paper allow us to deliver greater support for recruitment, retention and teacher development."



Anne Murdoch

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# College threshold for more in-year 16-18 cash lowered

**BILLY CAMDEN**  
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The Education and Skills Funding Agency has revealed a new in-year growth funding calculation for 16-to-18-year-olds to support “modest growth”.

The news follows concerns that there are an estimated 20,000 students who are currently going unfunded in colleges due to FE’s lagged funding model, combined with a surge in young people choosing to continue education rather than enter the workplace amid Covid-19.

In-year growth is usually only awarded to those colleges that have “significantly” oversubscribed, but the ESFA said this week that colleges with “more modest levels of over-delivery” will “also receive some growth funds” this year.

The ESFA explained that this process will be “purely data driven” and they will not accept business cases as in previous years.

The calculation includes lower and upper thresholds, depending on the number of students originally allocated prior to the year starting. It also takes into account any under-delivery in the previous year.

Most sixth-form colleges and large FE colleges have been set the highest lower threshold of 100 students, but with a minimum growth increase of at least ten. This means if they over-delivered by between 100 and 109 they would not receive extra funding, but if they over-delivered by 110 they would receive growth funding.

For colleges with a small number of 16-to-18-year-olds it is possible under the model for them to have recruited just 35 more students than allocated and still receive in-year growth funding. For example, with the lowest lower threshold minimum for colleges set at 25 and

a minimum growth set by the ESFA as ten, a college could be funded for ten extra students if they had an allocation of 300 and actually recruited 335.

For specialist post-16 institutions the lowest lower threshold minimum has been set at just five, with no minimum growth value. So a specialist post-16 institution would be funded for one extra student if they had an allocation of 50 and actually recruited 56.

Colleges with larger allocations and more significant growth increases would still only be funded this year for up to half the value of the growth, as has been the case in previous years.

The ESFA says growth payments will start to be received from March 2021 “in most cases” and will be profiled across the remainder of the current academic year.

James Kewin, the deputy chief executive of the Sixth Form Colleges Association, said this announcement was a “welcome move”.

“The threshold for securing in-year growth funding has always been very high, and as a

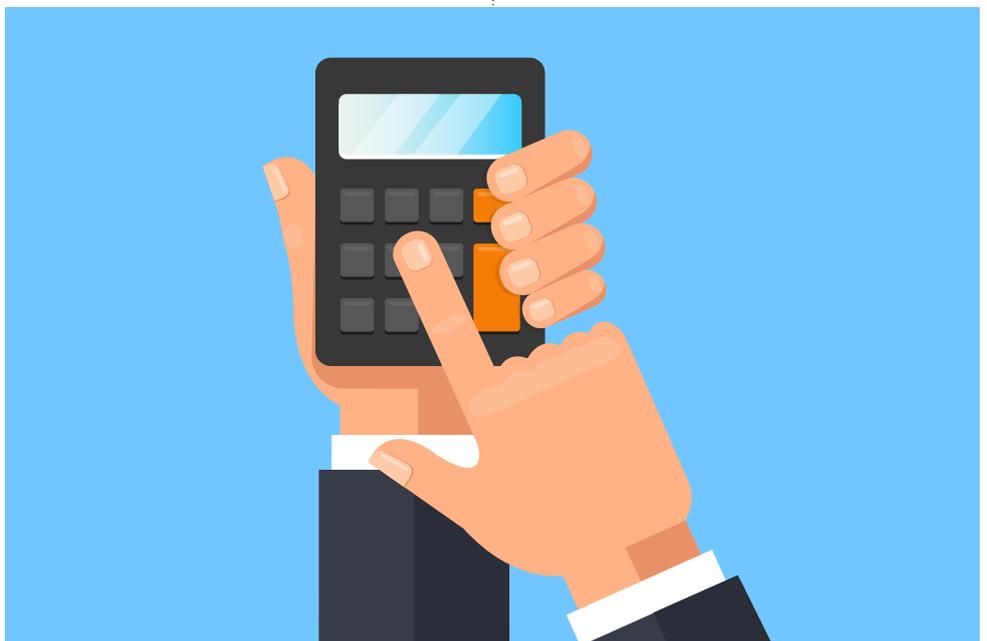
result, very few institutions have been able to access it,” he told *FE Week*.

“Reducing the threshold will make this funding available to more colleges and relieve some of the short-term financial pressure that can accompany growth. It is particularly welcome this year, given the sharp increase in student numbers experienced by many institutions.”

Kewin added that he would like to see similar arrangements put in place for future years, particularly as the demographic increase in the number of 16-to-18-year-olds is set to continue in many areas until the end of the decade.

The ESFA’s announcement did warn that the agency has not yet made a decision on in-year growth for 2021/2022 and colleges “should not assume that the 2020/2021 rules above will be continued next year”.

And they made clear that this process does not apply to independent learning providers for whom there is a separate reconciliation process.



# Pace of EQAs transferring to Ofqual slows to a crawl

FRASER WHIELDON  
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Exclusive

Providers will be stuck paying for external quality assurance (EQA) for even longer than planned, as the process of transferring responsibilities to exams regulator Ofqual has slowed to a crawl.

EQA duties for just one standard, accident repair technician, were transitioned from the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) to Ofqual last month.

That is despite the watchdog telling end-point assessment organisations (EPAOs) in August that EQA for 54 apprenticeships in construction and engineering, handled by the institute through contractor Open Awards, would move over from January.

Sixty-nine apprenticeship standards, where the EPAOs were all formally recognised by Ofqual, transitioned last November.

Ofqual has said standards will be transferred "on a monthly basis", and when each apprenticeship transfers will depend "on a number of factors", such as how many EPAOs are delivering it, and whether they have Ofqual recognition.

"Each standard will be taken on a case-by-case basis," a spokesperson said, adding that the regulator is continuing to talk to EPAOs to transition the remaining 245 standards that were originally planned to transfer over the summer.

For standards that have not transferred over, providers will continue to have to pay charges for EQA on each apprentice who takes their end-point assessment.



IfATE controversially charges £40 for EQA, but awarding bodies have had to stump up almost £200 per apprentice by certain EQA bodies, leading Federation of Awarding Bodies chief executive Tom Bewick to brand it a "Wild West" market.

*FE Week* was first to report last September that charges would end once a standard's EQA was moved to Ofqual.

An IfATE spokesperson said they are "working hard" to support EPAOs with their transition to Ofqual and "realise the benefits this offers".

"We will continue to listen carefully to the sector," they added.

EPAOs were told last year the transition of EQA would be a two-year process, with standards where IfATE carries out EQA transferring by the second quarter of 2021 and apprenticeships where an alternative employer body runs EQA transferring in year two.

Under the new system, all EPAOs will need to be "recognised" by Ofqual, meaning their qualifications can be considered for public funding to be taught in schools, colleges and other FE providers, and its certificates can carry the Ofqual logo.

When applying to be recognised, organisations have to be able to prove they have "adequate financial reserves which will support the organisation through the lifecycle of a qualification" as well as accounting and financial monitoring systems either in place, or in development if it is a new awarding organisation.

It was first revealed in February that Ofqual would be taking over EQA from IfATE and assorted employer bodies, with the Office for Students taking over apprenticeships with integrated degrees, when a consultation on the proposals was launched.

The decision to bring in Ofqual and the OfS was made, according to an IfATE report into external quality assurance published last December, because the other EQA bodies "lack the regulatory powers to enforce changes from EPAOs" when the EPA plan or conditions of the register of end-point assessment organisations have "not been complied with" by EPAOs, "and where the independence or validity of assessment has been compromised as a result".

# UK pulls out of EuroSkills because of Covid restrictions

FRASER WHIELDON  
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The UK will not take part in this year's EuroSkills competition – the first time the country has ever pulled out of any WorldSkills competition.

The decision, which has also been taken by Finland, the Netherlands and Norway due to Covid-19 restrictions, was announced as WorldSkills Europe, the organisers of EuroSkills, revealed the competition will now take place in Graz, Austria on September 22 to 26 this year.

It has also been confirmed WorldSkills Shanghai, which had been due to happen in 2021 before being postponed, will now take place October 12 to 17, 2022.

WorldSkills UK chief executive Neil Bentley-Gockmann said the decision the pull out of EuroSkills had been "difficult... There is still too much ongoing uncertainty, with a changing situation in terms of Covid security, to be able to commit now to participate."

"We have a duty of care to our competitors and we are aware that the ongoing restrictions mean



Neil Bentley-Gockmann



that our Team UK members might not be able to prepare fully, in sufficient time, for the event.

"We are also aware that we may face further controls regarding international travel, and we are not in a position to commit public funding to take part when we could face further disruption."

The UK has competed in every EuroSkills competition, where young people from across the continent compete against one another in skill-based tournaments, since they started in 2008.

At the last EuroSkills event, in Budapest in

2018, the UK secured a place in the top 10 nations, finishing ninth in the medal tables.

There has also been a UK representative at every WorldSkills competition, where young people from across the world compete, since 1953.

The EuroSkills competition had been set to take place in Graz in September 2020.

Competition organiser Josef Herk today said they "will do everything in our power to hold EuroSkills in Graz in autumn 2021".

Bentley-Gockmann said the UK will now focus on training for the WorldSkills competition in Shanghai next year.

## Ofsted gives 8 March as earliest date for resuming 'in-person' visits

JAMES CARR  
NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Ofsted has confirmed that in-person routine inspections will not be returning until March 8 at the earliest.

The education watchdog had originally planned to undertake remote inspections until the February half-term before reviewing its next steps.

However, new guidance published as part of the inspectorate's rolling Covid-19 update today confirmed that planned inspection work will be carried out remotely until March 8 at the earliest.

But Ofsted can still conduct on-site inspection if it has 'immediate' concerns over such areas as safeguarding.

The watchdog's remote inspections began last week with a "particular focus

on how well learners are being educated remotely". It is also running normal FE monitoring visits, to new apprenticeship providers, for example.

While it had originally planned to conduct inspections this term on-site, these plans were dropped in January after inspectors rebelled and advice from the government for everyone to "act as if you have the virus".

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Introducing...

# STEVE KELLY

Principal, Keighley College

'My staff can make the decisions. They're big boys and girls'

JESS STAUFENBERG  
@STAUFENBERGJ

Whether it's teaching in prisons or walking on hot coals with Oprah, Steve Kelly says the biggest lesson he's learnt is about trust

Steve Kelly, principal at Keighley College near Bradford, was trusted early on in his teaching career. There he was, sat in a PGCE class at Charles Keene College in Leicester as a slightly

older student, having pledged to avoid becoming a "traditional teacher". His trainer, David Grayson, put an acetate slide on the projector and turned to the class. "I distinctly remember that first lesson with David," Kelly tells me. "He put this image on the screen and it was the crappiest picture of a cartoon student, with a cap on, scruffy jeans, not looking great. The activity was to take this picture and tell me everything we need to do to help this student learn." The lesson was not to focus just on

qualifications, but on helping somebody become themselves in every direction possible – a lesson that "really stuck with me".

After just a few months Grayson, who became Kelly's mentor, offered to pay him to teach the special educational needs module of the course, given his degree in youth and social work and experience working with young people with autism at camps in America and as a qualified youth worker in Leicester. "That's what was amazing about David. He saw in me an ability to

# Profile

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fix things – this part of the course was poor and he allowed me to do that. He trusted me. What I learned from David was to trust your staff.”

Kelly himself has come from an environment in which he was well trusted. He calls himself a “slow reader and a reluctant student” whose mum, a bright woman who had to leave school early to work in Liverpool’s factories, made him sit at the dinner table for a certain amount of time to improve his reading. His father and grandfather were both dockers, and together with his mum taught him a strong work ethic. But along with the discipline came a clear message, says Johnson, that “whatever you want to do, we’ll support you in those decisions”. He “did miserably” in his A-levels and began to volunteer aged 18 at a residential home for young people with learning difficulties. It looked like a career towards teaching, but at that point “I wasn’t very teachery in my head”.

But the result of such a trusting home environment was the confidence to make bold decisions for himself. While at Northampton University, and supposed to be studying a degree in psychology and performance, Kelly set up a theatre production company that soon began to take on big events. Two-and-a-half years into his degree he quit, literally moments before sitting an exam. “I realised I knew nothing about what I was going to write about. I was either going to go into the exam room, or walk away, and I walked away.” It’s a bold move, and not one everyone would bounce back from. But Kelly was making money, driven by a growing capacity to spot gaps and think up solutions.

One of the biggest gigs his production company landed was launching the infamous

‘Nemesis’ ride at Alton Towers. Kelly surely must be the only principal in FE whose voice has introduced a heart-stopping themepark ride to thousands of overexcited people. “We did all the lights, smoke and stuff like that. It was brilliant.” I can just imagine his Scouse twang hiking up the octane levels several times over on the speakers, with an appropriate amount of drama and fun raging around. Like many of the most trusting people, Kelly seems comfortable in allowing fun – and even a certain amount of rule-bending – to play a big role in his leadership style.

It’s partly why Kelly became known for “ripping up lesson plans” halfway through a session and prioritising student experience. “I was good at saying, this isn’t working, let’s just scrap it. People didn’t always know what to say to me in lessons – they’d say, you changed the lesson halfway through. And I’d say, did they learn? Did they progress? Did they enjoy it? And they’d say yes, so I’d say, what are you moaning about?” He laughs infectiously – you can imagine that staff meetings with Kelly are a riot.

It’s the kind of energetic, flexible approach that will have likely stood him in good stead working in some of the toughest



On a summer camp trip, 1994

FE environments around. Shortly after qualifying as a teacher, he taught at HM Prison Glen Parva in Leicestershire with responsibility for all learners with special educational needs for almost three years. Talk about the deep end. Since then, he’s held roles overseeing the learner experience and vulnerable students at Leicester College, Chesterfield College and The Sheffield College. He even did a stint as an education consultant, just to try it out.

**“I was good at saying, this isn’t working, let’s just scrap it”**

Perhaps the more unusual quality about Kelly is that he doesn’t just trust himself to take risks but appears to trust others too. “One of the strategies I’ve done at the college is basically devolve lots of authority from me. I ultimately am in charge of the college, of course I am. But I have no authority whatsoever. My heads of department have the budget, the staff responsibility, the curriculum, in their hands.” Mischievous staff reading this should take note, to see how wild a suggestion they can make that Kelly might be willing to pilot. “My answer will always



Being interviewed

# Profile

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be yes, to whatever you're asking to do, unless I can really see a good enough reason to say no."

His key performance indicators in staff meetings also sound fairly unorthodox. "I'll say, I'm not bothered about your registers, all those tick boxes. Are the students engaged? Are they having fun?". One member of staff replied to him, "Yes, but you'll be worried if sign-up rates dip", to which Kelly replied, "Well, they won't, because you're in charge".

## "I'm devoted to students, but I'm equally devoted to staff"

The all-trusting, it-should-be-enjoyable approach extends to learners too. As we speak, a student of Kelly's is waiting to find out whether he will be allowed to stay at the college following a fairly serious behaviour incident. There is no decision to be weighed in Kelly's mind: of course he'll be kept on. "He probably would have been excluded from most colleges. But he's going to volunteer some time with student services, tell other students why his behaviour was not

appropriate, eat some humble pie. If I can work in a restorative way, he can learn to be respectful." He looks at me seriously. "Why should I, in a nice lovely office, ruin a kid's life?"

Much of this thinking – which the literature often terms "servant leadership" – has been developed in Kelly over a lifetime of reading self-development and people-management books. He's writing one himself at the moment, and reels off his top three recommendations: Good to Great by Jim Collins, How to be Brilliant by Michael Heppell and Start with Why by Simon Sinek. The approach may be partly inspired by his summer stints in America, where self-development and self-belief are perhaps a bigger part of the culture than in Britain. In another off-the-wall anecdote, Kelly tells me he attended one personal development training exercise at which Oprah herself was present. But that's not the most extraordinary bit: the exercise involved all the participants walking on hot coals. Really? I repeat, trying not to sound too incredulous. "Yes, hot coals. You don't wreck your feet. You walk that fast."

Perhaps what Kelly understands best of all, as a former drama type, is that most people want to feel significant – to have a small stage on which their voice is heard. It's why he thinks it's a good idea for the misbehaving student to sit on the college's student voice committee. "We've trusted him, he wants to change his behaviour and we can also show that by giving him this authority. The word is 'significance'. He doesn't feel significant at the moment. It's about certainty and significance." As a former prison teacher, he's seen it before. "That's why people join



a gang. There's certainty in it, and there's significance, because you're important." Being such an enabler, one imagines Kelly will, like many leaders, want to look around for new challenges once his institution is up and flying. He jokes that he's done so many roles he "sounds about 90 years old"; but he has stayed the course in several places, including eight years at Leicester College and five years at Chester College. And challenges remain: Keighley College is still establishing itself after breaking away as a separate institution from Leeds City College in 2018, within the also rebranded Luminare Education Group, formerly the Leeds City College Group. But when he took the principal post in 2019, a 'good' Ofsted grade was already in the bag from the year before, and the report gave a particular nod to the 'outstanding progress' made by the two specific groups he was responsible for before he became a principal: 14-to-16 and SEND learners. So far, so solved. So what keeps him ticking? I ask.

"I'm devoted to students, but I'm equally devoted to staff," he replies straight off. "I've always been really interested in teaching leaders. So I'm here to look after them but also to let them get on with it. They can make decisions. They're big boys and girls."



# MARK SMITH

Chief executive, Ada National College for Digital Skills



## More employers want technical talent who are trained in FE, not at university

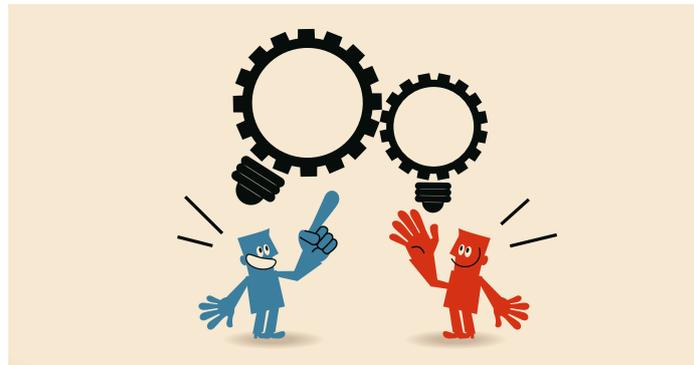
**Businesses are so used to having to re-train graduates they don't complain about it – but FE can now step in, writes Mark Smith**

The word 'university' is derived from the Latin word *universus*, meaning 'whole, entire'. In a strictly academic sense, it is the shortening of the Latin phrase *universitas magistrorum et scholarium* meaning 'community of masters and scholars'.

In this word, working closely with employers, facilitating teachers and engaging learners for the modern, digital economy is not mentioned. And yet this is what modern British society has come to expect universities to do. Technology, however, is finally putting paid to these unrealistic expectations.

Advanced technical skills meld academic and vocational learning, and these skills require an andragogy (the education of adults – as opposed to pedagogy, the education of children) that is both academically stretching and practically rigorous. But universities are ill-equipped to deliver this kind of education.

Having led Ada, the National College for Digital Skills, for the past seven years, I have had countless conversations with large tech employers and small- and medium-enterprise partnerships. Many rue the wasted years and fees that aspirational technical talent has spent studying an outdated computer science course at university, in the mistaken belief it



will get them a good entry-level job in the tech sector upon graduation.

This means most junior tech hires are recruited on potential and measured through in-house assessment centres by employers who are confident they can "re-educate" junior hires to become useful within three to six months.

**"Many rue the wasted years that aspirational technical talent has spent studying an outdated computer science course"**

This approach is so embedded that employers have almost forgotten to complain about it. But now alternative talent sources are starting to emerge. Higher level and degree apprenticeships, 'bootcamps' and retraining initiatives are hitting the mainstream consciousness.

As such, on-the-ball employers are rapidly updating their talent

attraction processes. For example, Deloitte now hires a mix of technical apprentices, graduates and a few bootcamp completers each year.

Techies care little for formal qualifications. The quality of your github account or technical portfolio counts far more than the letters after your name, and this plays into what the FE sector has been quietly excelling at for many years: preparing people effectively for the world of work.

But the tech sector demands skills that are continuously evolving, which means course leaders, awarding bodies and employers must work symbiotically for their mutual benefit.

This is an issue. College teachers are hugely squeezed for time. As a volunteering manager for a large tech company said to me, "It recently dawned on me that when college staff say they are 'at capacity', this has an entirely different meaning to 'at capacity' in the business world: their entire weeks are literally timetabled almost to the minute!"

Finding a common language and

understanding between college staff and employer volunteers (who donate their time and expertise to supporting learners) is challenging but crucial. Many teachers feel they simply don't have capacity and most volunteers start out irrationally scared of making fools of themselves and being heckled.

At Ada, we've found that by having high expectations of our staff, students and apprentices, the tech sector has responded by volunteering their time, expertise and energy. Teachers have also felt more fulfilled.

As with any other industry sector, employee volunteers want to work with staff and students who are engaged and curious about their working world.

But the more than 40 companies we partner with complain that these skillsets are in desperately short supply in the UK, forcing them to pay inflated salaries for people who are not particularly talented.

The welcome announcements in the white paper (albeit with further details needed) are now coupled with increased remote volunteering experience due to Covid and the decline of Eastern European technical talent due to Brexit.

So these circumstances present a unique opportunity for FE colleges and employers to lead the way in the design and delivery of higher technical skills in England.

This will deliver value-for-money for learners and help redefine what being a 'community' of learning really looks like.

# STEPHEN EVANS

Chief executive,  
Learning and  
Work Institute



## Delayed traineeships are a scandal in the face of our youth unemployment crisis

**There will be a lost generation if we don't roll out a comprehensive offer of advice and support for those not in education, writes Stephen Evans**

Young people are facing the double whammy of a disrupted education and a weakened labour market. Youth unemployment has doubled since March 2020. A period out of work when young can have serious long-term impacts, so this represents a national crisis demanding urgent action.

It was great, therefore, to see the chancellor's July 2020 Plan for Jobs announce an extra £111 million to expand Traineeships in England and £2.1 billion to create Kickstart, which covers the wages of young people at risk of long-term unemployment if employers create jobs for them for six months.

But, while the ambition is great and we have many of the right building blocks, there are problems with speed, design and coherence.

On speed, it's more than six months since the Plan for Jobs but we're yet to see a single young person start one of the new traineeships, despite the fact this was about expanding an existing programme.

In fact, the Department for Education has only just decided which providers to allocate extra the traineeship money to. That



simply doesn't match the urgency of the crisis we face.

Meanwhile over at the Department for Work and Pensions, Kickstart was not only designed from scratch, but the first young people were in jobs funded by Kickstart by November. The chancellor was even sporting a Kickstart hoodie.

Speed isn't everything – the design of programmes also needs to be right. As FE Week reported, the government will now allow employers to apply direct to DWP for Kickstart funding, whereas previously, employers wanting to take on fewer than 30 young people had to apply via a gateway organisation.

But this risks many young people not getting the support that gateways were intended to ensure, particularly in small firms.

This training and support was central to the success of the Future Jobs Fund, a similar scheme introduced in 2009. The result could be lower take-up (as employers find it too complex to

claim funding) and limited impact (as young people are less likely to find work at the end). Kickstart may have started swiftly, but we may be losing sight of what would make it a success.

**“What young people are offered depends too much on which bit of the system they access”**

We should emphasise that employers can still work through gateways if they wish to. However the biggest problem of all is the overall coherence of the response. Too often it feels as though we have a series of individual policies and that what young people are offered will depend on which bit of the system they access, rather than what they actually need.

For example, young people who arrive for help at the Jobcentre

are far more likely to be offered a Kickstart job than a traineeship. And there seems little focus on getting young people out of work into an apprenticeship.

Better instead to have a Youth Guarantee, which ensures every young person is offered a job, apprenticeship or training place based on their aspirations. That would ensure young people are offered the full range of employment and skills support regardless of which part of the system they access.

Finally, who's going to find and engage those young people who aren't accessing any of this?

Only 33 per cent of 16- to 17-year-olds not in full-time education are in work. Most are not eligible for Universal Credit and so will miss out on Jobcentre Plus support and Kickstart. Who's going to find them? What will we offer them?

That's why Learning and Work Institute's Youth Commission argued 16- to 24-year-olds should get an adviser who agrees a plan with them to find work, build a career and improve their skills up to level 3. This would focus on building skills as well as finding a job, and be open to 16- to 17-year-olds who are not eligible for Universal Credit at the moment.

If we're to avoid a lost generation, we need to combine urgency, good design and coherence. A clear Youth Guarantee would be a great start.

## BEN MCGIRR AND TOSHIF VALLY

Education category specialists,  
Education Buying



## The way colleges go to tender is about to undergo a big shake-up

**There are many more freedoms – but also more scrutiny – in the government's new proposals around bidding, write Ben McGirr and Toshif Vally**

You'd be forgiven for not noticing that in December, the Cabinet Office published a green paper called *Transforming Public Procurement*. The three-month open consultation is part of an attempt to move public procurement away from its EU roots and towards a more UK-driven national law.

Under it, colleges could get more freedom and control about how they contract for cleaning, catering, building and other services, thereby helping your bottom line. But it could come with more transparency strings attached too, so do watch out.

Under the proposed changes, first of all there will be more flexibility on running tenders. At the moment, there are multiple ways you can go to tender, and most colleges will only ever encounter one, which is a normal 'open' tender.

The second most common route is designed for handling a very large anticipated number of bids and involves shortlisting. All other routes tend to involve lawyers for complex negotiations, or relate to very complicated requirements.

Instead of all these different prescribed routes to tender, there would be just three streamlined ways.

The first way would just be a normal open tender, as now. This is a standard tender which currently stays out for a minimum of 30 days and you must take the bid at face value, with whoever scores highest in the tender getting the contract. Strictly speaking, colleges can't negotiate the price set out by bidders.

### “The biggest thing to take note of is the new transparency proposal”

The second way would be a new competitive, flexible route, which increases a college's ability to negotiate. Essentially the government is suggesting you can set your own rules on what the tender looks like. They will establish some minimum requirements, but they haven't gone into more detail on what these might be yet.

Under these suggestions, a college could set its own timeline for how long or short the tender is out, meaning that for a smaller purchase you could close the tender after a couple of weeks, rather than having to keep it open for a longer period.

The third route would, under limited circumstances, allow colleges to avoid a full tender, an option which has emerged from the Covid crisis. If you can justify a need to purchase ASAP, such as the urgent need to buy PPE, then you wouldn't necessarily need to tender.

But be warned that if you went down this route, your college would have to be very transparent about why you did so. We expect there to be more detailed guidance on when this would apply.

Aside from these three routes, the government is also suggesting that buyers such as colleges can consider social value – and not necessarily have to award to the lowest bid. So a scored question on the tender might ask how social values can be achieved. The

bidders might say they'll offer some apprenticeships or environmental work.

Government guidance will probably set out which sectors are obligated and which are encouraged to take this social consideration.

Interestingly, the green paper also suggests a national database that would display bidders' poor performance in previous contracts. At the moment, you are very limited in whether you can discount bidders based on poor performance in the past, to protect against biases. But this move would make it easier for colleges to spot the really poor performers.

Other suggestions include buyers being allowed to reopen bids at set dates under pre-existing agreements, which are known as frameworks, if they wish to.

But the biggest thing colleges should take note of is the new transparency proposal. There would be an enhanced obligation for buyers to publish evaluation reports for every tender, showing all their scores and notes.

At the moment, a lot of colleges probably don't go into sufficient detail on this. It will mean a higher workload for those not accustomed to this careful evaluation method.

The consultation period will end on March 10, 2021 and changes would arrive in the next 12 to 18 months. So those in FE looking to buy should keep their eyes peeled.



DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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# READER'S REPLY

### New data shows improved picture for apprenticeship starts amid pandemic

Yes, the percentage drop has improved since Q4 of 19/20, which may be of some comfort. But there are differences in the 'weight' of different quarters: Q4 18/19 was 75,500 down to 43,600 in 19/20 (down 31,900), Q1 19/20 was 125,800 down to 91,100 in 20/21 (down 34,700)

If you view it in terms of the number of potential apprentices 'lost' and the subsequent impact this will have on providers, then it has actually worsened. The capacity of the provider base to support recovery will soon become the hot topic.

Anon, website

### Now is FE's chance to deliver higher technical education

I'm not sure the beggar thy neighbour approach is right. What we really need is that comprehensive post-18 tertiary plan which Augar made a stab at but the FE white paper (so far) fails to address.

Tom Bewick, Twitter

### It's risky business to have an employer-dominated skills system

Should we assume that the goals that society has for the skills system will match neatly the goals of individual businesses?

Sandra Dartnell, Twitter

## REPLY OF THE WEEK

### New data shows improved picture for apprenticeship starts amid pandemic



20 per cent of 19-64 have a level 3 as their highest qualification. 18 per cent have a level 2 but not a level 3. Where is the strategy to upskill or reskill at level 3, or is the message of the FE white paper this is not a priority? Watch for jumping from level 2 to level 4 if adults will take out fee loans.

Mark Corney, Twitter

### WorldSkills Diversity and Inclusion Heroes award winners 2021



Well done to our apprentice Haider. This was well-deserved. You're an inspiration.

Kaplan Apprentices, Twitter

### DfE expanding FE teacher recruitment programme with £3m tender



After years of neglect, a recruitment plan will only work if there is an accompanying commitment to pay parity with school teachers. This is a priority, but I have little faith in any government to take the appropriate actions. Only when marginalisation of FE ceases will this sector thrive.

Christopher Odams, website



These initiatives are all very well, but until the government funds FE properly the sector will always have issues recruiting and hanging on to teachers. Many good college lecturers now work in schools where they get anything up to a 20 per cent premium for doing essentially the same job!

Martin, website

# Movers & Shakers

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



## Sarah Stewart

Chair, Gateshead College

**Start date** December 2020

**Previous job**

Chief executive, Newcastle Gateshead Initiative

**Interesting fact**

She has been the High Sheriff of Tyne and Wear for the past year



## Gillian May

Chief executive and group principal, The Windsor Forest Colleges Group

**Start date** April 2021

**Previous Job**

Principal, Berkshire College of Agriculture

**Interesting fact**

Prior to her career in education and skills, she was the general manager for logistics for Walkers Crisps



## Lesley Davies

Chair, Hull College Group

**Start date** January 2021

**Previous job**

Principal, Trafford College Group

**Interesting fact**

She is "a bit of a twitcher" and always takes her binoculars and bird book on walks and travels

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