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## PERFECT STORM AT NORTHERN COLLEGE

- Grade 1 residential adult college in shock battle for survival
- ESFA demanding £1.2m be returned following data audit
- DfE review could end special x4.7 funding uplift
- Clawback following Covid disruption tops £600k



EXCLUSIVE

Page 4

## FEWEEK

## MEET THE TEAM



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### Crawley College staff praised for 'heroic' response to gunshot incident



Page 8



### Revealed: Thousands of level 5 management apprentices dropped-out last year

Page 12



### The DfE must realise the arts are key to the future of engineering

Page 30



### Mainstream colleges can be daunted by the prospect of supporting blind students

Page 31

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# Northern College faces 'perfect storm' and shock battle to survive

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From front

Exclusive

An adult residential college is facing a financial crisis that threatens its survival following a funding audit and government review.

Northern College, rated grade one by Ofsted with 'outstanding' financial health, is locked in a legal dispute with the Education and Skills Funding Agency following claims it has made "errors" worth £1.2 million across 2018/19 and 2019/20.

The alleged errors relate to claimed residential uplift support for learners who were not resident, but the college is contesting the agency's interpretation of the rules which have been in place for more than a decade.

The ESFA is, however, still demanding repayment of the funding and is extending its audit to cover a further two years, which could increase the clawback.

At the same time, the Barnsley-based college faces having to pay back an additional £660,000 following a significant shortfall in enrolments this year owing to Covid-19, which means they won't hit the ESFA's controversial 90 per cent tolerance level.

On top of this, the government is conducting a national review of adult residential funding which could remove an uplift which multiplies funding for residential courses by nearly five times as much as the normal rate.

All of these factors are contributing to a "perfect storm" which puts the long-term sustainability of the college at risk.

The FE Commissioner has been asked by the ESFA to conduct a diagnostic assessment and structure and prospect appraisal, which could result in the college being forced to merge.

Supporters of the college have strongly condemned the government for causing its financial woes after years of strong performance.

Writing for *FE Week* (see page 5), former DfE director of FE funding Sue Pember, who is now the policy director of adult education network HOLEX, said: "Northern College is not at risk because of anything it could have foreseen but because of the unintended



Wentworth Castle, the home of Northern College

consequences of administrative action DfE may or may not choose to do."

She described the situation as a "triple whammy" that "could be diverted with joined-up administration and impact assessment".

MPs are also lobbying to help the college, which was founded in 1977 to train disadvantaged and disengaged adults and operates out of Wentworth Castle, a grade 1 listed building owned by Barnsley Council.

Dan Jarvis, Labour MP for Barnsley Central and mayor of the Sheffield City Region, raised the issue this week with skills minister Gillian Keegan during education questions in the House of Commons.

He later told *FE Week* that any loss of service from the college would be "devastating" and he will do "everything I can to protect this iconic South Yorkshire institution".

Miriam Cates, MP for Penistone and Stocksbridge, said she is also working "very closely" with the college to try to secure its future.

There are four residential adult education colleges in England and they were all notified of the government's funding review in January 2020.

In its subsequent audit, the ESFA told Northern College that it had been applying the 4.7 multiplier uplift for residential funding incorrectly to each course they offer rather than the learner.

*FE Week* understands the college is claiming that this interpretation of the rule was never clear and is challenging the government for allegedly changing the goalposts retrospectively.

The college's accounts for 2019/20 are currently being held up by the dispute, which could end up in court.

Northern College is also expecting to deliver 73 per cent of its £3.8 million adult education budget allocation this year after being forced to

close due to the pandemic.

The agency has decided that where colleges deliver less than 90 per cent of their allocation in 2020/21, they will recover the difference between their actual delivery and 90 per cent.

Northern College said it usually meets its enrolment targets year-on-year and claimed that residential provision had been disproportionately impacted by Covid-19 as the disadvantaged adults they train struggled with the move to online learning.

The college has £5 million cash reserves. Another issue facing it is a pension liability which currently stands at more than £6 million.

Commenting on the potential crisis, principal Yultan Mellor said: "The college's residential adult education programme and wrap-around support have never been so vital to adults.

"We remain committed to continuing to work with our partners to support the economy to recover and grow following the impact of Covid-19, enabling the delivery of our regional jobs-based recovery programmes."

A spokesperson for the ESFA said the agency "does expect Northern College to repay the funds identified as being at risk following the audit of provision".

And responding to claims that the college was audited against the wrong set of funding rules, the spokesperson added: "The audit was conducted against the funding rules and ILR specification in place for the years covered by the audit and these formed part of the terms and conditions of the funding agreement with the college."

The outcome of the national residential funding review will be published "in due course".



SUE  
PEMBERDirector of  
policy, HOLEXLet's not undermine  
a much-needed and  
loved institution

**The triple whammy facing the much-loved Northern College can be avoided, writes Sue Pember, a former DfE director who now leads adult education membership body HOLEX**

Northern College has been a beacon in the world of adult education and a forerunner in what we know is a fantastic way to kickstart career change – one of the most important parts has been the residential element. Residential courses should not just be for HE students or those who go to private schools but should be for all students and adults. That is why we need adult residential centres in every region.

Residential activity is recognised as an integral funded element in the national citizen service programme which has been developed for young people; and therefore, we should have similar a residential experience for all adults.

So it's unfortunate when we are talking about skills bootcamps and intense provision that Northern College, which provides residential education for adults, seems to be at risk. It's not at risk because of anything it



could have foreseen but because of the unintended consequences of administrative action that the DfE may or may not choose to do.

Three issues have come together to create a perfect administrative storm: when the DfE undertook a review of residential funding, the scope was wide, and it was always felt that adult residential was only added as an afterthought. The focus of the consultation was about finding solutions that worked for the 16-to-19 sector, such as elite sport and land-based activity.

In hindsight, the funding review should have been split and adult residential activity viewed through a different lens, where the pros and cons could

have been properly aired. As it stands, we don't know whether the DfE is going to take the action it proposed or not.

**“It doesn't seem right to start changing those rules retrospectively”**

The second issue is about funding rules that have been in existence since before 2007. It doesn't seem right to start changing those rules retrospectively without looking at the impact and modelling of those changes and offering tapered support.

And lastly we have the issue of the pandemic and the DfE announcement about retrospective clawback, and the department's inability to recognise that they created the issues by insisting that providers stayed open, then closed, then went online and so on, and not meeting the consequent increased costs of delivery.

Each one of these issues stacked on top of the other puts the institution at risk, a triple whammy that could be diverted with joined-up administration and impact assessment.

What is needed is a debate on what type of adult skills offer we want, then a discussion about funding. Let's not allow the unintended consequences of proposed policy changes to undermine a much-needed and loved learning institution, and let's not jump to the FE Commissioner's sole solution to any problem – merger.

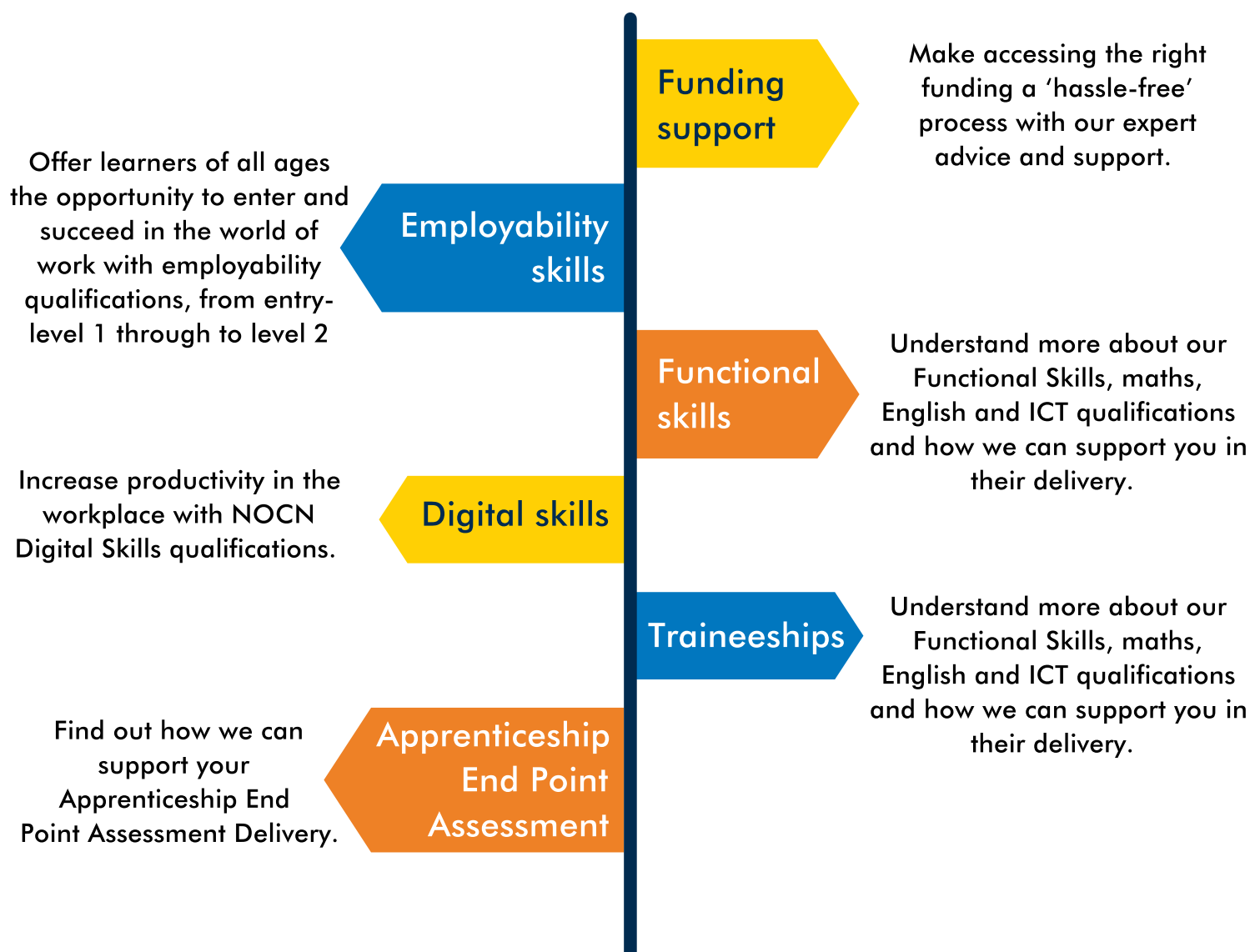
If funding can be adjusted to allow for other small unique establishments, such as Institutes of Technology and University Technical Colleges to operate, then the DfE should be able to do the same for adult residential colleges.

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# London UTC in danger of closure just three years after opening

FRASER WHIELDON  
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Another university technical college looks set to close just three years after opening.

Sir Simon Milton Westminster UTC, named after the former Conservative politician, announced last week it would be pausing student recruitment from the next academic year.

This is while “the UTC’s future is decided”, with chair Andrew Christie saying the “difficult but pragmatic” decision was taken as “the school has not attracted the level of interest that we had hoped from students looking at different options for their studies.

“As a consequence, we are working with the Department for Education to identify a way forward.”

The UTC opened in 2017 and specialises in science, technology, engineering and maths. It has capacity for 550 students aged 14 to 19 but has just under 150 on roll currently. The college is yet to be inspected by Ofsted.

According to its latest financial statements, for the year ending July 2019, the UTC had £319,000 in capital grants that year, on top of £395,000 in 2018, and just over £1 million in 2017.

**“As a consequence, we are working with the Department for Education to identify a way forward”**

Christie appeared to indicate the UTC will close by providing assurance in his statement that “this does not mean the end of technical education being offered on our fantastic site”.



When asked for more detail about this, a spokesperson said: “There is an ongoing commitment for the site to be used to support technical education moving forward.

“How this will be achieved will be discussed after the future of the UTC has been determined and agreed, and will be a matter for the DfE.”

The UTC’s 2019 accounts reveal the college had been in discussions to join Fulham Boys School multi-academy trust, with a decision on whether the DfE would approve the move scheduled for March 2020.

But this didn’t get the go ahead. When asked what happened with the merger, the spokesperson would only say the MAT had “provided specific services to support the UTC’s administration functions.

“This, in part, helped provide the capacity for the UTC to look at all the options available to us for the future.”

More than 50 UTCs have opened since they were launched in 2010 by former education secretary Lord Baker. Many of the colleges have, however, faced difficulties recruiting students and staying afloat financially.

Eleven have closed to date.

In January, the future of another UTC looked in doubt after East London UTC was slapped with a second financial notice to improve. It received a £375,000 government bailout in 2020 after recording a £1.8 million deficit.

In order to mitigate low student numbers, a number of UTCs have begun recruiting students at age 13 or even 11, rather than their traditional starting age of 14.

Schools system minister Baroness Berridge was quizzed on the future of UTCs during an accountability hearing with the Commons education select committee on Thursday.

She told MPs the government hopes to have a “strong sustainable group of UTCs” by the autumn and claimed there is “no bar or prejudice against them”.

“The programme has had challenges in relation to the typical entry point, but there are many that are really successful,” Berridge said. “We are working to make sure by autumn we have worked through any of the issues that are remaining.”

Asked whether there should be more of them, she said only “if there is a bid with a clear vision for the involvement of employers and particularly with the support of the local authority”.

# Crawley College staff praised for 'heroic' response to gunshot incident

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Two college staff members were praised for their "heroic" efforts this week after they tackled an armed student on campus.

Crawley College was evacuated on Monday as police responded to reports of gunshot fire.

Sussex police later said a teacher and a member of support staff suffered minor injuries as they detained an 18-year-old who was in possession of a blank-firing handgun and a knife.

**"Particularly proud of the two members of staff who acted so bravely and swiftly"**

Chief inspector Shane Baker said their "heroics have not gone unnoticed. They put themselves in harm's way in order to protect their students, fellow employees and the wider public, and I am hugely grateful for their quick-thinking actions."

The injuries were not gunshot wounds and the situation is being treated as an isolated incident that was not terror-related.

Baker added: "We are also working with the college and the local authority to manage the welfare and wellbeing of those involved – including students – who will have been understandably shocked by this experience."

Crawley College is part of the Chichester College Group and teaches 16-to-19 study programmes, adult learners and



Police descend on Crawley College

apprenticeships.

Its campus stayed closed in the days following the incident but began a phased reopening on Thursday.

Principal Vicki Illingworth said she was looking forward to welcoming staff and students back after they were left "shaken".

"We'd like to reassure everyone that the college is safe and they will be well supported in their return to the campus.

"I can reassure everyone that this was a one-off incident and we have strategies in place to keep everyone as safe as possible, as well as giving the students the support they need to come back and join us to complete their studies successfully."

Illingworth also paid tribute to the staff who supported students who were on site during the events of Monday afternoon.

She added: "I continue to remain full of admiration of our team. They pulled together on Monday and implemented all of the protocols we have in place to keep

students safe.

"They've continued to work together to support each other and their students over the past couple of days – and they will continue to do so when students return to campus.

**"It was a very intense time for everyone involved"**

"We are also particularly proud of the two members of staff who acted so bravely and swiftly to apprehend the individual before the police arrived. They acted selflessly to protect their students and the college community. They have asked for privacy during this time.

"It was a very intense time for everyone involved."



# Plans to limit apprenticeship providers by sectors move forward

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Exclusive

The Education and Skills Funding Agency has moved a step closer to limiting apprenticeship providers' delivery to the sectors they have experience in.

Under new conditions published last week for the refreshed register of apprenticeship training providers, providers must prove their "experience of managing and delivering training to learners and are established within the sectors in which you intend to deliver".

And if in the future the provider wants to move into sectors they did not mention in their initial application, they must for the first time inform the agency "within one calendar month", a spokesperson told *FE Week*.

Failure to do so will now determine the provider as "high risk" under the intervention regime.

However, the process for informing the ESFA of any delivery changes is still being worked on.

The agency's director for apprenticeships Peter Mucklow told *FE Week's* Annual Apprenticeship Conference this week that those details will be set out in "due course".

He said it is "clearly a warning sign" if a provider changes the sectors they deliver in at "very short notice" and "as regulator, we ought to know about that and be at least able to raise questions".

But he insisted it is not the ESFA's intention to "prevent good providers from moving into new areas".

Plans to limit providers by apprenticeship standards and sectors were first revealed by Mucklow's predecessor Keith Smith at last year's AAC.

*FE Week* understands that since then, the



Peter Mucklow

proposal, as well as another to introduce earning limits on providers, has been drawn up but the agency is holding out for extra funding from the Treasury to increase its oversight capacity, which is not yet forthcoming.

Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief executive Jane Hickie said it "seems reasonable" for providers to prove their sector-subject expertise, but her organisation is "watching carefully the ESFA's approach, which may further evolve moving forward".

"Informing the ESFA is very different to seeking approval, but we are clearly moving towards a more regulated marketplace for apprenticeship training through another RoATP refresh and the ESFA making moves to gather more granular information on sectors and standards," she added.

"Apprenticeships are driven by employer-led demand, so a balance of risk and oversight needs to be struck."

The move to potentially limiting providers by sectors would align the provider register to the one for end-point assessment organisations, which can only assess apprenticeship standards they are experts in and approved for via

application.

Tom Bewick, chief executive of the Federation of Awarding Bodies, said that if the ESFA had "managed the provider register, setting the bar high enough in the first place", the agency "would not now find itself in this remedial position".

"Too often over the last few years we've seen officials encourage new market entrants to the detriment of system-wide quality."

But, he added, one "problem with the ESFA now micro-managing the provider base is that, over time, it may end up stifling innovation and discouraging business investment".

This will be the third version of the register of apprenticeship training providers (RoATP) since its launch in March 2017. The most recent "refresh" was in January 2019.

Controversially, all existing providers on the register will need to reapply yet again.

Mucklow said that process will get under way "imminently".

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# Revealed: Thousands of level 5 management apprentices dropped-out last year

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## Exclusive

Thousands of apprentices on a new level 5 management programme have already dropped out of the course, official figures have revealed.

The operations or departmental manager standard had a retention rate of just 53.5 per cent last year for 4,250 “leavers”.

That means 1,980 apprentices – 47 per cent – did not complete their course and dropped out between August 2019 and July 2020.

The management standard has been one of the top 10 most popular apprenticeships at all levels and sectors in England for the past two and a half years, with 5,542 starts in the first six months of 2020/21 alone.

In 2019/20, it secured 10,052 starts, making it the fifth most popular apprenticeship that year; and in 2018/19, it saw 10,466 starts, and placed seventh.

The maximum funding band for the course was cut from £9,000 to £7,000 for starts from March 4, 2019.

The Department for Education does not publish funding values, but it is likely that around £10 million was spent on these nearly 2,000 apprentices who did not finish the course.

The achievement rate on the standard that year



was also only 52.9 per cent.

Retention rates on all level 5 apprenticeships overall have been dropping year after year: in 2017/18, the level recorded a 64.8 per cent rate; then in 2018/19, the rate was 61.1; and in 2019/20, it was 57.5 per cent.

The findings come just days after skills minister Gillian Keegan told delegates at *FE Week's* Annual Apprenticeship Conference she had ordered an investigation into the “astonishing” drop-out rate for apprenticeship standards.

Official government data published last month showed that just 60.2 per cent of apprentices training on new-style standards stayed on their programme until the end in 2019/20, compared to 48.3 per cent the year before.

The retention rate on the old-style frameworks has stayed consistent at

69 per cent.

The DfE has made a policy not to share provider-level data for last year, publicly, or even with Ofsted, citing as its reason the disruption caused by Covid-19 to the apprenticeship delivery.

*FE Week* has long warned that management apprenticeships would come to dominate the sector following the introduction of the levy and other reforms since 2017.

Even before the reforms, this newspaper published an investigation into “The unstoppable rise of management apprenticeships” in 2016, after it became the third most popular apprenticeship subject.

Since then, a number of prominent sector figures have expressed their own concerns about the rise in management training as apprenticeships.

Ofsted chief inspector Amanda Spielman warned in 2018 graduate schemes were “in essence being rebadged as apprenticeships”.

In 2019, the National Audit Office reported levy-payers “are replacing their professional development programmes – for example, graduate training schemes in accountancy or advanced courses in management – with apprenticeships”.

The move to publicly funding management courses has been defended by Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education chief executive Jennifer Coupland, who said in January 2020 that the practice was “perfectly legitimate”.

Official apprenticeship achievement, retention and pass rates for 2019/20

	Level	All leavers	Retention rate	Pass rate	Achievement rate
All apprenticeships	2	101,000	66.1%	98.1%	64.9%
	3	110,200	66.2%	98.0%	64.8%
	4	12,400	62.9%	97.7%	61.5%
	5	13,600	57.5%	97.4%	56.0%
	6	1,700	68.7%	99.0%	68.1%
	7	700	69.9%	97.7%	68.3%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>239,700</b>	<b>65.5%</b>	<b>98.0%</b>	<b>64.2%</b>
<b>Operations or Departmental Manager</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4,250</b>	<b>53.5%</b>	<b>98.9%</b>	<b>52.9%</b>

DfE apprenticeships statistics, published 29 April 2021



## ANNUAL APPRENTICESHIP CONFERENCE 2021 HIGHLIGHTS

## Keegan promises probe into standards' high drop-out rate

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The skills minister has ordered an investigation into the "astonishingly" high drop-out rate for apprenticeship standards.

Official government data published in March showed that just 60.2 per cent of apprentices training on new-style standards stayed on their programme until the end in 2019/20. This figure sat at 48.3 per cent the year before.

The retention rate on the old-style frameworks has stayed consistent at 69 per cent.

Quizzed on the numbers on day one of *FE Week's* Annual Apprenticeship Conference, the minister revealed she has asked the Department for Education to "look into this".

She pledged that she "won't

stop" until the completion rate is "much, much higher".

Keegan said she "couldn't understand" why this is happening as apprenticeships were seen as the "golden ticket" when she left school and the "last thing you would dream of is not finishing it".

"Are people being put on to apprenticeships they don't know they're on? Are people not being given the right support to finish? Are people going on to apprenticeships and then deciding it is not for them and then giving up and starting some other pathway in life?"

Keegan admitted there could be a variety of reasons for low retention, but one key reason could be because some new apprenticeships are "disjointed".

She explained that apprentices will often drop out if they achieve

a qualification that proves their professional competency quite a while before they are due to sit their end-point assessment.

Keegan described this as creating an "artificial end-point" that "needs to be more logically placed as part of the apprenticeship".

The issue that Keegan describes is already being acted upon by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. In October 2020, the quango announced plans to "simplify and strengthen" apprenticeships that have a "statutory regulator" and an "established professional competency test".

It would mean that in situations where an apprentice has met a statutory regulator's requirements to practice, this will be counted as that apprentice's end-point assessment in the future.

Currently, just 28 standards out of a possible 500 that are approved for delivery could be impacted, most of which are in the healthcare sector.



Gillian Keegan

## Spielman still 'troubled' by quality of apprenticeship training

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Ofsted's chief inspector has warned the quality of apprenticeship training is still "troubling".

Following the resumption of new provider monitoring visits, Amanda Spielman told AAC delegates that inspectors had made 100 such visits since mid-March.

It was "concerning," she said, that one-third of these resulted in at least one 'insufficient progress' judgment.

"The quality of apprenticeship training does need to improve," Spielman told delegates.

Both she, and Ofsted more generally, have expressed repeated concerns about quality in the apprenticeship sector. At AAC 2019, the chief inspector said the quality of apprenticeships was "sticking" instead of moving forward.

Ofsted's 2020 annual report said

apprenticeships were the "weakest" area of provision in FE providers, with one in ten judged 'inadequate' last year.

Speaking on Thursday morning, Spielman said: "Let's be frank, this can't be blamed on Covid. This is the same pattern we were seeing before the pandemic.

"To have such a high proportion of insufficient progress judgments is troubling."

Ofsted's stated concerns contrast with those of the Department for Education, which has continually boasted of the quality improvement apprenticeships have experienced because of the government's reforms to the sector since 2017.

Skills minister Gillian Keegan, writing for *FE Week's* National Apprenticeship Week supplement in February, stated: "Thanks to our reforms, apprenticeships are now longer and higher quality, and we have taken steps to ensure apprentices learn the skills employers need to thrive at any age."



Amanda Spielman

When asked by *FE Week* editor Nick Linford, neither Spielman nor Ofsted deputy director for FE Paul Joyce would be drawn on whether quality had improved since the apprenticeship reforms.

Joyce explained they were at an "early stage" of their evaluation of the programme, partly as there were still providers delivering apprenticeship frameworks while being inspected by Ofsted, as opposed to the reforms' flagship apprenticeship standards.

## ANNUAL APPRENTICESHIP CONFERENCE 2021 HIGHLIGHTS

# L2 business admin replacement proposal under consideration

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The apprenticeship regulator is reviewing a proposal for a level 2 business administration replacement, which employers hope could be ready for delivery as soon as September.

Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) chief executive Jennifer Coupland told the Annual Apprenticeship Conference on Tuesday they are mulling over a "public sector organisation administrative assistant" standard.

*FE Week* can reveal the standard will be known as the level 2 operational support apprenticeship if it is successful.

This has been put forward by government employers, including the NHS, after repeated proposals for a replacement for the popular level 2 business administration apprenticeship framework were rejected.

Coupland said the institute "will always respond to employers who come forward with proposals for new apprenticeships and we take every proposal on its merits".

A "number" of employers had come forward with the proposed new standard, which would be considered "in isolation from things that may or may not have gone before," as "that's a fair and proper thing to do".

Coupland said the proposed standard would have to meet IfATE's "usual" tests to be approved for delivery.

It was she who drove the final nail into the business administration standard's coffin, ahead of the framework being switched off last July.

At a last-chance meeting with employers in February 2020, after she took the chief executive post the previous November, Coupland said the employers' proposal did not meet the minimum 12-month duration.



Jennifer Coupland

She also told the employers they would not be able to submit any further proposals for the standard.

Sparking controversy at last year's Annual Apprenticeship Conference in March 2020, the former Department for Education civil servant justified her decision as proposals for the level 2 standard "did not meet the tests" for a "high-quality training programme".

"Apprenticeships must be for training for skilled occupations that require at least a year of sustained and substantial training to become competent in the role," she said.

Employers have been able to utilise the level 3 business administrator standard, and the Education and Skills Funding Agency has highlighted the level 2 customer service practitioner standard as a replacement for the level 2 framework.

*FE Week* reported last October plans were afoot for a new, level 2 "organisational support assistant" standard, which was being developed by the NHS and local councils for use in the public sector.

And plans for this new public sector replacement for the programme appear to be quite far advanced.

Addressing an Annual Apprenticeship Conference workshop this week, NHS Health Education England's national programme director Lucy Hunte said her organisation was "busy" with getting the new standard ready for delivery from this September.

The programme would be "widened" to outside the public sector, she confirmed, adding that surveys will be "coming out shortly just to get private sector input." But the aim is we would hope to have this ready for delivery from September, but don't hold me to that, and obviously this is all IfATE-dependent."

Hunte said the institute "is really interested in the social mobility aspect this time round".

The co-chairs of the new standard's trailblazer group, Michelle Place from Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust and Lisa Shepherdson from Hull County Council, said they "are in the very early stages" and are working on a proposal with the support of the IfATE, HEE and local government authorities.

"This is a brand-new proposal for a new apprenticeship and should not be confused with any previous submissions. The proposal will be judged on its own merit.

"If the proposal is approved, the group will produce an apprenticeship standard and will work closely with the institute to ensure we prepare a high-quality apprenticeship that will meet the requirements of employers."

The two co-chairs added: "It is very difficult at this moment in time to say when and if an apprenticeship will be approved, but the group are working collectively to create a new standard that will meet the needs of businesses nationally and provide opportunities for those wanting to pursue a career in operational support."

## ANNUAL APPRENTICESHIP CONFERENCE 2021 HIGHLIGHTS

## Does Labour employ any apprentices?

FRASER WHIELDON

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The shadow education secretary has refused to reveal if the Labour Party employs even one apprentice.

At *FE Week's* Annual Apprenticeship Conference shadow education secretary Kate Green was quizzed on how many apprentices work for the political party, which often criticises central government for not employing enough of the learners.

But while admitting it was a "legitimate question to ask any politician", she said they "don't share information about our workforce".

Her own constituency office does not employ an apprentice, she says, because it is a "very, very small" team, so they would not be able to provide the necessary "intensive support".

But they have made a "huge priority" of taking on young people with learning disabilities "to give them their first work experience."

"So I think it's horses for courses, isn't it?"

During the question-and-answer session, *FE Week* editor Nick Linford asked the



shadow education secretary again whether the Labour Party had any apprentices at all.

But Green would not be moved, saying "we just don't disclose the source data of our workflow".

## “[We] don’t share information about our workforce”

"I'm guessing the answer is probably 'none'," Linford replied, but Green advised him not to make that inference.

Yet when pushed again to give an answer, she said: "We don't disclose that data."

Approached for further comment after the session, the Labour Party told *FE Week* it had "nothing to add" to Green's remarks.

Shadow apprenticeships and lifelong learning minister Toby Perkins was also approached for his reaction, and on how many apprentices he employed, but did not respond

by the time of publication.

All public sector bodies with 250 or more staff in England have been bound to a target to employ an average of at least 2.3 per cent of their staff as new apprentice starts over the period of April 1, 2017 to March 31, 2021.

Latest official data shows that from April 2017 up to the end of March 2020, 1.7 per cent of the civil service's headcount were new apprentices.

That target has since been restated for an extra year to cover 2021-22.

Also speaking at the conference on Thursday was Commons education select committee chair Robert Halfon, who attacked the 2.3 per cent target as "unambitious" and "sending all the wrong signals".

He said the public sector "should be leading the way", and wherever possible, all new recruits to the public sector should be offered an apprenticeship.

Additionally, the number of apprentices a company employs should feature in the criteria for awarding public sector contracts, Halfon added.



Robert Halfon



## ANNUAL APPRENTICESHIP CONFERENCE 2021 HIGHLIGHTS

## Finalists announced for AAC Apprenticeship Awards 2021

FRASER WHIELDON

FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The national finalists for this year's FE Week and AELP AAC Apprenticeship Awards have been revealed.

From 350 entries the shortlists for the 21 awards, being run in partnership with Open Awards, were announced at a virtual ceremony on Thursday evening, hosted by comedian and impressionist Rory Bremner.

They will now go forward for the awards, which will be announced at a gala dinner in Birmingham on Thursday, July 8.

Shane Mann, managing director of FE Week's publisher Lsect, said: "These finalists are some of the very best of the apprenticeship sector and show just what can be achieved.

"The past year has placed an enormous strain on all our lives, both in our private lives and our places of work.

"The judges were astounded by the innovation, tenacity and thoughtfulness of apprenticeship providers and employers across the UK. These awards are just one of many ways we can show our appreciation and celebrate their exceptional work.

"In past years we've announced the national finalists during a parliamentary reception. This wasn't possible this year.

"But it was great to have Rory Bremner host this evening's special online presentation."

The big award, apprentice provider of the year, will go to either Cardiff and Vale College, Exeter College, Acacia Training and Salford City College.

Meanwhile, Lee Marley Brickwork, Merseyside Police, Pendennis Shipyard Ltd and the Royal Air Force will duke it out for apprentice employer of the year.

AELP chief executive Jane Hickie said it was "very difficult to choose the shortlist for each category." "As this year's array of finalists demonstrates, the fantastic training being delivered to young people and to existing employees who need to enhance their skills in the face of the pandemic and current economic uncertainty never ceases to amaze me.

"AELP partnered with FE Week on these awards as a way to demonstrate the amazing work done by providers in supporting their learners and employers – we certainly have many examples of outstanding work demonstrated

across the sector."

A number of sector leaders are also in the running for the individual award for outstanding contribution to the development of apprenticeships.

These include Anthony Impey, chief executive of Be The Business; Andy Berry, principal of

Bridgwater & Taunton College; Rob Colbourne, chief executive of Performance Through People; and Robert Watts, European apprenticeship and early talent programme manager for Covance Laboratories.

Tickets for the awards ceremony are now on sale from <http://aacapprenticeshipawards.com/>

## Full list of the National Finalists

<b>Agriculture, Environmental &amp; Animal Care Apprenticeship provider of the year</b> Bridgwater & Taunton College Myerscough College <b>Business &amp; Administration Apprenticeship provider of the year</b> Abingdon & Witney College Wiltshire College <b>Care Services Apprenticeship provider of the year</b> Aspiration Training Paragon Skills <b>Catering &amp; Hospitality Apprenticeship provider of the year</b> Sponsored by Skills & Education Group Bournemouth and Poole College Remit Training <b>Construction Apprenticeship provider of the year</b> City of Bristol College Kirklees College <b>Digital Apprenticeship provider of the year</b> Sponsored by bcs Gower College Swansea Manchester Met University <b>Education &amp; Childcare Apprenticeship provider of the year</b> Exeter College Hawk Management (UK) <b>Engineering &amp; Manufacturing Apprenticeship provider of the year</b> Gower College Swansea Make UK	<b>Hair &amp; Beauty Apprenticeship provider of the year</b> Sponsored by VTCT HA HA Training Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education London Hairdressing Apprenticeship Academy <b>Health &amp; Science Apprenticeship provider of the year</b> Manchester Met University Petroc Skills Training UK <b>Legal, Finance &amp; Accounting Apprenticeship provider of the year</b> Gower College Swansea Workpays <b>Sales, Marketing, Procurement Apprenticeship Provider of the year</b> Lifetime Training Remit Training <b>Transport &amp; Logistics Apprenticeship provider of the year</b> Performance Through People Training Qube Learning <b>Apprenticeship Diversity Award</b> Coach Core Foundation Multiverse <b>SEND Apprenticeship Champion Award</b> Devon County Council Sheffield City Council <b>Promoting Apprenticeships campaign of the year</b> Carlisle College Luminate Education Group Weston College	<b>Outstanding Contribution to the Development of Apprenticeships: Employer, provider and individual</b> Sponsored by City Skills   ilm <b>EMPLOYER</b> British Steel Fort Vale Health Education England Teledyne e2v <b>PROVIDER</b> Bridgwater & Taunton College Luminate Education Group Remit Training Wakefield College <b>INDIVIDUAL</b> Anthony Impey, CEO, Be The Business Andy Berry, Principal, Bridgwater & Taunton College Rob Colbourne, CEO, Performance Through People Robert Watts, European Apprenticeship and Early Talent Program Manager, Covance Laboratories <b>Apprentice Employer of the year</b> Lee Marley Brickwork Merseyside Police Pendennis Shipyard Ltd Royal Air Force <b>Apprenticeship Provider of the year</b> Cardiff and Vale College Exeter College Acacia Training Salford City College
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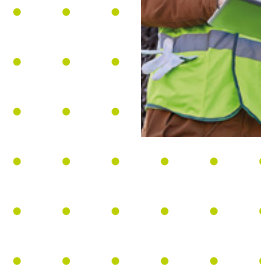
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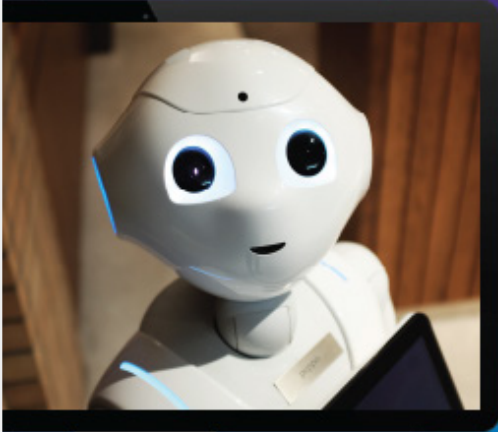
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Advertorial

# DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION ANNOUNCE £5.4M OF FUNDING IN LATEST CCF ROUND



The DfE has announced that £5.4 million in funding is available to colleges as part of The College Collaboration Fund (CCF).

The CCF is a national programme of competitive grant funding for all statutory further education colleges in the UK and enables colleges to collaborate and share good practice and expertise to address common quality improvement priorities.

CCF funding can be used on a variety of projects, however, the DfE has highlighted the need for more 'engaging digital content and resources' as a specific quality improvement need in their CCF guidance.

Following three national lockdowns and a 'stay at home' order from the government, the FE sector as a whole has struggled to provide adequate learning resources to students throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and have been forced to innovate.

## A Bleak Outlook

The Association of Colleges (AoC) recently conducted a study to better understand the impact of Covid-19 on both students and learning providers, and the results were bleak.

In its report, the AoC found that a staggering 77% of 16-18-year-olds were underperforming on their courses. To combat this, 71% of colleges provided additional tuition over and above the tuition fund – causing financial stress to providers and a strain on tutors' wellbeing and work-life balance.

## A Lesson Learnt?

The pandemic has taught us many things, one of which is that

delivering courses via a traditional 'face-to-face approach' offers little to no flexibility, especially during a crisis.

Colleges have been forced to move teaching online, in most cases, teaching classes using tools such as Teams or Google Classroom.

Albeit a solution, teacher-led online learning remains a significant drain on teaching staff – especially while some tutors lack the digital skills required to run effective online delivery.

While face-to-face and teacher-led online learning have their systematic problems, what can colleges do to create the most effective learning space for their students?

## "More engaging digital content and resources"

This is where e-Learning comes into play.

When designed and used correctly, e-Learning modules can be a great asset to your teaching, providing your college with delivery assets that are not limited by teacher availability, promotes consistent delivery, and engages students with your teaching materials.

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e-Learning modules have come a long way in recent years. They are extremely versatile and can incorporate multiple interactive activities, such as branching scenarios, embedded video and interactive graphics. They also offer a means of assessing each student's learning, which you can track via your Learning Management System (LMS).

Students studying practical courses have been some of the hardest hit by Covid-19 due to the restrictions on social distancing and the limit on the number of people allowed indoors at any given time. Courses that consist of more practical modules, such as Engineering and Hair & Beauty, can use e-Learning as an alternative to physical lessons due to the interactive nature of digital modules.

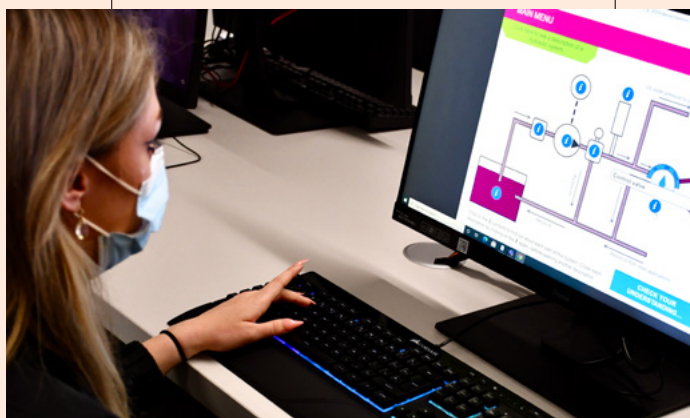
## How Can Eidos Consulting Help?

We have been providing high-quality e-Learning solutions to the FE sector since 2018 and have worked with numerous colleges across the South Coast in particular, including successfully delivering projects for the Education & Training Foundation (ETF) and the DfE's College Collaboration Fund (CCF).

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[You can find details of our most recent CCF project here.](#)

If you are interested in exploring the opportunity CCF offers to create high quality e-Learning resources for your college, please contact us via [info@eidosconsulting.co.uk](mailto:info@eidosconsulting.co.uk) or call us on **02392 049583**.

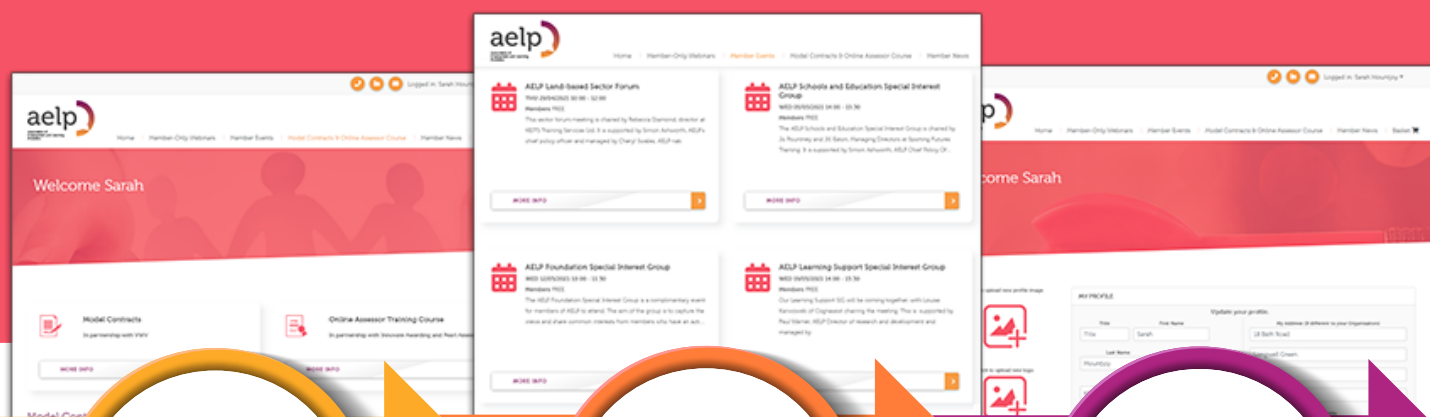




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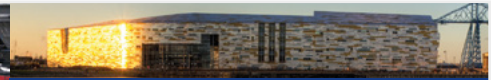
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## Feature

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## ‘Apprenticeships should be about levelling up – giving learners a chance’

**JESS STAUFENBERG**  
@STAUFENBERGJ

**Employers are allowed to set their own entry criteria for apprenticeships, even though officially, no formal qualifications are needed. When is the bar being set too high? asks Jess Staufenberg**

The government has two favourite phrases for its ambitions in further education, and for apprenticeships in particular.

The first is ‘employer-led’. The term, bandied about constantly by ministers, had its latest big outing in the recent Skills for Jobs white paper. But the approach prompted changes to apprenticeships from 2016, when the old apprenticeship ‘frameworks’ – designed by awarding bodies – were gradually replaced by the new, tougher apprenticeship ‘standards’ – designed by employers. Any hint that an employer-led system can be troublesome (see

delays to the new standards as employers struggled to get them ready) has done nothing to put ministers off.

The second phrase is ‘levelling up’, used widely across all departments to describe the government’s ambitions post-Covid.

In a way, apprenticeships are where the ‘employer-led’ and ‘levelling-up’ agendas meet. For a young person without GCSEs, or an adult made redundant, apprenticeships put the learner on a path from level 2 to level 7 to earn and qualify without taking on the debt of a degree. And what could be more employer-led than an apprenticeship?

Yet the latest data has caused concern. Only 31 per cent of apprenticeship starts were at level 2 last year, down from 65 per cent in 2013/14. Starts among 17-year-olds dropped the most, with 26 per cent fewer in 2019/20 than the year before.

Meanwhile chancellor Rishi Sunak’s strategy of handing over £3,000 to employers per apprentice regardless of age this month

was strongly criticised, with experts warning increased funding should have gone only to 16-24-year-olds, because it is young people that employers appear most reluctant to hire.

Now FE Week can reveal some of the high qualification requirements young people have to meet too. The tension is seen on the DfE’s Institute for Apprenticeships website: “Apprentices without level 1 English and maths will need to achieve this level [...] prior to taking the end-point assessment”. Apprentices should also work towards their level 2 English and maths. In other words, apprentices without level 1 functional skills, equivalent to a GCSE 2 or 3, can still do an apprenticeship and will be supported by their training provider to gain it during the course. They will also work towards a level 2 in English and maths, equivalent to a GCSE pass 4.

**CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE**

## Feature

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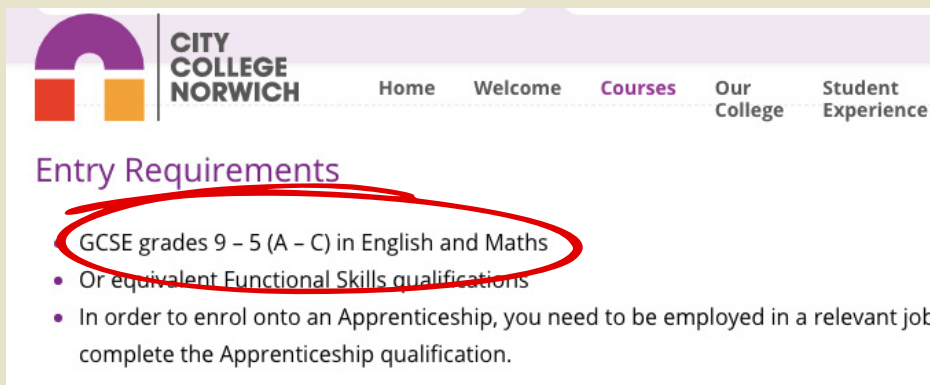
## CONTINUED

But the standards then state: "Individual employers will set the selection criteria for their apprenticeships". There is no law or guidance that prevents an employer (or, indeed, training provider) from setting the selection criteria they like.

Should there be? Where is the line?

FE Week found significant variation in apprenticeship adverts. First off are the apprenticeships that state GCSE passes are "preferable" or "desirable", rather than deal-breakers. In most cases, the training provider says these are the employer's criteria – for instance, an engineering operative level 2 apprenticeship advertised by training provider Gen2, which belongs to the City & Guilds group, warns employers will "typically" want "three GCSEs at grade C or higher".

But in other vacancies, the entry criteria have been set by a college, not the employer. An advert for a countryside worker level 2 apprentice with construction employer DTMS Group, delivered with Craven College in north Yorkshire, states "candidates will ideally have at least 4 GCSEs at grades A\* -



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C/9 - 4". When asked, a DTMS spokesperson said, "I don't agree that there should be a minimum GCSE requirement that stops the less academic from applying, as long as they realise further study will be required during the apprenticeship."

Richard Swires, apprenticeship manager at Craven College, said it "has no specific entry requirements for apprentices and this is why the advert indicates 'ideally'". He added that "in the instance of [...] this vacancy, of the last five apprentices to successfully achieve, only one had four GCSEs and four had maths and English at below level 1".

This is reassuring, but if the employer is not demanding that "ideally" apprentices

have four GCSEs, why include it in the advert? Research shows that disadvantaged candidates are put off by roles asking for "desirable" qualifications they don't have.

One advert at City College Norwich sets the bar yet higher. For an accounts and finance assistant level 2 apprenticeship, the

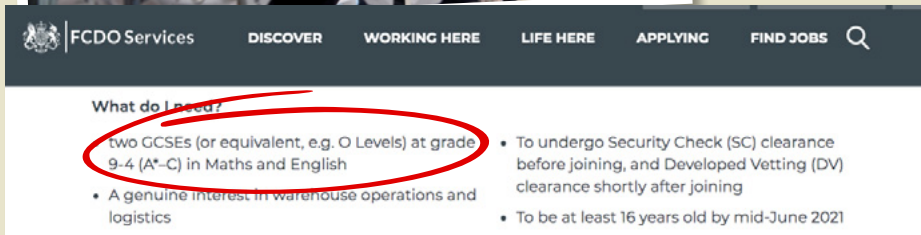
college gives an entry requirement of "GCSE grades 9 - 5 (A - C) in English and maths". The entry criteria here is a 'strong' pass 5 rather than a 'standard' pass 4, which is a C+ rather than a C- although it adds an apprentice without these can attend functional skills classes. A City College Norwich spokesperson said the criteria "presents guidance on the entry qualifications that our employers who recruit to apprenticeship roles in these sectors most often ask". Colleges try to offer flexibility, while pointing out it is employers driving the higher requirements.

Simon Ashworth, chief policy officer at the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, said a certain level of pre-screening makes sense, but in some cases employers may be setting the bar too high. "Apprenticeships should be about leveling up – giving those learners who perhaps didn't suit school a chance in a practical space."

Employers and training providers benefit if apprentices already have English and maths GCSEs. "Employers already lose at least 20 per cent of apprentice working hours to 'off-the-job training', and those without English and maths must also be released to study functional skills." Meanwhile, training providers are funded at £471 to deliver functional skills per apprentice, less than non-apprentice rates for the same course, at £724.

"With funding rates so low, you've got the employer who's looking at someone who will be less productive, and the provider who'd prefer them to already have English and maths." Ashworth said functional skills study should be included in the 20 per cent off-the-job time and funding rates made equal.

The problem is that for the most high-status apprenticeships, employers will

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## What do I need?

- two GCSEs (or equivalent, e.g. O Levels) at grade 9-4 (A\*-C) in Maths and English
- A genuine interest in warehouse operations and logistics
- To undergo Security Check (SC) clearance before joining, and Developed Vetting (DV) clearance shortly after joining
- To be at least 16 years old by mid-June 2021

Adverts for level 2 apprenticeships at City College Norwich (top right) and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (above)

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



## Feature

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## CONTINUED

always be able to pick and choose. For a botanical horticulture apprenticeship at Kew Gardens, two GCSE passes are needed. "Entry to our apprenticeships is very competitive," explained a Kew spokesperson, adding that "people without GCSEs or functional skills would struggle to manage things like plant nomenclature". Is a higher bar good for apprenticeships? Perhaps this helps raise their status.

College staff themselves sympathise with employers wanting to set entry criteria. Two college apprenticeship leads told FE Week that companies are good at listening to their advice about potential apprentices who don't meet qualification requirements on paper.

But ultimately, they support a fairer system. Lindsey Wedgewood, head of apprenticeships at Askham Bryan College in north Yorkshire, said "the level of maths and English doesn't determine how good that person is going to be in that role. There are fantastic apprentices out there who may struggle with English or maths at first, but put them in the workplace and they're brilliant". David Boyer, director of apprenticeships at Capel Manor College in London, added, "Formal qualifications is too blunt a tool. There are many other factors in determining if they're suitable."

The practice is pretty widespread. The University of Sheffield has an advert for

## University of Sheffield - Grounds person - Sports Turf Operative Level 2 Apprenticeship - Sheffield

### University of Sheffield

University of Sheffield are seeking a practical and friendly individual with the ability to quickly build and maintain excellent working relationships to join our friendly Landscape Services team as an apprentice grounds person.

#### Desired qualifications

- 5 GCSEs or equivalent including English Language and maths

a sports turf operative level 2 apprentice with "5 GCSEs or equivalent, including English and maths". University College London states for "most" of its intermediate apprenticeships, "you will need 5 GCSEs grade 4 – 9, including English and maths". The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office wants two GCSE passes for a warehouse operative level 2 apprentice. Of the 20 most recent apprenticeships posted on Getmyfirstjob.co.uk, a quarter said GCSE qualifications were needed or desirable, including for a café assistant apprentice in Kent. None of the above responded to repeated requests for comment.

Paul McGrail, assistant principal for apprenticeships and skills at Myerscough College in Lancashire, said the problem lies in the lack of well-funded, flexible pre-apprenticeship options for learners

who need to improve their English and maths. There aren't enough traineeships around, he said, which include English and maths level 2 and are usually less than six months. "We need another way to tap into pre-apprenticeship funding," he said.

Traineeships are also not a popular choice at Capel Manor College because they are "largely unwaged", added Boyer. Instead, the college enrolls unsuccessful apprentice applicants

"on to a level 1 programme, where they do a vocational course with English and maths".

The good news is that students on such courses can sit their functional skills tests at multiple points throughout the year, and then transfer from the study programme on to an apprenticeship, said Rachel Bunn, assistant principal for apprenticeships at East Coast College in East Anglia. "If they complete early on a study programme, that's not an issue, we can move them over."

However, many functional skills courses are for level 1 only, explained Wedgewood – whereas many apprenticeships are asking for a level 2 qualification, which would require a GCSE programme with exams either too early in November, or late in June. "We need something between two and six months to help them upskill in maths and English that gets them to level 2," said Wedgewood.

The DfE does not look as though it will get involved. A spokesperson said, "We encourage employers of all sizes, and from all sectors, to open up apprenticeship opportunities to a wide group of potential applicants" but added, "ultimately, an apprenticeship is a job, and like all jobs, it is for the employers to decide entry requirements".

Ashworth reflects on what can be done. "I would discourage employers from setting a threshold around having maths and English already," Teresa Frith, senior skills policy manager at the Association of Colleges, agrees. "But," she points out, "this government has said everything is employer-led. So how do you get around that?"

Adverts for level 2 apprenticeships at the University of Sheffield (top right) and University College London (above)



# PROVIDE THE TRAINING PEOPLE NEED TO KICKSTART THEIR CAREER IN A NEW SECTOR

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- ✓ **Delivery guidance** – outline of suggested indicative delivery models for each unit
- ✓ **Witness testimony and observation** internal assessment guidance and record
- ✓ **Portfolio evidence** locators for completion by the learner
- ✓ **Mock external assessment** questions

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— **Steps to achieve Gateway success:** Wednesday 28 April 12pm – 12:45pm

— **E-employability solutions and giving your bid the edge for DWP restart contracts:**  
Thursday 29 April 12pm – 12:45pm

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[apprenticeships@ncfe.org.uk](mailto:apprenticeships@ncfe.org.uk)

## ANN-MARIE SPRY

Vice principal,  
Leeds City College



## The DfE must realise the arts are key to the future of engineering

**Many of the skills and behaviours in creative digital qualifications are transferrable to the STEM sector, writes Ann Marie Spry**

An estimated 11 million adults in the UK are now eligible to obtain a new qualification for free to help them gain in-demand skills. But it's more urgent than ever that we address the creative digital skills gap through specifically designed digital courses.

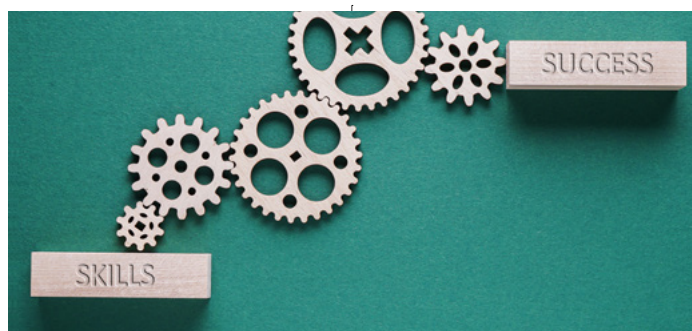
I recently attended a webinar hosted by the Prince's Trust that looked at the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on young people. It is quite clear that there continues to be a missed opportunity to extend the lifetime guarantee list.

My definition of young people takes us beyond the typical 24-year-old boundary and extends to individuals who are well into their 30s, with the working age increasing over time.

Both industry and the government understand that only a large-scale skills programme can safeguard jobs as we recover economically. Free qualifications for adults are an excellent way to enhance career prospects and enable people to secure rewarding careers.

Nonetheless, education always has more impact when it really engages the learner because it is something they care about and enjoy.

Meanwhile, employers cite behaviour traits and transferable skills as vital to long-term sustainable employment – not a



specific qualification.

With under-25s accounting for three in five jobs lost, youth unemployment is due to climb considerably, even as the economy recovers. Now, more than ever, it is paramount that people gain access to life-changing education, particularly in areas that are not covered by the list.

I believe that including a broader range of qualifications would address both the needs and interests of potential students and the transferable skills element for employers.

Through digital creative provision, we can adapt to the new economic landscape we now face in the coming months and years.

Many of these skills acquired are exactly the same as those in computing qualifications, with the added bonus of creativity, collaboration and innovation, developed by design. Music and film production, and editing, are other great examples.

Strong policy reform, not only focusing on displaced workers but also looking at youth employment, will be key to ensuring opportunities for all. Central to this

will also be small businesses as they will primarily be the key link to job creation.

Furthermore, employers need to work closely with the FE sector to understand and address gaps in the market. A more focused and agile approach to the curriculum will help ensure that workforce development is driven by creating opportunities to upskill.

### “The government must review the lifetime guarantee list to build a broader offer”

The government's own press release for the lifetime skills guarantee references *The Squiggly Career* by bestselling author and business leader Helen Tupper. The premise here is that the old way of looking at the linear “training to career” path is outdated and being replaced by more flexible, organic and responsive journeys to success.

The ability to adapt, innovate and self-organise are key characteristics of creative students.

When you add the greater self-confidence, self-understanding and enhanced communication skills that come with an arts education, you are future-proofing adults to enter this new landscape of employment.

A report called “10 reasons why arts and culture make a difference to young people's lives” by the Arts Council identifies that arts and culture promote economic growth. The arts teach entrepreneurial abilities that are key to the future of engineering and the economy.

As a result, businesses that deploy STEM and art skills (STEAM) experience faster sales growth than STEM firms.

The increase in automation means that the jobs of the future are likely to require skills only humans can bring, such as empathy, creativity and enterprise.

There is strong evidence that involvement in arts and creativity increases cognitive abilities, critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork, communication and social competency. It also creates a higher chance of sustaining employment into later life.

We need the government to review the list to encourage organisations and awarding bodies to make more qualifications accessible, and designed to take into account employer needs, with more choice for learners that address skills gaps.

I therefore urge the Department for Education and devolved authorities to build a much broader offer.



## CAIREEN SUTHERLAND

Principal education officer, Royal National Institute of Blind People



## Mainstream colleges can be daunted by the prospect of supporting blind students

**Childhood vision impairment is very rare, so colleges are often inexperienced in best practice, writes Caireen Sutherland**

Throughout education, it is vital that young people with vision impairment have the right specialist support in place. Although getting the right support for students with vision impairment at any stage of education is important, it can be fraught with challenges.

And having worked with many colleges and lecturers, I know that many settings will have never supported a student with vision impairment before – which can make the task feel like a daunting, overwhelming and confusing prospect.

It is particularly fraught during times of transition between different stages of education, such as from secondary school into further education.

A longitudinal research project by the Royal National Institute of Blind People and the Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research at the University of Birmingham looked at the experiences of students as they moved from school to further and higher education.

Some key themes emerged – a high ‘churn’ of learners who leave the education system was identified as a significant problem, and gaps in the use of suitable assistive technology were highlighted.

Crucially, it was also found that not all participants had the range of skills deemed important for

independent learning, such as everyday living, mobility, social and self-advocacy skills.

These issues could well be exacerbated by the low number of students with visual impairment within FE. Childhood vision impairment is a low-incidence disability. Based on World Health Organization international classification, only two in every 1,000 children and young people have a vision impairment.

**“All students with vision impairment should have access to specialist support”**

During school years, a young person may have an education health and care plan (EHCP) which outlines the specialist support they require. A key component is input from a qualified teacher of vision impairment (QTVI) and potentially

a habilitation officer, who provides vital support in terms of mobility, independence and self-advocacy skills.

A QTVI's role is varied, but they can support with functional vision assessments, link in with other professionals, help with required equipment and teach specialist skills (Braille, for example).

As a QTVI myself, I know how important it is that blind and partially sighted students continue to be supported into further education. But I also know that, at this stage of education, input can vary.

Some students may have an EHCP and the college will have hopefully been involved in the transition process and be aware of the students' needs.

However, sometimes students move to FE with no EHCP. Sometimes the amount of available QTVI time varies. At the same time, there is a change in expectations on the student in terms of independent learning and course formats which can cause significant challenges for them.

To prevent these challenges, all students with vision impairment should have access to the necessary specialist support, such as from a QTVI and a habilitation specialist.

A learning provider can also think about how courses are delivered, by making information and resources accessible and ensuring students have the right equipment to access their course.

There is a wide range of guides and online information and advice that can support both students and colleges to make the most of their FE experience.

For example, Thomas Pocklington Trust (TPT) in partnership with RNIB, has created new guidance for further education providers. The guide, which contains helpful tips and checklists for colleges, is also useful for students and families.

At FE, more than any other stage of education, students should be involved in their own learning experience. The impact of inadequate support at this point in a young person's educational journey can be very damaging to their ongoing academic success, wellbeing and future prospects.

It is important that they have the opportunity to tell learning providers what works for them and what doesn't, and what they need to be in place in order to access their chosen course and succeed.

Students with vision impairment have the same ability, aspirations and potential as their peers. They just need the right support to achieve it.



DAVID  
CHAPMAN

Vice principal,  
Aston University  
Engineering Academy  
and Sixth Form



## Three ways to replace in-work careers experience for your students

**Virtual reality technology and collaborative projects can keep students switched on to careers, writes David Chapman**

It's no wonder many young people are struggling to picture their future. When entire business sectors have been forced to close, relatives are being laid off and exams are cancelled, it's hard to think beyond the next few months.

Students will no doubt be aware that it's the youngest segment of the workforce – the group most heavily represented in retail, tourism and hospitality – who have been hit the hardest by the pandemic, according to labour market statistics from the Institute for Employment Studies.

Against a backdrop of economic uncertainty, today's students are feeling less sure than ever about their career plans. Yet Generation Z are the very people we need to fill the skills gap if the country is to recover from the pandemic and forge a new post-Brexit identity.

So how can careers education engage students at this critical time?

First off, we must encourage early aspirations. The government white paper, Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth, calls for careers education to be embedded in the life of every school and college.

This makes sense because when students have a goal in mind, they are motivated to study harder and achieve the grades they need.

As a university technical college

(UTC), our students join us because they are attracted by a future in STEM, but they're not always aware of the enormous diversity of careers that exist in these sectors.

To get students thinking about careers in a more focused way, we task our youngest students with researching career pathways.

Students interested in engineering might explore areas such as aerospace, food processing or robotics. They look into career progression, salary expectations and the qualifications they need, and prepare a presentation on their findings.

An approach like this gives providers an insight into which career paths their students are keen to follow, so they can deliver targeted advice, and link curriculum learning to careers, in line with the Gatsby benchmarks.

Second, we need to personalise career guidance. Generic careers education too often misses the mark. There is little point making students sit through careers talks that hold no interest for them.

Personalised careers advice is much more effective, but students need to find out which job types they are most suited to.

It's important to help students understand their strengths, interests and character traits. One of the tools we use provides a free online personality quiz which helps a student unlock their "spirit animal" based on their answers and then links them to suitable careers. Even the most world-weary sixth-former enjoys seeing if they are a polar bear, seahorse or tiger.

### "We need to personalise career guidance"

With deeper self-knowledge, a student can make informed choices. A medical career is not only about being a heart surgeon, it's also about being a microbiologist, pharmacologist or

biomedical engineer, any of which could be the right fit for a young person interested in medicine.

Finally, we should use technology to expose students to the world of work.

Previous work experience placements have seen our students building a two-seater propellor aircraft in collaboration with industry experts. They are now embarking on a project with aviation charity The Air League, RAF Cosford and STEM Highflyers.

When the pandemic put a stop to hands-on experience of the workplace, colleges like us have had to find different ways to keep careers in the spotlight.

Fortunately, many employers have been flexible in providing opportunities for students, supported by organisations such as the Careers & Enterprise Company.

Another key route to engaging young people through technology is with apps, podcasts and videos, such as the WorldSkills Spotlight talks, which all appeal to a digitally fluent generation.

Virtual reality experiences are another sure-fire way to spark students' interest. Engaging students in a gameified environment, immersing them into a job role and helping them visualise the education pathways to achieve it is incredibly powerful.

What young people need now is hope for the future. Relevant, personalised and aspirational careers education will help today's students leave uncertainty behind and find their place in the world.





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The four-day event will consider whether we are on the right track in respect of reforms to apprenticeships, traineeships, adult education, English and maths, and other provision in the light of the pandemic and its impact on employment, especially for young people. A key question is whether programme design and delivery are doing enough to encourage and secure learner progression.

The results of the mayoral elections in May will also offer pointers to devolved skills provision in the future with candidates' manifestos calling for 'youth guarantees' and more control over skills budgets.

Delegates will have the opportunity to listen, debate and ask questions on all the latest developments over the course of the four days. Plus the opportunity to network with other delegates from the comfort and safety of their laptops/devices!

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## READER'S REPLY

### Government consults on replacing ATAs with new 'flexi-job' apprenticeship scheme



I think the Department for Education/Education and Skills Funding Agency will eventually remove the sector shackles when they realise that it's not always easy to achieve critical mass for the effective running of an apprenticeship training agency model...

**Paul Butler, Twitter**

### Chartered Institution for Further Education relaunches



I'm confused. I fully support elevating professionalism within our sector but what is the CIFE proposing/ offering that isn't already provided by, or could be provided, by the AELP and AoC?

The application fee and annual membership cost are at a level that will exclude the organisations that need support in professional improvement so who's interests will they serve?

If you have an initial outlay of £8,000 burning a hole in your pocket, I'm sure there's a charity that would welcome the donation and you can then concentrate your efforts through existing channels.

Professionalism is born from action not status!

**Noel Johnson, website**



£5k membership and a £3K application review? That's an expensive, pointless and frankly nonsensical vanity project. Regardless of the accolades providers purchase, their reputation relies on the student experience. Get that right, and everything follows.

**David, website**

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## REPLY OF THE WEEK

### Should the Further Education Trust for Leadership be replaced?

Great piece in *FE Week* and richly deserved to FETL and its founder, the irrepressible Ruth Silver. FETL leaves us a great legacy and archive and a tremendous achievement of research and ideas to keep FE rightly at the front of education in UK.

**Gordon Marsden, Twitter**



I wonder how chartered status will benefit college customers? Shouldn't colleges be doing their best to provide quality provision with/without being chartered? Looks like more £ being spent on what failed before. How is this different? Eye on the wrong ball?

**Stefan Drew, Twitter**

### Here are 3 lessons Covid taught us about learners with autism



Well done to Jeannie Christina from South and City College Birmingham on sharing her experiences of supporting learners with autism during lockdown.

**Laura Burley, Twitter**

### Movers and Shakers: edition 350



Great to see Cheryl Swales included.

**Rebecca, Twitter**

## Bulletin

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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**Lisa Wilson**

Group director of apprenticeships and employer services, Nottingham College

**Start date** March 2021

**Previous job**

Director of apprenticeships, RNN Group

**Interesting fact**

She has run the Manchester half marathon and taken part in a number of 'Tough Mudders'.

# Movers & Shakers

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



**John Mothersole**

Chair, The Sheffield College

**Start date** April 2021

**Previous job**

Chief executive, Sheffield City Council

**Interesting fact**

He has a banjo, guitar, clarinet and saxophone, and dabbles with them all but has mastered none – although he has conquered the piano.



**Chris Malish**

Principal, Hull College

**Start date** May 2021

**Previous job**

Deputy chief executive, Bradford College

**Interesting fact**

He achieved the qualification to become a lifeguard at age 14, though never ended up being one.



**Damian Hinds**

Chair, T Levels All Party Parliamentary Group

**Start date** April 2021

**Concurrent job**

MP for East Hampshire

**Interesting fact**

Before he was elected to Parliament, he worked for almost 20 years in the hospitality business, including in hotels and pubs.

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

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