

**TAKE TIME
FOR A GUILT
FREE FIKA**

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**SIGNS OF GANGS
NOT ALWAYS
OBVIOUS**

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**I REALLY LOVE
WORKING FOR
THIS COMMUNITY**

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REVEALED: COMPLEX £118m 'ADULT LEVEL 3 OFFER' ALLOCATIONS



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APPRENTICESHIP HIRING BLOCKED

- DfE cap on starts for small employers has been in place since January 2020
- Pressure on government to raise or remove 'bonkers' 10 apprentice limit
- Policy now restricting use of Treasury cash incentives for new hire apprentices

EXCLUSIVE

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'Absurd': Small employers blocked from apprentice cash incentives

BILLY CAMDEN

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From front

Exclusive

Small employers are being blocked from the government's cash incentives for hiring apprentices due to a "bonkers" cap on starts, an *FE Week* investigation has found.

Under the terms of the bonus scheme, employers can only make claims through the Education and Skills Funding Agency's digital apprenticeship service.

But non-levy-paying businesses have been capped on the number of apprentices they can put through the portal since January 2020 – starting with a limit of three before increasing to ten in July – to ensure the overall apprenticeships budget is not overspent.

Ministers are now under pressure to lift or extend the cap as some small employers have already met the limit and cannot put any new starts through the service. This means it is impossible for them to claim the cash incentives.

The bonuses were first introduced by Chancellor Rishi Sunak in August to help get people back into work following the pandemic. He announced last week they will double from April to September 2021, allowing employers to receive £3,000 for every apprentice they take on, regardless of their age.

One non-levy-paying business that has reached the starts cap told *FE Week* they want to take on ten new apprentices and are therefore set to lose out on £30,000. They described the situation as "absurd", while training providers have said it is "frustrating" and "counter-intuitive".

The Education and Skills Funding Agency told *FE Week* it was monitoring the impact of the reservations cap and will "very shortly" confirm how it will operate from April 2021, from which date all apprenticeship starts must be put through the digital apprenticeship service.

They added that ESFA analysis of non-levy demand in 2020-21 shows that a cap level



Rishi Sunak

of ten is "sufficient for 99 per cent of smaller employers".

The digital service was launched in April 2017 but was only for levy-paying employers to manage and spend their apprenticeship funding.

Since January 2020 employers who do not pay the levy have been able to create accounts and were initially capped at three starts before this increased to ten in July. Small employers have been able to start more apprentices through procured non-levy contracts held by training providers, but these end for new starts next month.

The cap was imposed owing to concern that the amount of money not being spent by levy payers wouldn't be enough if the government allowed small employers to have as many starts as they wanted.

But in the past year starts have dropped dramatically across England because of the pandemic.

Take-up of the financial incentives has also been low. The Treasury originally budgeted for up to 100,000 incentive payments for new apprentice hires, but latest Department for Education data shows that 25,420 employers have submitted claims for the bonus.

Debbie Gardiner, a well-known FE consultant who works with a number of training providers, said it "feels like the right arm doesn't know what the left arm is doing".

"My instinct is that the Chancellor didn't even know about the cap issue when announcing the

incentives," she told *FE Week*.

"The cap was there to initially test the system and ensure there is a budget control. We don't need this level of control any more because we have had a pandemic and apprenticeship numbers are nowhere near where you'd expect them to be."

She added that one of her training providers estimates this will negatively impact them by around 100 apprentice starts, mostly in childcare, between now and July.

An employer feeling the direct impact of the cap is Katey's Nursery & Pre-School – a nursery group with five sites in London.

Its finance director, Janet Firmston-Williams, told *FE Week* that they have started ten level 3 early years apprentices through the ESFA's digital service over the course of the past year. And despite two dropping out, they are still being blocked from putting any more starts through the service, even though they want to employ ten new apprentices.

"Until the limit of ten is removed the incentives are of no benefit to us," Firmston-Williams told *FE Week*.

"In an industry that desperately needs to attract workers, how absurd is all this? £30,000 will be lost. For a nursery business, that is key."

She added: "The government is trying so hard to be seen to be encouraging employment of apprentices but ultimately the incentives do not work."

The Association of Employment and Learning Providers told *FE Week* it understands the cap will stay in some form for the "foreseeable future" but that it could be increased come next month.

Its chief policy officer Simon Ashworth said the current cap is "counter-intuitive" and "a bit bonkers", considering the drop in starts and expected apprenticeship budget underspend.

The ESFA pointed out that funds transferred from levy-paying employers to smaller employers through the apprenticeship service do not require the receiving employer to reserve funds. They can therefore use this system to exceed the ten cap and claim incentives.

FE white paper: Employer casts doubt on chambers of commerce leading role

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Exclusive

Chambers of commerce are “not close enough to industry” to play a leading role in the skills system as set out in the FE white paper, an employer has warned.

Flannery Plant Hire director Paul Allman made the remarks at an *FE Week* webcast on the Skills for Jobs white paper, which announced the creation of new “local skills improvement plans”.

These plans, which will force colleges and providers to align the courses they offer to local employers’ needs, are set to be piloted in a number of currently unknown trailblazer areas this year, with chambers and other business representative organisations leading the work.

The government is even intending to legislate to put employer leadership of the plans “on statutory footing”.

But *FE Week* understands chambers are still in the dark about what their exact role will be under the reforms, despite the government promising to announce the pilot areas in “early 2021”.

And Allman, whose company has helped develop apprenticeships as part of a trailblazer group, expressed his doubts about how effective the chambers would be in leading employer engagement.

“I don’t really see the chambers as being a good route to solving these problems,” he said. “I don’t think they’re close enough to what industry needs, particularly not in the construction sector. They don’t fit into the space, to be honest.”

Education secretary Gavin Williamson’s foreword in the white paper said that local business organisations, chambers of commerce specifically, will “place employers at the heart of defining local skills needs”.

It is part of Williamson’s attempts to model England’s technical education system on that of Germany, where chambers provide a “one-



Paul Allman

stop shop” to register apprentices, supervise training, assess trainers and conduct examinations, the white paper says.

Membership of the chambers is compulsory for German employers, but this is not the case in England and there are no plans to change this.

There are 43 chambers across England which comprise groups of local businesses, with varying levels of staff. They typically offer their members opportunities for networking as well as advice on legal matters, health and safety and tax.

In response to Allman’s remarks, Jane Gratton, head of people policy for the British Chambers of Commerce, said the place-based, business-led chambers have the ability “to convene employers of all sizes and sectors, together with a wide range of skills providers and economic stakeholders, to discuss and agree local priorities”.

Gratton said they “look forward” to further announcements from the Department for Education about how the Local Skills Improvement Plans policy will be “brought to life” but are yet to have those conversations with ministers.

“We expect chambers across England will step forward to play their part in ensuring more people can train and retrain for new and

emerging jobs in their local communities.”

Allman also warned that there is “a lot of apathy” from employers about getting involved in the skills sector that could dampen the government’s ambitions.

He said there should be “a drive within our sector to get the key organisations together and really focus on how we can work closely with the FE colleges to actually develop something that is fit for the purpose of what we need”.

Responding to the concerns, a Department for Education spokesperson said: “We want a wide range of businesses of all sizes and from all sectors to feed into local skills improvement plans so that technical education and training meets their needs.”

“We therefore expect the business representative organisation leading the development of a local skills improvement plan in a trailblazer area to engage effectively with other relevant business representative organisations and sector bodies in the local area as part of their engagement with key local stakeholders.”

The DfE added that it will be running an open process to select the trailblazer local areas and that further information will be announced in the “near future”.

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Ex-skills minister criticises lack of T Levels targets

BILLY CAMDEN
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A former skills minister has criticised the Department for Education for moving away from T Level student recruitment targets.

Sir John Hayes, the Conservative MP for South Holland and The Deepings who held the skills brief between 2010 and 2012, said numerical goals are essential to making new programmes “credible”.

He said targets are vital to “gauge success” and that he’s “never bought the argument” that you cannot focus on both quality and quantity when rolling schemes out.

The Department for Education had originally set student number “estimates” for the first three T Levels but has since claimed they have no fixed targets.

Documents for a T Level awarding body tender from 2018 show the department estimated there would be 900 learners on the education and childcare pathway, 400 on construction and 1,200 on digital in the first year of the rollout in 2020/21.

An updated T Level action plan published by the DfE in January showed that, as of October 2020, 650 students were enrolled on the education course, 250 on the construction pathway, and 400 were on the digital.

Hayes was speaking at a Westminster



Sir John Hayes MP

Education Forum event this week during which Sue Lovelock, the Education and Skills Funding Agency’s director for professional and technical education, said the government chose not “dilute” the quality of T Levels by setting targets.

She said: “One of the lessons that we learned from looking at previous reform programmes is that actually, if you have a sort of very numbers focused approach on ‘we need X number of providers, we need X number of students’, then you almost by consequence dilute the focus on quality.

“We’ve really tried to put quality at the forefront of all of our planning. So, we haven’t set targets for how many providers we want or how many students we want on particular courses.

“We want to work with providers that are really keen to meet our quality bar and for them to think about the number of places that they think are right for their institution as we roll out T Levels in the early phases.”

She added that this was a “conscious decision to put quality rather than quantity at the front of all of the work that we’ve been doing on T Levels”.

But Hayes, who chaired the event, hit back. “I’ve never bought that argument,

Sue, because when I was the minister, we put into place for the first time statutory standards for apprenticeships,” he said.

“We got rid of programme-led apprenticeships. And yet at the same time, we massively boosted the number. I’ve never bought the argument that there’s a trade-off.”

The former skills minister added it was “absolutely right” that reforms have “rigour” but warned “unless you have coverage they won’t be embedded in the consciousness of learners, of potential learners, of providers, of parents, of everyone else”.

He continued: “You have to have numbers in order to make the programme credible, it seems to me. I take your point about policy I just don’t think there’s a simple trade-off.”

In response, Lovelock conceded: “That’s completely fair.”

Asked whether the enrolment numbers had increased since October, Lovelock said: “I don’t think the number has changed significantly.”

The two awarding bodies delivering the first three T Levels – Pearson and NCFE – later confirmed to *FE Week* that there has been no big change in the numbers since October.



Sue Lovelock

Revealed: The most popular Skills Toolkit courses

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The government has for the first time revealed the most popular courses being taken through its "Skills Toolkit" – but questions may again be raised about the data's accuracy.

Figures published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency show 162,320 "registrations" and 30,254 "completions" on the courses offered for free by 12 providers as of January 24.

Sitting at the top of both tables (see right) is the Good Things Foundation's "Learn My Way" programme – a collection of resources to help visitors use the internet, such as "how to use your computer or device" tutorials.

The second most popular is a web page called "Learn For Everyday Life" by Lloyds Bank, which features a series of downloadable videos and PDF resources to help with digital skills, organisation and finance like "improve your CV".

And in third place is a course offered by technology company Cisco which teaches people to learn to code in Python – a programming language used by small companies and tech giants.

The toolkit's "platform" was launched in April 2020 at a cost of around £1 million and directs visitors to free online content which aims to help build their skills during the

coronavirus outbreak.

But as previously reported by *FE Week*, significant overcounting has already led to revised estimates of "registration" claims in the official statistics which continue to include web hits and could be coming from anywhere in the world.

The "completions" data is brand new and how these are recorded varies by each course. For some, learners need to reach a pass mark, but other courses simply consider the time a learner actively spends on the content.

For example, FE training provider Corndel offers a course called "Organisational Financial Management: An Introduction" – a web page featuring a series of videos and PDFs – which is reported as having had 9,975 registrations and 178 completions.

Corndel told *FE Week* that a registration is triggered when users click on at least one learning asset and that a completion is recorded when the user spends at least three minutes on a continuing professional development component of the course.

Elsewhere, the Good Things Foundation's "Learn My Way" course triggers a completion when a learner clicks on either a "next course" or "back to course start page" button when they get to the end of one of the resources.

For other courses, visitors have to register through a portal and submit assessments upon which a decision is made regarding passing and completion.

The Learning Curve Group offers a business and customer awareness course whereby learners sign up to an online platform. A completion is recorded when the learner has submitted their assessments and reached a pass mark of 75 per cent.

FutureLearn, which is part of the Open University, operates a similar system to Learning Curve. On all 23 of the courses it offers through the toolkit, visits must mark over 90 per cent of course steps and attempt all test questions, achieving a score of over 70 per cent.

The take-up of the free content was welcomed by the course providers.

Hannah Brindle, managing director of the Virtual College, said: "Supporting people to focus on personal growth and development in a time of uncertainty and worry makes a huge difference to mental health and overall wellbeing. Hopefully through this initiative people have been able to feel a sense of control over some aspect of their lives and futures, by keeping their minds optimistic, curious and open to learning new things."

Harminder Matharu, director of government partnerships at FutureLearn, added: "The popularity of our selected digital and workplace skills courses further confirms the value of online flexible courses that are available to anyone, at a time that suits them, enabling people to learn those critical basic and digital skills that employers look for."

Education secretary Gavin Williamson and skills minister Gillian Keegan have often celebrated the impact of the skills toolkit, claiming it has had a "transformational impact" on those looking to retrain during the pandemic despite having no system in place that tracks learner destinations.

The Department for Education also previously refused to release the names of the organisations given funding to develop the toolkit's platform and conduct user research.

But the DfE has reluctantly now told *FE Week* the names of the firms through a Freedom of Information request. The companies that shared almost £1 million were: Contracts Online Ltd; eSynergy Solutions Limited; Leidos Innovations UK Ltd; Methods Business and Digital Technology Limited.

Top 20 most popular Skills Toolkit courses

Provider	Course	Skills Toolkit Registrations reported as at 24 January	Skills Toolkit Completions reported as at 24 January
Good Things Foundation	Learn My Way	22,401	8,365
Lloyds Bank	Learn For Everyday Life	14,386	6,486
Cisco	Programming Essentials in Python	13,782	184
OU	Everyday Maths	12,407	NA
Good Things Foundation	Make it click	10,225	0
Corndel	Organisational financial management: an introduction	9,975	178
FutureLearn	Digital Skills: Social Media (for business)	7,789	1,898
OU	Learn to code for Data Analysis	6,545	NA
OU	Introduction to Bookkeeping	6,125	NA
FutureLearn	How to Create Great Online Content	5,585	720
FutureLearn	Create a Professional Online Presence	4,308	482
Virtual College	Growth Mindset	4,192	2,336
FutureLearn	Presenting Your Work with Impact	3,614	243
Google	Fundamentals of Digital Marketing	3,575	2,204
Virtual College	Dealing with Stressful Situations	3,137	1,535
OU	Introduction to Cyber Security: Stay Safe Online	2,728	NA
Virtual College	Personal and Professional Development: Resilience	2,279	1,134
FutureLearn	Wellbeing and Resilience at Work	2,192	260
Virtual College	Neuroscience for Personal Development	1,935	852
Virtual College	Personal Development and Self-Awareness	1,804	710

Source: DfE's apprenticeships and traineeships statistical release February 2021

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Revealed: Complex allocations for the 'targeted level 3 adult offer'

NICK LINFORD
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From front

Just over £118 million has been set aside to pay for the new "targeted level 3 adult offer" across England – but the cash will come from two different education budgets.

From next month until the end of July 2022, "core funding" of £100 million will come from the new National Skills Fund (NSF) along with £16.25 million to pay for an "uplift" for learners aged 24 and over.

The remaining £2.5 million, to pay for an "uplift" for learners aged 19 to 23 will not come from the NSF but will instead be funded from the adult education budget (AEB).

The uplifts are £150 extra for short qualifications (less than an indicative 360 hours) and £600 for long qualifications (360 hours or more).

The level 3 adult offer was first announced by prime minister Boris Johnson last October and forms part of the "lifetime skills guarantee".

It will fully fund around 400 short and long qualifications at level 3, making them free to learners aged 19 and over who do not already have a first full level 3 qualification.

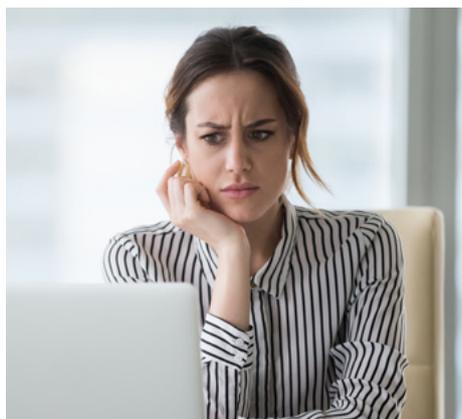
The Department for Education has so far refused to say how much funding has been allocated for providers to deliver the new offer.

But the total NSF and AEB budgets for the level 3 adult offer were revealed in a letter sent by the Education and Skills Funding Agency to the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan.

The letter, dated February 3 and marked "official sensitive", has been published on the Greater London Authority website.

It explains how the complex budgeting arrangements filter through to an even more complex set of funding allocations for providers in both non-devolved and devolved areas.

The funding will be routed through the AEB funding formula and rates, but all the NSF funding is "ringfenced" and will be clawed back if not spent on the "level 3 adult offer".



For learners aged 24 and over, their level 3 adult offer core funding and uplift would be funded from the NSF in this way.

But the letter reveals for the first time that it is much more complicated for those aged 19 to 23.

If a 19-to-23-year-old chooses a qualification "that is included in both the level 3 adult offer and the 19-to-23 level 3 legal entitlement" then both the course and uplift funding is not ringfenced and comes from the AEB budget and not from the ringfenced NSF.

In this example, just the £150 and £600 uplifts would be funded from the £2.5 million set aside for this purpose.

But, if a 19-to-23-year-old chooses a qualification "on the level 3 adult offer list

that is not included in the 19-to-23 level 3 entitlement, then the funding for the course and the uplift will come from the ringfenced NSF funding".

The letter also says £23.75 million of the £118 million relates to April and July 2022 which "falls outside the current spending review period and the department is allocating this amount at its own risk."

These highly unusual and complex budgeting arrangements are expected to be "transitional", coming after publication of the FE white paper – but before a consultation on the new NSF.

Last week, on an *FE Week* webcast, Keith Smith, the DfE director of post-16 strategy responsible for the FE white paper, said the NSF consultation would be published in the spring.

The FE white paper promises "simplification and streamlining of funding" but Smith conceded that introducing programmes with brand-new funding rules and methodologies do add further complexity to an already complicated system.

As reported in *FE Week* he also said: "Please don't take anything that happens in the short term as any sort of indication of where the future intent will be."

NSF	FY 2021-22		2022-23 FY ¹	Total
	AY 2020/21	AY2021/22		
	1 Apr 2021 to 31 Jul 2021	1 Aug 2021 to 31 Mar 2022	1 Apr 2022 to 31 Jul 2022	
Level 3 Adult Offer				
'Core' Funding ²	£20.00m	£60.00m	£20.00m	£100.00m
'Uplift' Funding for 24+ learners ²	£3.25m	£9.75m	3.25m	£16.25m
'Uplift' Funding for 19 to 23-year old learners ³	£0.50m	£1.50m	£0.50m	£2.50m
The amount of funding to be shared between the devolved and non-devolved areas	£23.75m	£71.25m	£23.75m	£118.75
Notes:				
1. The £23.75m for FY 2022-23 falls outside the current Spending Review period and the Department is allocating this amount at its own risk.				
2. This funding will be ringfenced and subject to separate arrangements.				
3. This funding will be included in 'core' Devolved AEB and will be non-ringfenced				

Source: Greater London Authority board minutes

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News

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Ofsted ends progress visits to prioritise new provider inspections

BILLY CAMDEN
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Progress monitoring visits of grade three and four FE providers will end from March 15 as the "highest priority" inspections of new providers finally restart.

The watchdog has been carrying out remote progress monitoring visits to poorly graded colleges and providers since January in place of routine in-person inspections, which have been suspended during the pandemic.

But the inspectorate has updated its operational guidance to state it will "discontinue" the check-ups from next week other than in "exceptional cases".

This could happen when, for example, "it has already been necessary to engage additional planning and resources for a visit and we believe that to be the most appropriate means of monitoring progress at

this time".

Ofsted said the decision was taken after reviewing its face-to-face inspection activity following the government's announcement about the return to onsite education from March 8.

Full and short inspections will remain suspended for the time being.

But the watchdog will again begin carrying out "new provider monitoring visits (NPMVs) to new providers that have not yet received a monitoring visit" from March 15.

Ofsted said it considers this group to be the "highest priority for face-to-face inspection activity".

FE Week understands the Education and Skills Funding Agency has grown increasingly concerned with new apprenticeship providers operating for prolonged periods without oversight from the watchdog.

The inspectorate has also expressed its own concerns about the quality of new

providers' training.

Ofsted confirmed that the ESFA will continue to take into account the outcome of these NPMVs when making intervention decisions as usual, such as about apprenticeships starts and registration.

If a provider scores 'insufficient progress' in one or more themes, they typically face having their starts suspended and being kicked off the register of apprenticeship training providers.

The NPMVs will be carried out in the same way as before the suspension of routine inspection activity but the impact of Covid-19 will be taken into account in the findings and progress judgments.

NPMVs to universities and other provider that have level 6 and/or 7 apprenticeships provision will start from April 1, 2021, from which date the inspectorate takes on responsibility for overseeing this provision from the Office for Students.

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2022 exams may need similar 'adaptations' as those proposed for 2021, warns Ofqual chief

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The government is considering making "adaptations" to exams in 2022 similar to those proposed for this summer's assessments before they were cancelled, the head of regulator Ofqual has said.

Simon Lebus, the interim chief regulator, told MPs this week that the "thinking at the moment is about adaptations along the line that had been originally contemplated for this year when exams were still to go ahead".

The government proposed last year that grading for exams in 2021 would be as generous as it was in 2020, and that students would get advance notice of topics in certain subjects and be allowed to use exam aids.

Those plans were abandoned in January when exams were cancelled following partial school and college closures.

But Lebus suggested on Tuesday that some of them may be resurrected next year in recognition that future exam students will also have been impacted by the pandemic.

"So far as 2022 is concerned, the thinking at the moment is about adaptations along the line that had been originally contemplated for this year when exams were still to go ahead," he told the education select committee.

"And that's based on the reality of the cohort taking exams next year will have suffered considerable disruption to their learning, though we would hope not on the scale and at the level that has been suffered by this year's cohort, so that it would be a reasonable thing to carry out some form of public exams but that they would be adapted to reflect the learning disruption that's taken place."

His comments come after MPs raised concerns about grade inflation being



Simon Lebus

"baked in" to the system for years to come. Grades will be issued on the basis of teacher assessments this year.

Lebus said the process of recovering lost learning would take "several years", adding there would "have to be policy initiatives in place to deal with that over a period of time".

In terms of what happens after 2022, Lebus said there needed to be "reflection on what we do longer term to the exam system to take account of the disruption that's occurred over the last three years and the disjunct before and after".

"And so you inevitably end up asking the question, do we in post-Covid times approach things slightly differently?"

"And all sorts of issues have been raised about coursework, teacher judgment. There's always been a dialogue going on about the weight you give teacher judgment as opposed to summative exams, though all those have been issues that have been surfaced by this and they will form part of the policy mix that is determined in order to address lost learning over the coming years."

This comes after Dame Glenys Stacey, who served as interim chief regulator at Ofqual between September and December last year before Lebus took over, warned there would be a "long backwash to this pandemic in education". She said the need for a "good and considered and open discussion about what the right thing to do would be".

Stacey also previously warned that going "straight back" to standards seen pre-pandemic in 2022 "wouldn't be fair".

"We need to see how the pandemic washes through so we can have the broad discussion about where standards are set for 2022," she told MPs last year.

Schools minister Nick Gibb also accepted in December that the government would need to "look again, as the pandemic proceeds, to see what happens about what we do in 2022, because again, the 2022 cohort will have suffered some disruption to their education as well".

The Turing scheme opens for bids

FRASER WHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Colleges and training providers can now apply for funding to send students and apprentices to study or work internationally under the government's new Turing scheme.

The programme, named after the famous mathematician, is intended to create 35,000 placements in 2021/22 and is replacing the European Union's Erasmus+ programme.

As revealed by *FE Week* last week, Ecorys, the co-delivery partner with the British Council for the Turing scheme, has said the funding available will total £105 million: £35 million will go to further education; £60 million will go to universities; and £10 million to schools.

The Department for Education said today that the scheme will actually total £110 million, which is "inclusive of the costs of administering the scheme", such as outreach and communications work.

Ministers are promoting the potential for disadvantaged students to take advantage of the scheme, with prime minister Boris Johnson saying the project "seeks to help students of all income groups from across the country experience fantastic education opportunities in any country they choose".

To promote Turing, schools minister Nick Gibb and skills minister Gillian Keegan are planning to visit areas which have previously not benefited from Erasmus+, the DfE said.

Education secretary Gavin Williamson has urged colleges, schools and universities to put in applications.

"The programme's focus on social mobility and value for money will open up more opportunities for international education and travel to all of our students, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds," who, Williamson said, were "less likely to benefit from the previous EU scheme".

The idea that Erasmus+ did not help disadvantaged learners has been

challenged, however. A spokesperson for Ecorys told this publication last week that one-fifth of vocational placements on Erasmus+ went to disadvantaged students.

The Turing scheme's placements will last between two and 12 weeks and are due to start in September.

Learners can also use the funding to partake of international skills competitions, which can last between one and ten days.

If a learner has special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), placements can start from five days, as long as that is justified in the provider's application.

Providers that are successful in their applications will receive funding to administer the scheme while the students will receive grants to help cover living, tuition and travel costs.

FE and vocational education and training (VET) students will receive up to £1,360 for travel costs.

Living costs are being broken down into three groups: group one for a high cost of living, group two for a medium cost and group three for a lower cost.

So for living costs, FE and VET applicants will receive:

- To group one destinations: £109 per day for the first 14 days, £76 per day after the 14th day
- To group two destinations: £94 per day for the first 14 days, £66 per day after the 14th day
- To group three destinations: £80 per day for the first 14 days, £56 per day after the 14th day.

FE and VET participants from disadvantaged backgrounds will receive actual costs for additional travel expenses, including for visas, passports and health insurance.

"We see this as crucial because travel-related expenses can often be a deterrent to potential participants," the scheme's website reads.

Learners with SEND will receive funding for up to 100 per cent of actual costs for support directly related to their additional needs.

Colleges looking to apply have been told to visit www.turing-scheme.org.uk/

The Department for Education said bids will close on April 29 and it expects to issue funding decisions in July.





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For an informal discussion with the CEO, please contact nigel_evans@weymouth.ac.uk or the Chair please contact richard_noah@weymouth.ac.uk

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For an initial confidential discussion please contact John Rees, Principal and Chief Executive, on 01422 399303 or email Liz.smith@calderdale.ac.uk

Closing Date: **26th March 2021**

Provisional Interview and assessment date: **Friday 9th April 2021**

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Informal discussion:

Karen Robson,
Head of HE and Professional
krobson@yorkcollege.ac.uk,

Alison Davis, Head of Health, Care and Education
adavis@yorkcollege.ac.uk.

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Introducing

ASFA SOHAIL

Principal,
Lewisham College



'Once all this is over, I want to make sure we don't lose all this unity'

JL DUTAUT
JL.DUTAUT@FEWEEK.CO.UK

JL Dutaut meets a college principal for whom building resilience is a matter of building communities

How are you?

Good leaders ask this question often. The best stick around for the answer. But it's their lot seldom to be asked the question themselves.

It's one of the changes Lewisham College principal Asfa Sohail has noticed among her staff and community since the advent of Covid. "My staff come and ask me how I'm doing. People never asked me before. Even my union colleagues asked me once!"

Fostering a sense of community in an organisation may be the greatest challenge for a new leader. But for Lewisham College, being part of one is almost a given: campaigns to reverse cuts to its library and mental health

support services and to save Lewisham hospital; local restaurants handing out 100,000 free meals during the pandemic; eight-year-old, Leila Miah making 100 hot meals for a local food poverty initiative; 'Grow Lewisham', a project to supply the community's food banks with locally grown food. All these are testament to a proud local history of citizen engagement that has only increased with the experience of Covid. The sense of shared responsibility and a relentless focus on wellbeing are palpable in the

Profile

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headlines alone.

And it's no wonder. The London borough has been hit by 499 deaths since the start of the pandemic, more than one in every thousand. Among Sohail's staff, three have passed away in the past year.

For Sohail, who last month marked two years in post, it has been a sobering experience. For the college community as a whole, losing members of staff with decades of service between them has hit hard. But, she tells me, the college and its lecturers are nothing if not resilient.

In true Lewisham fashion, a celebration of their colleagues' lives may be on hold, but it's certainly not cancelled. "I've got lots of suggestions people have put forward for what they want to do for their colleagues," Sohail tells me. "We're just waiting for this pandemic to be over and then we'll do something special!"

The challenge of the past year, here and across the sector, has gone far beyond being part of communities. Colleges have been instrumental in keeping them together and keeping them afloat. Not just their professional communities of staff and students, but in the broadest sense – families, carers, local businesses and frontline services. All have benefitted from college leaders who have redefined their roles and redeployed their resources to survive and beat the pandemic.

For Sohail, putting values first comes naturally. Born and raised in Pakistan, she recalls with fondness the ethical grounding



A young Sohail with family in Pakistan

she got from her father. "He made me see life from both ends. I come from a middle-class family but he made me see the poverty nearby. I remember once there was a beggar and my dad brought food and asked me to sit down and eat it with him. He said to me, 'You should feel what people go through.'"

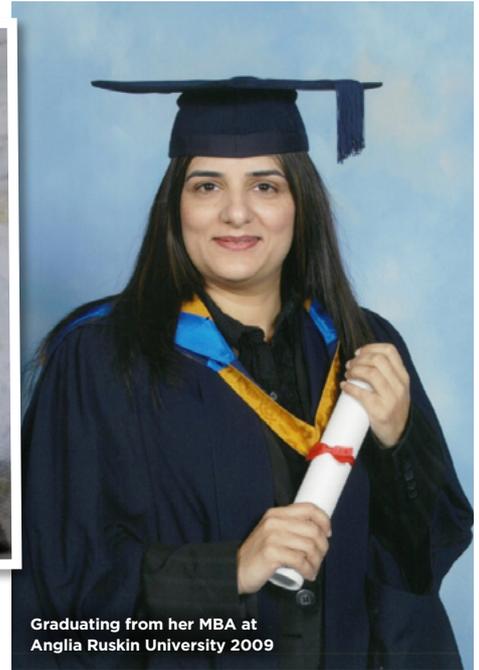
After two years in post, the first spent in the heat of first-time principalship and the second in the crucible of Covid, it's fair to say Sohail has found a home and a voice for her ethical leadership.

This year, she will begin leading a new committee as part of the Black FE Leadership Group, founded by former Cornwall College Group CEO, Amarjit Basi. "The purpose of that group is that we will set up a mentorship scheme for others aspiring to senior leadership roles."

With relish, she adds that she's soon to be part of another initiative that's all about "giving back", but that she's keeping it under her hat until it's official.

But while fighting prejudice and giving back may be second nature to Sohail, education, it turns out, is another matter altogether.

Where she finds herself – on the cusp of using her position and platform to bring about systemic change while leading a college in London's seventh most deprived borough – is



Graduating from her MBA at Anglia Ruskin University 2009

about as far as she could be from what she imagined a couple of decades ago.

Recalling more of her father's ethical grounding, she tells me that, in a male-dominated society and with her heart set on a career in a male-dominated sector, her dad urged her to ignore prejudices and follow her passion.

"My staff come and ask me how I'm doing. People never asked me before"

"Everybody was so critical of me at the time saying, 'Why is she doing these males subject? What's she going to do?' Anyway, because I had his support, I just went with it."

So she signed up for a degree in maths and physics from the University of the Punjab in Pakistan. She was certain about one thing though: "I always used to say to my dad, 'I'm never going to be a teacher', and he used to say, 'Never says never'. And guess what happened!"

Sohail met her husband while studying for her degree. They were married by the time she was 20, to her mother's serious misgivings. When they moved to England together as he launched his career as a civil engineer,



Presenting the Lewisham College Student Awards 2019

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she studied for a higher national diploma in software engineering in the evenings.

And so it began. "One day, one of my teachers came up to me and asked, could you cover a class tomorrow morning? I said I don't think I can be a teacher. I just don't have the guts."

A friend sitting next to her piped up: "You'd be really good at it. You should just give it a go." Sohail's answer: "Why don't you go and do it?"

But try she did and to this day she still waxes lyrical about the "amazing feeling" of running that class.

"I said I don't think I can be a teacher. I just don't have the guts"

That was in 1997. She went on to complete a BSC in computing from the University of Westminster in 2001, all the while teaching as a lecturer at Newham College.

By 2004, she had completed her PGCE and was already Havering College's curriculum manager for IT. By 2009, she'd completed an MBA with Anglia Ruskin and taken two further career steps to deputy director for the



business, care and service sectors at Havering. That year, she also became an Ofsted inspector.

Sohail stayed with Havering until February two years ago, when she left her post as vice principal there to take on the role at Lewisham.

Another principal job was advertised simultaneously at Southwark College, which had, until their demerger and simultaneous absorption into the Newcastle College Group (NCG), been the other half of the same college.

But unlike many of her competitors, Sohail only applied for the Lewisham job. "I did my research," she tells me, and made her decision guided by "the values instilled by my dad. [...]"

And I'm pleased that I did. I really love working for this community and the passion the staff and community bring into this college. I get my inspiration from these people."

While the job of leading a college can be a lonely one – and has been especially so for many over the past year – she is grateful to be part of another, somewhat unique community.

She is in no doubt about the benefits of being part of NCG, the country's largest and most geographically dispersed college group. "If I was a principal on my own, I probably wouldn't have access to all the information or the kind of validation I have at the moment. People often say geography is an issue for us. But actually, it isn't. We've become a cohesive team. We have communities of practice, where subject specialists come together. There are so many benefits that come out of it."

With the layers of community she's built around herself and her team, it's little wonder that at Lewisham College 'how are you?' is often asked, and the answer heard.

So while Sohail is realistic about the pandemic's impact on wellbeing, her optimism is well founded. "It's a matter of making sure that if you're down you come out of it quite quickly. Because it's OK to be there, but not stay there for too long. That's the mentality I've been fostering across the organisation."

"Once all this is over," she adds, "I want to make sure we don't lose all this unity." Something tells me she won't let us.



Meeting Lewisham College student representatives 2020

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 Plenary four | Thursday



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 Apprenticeships Minister
 HM Gov - DfE
 Plenary one | Monday



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Victims of county lines gangs easily go under the radar in colleges

Creating a non-judgmental space for victims to discuss gang involvement would make a big difference, writes Teresa Carroll

The increase in gangs selling drugs to our communities served by the further education sector is startling. The National Crime Agency's analysis suggests there are more than 1,000 county line drug lines in operation across the country. This refers to the exploitation of vulnerable adults and children to move and deliver drugs, usually from cities to rural areas.

Victims include children and young people, both girls and boys, aged between 15 and 17. However, as county lines is often a hidden form of abuse, the age of victims may be even lower. Many victims are recruited as children, with exploitation continuing into early adulthood.

Last month, Anne Longfield, the children's commissioner, warned that there were around 27,000 children aged between 10 and 17 at high risk of gang exploitation, with these numbers likely to increase because of Covid-19.

Statutory guidance across the UK highlights it is the responsibility of educators to safeguard young people from all forms of abuse and criminal exploitation. The government's Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance from September is clear that county lines is a safeguarding issue.

In September 2018 the Home



Office published updated guidance, called 'Criminal Exploitation of Children and Vulnerable Adults: County Lines Guidance'.

More recently the Ministry of Justice also published practical advice for frontline practitioners on safeguarding, signs of exploitation and referral pathways, called 'County Lines Exploitation Practice Guidance for YOTs and Frontline Practitioners'. But more needs to be done to raise awareness of county lines in FE providers and schools.

Young people and adults more at risk include those who are economically vulnerable, have a special educational need or disability, are in the care system and who have been excluded from mainstream education.

But colleges need to remember the signs are not always obvious. Take Patrick (not his real name), who was an academically gifted and talented 17-year-old footballer when his family started to notice changes in his behaviour.

He began refusing to attend college and skipping football practice. He was soon repeatedly

arrested on drugs-related charges, sent to prison, and released after serving his 12-month sentence.

He is just one of many examples of a young person who was groomed and exploited by a county lines gang. Victims are often recruited face-to-face, including in FE institutions, special educational needs schools and homeless shelters, as well as on social media. Some children are groomed through family members.

We must ensure that all our children and young people have access to an education that provides a clear line of sight to an independent life, with employment that will sustain them.

"The signs are not always obvious"

County lines gangs can take advantage of young people who feel they have no prospect of getting an education or a well-paid job. As one victim said, there is a need for money, and county lines is a "way of

making good money".

So, what can colleges and FE providers do?

Firstly, it's important to recognise that learners will rarely report county lines exploitation. This is a hidden crime and many victims easily go under the radar. Educators need look out for clues, such as missing classes, unexplained acquisition of money, clothes, mobile phones or behaving in an unusual way.

The *County Lines – Children's Society toolkit for professionals* offers guidance on vulnerabilities and indicators. Robust procedures need to be in place when these are flagged.

Staff must also listen closely to young people who have been affected. To gain a better understanding of young people's experiences, this week the ETF presented the critically acclaimed production *Bullet Tongue Reloaded* by The Big House, an organisation that works with those from the care system to produce plays.

In a Q&A session with the young cast, many said colleges and schools listening to them in a non-judgmental way would have helped them escape gang culture.

County lines gangs could exploit the uncertainty created by Covid to prey on more vulnerable young people.

Therefore, education and training that has a clear line of sight to a decent job with a successful career pathway has never been more important.

VICTORIA GRIMBERG

Project coordinator,
South Devon College



This is what I learned from working in FE in Sweden, then England

If staff are skipping lunch and only talk about work when at work, they and their principals need to read this, writes Victoria Grimberg

Having lived in both Sweden and England, I have seen many notable differences in work culture first-hand. One that has really struck me is the difference in staff stress levels.

According to the 'OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey' in 2018, 40 per cent of UK teachers say they commonly experience stress in their profession. That's double the 20 per cent of Swedish teachers who made the same claim.

This became evident to me when I moved to England, and FE colleagues of mine, who get a 30-minute window for lunch, were so stressed that they often did not have lunch all.

"I don't have time!" would be a common midday exclamation by the time they had walked to the office, checked their next lesson, printed any last-minute resources and squeezed in a toilet visit. I am sure many reading this recognise themselves in this lunchtime routine.

But in Sweden, the Working Hours Act states "the employer shall organise work so that employees are able to take pauses

from work as necessary [...] Pauses are included in the working time".

These pauses actually have a much-loved name in Sweden. You may have heard of hygge in Denmark, meaning a mood of cosiness and contentment. But have you heard of fika?

"I don't have time!" would be a common midday exclamation"

Fika are breaks that are a deeply established part of Swedish life and work culture. They usually come with coffee and cake and are at least 15 to 20 minutes long (but can go on for longer) and occur twice daily: one in the morning around 10am and one in the afternoon around 3pm.

Various studies show that taking a break and stepping away from your desk makes you feel more energised which, in turn, helps reduce stress levels, improves staff wellbeing and increases workplace productivity.

Management and staff are encouraged to fika together (yes, it's a verb as well as a noun) regardless of power and position. Above all, it is a social gathering where you are advised specifically not to talk about work. Many Swedes consider it

essential to make time for fika every day. You may be astonished to find out that employees are encouraged or scheduled to take two fika breaks per day, on top of their lunch break.

Research shows Swedes fika for about 227 hours per year, the equivalent of 7.5 working days.

Maybe that is partly why Sweden was seventh on the World Happiness Report in 2020, while the UK was thirteenth. Might there be a correlation between the happiness of Swedes and fika culture?

I decided to introduce fika to South Devon College. After meeting our now vice principal for a chat and being given the opportunity to share a presentation about fika for health and wellbeing, it was decided that we would host a drop-in fika session for three hours.

Staff were encouraged to come and share a hot drink with Swedish chocolate cake I made from my grandmother's recipe.

The successful drop-in was followed by a month of fika in January 2020. Students and staff could go to

different venues to escape the day-to-day cycles of work.

Colleagues of mine really took it to heart. One said, "I enjoyed taking part in fika and I was glad that there was encouragement from my supervisor to do this."

Another said it was a "welcome addition to allow time away from the stressful day".

Perhaps you recognise yourself in this final comment: "I'm the classic 'tied to my desk'. I break at my desk, lunch at my desk, so it was great to take a bit of time to chat to colleagues. I definitely felt more positive and productive when I went back to work."

The college is encouraging staff to take time for a fika without feeling guilty and it's even a part of the South Devon College people strategy.

With wellbeing under greater strain than ever with Covid, could you encourage your staff to fika?



STEPHEN EVANS

Chief executive, Learning and Work Institute



The Chancellor did broadly the right thing with the Budget – now to delivery

The government will need to be much quicker delivering what it announced last week than its record so far, writes Stephen Evans

Times have changed. Last week, we already knew most of the measures in the Budget in advance through Treasury press releases. But in 1947 Hugh Dalton resigned as Chancellor because a newspaper published leaked details of the Budget before it had been announced in the House of Commons!

The result of how we do things in 2021 is that there wasn't much which was new last week that we didn't already know about. However, the Budget did shed light on the approach the government is taking and what the future might hold.

'Right policies, right scale'

The Budget confirmed that the Plan for Jobs, first published in July 2020, is the government's main answer to unemployment.

The Office for Budget Responsibility expects unemployment to peak at 6.5 per cent, which is lower than previously expected and testament to the success of the furlough scheme – now extended to September 2021.

However, that still means almost a million more people out of work than before the pandemic. Helping people back to work is going to be a big focus for us all for years to come.

Our research shows it takes three to seven years for employment to recover after recessions. Long-term unemployment is already up by 25

per cent on last year.

Government measures to tackle this include Kickstart (which is funding jobs for six months for young people at risk of unemployment) and Restart (which will help long-term unemployed people back to work).

As pre-announced, the Budget also gave extra funding for traineeships in 2021-22 and increased incentives for employers to take on apprentices.

From my analysis, the government's got many of the right policies and of broadly the right scale.

'Delivery must be quicker'

But the challenge is in delivery. It took seven months to even decide which providers to allocate the extra traineeship money announced in July 2020.

We'll need to be much quicker than that with the new money announced last week. Young people need help now.

And I worry that we risk having a list of initiatives rather than a coherent offer for young people

and adults.

For example, we at the Learning and Work Institute have argued for a Youth Guarantee so every young person is offered a job, training place or apprenticeship.

"The government's got many of the right policies and of broadly the right scale"

The other thing to bear in mind is that Kickstart is currently due to close for new entrants in December 2021.

That's just three months after furlough will end and likely a year before youth long-term unemployment will peak. Surely we'll see an extension to Kickstart at some point?

'More investment still needed'

The other key theme of the Budget was about building the economy of the future – looking beyond

the pandemic. Here, there was lots of talk of green investment, infrastructure and levelling up.

All fairly sensible, particularly given economic growth has been poor since the last recession. Unless we boost growth and productivity, we won't have rising prosperity or extra resources for public services.

Skills drive economic growth, and have much wider benefits for health, wellbeing and citizenship.

The good news is that, after a decade of cuts, there is already new money in the pipeline, including in the form of the National Skills Fund.

But this won't get us back to 2010 levels of investment at the end of the New Labour government, which weren't high enough anyway.

And we need much better joining up, for example, by ringfencing jobs and apprenticeships for young people and unemployed people.

It also means investing in public services such as social care, creating jobs where they're desperately needed.

That all needs to be underpinned by a long-term investment plan in skills – from basic skills to levels 4 to 5 and beyond.

All told, the Chancellor has done broadly the right things in terms of emergency support, but we need a tighter focus on delivery.

And the ambitions for a future economy are good, but need to be backed by increased spending in learning, skills and retraining.

All eyes on the autumn spending review to see if it delivers the goods...



DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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READER'S REPLY

ESFA announces new subcontracting cap

... This is very welcome news and just what was needed. Too much poor subcontracting is happening in the shadows where auditors and Ofsted can't monitor. This further de-risks the sector from the reputational damage caused by providers who turn a blind eye to funding rules. I was able to sign up for a fully funded online course with a national subcontractor. At no point was my salary checked, which would have made me ineligible for funding. It's still going on and it has to stop.

Darren Carter, website

f DFE not got a clue!

Jon Allen, Facebook

How does the Turing scheme compare to Erasmus?

... The proper funding for students on lowest household incomes to pay for airfares and other costs, will unlikely meet Erasmus levels. So again, disadvantaged young out miss out in #BrexitShambles

Alison Chapman, Twitter

Williamson defends independent provider Covid-19 testing 'madness'

f Absolutely disgusting independent training providers are left out of everything, even the news only focuses on schools and colleges. We are doing the same thing as other providers, but oh no, forgotten again. Then they wonder why the pandemic does not improve.

Jenny Murphy, Facebook

REPLY OF THE WEEK

The Budget should have tackled the deep structural problems with apprenticeships

... I'm not convinced that the lack of starts in recent months is all because of a lack of demand from employers. We are a not-for-profit apprenticeship training agency and shared apprenticeship service and we have demand from businesses and from young people, but finding sufficient training provision at the right level, in the right place and starting at the right time is very challenging. So many colleges and providers are saying that they are not recruiting at present due to Covid. In addition, finding sufficient levy transfer funding is also an additional challenge now that provider allocations are ending. With no funding or training availability, apprenticeship numbers will never recover.

Paul Wright, website

Intervention regime WILL include college failure to comply with local skills improvement plans

... Local skills improvement plans are politically driven, are expensive to set up in bureaucratic terms, and historically deliver little in the way of long-lasting results. But hey, when the auditors arrive, they will have all the answers, won't they!?

Philip, website

... They clearly know what they want an LSIP to look like, so why not fill the void and tell us all? The white paper is so vague on any operational detail, it's almost useless.

Bob Smith, website

Bulletin

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Lizzie Beale

Youth member of board, The Careers and Enterprise Company

Start date March 2021

Concurrent job

Charity and community partnerships manager, Heathrow

Interesting fact

She has debated in the House of Commons twice as an elected Member of Youth Parliament.



Asif Khan

Head, Blackburn Sixth Form, Blackburn College

Start Date May 2021

Previous Job

Senior leader and director of e-learning, St. Marys College

Interesting fact

He used to teach Chinese Kickboxing alongside teaching computer science at Bolton Sixth Form College.

Movers & Shakers

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



Sydney Samuels

Youth leadership team, The Careers and Enterprise Company

Start date March 2021

Concurrent job

Founder and managing director, Loop not Luck

Interesting fact

She won Dragons Den at 11-years-old and Peter Jones invested in her first business idea - an over-the-shoulder utility bag called a Funky Strap.



Andrew Webster

Education sector manager (further education and skills), The Careers and Enterprise Company

Start date March 2021

Previous job

Area education manager (West), The Careers and Enterprise Company

Interesting fact

He has climbed the mountain Snowdon (pre-lockdown) and hopes to get a few more big hills, small mountains in soon.

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

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