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FRIDAY, MAY 21, 2021 | EDITION 354

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National college closes without ever having opened

FRASER WHIELDON

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Exclusive

One of the government's once-vaunted national colleges is being wound up – without ever opening, *FE Week* can reveal.

A notice to dissolve was posted on the National College for Onshore Oil and Gas (NCOOG) Companies House profile last week, seven years after it was originally announced.

Its former interim managing director Martin York said there was “no requirement” to proceed with the college following a government review into the industry.

“Its provision was dependent upon the UK government granting permission for the onshore oil and gas industry to extract shale gas via rock fracturing in order to proceed,” York told *FE Week* in a joint comment with Blackpool and the Fylde College, which is where NCOOG was set to be based.

The government subsequently imposed a moratorium on fracking which “contributed to the industry decision that it no longer had a UK skills shortage and as such there was no requirement to proceed with the National College Onshore Oil and Gas”.

More than £5 million of government capital funding had been earmarked for the college, but York claimed this was never drawn down.

The Department for Education said the college had received £429,000 in research funding since its inception.

A spokesperson for the department added that the energy industry and government focus had “changed since the initial proposals to establish the National College for Onshore Oil and Gas”.

“Given the change of landscape, the DfE and Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy felt it was unlikely that the industry would be seeking to train apprentices at the rate which was originally anticipated in the short term and we therefore were content with the college's



proposals to dissolve its operations.”

News of NCOOG's abrupt collapse comes in the same week it was announced a second of the five national colleges had dissolved.

After facing insolvency, the flagship national college for HS2, now called the National College for Advanced Transport and Infrastructure (NCATI), has been closed by ministers and relaunched as a subsidiary of a university.

Similarly, the National College for Creative Industries (NCCI) dissolved and handed over its courses to a college and private training provider in February 2020 after years of surviving only on government bailouts.

Tens of millions of pounds have been pumped into the national colleges programme since government announced plans to open five of them in the 2015 spending review, which said they would “train an estimated 21,000 students by 2020 in industries central to the productivity agenda, such as digital and high-speed rail”.

Tom Richmond, a former Department for Education special adviser turned director of think-tank EDSK, said: “The demise of yet another national college emphasises why top-down solutions to improving the skills system are always likely to struggle.

“New initiatives, new buildings and new equipment are often an expensive and inefficient way to meet the needs of different industry sectors, but the lack of policy memory among government departments and civil servants means that such mistakes are repeated

with alarming regularity.”

Richmond said the onus was now on the Institutes of Technology (IoT), providers of higher technical skills developed in collaboration between higher and further education providers, “to ensure they do not suffer the same fate”.

Twelve IoTs based around England were given the go-ahead by the Department for Education in 2019, and a process is currently ongoing to approve another eight.

NCOOG was originally announced by sector representative body UK Onshore Oil and Gas, which York chairs, in 2014.

In April 2017, it was revealed the plans to launch the NCOOG had stalled, and its launch date of September that year had been pushed back.

In 2019, UK Onshore Oil and Gas told *FE Week* the college's further development was “on hold” while “greater clarity and progress by way of timing and the scale of production activities is ascertained”.

The college was to be based at Blackpool and the Fylde College, with principal Bev Robinson serving as one of the national college's directors.

Blackpool and the Fylde College has since put forward a bid to open an Institute of Technology.

Funding troubles have bedevilled the national colleges programme: NCATI had to take a £4.55 million bailout from the Department for Education to sign off its 2017/18 accounts and was placed in formal intervention in December 2019. It has now been reformed as a new institution, part of the University of Birmingham.

NCCI made it through 2017/18 as a “going concern” only thanks to a £600,000 bailout from the DfE, as *FE Week* reported in June. It now licences its provision to South Essex College and Access Creative College.

The two remaining national colleges are Ada National College for Digital Skills, based in London and Manchester, and the National College for Nuclear, which is split between two hubs: one at Lakes College in Cumbria and another at Bridgwater & Taunton College.



Bev Robinson

'Middle-class grab' on apprenticeship reforms confirmed by new analysis

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From front

Exclusive

The apprenticeship reforms are increasingly disadvantaging people from low-income areas, new *FE Week* analysis has revealed.

Since the new-style employer-led standards were first introduced in 2015, latest government figures show there has not only been a decline in starts, but also a far smaller percentage of them are from those living in the most deprived areas.

In 2015, 26 per cent of all apprenticeship starts lived in the "most deprived" areas, a figure that has fallen each year to just 18 per cent by the end of 2020.

For higher level apprenticeships this has fallen each year from 22 per cent to 14 per cent by the end of 2020.

Conversely, 14 per cent of all apprenticeship starts lived in the "least deprived" areas, a figure that had risen to 19 per cent by the end of 2020. This figure hits 23 per cent when only higher level apprenticeships are taken into account.

These latest findings come in the same week that apprenticeships minister Gillian Keegan expressed concern at an education select committee hearing that university-goers could "squeeze out" those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The worry within the current government is echoed by that of a former apprenticeships minister, Anne Milton, who told the same committee in 2017 that fears of a "middle-class grab" on apprenticeships are "valid".

FE Week tried to update more detailed analysis from 2018/19, undertaken by the Sutton Trust for their Making Degree Apprenticeships Work for Social Mobility report.



Gillian Keegan

At that time, just 13 per cent of apprentices on degree apprenticeships lived in the most deprived areas. But, without explanation, the government has stopped publishing deprivation data separately for levels 6 and 7.

When *FE Week* asked for the deprivation figures, which until 2018/19 had been routinely published, the DfE said they would treat the enquiry as a Freedom of Information request.

Sir Peter Lampl, founder and chair of the Sutton Trust, said: "Higher and degree level apprenticeships hold such promise for social mobility, by offering young people a career-focused – and debt-free – alternative to university degrees. Yet as this latest analysis shows, low-income young people are being squeezed out of the best apprenticeships by the middle classes.

"While it is good that the Department for Education has recognised these concerns, we need action now. As a starter, we need better data on who is starting these apprenticeships, so that we know where efforts to widen access should be focused. We should also prioritise levy funding on younger, newer starters and a proportion

of the levy should be spent on widening participation."

The Department for Education was asked how concerned it was about the findings and what was being done to help more people from deprived communities to access apprenticeship opportunities.

A spokesperson said: "As we recover from the pandemic, we are focused on supporting as many people as possible to gain the skills they need to start a rewarding career or retrain.

"Apprenticeships will continue to play a vital role in this and we are continuing to support employers large and small to offer more opportunities, including through our incentive offer.

"We recognise more needs to be done to ensure everyone, no matter their background or where they live, can access the training they need to progress.

"Our reforms to post-16 education will do just that by making it a legal requirement for employers and providers to collaborate so that the training on offer meets the need of business and local communities."

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£250m of apprenticeship funding goes back to Treasury

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Exclusive

Apprenticeship funding to the tune of £250 million was handed back to the Treasury in 2020-21, *FE Week* can reveal.

The Department for Education said it had to surrender the money as demand for apprenticeships from employers was “lower than expected” partly due to the impact of Covid-19.

Government statistics show that apprenticeship starts were down 18 per cent in the 2019/20 academic year compared to the previous year, falling from 393,400 to 322,600.

AELP chief executive Jane Hickie said with workplaces closed, the pandemic was “always going to have an impact on starts and spend” but she sees no reason why “every penny” of the apprenticeships budget should not go to levy- and non-levy payers in future years as the economy recovers.

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

The levy policy was designed so that large employers wouldn't use all of their funds. The unspent money is meant to be recycled



and made available to small businesses who do not pay the levy to use to train their apprentices. Unspent funds are also used to top up levy funds by ten per cent as well as pay for English and maths teaching for relevant apprentices, among other things.

But because government refuses to share annual spending data, there are many misconceptions in the sector and national media that all apprenticeship funding that expires from levy accounts goes back to the Treasury.

The actual sum of apprenticeship funding surrendered to Treasury each year is published in the DfE's annual “estimates memorandum”.

The memorandum for 2021/22 was published this week and states: “Unspent funding of £250 million was surrendered at the 2020/21 Supplementary Estimate (as the demand for apprenticeships from employers was lower than expected during 2020/21, partly due to the impact that Covid-19 had on employers' recruitment plans).”

A DfE spokesperson confirmed the funding was returned to the Treasury, which is “usual practice” for “any underspends in overall departmental budgets by the end of the financial year”.

This isn't the first time the DfE has handed back lumps of apprenticeship funding to the

Treasury. In 2017/18 – the first year of the levy – around £300 million was surrendered.

The DfE claimed it did not surrender an apprenticeships underspend in 2018/19.

But £330 million was sent back to Treasury in 2019/20, despite concerns at the time that small employers had struggled to find providers with sufficient non-levy funds to train their apprentices, with some being turned away.

There have been numerous calls over the past year for unspent levy funding to be redistributed to other parts of the skills system or reinvested into apprenticeships.

The Labour Party, for example, wants any unspent levy funding to be used to subsidise the wages of apprentices as a way of boosting the number of people taking up the programmes.

Hickie said making use of the full apprenticeship budget in future can be “easily done if the government steadily lifts the limit on each small employers' starts but more likely we can anticipate levy-payers spending their entitlements again so that we end up with a repeat of the ‘hard choices’ planning”.

“It is a major reason why AELP agrees with *FE Week* that there should be much more transparency surrounding levy funding,” she added.



Jane Hickie

ESFA to select providers for reapplication to apprenticeships register in random order

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Exclusive

All providers on the apprenticeships register will be "randomly selected" to reapply in different phases over the next year, the Education and Skills Funding Agency has said.

The agency also confirmed that the register remains closed to new providers unless they offer training for critical workers, with no timeline for opening it up to all.

Officials in the ESFA controversially announced in April that they would require all active apprenticeship providers to reapply to the register of apprenticeship training

providers (RoATP) as they unveiled plans for a third refresh since 2017 to introduce "more stringent entry criteria".

Providers must, for example, for the first time prove their "experience of managing and delivering training to learners and are established within the sectors in which you intend to deliver".

The agency began a "phased reapplication" process this week but has so far failed to publicly explain the format of this approach.

After *FE Week* enquired about this, a spokesperson said: "ESFA will randomly select active providers on the register to invite them to reapply in phases, over the next 12 months from May 2021 to March 2022."

Providers will only be able to access the service if they have received an email

notification inviting them to reapply. They will receive an invite six weeks before each one-month application window opens.

The cost of refreshing RoATP was revealed in an impact assessment report for the Skills Bill this week.

It totalled £1.2 million as it involved 19 staff in just under two years, and the assessment of over 3,500 providers.

The agency also confirmed to *FE Week* that the register is currently closed and only open "by exception to those providers that offer training for critical workers and have an employer endorsement to support their application".

A spokesperson added that they will keep this approach to targeted entry to the register "under review".



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SKILLS AND POST-16 EDUCATION BILL LAUNCHED

The key new measures you need to know

BILLY CAMDEN

BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

From front

The first draft of the landmark Skills and Post-16 Education Bill was officially laid before parliament this week.

It outlines the legislation behind the government's planned reforms for FE set out in this year's white paper, including local skills improvements plans, strengthened intervention powers for the education secretary and a flexible lifelong loans system.

There are also new regulations for independent training providers, FE teacher training and an expanded role for the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.

The Bill will now be debated in the House of Lords and Commons in the coming months, which could lead to amendments. A second reading is scheduled for June 15.

FE Week has the pulled out the key things you need to know.

'Duty' to have 'regard' for local skills improvement plans

A statutory underpinning has been placed on local skills improvement plans, introducing a power for the secretary of state for education to designate employer representative bodies to lead the development of the plans.

A "duty" has been placed on all colleges and training providers to co-operate in the development of, and then "have regard" to, the plans.

There will also be a duty introduced for all FE providers to review how well the education or training they provide meets local needs, and assess what action the institution might take to ensure it is best placed to meet local needs.

Each college and provider will be required to publish their review on their website.

New powers to force mergers

Government plans to extend the statutory intervention powers



currently applicable to colleges under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

This measure will enable the secretary of state for education to intervene where there has been a failure to "meet local needs", and to direct structural change, such as mergers, in order to secure improvement.

It is not clear at this stage how the government will determine when a college is not meeting local needs.

New list of private providers, which can restrict subcontracting

A new list of independent training providers will be launched to "indicate which providers have met conditions that are considered to prevent or mitigate risks associated with the disorderly exit of a provider".

It will be separate from the register of apprenticeship training providers and requires ITPs to register.

Any provider not on the list will not be granted funding agreements or be allowed to subcontract with another provider who is on the list.

Conditions to get on the list may relate to whether a provider has a student support plan; insurance cover; willingness to give access to information about the owners; and those relating to the relevant provider taking action specified in directions given by the secretary of state.

The government said there were 64 unplanned provider exits in the academic year 2019/20, and there are delays in the current system finding a new provider, which affects learner experiences.

This legislation is hoped to address gaps in these requirements.

Additional functions for IfATE

A new job is being given to the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education to define and approve new categories of technical qualifications that relate to employer-led standards and occupations in



different ways.

The quango will be required to cooperate with Ofqual to create a "single approval gateway" for technical qualifications.

The institute's new powers will allow it to charge a fee as part of the qualification approval process and introduce a moratorium on the approval of further qualifications where there is evidence of proliferation.

It will also have a requirement to review approved technical qualifications, withdrawing their approval where they are no longer performing as expected.

Introduce a 'lifelong loan entitlement'

The government plans to introduce a new loans system that allows people to study more flexibly and space out their studies across their lifetime.

Named the "lifelong loan entitlement", learners will be given four years' worth of loan funding and be able to transfer credits between FE and HE providers. The goal is to encourage more modular provision and part-time study.

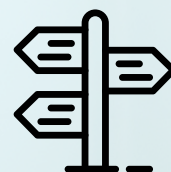
A full consultation on this new entitlement is expected to run this year.

Regulations to improve FE teacher training

The government describes the quality of initial teacher training (ITT) as an essential ingredient in the FE sector.

An "enabling clause" to bring about required changes and improvements to the current system if they cannot be achieved through non-legislative means has been handed to the education secretary in the Bill.

Regulations may include making provision for accrediting an institution as a provider of specified ITT of FE courses; accrediting specified courses; prohibiting the provision of specified ITT FE courses by an institution.



SKILLS AND POST-16 EDUCATION BILL LAUNCHED

DfE accused of 'power-grab' over colleges

BILLY CAMDEN

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The much-heralded Skills Bill contains a Department for Education "power-grab" and will "fail to meet the scale of the challenge that years of neglect" of FE have caused, Labour has said.

Writing for *FE Week* (see page 21), shadow skills minister Toby Perkins warned that many "smaller" colleges will be looking nervously at the government's expressed right to force mergers "without recourse to local circumstances or consultation".

He said there is also "little expectation" of a role for metro mayors and nor does there appear to be "any enthusiasm for Local Enterprise Partnerships".

Perkins added that in the "many hundreds of meetings" he has held during his first year in this post, "I confess I have never heard anybody suggest that a more hands-on role for Gavin Williamson was central to ensuring Britain is equipped with a well-skilled workforce".

Yet here, the education secretary "awards himself new powers to intervene in 'failing' colleges, to merge or replace colleges, to select or to sack 'employer representative' bodies, and to dictate whether colleges are fulfilling the requirements these bodies lay down".

"Poorly defined local skills plans risk shutting out metro mayors and combined authorities, many of which have democratic accountability for local skills and economic regeneration," Perkins added.

Local skills improvement plans led by employers and new powers for the education secretary to intervene when colleges "fail to meet local need" are central new pieces of legislation in the Skills Bill.

Batting for the government in this week's edition of *FE Week* (see page 20), skills minister Gillian Keegan insisted that the Bill is "not about taking back control of

colleges".

"This is about ensuring we can continue to sustainably offer high-quality education and training to as many people as possible, and that the training on offer meets the needs of employers and local communities," she added.

Other sector leaders have cautiously welcomed the reforms.

Tom Bewick, chief executive of the Federation of Awarding Bodies, said the Bill gives "sweeping new powers to end FE college autonomy as we know it".

"Power without proper resources is futile," he continued. "And too much centralisation of power without devolving resources to individuals, employers and local communities will not work either."

Bewick said the federation "broadly supports" the direction of travel of the reforms but will "examine carefully" the clauses that appear to change the focus of independently regulated qualifications, particularly those that give the Institute for Apprenticeship and Technical Education new powers to accredit technical courses.

"In no circumstances must we return to a situation where public agencies are marking their own homework when it comes to ensuring public confidence in apprenticeships and qualifications. That's why Ofqual was set up in the first place."

David Hughes, chief executive of the Association of Colleges, said the Bill puts post-16 education, skills and colleges in the "forefront of the government's priorities as look to a post-

pandemic and post-Brexit world".

He added that his association is looking forward to hearing the proposals on what will trigger interventions and how DfE proposes to measure and assess the degree to which colleges are meeting local needs.

"Getting the balance between accountability and intervention powers is a bit like walking a tightrope, and requires careful consideration and fine tuning, but colleges are confident that they meet local learner and employer needs, so we're confident that there is a way to ensure the measures are fair and proportionate."

Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief executive Jane Hickie welcomed the "employer-informed approach" and is "generally comfortable with the direction of travel that the Bill is pursuing".

She said the House of Lords can play a "very useful role" in probing the government on how the legislation's clauses on local skills improvement plans will apply in practice to independent providers, especially as the impact assessment document states that the duty to "have regard" to the plans "does not mean that a provider is required to implement or deliver the skills needs outlined in the plan".

Another key reform in the Bill is the introduction of a new register that private providers will need to be on to be eligible for funding and subcontracting.

Hickie said AELP has "no argument" with new legislative measures to protect the interests of learners.

However, "where we have serious concerns is that being on the list will, according to the government, have 'significant impact' on the costs of smaller providers because, for example, of the imposition of professional indemnity insurance.

"If this is a backdoor method of trying to reduce the number of ITPs in the market, it could backfire because many are either specialist providers or serve areas out of easy reach of a local college."



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Cross-party group urges reversal of AEB clawback

BILLY CAMDEN

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A cross-party group of MPs has called on the education secretary to reverse his adult education budget clawback plans to give colleges "financial security" amid the pandemic.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on FE has also urged ministers to give students leaving college a fully funded extra year of study and introduce a new fund to support disadvantaged 16- to 19-year-olds to help make up for lost learning.

The members state that these shorter-term decisions are crucial to support the government's overarching goals on skills reform as outlined in the Skills Bill this week.

Led by chair and Conservative MP Peter Aldous, the group has penned a letter to education secretary Gavin Williamson with the demands and urging him to announce his Covid catch-up plan.

It comes after Education Policy Institute research claimed it will take £13.5 billion to make up for lost learning.

The MPs' letter states that colleges are currently facing "a number of challenges" in delivering the catch-up support needed, which is "in no small part due to the fact that college finances have been hit hard as a consequence of the significant disruption caused by the pandemic, and compounded by the recent decision by the ESFA to claw back adult skills funding from colleges".

Announced in March and forced by the Treasury, the clawback decision means that any college that delivers less than 90 per cent of their national adult education allocation must repay the difference between that threshold and their actual delivery.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency has also ruled out a business case process whereby colleges could put forward reasons as to why they should cling on to the money if they did not reach the



Houses Of Parliament

threshold.

Research by the Association of Colleges suggests that this decision will in effect be an almost £60 million cut to adult funding, announced eight months into the academic year that it applies to, giving colleges little time to reduce costs.

"We are calling on your department to take a business case approach"

The APPG is calling on Williamson to revise the approach for the ESFA to take a business case approach.

Last month, colleges asked the prime minister to intervene in the "devastating" clawback plans, warning that they risk courses being scrapped and redundancies.

To go with this, the APPG has said a new "simple, flexible" fund should be introduced to give students a free extra year of college. The fund would allow colleges to "design programmes lasting between six months and one year to meet

needs and outcomes, with a bursary to support some of the most disadvantaged learners to participate".

A school and college leavers scheme was introduced last year by government, which gives 18- and 19-year-olds who are struggling to find work due to Covid-19 the opportunity to study "targeted" level 2 and 3 courses for a third year free of charge. The fund was only available for the 2020/21 academic year.

Lastly, the APPG wants Williamson to provide colleges with "targeted support for the most disadvantaged learners through a 16-to-19 student premium", just like the pupil premium in schools.

"We ask that the student premium be paid to 16-, 17- and 18-year-olds to reflect the government's commitment to supporting the needs of young people, the skills agenda and the wider governments social mobility goals."

This student premium would cost around £100 million using the secondary school eligibility criteria and funding level, the group added.

The letter is undersigned by Aldous and other members of the group including Lord Blunkett, Baroness Garden of Frognal, Stephen Farry MP and Emma Hardy MP.

For sale! Land of insolvent college goes on the market for £580K

FRASER WHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Exclusive

England's first college to be put through the government's insolvency regime is selling off a huge parcel of land, as the local community fights to reopen its popular farm shop.

A total of 45.42 acres – equivalent to 25 football pitches – has been put on the market for £580,000. The college entered education administration in May 2019.

A brochure for the sale by estate agent Knight Frank said the five lots up for grabs are separated into various field enclosures and would be "suitable for agricultural, equestrian or other leisure uses".

The college and its sister institution West Kent and Ashford College (WKAC), which entered administration in August 2019, have seen their campuses and sites split up between local providers.

Capel Manor College, EKC (East Kent College) Group, and North Kent College (NKC) took over the two colleges' educational provision over the course of last year.

Administrators BDO declined to comment on what the proceeds of this sale will go towards. Their latest administration report shows they have received 177 claims from unsecured creditors, totalling £20.8 million, to date.

Meanwhile, a petition is running to ask North Kent College, which took over the main Hadlow College site in Tonbridge, to keep its on-site farm shop open.

At the time of writing, there are 644 signatures on a Change.org petition entitled Save Hadlow College Farm Shop.

The shop was closed last year by Hadlow College before North Kent College took over in August 2020.

It was not part of the transfer of facilities to NKC and is not part of the land sale.

BDO's latest progress report on Hadlow College's administration, published in December 2020, says a marketing exercise was undertaken to sell the farm shop, but there was "insufficient interest to support a commercial transaction", which directly led to its closure.

The petition, started last year, calls on NKC to reopen the shop as it has "played a vital role in our neighbourhood for many years. During lockdown, its staff have gone above and beyond to serve the community. Please help us not to lose it," it asks readers.

Petition organiser Anne Waddingham told *FE Week* they had held out hope for the facility to reopen after local MP Tom Tugendhat met with NKC's principal David Gleed. Tugendhat wrote on his website



last September, following the meeting, that the closure of the shop "has hit the community hard".

But: "I was encouraged following my conversation with David that there could be a future which can serve local residents.

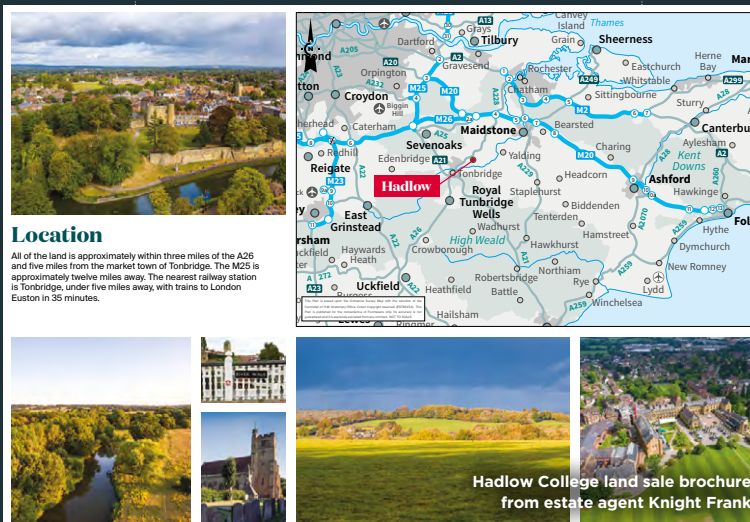
"In the case of the farm shop, North Kent College are considering how a shop in this location, with alternatives not far away, could be run sustainably."

The shop was not transferred to NKC as it was not directly linked to the college's education provision, Tugendhat wrote.

But NKC was "looking at how a farm shop can better work with the courses students are studying at the college, so that there is benefit for those learning too".

Waddingham said she had "heard nothing since then, which is disappointing".

An NKC spokesperson said it has "never operated the farm shop and at present have no plans to reopen it".



Location

All of the land is approximately within three miles of the A26 and five miles from the market town of Tonbridge. The M25 is approximately twelve miles away. The nearest railway station is Tonbridge, under five miles away, with trains to London Euston in 35 minutes.

Provider challenges Ofsted for 'factually incorrect' report

FRASER WHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Exclusive

A care worker apprenticeship provider is challenging a damaging Ofsted report and accused inspectors of lacking the knowledge to judge their provision.

Flexible Training Ltd was found to have made 'insufficient progress' in all three areas of an early monitoring visit for its provision of adult care apprenticeships to 21 learners.

One key criticism by inspectors was that the Hertfordshire-based provider's safeguarding arrangements were "inappropriate and a conflict of interest". The owner of their apprentices' employer is the designated lead but is not employed by the provider, so is "not impartial" to learners' needs.

Leaders were also lambasted for not providing an "ambitious curriculum", and for not enabling apprentices to "develop new knowledge and skills beyond the care qualification".

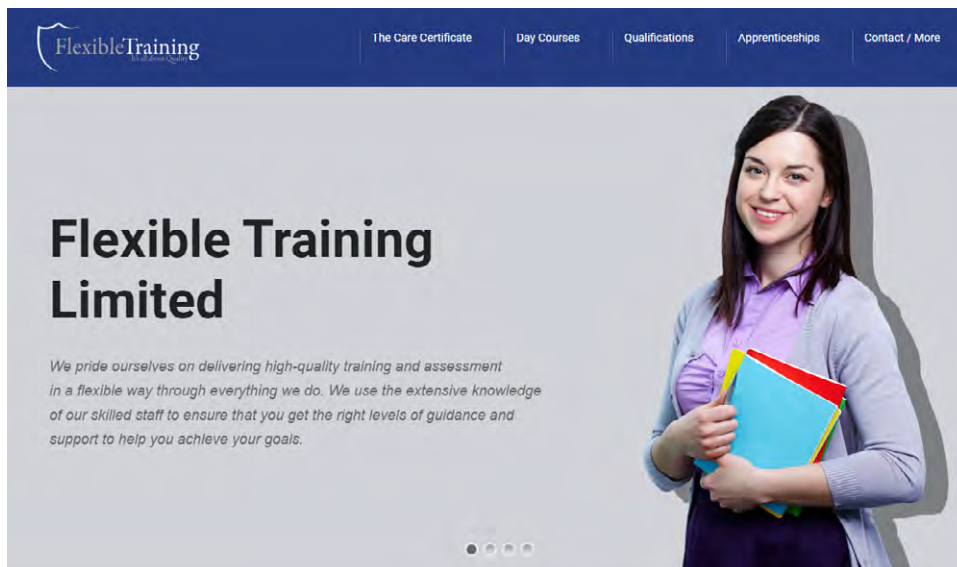
As a result of the 'insufficient' judgment, the provider now faces a ban on starts under Education and Skills Funding Agency rules.

Flexible Training has been delivering standards-based apprenticeships since October 2018, and when asked for a response to the report, the provider's managing director Jason Dudderidge listed a series of complaints about the way in which they were inspected.

He criticised the inspectors' "lack of specialist knowledge" of the care sector. "I believe that had they been competent in this sector, they would have been able to inspect in a more positive, productive and realistic way.

"Ofsted inspectors need to have experience in this sector as it is too regulated to guess your way around," he insisted.

Dudderidge also accused the watchdog of publishing inaccuracies. He said the safeguarding lead was previously employed by the provider and then left to start her own care



company but was still listed as one of their safeguarding leads.

This was addressed "immediately" after Ofsted flagged the issue, with responsibilities being transferred to a member of staff before the inspection in March was finished.

Ofsted also found that although the provider's assessors have continued progress reviews for apprentices during the pandemic, they have "not continued to teach apprentices to enable them to make good progress".

Apprentices, who all work for one domiciliary care employer, also "do not benefit from high-quality off-the-job training".

The curriculum is not tailored for apprentices' existing knowledge and skills appropriately, the report adds, and assessors do not make "effective" use of available online resources to teach apprentices so they can make good progress.

Yet Dudderidge said this was all "factually incorrect," as evidence of the apprentices' qualification requirements, mandatory training requirements and the apprentices' prior learning was shown to the inspectors.

How teaching practices had been adapted to the Covid-19 pandemic; how apprentices have

progressed in a timely manner; and the fact that none was overdue were also presented to the watchdog, he added. But, claimed Dudderidge, all this was "not considered and disregarded".

Inspectors asked to visit the apprentices' workplace, but Dudderidge said they were not allowed because of coronavirus restrictions, which he alleges "did not please" the watchdog's team.

The report notes assessors have been unable to visit workplaces for face-to-face reviews and observations. "They constantly challenged us in regard to visiting care homes which, as the country, and the world, knows, is something that has not been permitted, not even for residents' families, since March 2020, in line with government guidance," Dudderidge said.

"It was apparent the lead inspector 'did not like us' and as a result of this she led the inspection, clearly influencing the other inspector at times with her opinions, as she has expressed within this report."

He told *FE Week* he intends to formally challenge the inspection result.

An Ofsted spokesperson said it "would be inappropriate for us to comment on individual cases or complaints".

Post-16 Capacity Fund launches with tight deadline of June 14

BILLY CAMDEN
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

A new £83 million fund has been launched to ensure colleges can accommodate an expected demographic increase in 16-to-19-year-olds – but it comes with a “frustrating” deadline for bids.

The Post-16 Capacity Fund was promised in chancellor Rishi Sunak's spending review in November and opened for applications on Tuesday.

Announcing the launch of the fund, the Department for Education said: "Providers are invited to bid for a share of the fund, which will support projects to create more space for areas where there is due to be a demographic increase in 16-to-19-year-olds in the 2022/23 academic year."

"This could include building more classroom space or technical teaching facilities, so providers can continue to offer places to every young person who needs one."

The minimum project value for each college is £100,000, while the maximum has been set at £4 million.

However, bids for the capacity fund must be submitted within a month, by June 14.

William Baldwin, principal of Brighton Hove & Sussex Sixth Form College, said the additional capital is “welcome” but took issue with only being given 27 days to submit a bid to the level of detail being requested, which needs to involve multiple quotes and architectural drawings.

"Unless you have a shovel-ready project you're



James Kewin

not going to be successful, which is frustrating," he added.

James Kewin, deputy chief executive of the Sixth Form Colleges Association, described the deadline as “one major drawback”, but insisted his organisation is “confident that many of our members will still take this opportunity to secure expansion funding”.

He added that the new fund is a “hugely positive development” and a “real step forward” that will help institutions to accommodate the 260,000 additional 16-to-19-year-olds who will participate in education in the coming years.

Colleges are eligible for the funding this year, and if the initiative is extended in the spending review, they will be eligible in future years.

Kewin said the fact the funding is only for one year should not stop a college from submitting a bid next month.

“In the absence of multi-year funding

deals, we have to take opportunities like the capacity fund when they come along, and we are confident that many of our members will do exactly that.”

Only sixth-form colleges, 16-to-19 academies, 16-to-19 free schools such as university technical colleges, and general FE colleges are in scope.

Independent training providers, local authorities and school sixth-forms have been excluded.

Commenting on the exclusion of private training providers, Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief executive Jane Hickie said: "The capacity fund would be welcome if it's enabling parity for school leavers and other

learners, for example, living on the same housing estate, regardless of where they choose to access their opportunity.

“There is a clear need for ensuring these opportunities are aligned with both classroom and work-based provision. Levelling up requires recognition that post-16 classroom opportunities are not easily accessible everywhere.”

The DfE said independent providers are not eligible as the funding is “aimed at providing sustainable investment in long-term educational assets”.

They added that for school sixth-forms, which are also excluded, there remains an element of the Condition Improvement Fund that is for expansions.

The capacity fund is separate to the £1.5 billion FE capital fund that is being run over the course of this parliament.



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Taskforce launched to attract skills investment to the UK

FRASER WHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

A team of education and business leaders has been assembled to drive the use of skills in “levelling up” and attracting investment to the UK economy.

The Skills Taskforce for Global Britain, commissioned and supported by – but independent of – WorldSkills UK and accountancy firm EY, was launched at the former organisation’s virtual International Skills Summit this week.

Chaired by former Confederation of British Industry director general John Cridland, the 11-strong taskforce will also include EY’s lead partner for learning and skills in the UK Josie Cluer, DfE non-executive director Ruby McGregor-Smith and skills sector leader Ann Limb. WorldSkills UK chief executive Neil Bentley-Gockmann will oversee the committee.

At the summit, hosted by Dudley College of Technology and sponsored by NCFE, Bentley-Gockmann said the taskforce will “highlight the crucial role of high-quality skills for employers in internationally traded sectors to attract inward investment to all parts of the UK – and help level up our economy.”

“Bolstering our ability to attract international investment will bring huge benefits in terms of jobs, technology and innovation – not just in big multi-national firms, but in clusters of smaller firms and supply chains across the towns, cities, regions and nations.”

The taskforce will be preparing a “Roadmap to 2030” which will set out how, by the end of this decade, the skills of the UK’s young people will be recognised as attracting investment in the UK.

Questions the roadmap will seek to answer include how our skills compare with competitor countries, what are international investors looking for in terms of skills in the UK, and whether all parts of the UK able to attract inward investment.

Cridland said the taskforce “has much work to do,” as: “With global competition for inward investment getting fiercer every year, the UK must be able to add world-class skills to its international calling card.”

The taskforce will build on the work of the



WorldSkills UK Centre of Excellence, a three-year pilot project using WorldSkills UK skills coaches to train up teaching staff. Applications for the centre’s second wave opened on Monday.

WorldSkills UK also announced this week that it is signing up to a host of partnerships with overseas counterparts, which will mean greater sharing of skills expertise and more pressure testing for our competitors.

Thursday saw the UK formally sign its first partnership with Chinese Taipei.

WorldSkills UK is expecting that a total of 11 partnerships with WorldSkills members will be agreed by the end of the year, including with South Korea, Japan, Russia, India and France.

Bentley-Gockmann said the new partnerships “harness our global network and sharing international best practice, and will enable us to build on our work to boost standards in higher technical education, supporting young people to develop the high-quality skills needed by employers and investors in key sectors”.

WorldSkills Chinese Taipei’s official delegate Chen-Yang Shih called the partnership a “win-win situation”, adding: “The agreement symbolises a great step towards closer collaboration and stronger partnership.

“It provides a fantastic opportunity to work closely to mainstream innovation and excellence in skills development to help the youth build and strengthen their

capacity and explore their potential.”

WorldSkills UK says the partnerships will have a “key role” in shaping the work of its new, independent Skills Taskforce for Global Britain.

The full list of taskforce members:

John Cridland CBE (chair)

Josie Cluer (partner EY)

Baroness Ruby McGregor-Smith CBE (president British Chambers of Commerce, non-exec board member Department of Education)

Neil Rami (chief executive West Midlands Growth Company)

Chris Sutton (Welsh government’s Ministerial Advisory Board for the Economy, former chair CBI Wales)

Linda Urquhart OBE (non-executive director Coutts and Edinburgh Airport)

Stephen Burgin (board director Offshore Wind Growth Partnership, chair of governors South Staffordshire College, former vice president GE Power Europe, pro-chancellor Staffordshire University)

Andrew Hodgson OBE (former chair North East Local Enterprise Partnership, Airbus and BAE Systems)

Dr Ann Limb CBE (independent business chair of the UK Innovation Corridor)

Marie-Thérèse McGivern (Strategic Investment Board Northern Ireland, Skills Advisory Board Belfast Region City Deal, chair Belfast Maritime Board)

Dr Adam Marshall (adviser CMI and Flint Global, former DG British Chambers of Commerce)

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Applications with a current cv, should be submitted by COB **Tuesday 8th June 2021** to **alexpayne@landex.org.uk** Potential applicants are welcome to discuss the position informally with the Chief Executive. Tel: **01604 550109**

Closing date: COB Tuesday 8th June 2021



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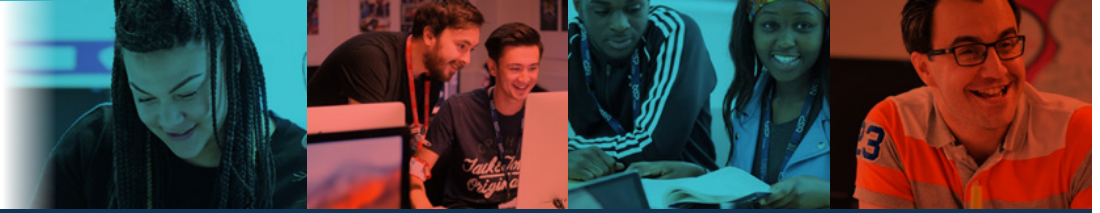
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For more information on each role and to apply, please visit: <https://www.uspcollege.ac.uk/about-us/working-at-usp-college/>

Closing Date:
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<https://www.sparsholt.ac.uk/college/jobs/>

HR@sparsholt.ac.uk

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- Health and Social Care Lecturer
- ICT full and part time Lecturers
- Electrical Lecturer Full or Part Time
- Built Environment Lecturer

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Profile

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
CONTACT US NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Introducing

LARISSA KENNEDY

President, National Union of Students

‘There’s a paternalisation of FE students’

JESS STAUFENBERG
@STAUFENBERGJ

Almost one year in to her two-year role, Larissa Kennedy, one of the youngest ever presidents of the National Union of Students, explains why she wants louder FE campuses

Larissa Kennedy, president of the National Union of Students, is on a specific mission to increase the voice of FE students, she tells me. The public may be used to university students going on

marches and protests – prompting the ire of a government who now claim free speech is at risk on higher education campuses – but what about further education learners? Can they, too, speak loudly enough that the government notices them?

“We need to empower FE students to have a say in a way that’s authentic to them,” explains Kennedy. “There’s this paternalisation of FE students – this energy that doesn’t centre their agency. We want to turn that on its head.”

Before speaking with me, Kennedy was on

a call with FE students at Leicester College helping them to coordinate protest action. The students are worried about the effect of the government’s adult education budget clawback on the college, a measure also currently being opposed by a cross-party group of MPs.

“They are infuriated that the Education and Skills Funding Agency are doing this! They’ve set up a petition and have got more than 5,000 signatures,” Kennedy tells me. “So I’m talking with them about how do we amplify that? How do we get it over the 10,000 mark, how do we

Profile

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

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get it the attention it deserves?"

She adds: "The question I often ask is, what's pissing you off? Then we turn that into action."

The fighting talk could sound blunt and formidable, but Kennedy grins for most of the time she's speaking and has a way of putting things that makes her sound both passionate and pretty reasonable at the same time. It may be a result of not being brought up in a stridently political household, but one in which injustices were explored through personal stories: a skill Kennedy herself has inherited. She's also been on both sides of society in her home stomping ground of Croydon in south London – rubbing shoulders with both the well-off, and everybody else.

"I think perhaps our household was more political than my mum knew at the time, mainly because of the things she was reflecting on to me," she says. Kennedy's mother is a teacher and was working in one of the most deprived schools in the neighbourhood, she says.

"She told me about having to give apples to kids who were hungry, or having to clean their shirts. She'd explain it was impossible for them to concentrate, because they were hungry and exhausted."

Her father would tell her how, when he'd moved over from St Vincent in the Caribbean, people had thrown bricks at his head as he and others tried to go to school. Such tales set Kennedy ticking on to the power of education, she says.

"It wasn't an intentional politicisation. But it made me question why people are so afraid of certain groups of people getting access to

education. What is in there that people are trying to hide?"

Kennedy is all praise for her primary school years, and particularly about the personal encouragement she got from Mrs Berkeley-Agyepong, her year 6 teacher. "I always loved school, I just loved learning," she beams. As a small child she'd be found trying to read the newspaper, sometimes retrieved by her mother if the content was considered too stark for a four-year-old.

There's a West Indies phrase for someone like her, Kennedy continues – a person who is "inner" (although she's not sure how it's spelled). "It's like a positive version of nosy. I want to be able to read everything, want to get into everything."

The personality trait paid off, and Kennedy won an academic scholarship, and a bursary place, to Croydon High School, a fee-paying private girls school in a different part of the neighbourhood. The experience was both formative and uncomfortable at the same time, and clearly leaves her feeling uncomfortable now.

"It was a massively different environment. I saw very starkly the difference between the friends in my area, and the people who were at my school, and it almost radicalised me. I could just see the avenues of opportunities were really different for us. At my school we went swimming every week because there was a pool and my friends from home weren't doing that. We had a library – it wasn't even just a library, it was called the resource centre."

When she met her old friends afterwards for chicken and chips, their different days soon became obvious. "I was in four choirs," laughs Kennedy. She continues more seriously, with a certain frankness. "It's something I struggle with. I don't know if I would be doing what I'm doing now, or if I would have gone to my university, and that makes me wholly uncomfortable. Here I am, campaigning against fees." She says she adopted a kind of



Kennedy at a summit organised by Women Political Leaders in Iceland in 2019

"character" act to fit in during those years.

With French, Spanish and English Literature A-levels under her belt, Kennedy then won a place at Warwick University to study politics, international studies and Hispanic studies. In fact, she's not finished it. She's still on a break from her degree, and should strictly be in Colombia for her year abroad. "I miss my degree so much," she joke-moans. Instead, she moved into student politics.

"The question I often ask is, what's pissing you off?"

It wasn't entirely surprising. Kennedy had already been a spokesperson for Girl Guides in sixth form, heading off to TV interviews during her late teens. She recalls being picked up by Sky News to give interviews before school and would have a "full face of makeup" on ready for 9am. Standing up for a good cause is a muscle she developed very early: her mum put her on the Girl Guides waiting list when she was four.

At Warwick, she became the freshers' representative for the anti-sexism society,



Kennedy presenting research on students of colour's experiences to the MP in the House of Commons (in 2019)

Profile

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and in her second year, she also became co-president of the anti-racism society.

Then a huge news story broke concerning the university two years ago, shocking much of the higher education sector. The BBC ran a special investigative programme on it: "Inside the Warwick University rape chat scandal". Young male students were writing horrific things to one another as "jokes" in a Facebook group chat. Comments included "rape the whole flat to teach them a lesson", as well as fantasies about named female students being abducted, chained up and urinated on. The young men had all given themselves names of notorious serial killers and serial rapists. Five were banned from the university, two of them for ten years. But when these two appealed, the university reduced the term to just 12 months.

"FE is one of the areas I really want to go big now"

"We were just completely flabbergasted," says Kennedy. "I spent the entire of second year fighting this, going out, galvanising people." Eventually, Warwick University launched a review into its disciplinary processes. By the end of it, Kennedy was well

known about the campus and students asked her to take a paid sabbatical role working for the student union. She became education officer and deputy president and during that tenure campaigned to get the university to pay an hourly wage to minority ethnic students contributing heavily to its decolonisation work.

"It was expected that we would continue this work, year after year. The university was using this to make itself more marketable, so why wasn't it being recognised as work?"

A black female member of staff at the university had said something to Kennedy that really stuck with her. "She said, 'Don't make yourself part of the black attainment gap while you're trying to fix it.'" With this in mind, Kennedy and her team secured pay for those students as official employees of the union.

Kennedy then tried to leave student



Kennedy at a Youth for Change protest campaigning for FGM training for teachers in 2017

politics, taking a placement with an organisation tackling gender injustice for a year. "I was like, I've done my work! I tried to escape," she chuckles. But her fellow campaigners rang her up to suggest she run for the president of the NUS against vice president Erica Ramos. Despite having no similarly impressive ranking within the NUS, she won the top role and began in July last year.

She also considers herself lucky: she swiped the role at an unusual time for the organisation. The NUS had completed an internal reform process after narrowly avoiding bankruptcy with a £3 million deficit in 2018, and had set itself a new course. One change was that the presidency would now be for two years, instead of one. Aged just 21, Kennedy had won the reins of power for longer than any of her predecessors.

"It's absolutely a good move for it to be two years. Now I feel like I've got my feet under the table. When I started, week six was the A-levels fiasco, and having to deal with that was incredibly difficult. Now I feel ready to take it bolder and bigger.

"FE is one of the areas I really want to go big now."

Kennedy and her team have set a target for engaging more FE students as part of their "new vision for education" campaign. Across both FE and HE, they want to mobilise 300,000 students this year. If she is going to galvanise more FE students into political action, then she draws on a formidable experience base of how to do it.



Kennedy speaking on sexual violence at Warwick University in 2018



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BLOOMSBURY EDUCATION

GILLIAN
KEEGANApprenticeships
and skills ministerThe Skills Bill is not
about taking back
control of colleges

Instances of serious failure are rare and the government wants to reduce interventions, writes Gillian Keegan

This week we introduced the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill in parliament. Not only did this mark an historic moment for education, it also signalled how serious we are about skills reform.

While the Bill is just one part of our wider reforms to post-16 education and training, many of which are being consulted on separately or are already in train, each of its nine measures will be vital in making sure we can progress this work.

I've been delighted at how much genuine support there is for our reforms, but I wanted to take this opportunity to set out why we need this legislation and why now.

First of all, I want to make clear this is not about taking back control of colleges. This is about ensuring we can continue to sustainably offer high-quality education and training to as many people as possible, and that the training on offer meets the needs of employers and local communities. This is central to our levelling-up agenda.

There are skills shortages throughout our economy, holding people back from working in highly skilled jobs and stopping employers getting the workforce they need.

We are also still recovering

from a global pandemic, which has significantly impacted opportunities for many people.

In 2019 employers reported that they were unable to fill a quarter of all vacant positions, due to not finding people with the right skills. Skills shortages accounted for 36 per cent of all construction vacancies, and 48 per cent of all manufacturing and skilled trade vacancies.

“This is about ensuring we can continue to sustainably offer high-quality education”

We need to act now to make sure everyone can gain the skills they, employers and the economy need to thrive.

If employers say they need more engineers or web designers, then it is crucial that we offer more

training that will meet that need.

This will support more people into work, including locally, so they are not forced to leave their hometowns to find well-paid jobs if they don't want to.

There are many colleges and providers that are doing a fantastic job and who are already collaborating successfully with employers to do this. We want to build on this and make sure this is replicated everywhere.

We will do this through our local skills improvement plans. The Bill will allow us to designate employer representative bodies to lead this work and make it a legal requirement for providers to collaborate on developing these plans, and to pay due regard to them, ensuring skills provision meets local training needs.

An employer-led system needs an employer-led approach, and this is the framework that will make that happen.

It will also offer colleges and providers an opportunity to take

a more proactive role in shaping future skills need; and to use their expertise to support employers to make the incremental innovations that are needed to drive demand for higher level skills and boost productivity.

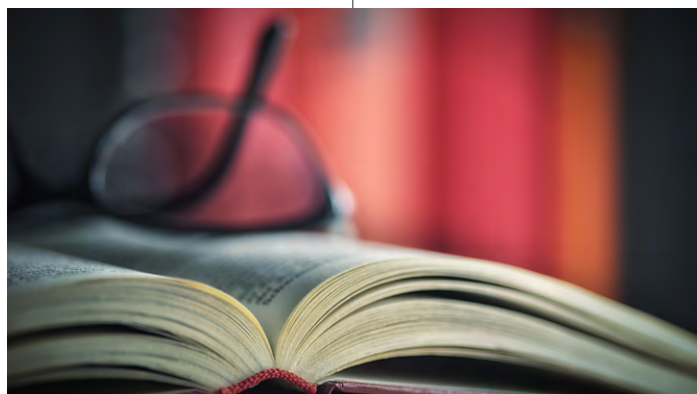
Most colleges are well run, and instances of serious failures are rare. We are already developing a more strategic and supportive relationship with colleges so that problems can be identified sooner and so we can reduce the numbers needing intervention.

The Bill will ensure that when there is failure, we can intervene, such as by requiring a restructure, to support colleges and to protect the interests of learners, employers and taxpayers.

Statutory intervention is only expected to be used as a last resort where it is not possible to secure improvement through other measures.

Finally, I want to reiterate that talent is everywhere, but opportunity is not. That's why we have put our reforms and this Bill at the heart of our recovery plans and our levelling up agenda. As colleges and providers, you will all play a vital role in making sure this happens.

I'm excited for the future. With government, employers and providers all working together we will bring about the change that is needed and that will make a huge difference to people's lives.



TOBY PERKINS

Shadow minister for apprenticeships and lifelong learning



The Skills Bill: inadequate to deal with years of neglect and a pandemic

This is an approach that remains inadequate to tackle the scale of the skills challenges we face post-Covid, writes Toby Perkins

After a decade of funding cuts and neglect of further education, the sector has understandably welcomed the government's new-found interest. But the much-heralded Skills Bill contains less than meets the eye, and we fear it will fail to meet the scale of the challenge that years of neglect and the impact of the pandemic have caused.

While this Bill was not expected to solve all funding challenges, the government is failing to even recognise the role their spending cuts have played in the decline of further education. The Conservatives have overseen a sharp fall in apprentice numbers since the introduction of their apprenticeship levy, at the same time as claiming to be the party of small business and excluding those very businesses from the levy. The sector is understandably sceptical when it comes to big new promises.

The heady claims that this was a government that believed in localism and devolution of power are clearly consigned to the history books. This Bill contains a Department for Education power-grab with little expectation of a role for metro mayors and confusion around the role of shire authorities in setting skills priorities. Nor does there appear to be any enthusiasm for Local Enterprise Partnerships to play a central role in bringing

together the needs of businesses and educators. Many smaller colleges will also be looking nervously at the government's expressed right to merge colleges without recourse to local circumstances or consultation.

In the many hundreds of meetings I have held during my year in this post, I confess I have never heard anybody suggest that a more hands-on role for Gavin Williamson was central to ensuring Britain is equipped with a well skilled workforce. Yet here, the Education Secretary awards himself new powers to intervene in 'failing' colleges, to merge or replace colleges, to select or to sack 'employer representative' bodies, and to dictate whether colleges are fulfilling the requirements these bodies lay down.

"It contains a DfE power-grab with little expectation of a role for metro mayors or shire authorities"

This is a government that has consistently created oblique structures and been surprised when they fail to deliver, yet there is again very little evidence of a robust, systematic approach to underpin the government's desire for employers to take the lead in skills reforms. Poorly defined local skills plans risk shutting out metro mayors and combined authorities, many of which have democratic



accountability for local skills and economic regeneration.

Given the continued decline in apprenticeship numbers, and unspent levy funds, supporting businesses to utilise more of that pot and spend the money as intended on boosting skills should be a key priority for this government. Yet again there is inaction. Silence in the face of Labour's call for a wage subsidy policy which could have created 85,000 new apprenticeships for young people last year, giving them their first step on the ladder.

There are measures here that we welcome – the moves to create learning accounts and expand learning entitlements are both positive steps. However, even here there are gaps, the lack of support for living costs risks closing the door to potential learners, in contrast to the Labour-led Welsh government's Education Maintenance Allowance, which supports young students to invest in themselves.

The government's proudest boast

in this Bill seems to be a reversal of their own move in 2013 to scrap the right for adults to study a level 3 qualification. Yet the renewed commitment is more limited than what existed before, and crucially won't allow someone qualified to level 3 in one field to receive funding to retrain in another, which, given the needs of the post-Covid world, is a remarkable failure. Its introduction in 2024 is also disappointingly slow.

It is also concerning that supported internships, which can play a huge role in supporting learners with learning difficulties to prepare for and enter the world of work, are missing from the Bill. We would like to see them specified as an intrinsic part of local skills plans.

This Bill is itself an acknowledgement of this government's 11 years of failure on FE policy and funding. Many measures, such as the Lifetime Skills Guarantee, are undoing previous mistakes or going over old ground to finally deliver promises such as employer-led skills. Yet at a time when the need for the sector has never been greater, the over-riding first impression is one of a government seizing powers for itself, to introduce policies dictated from an out-of-touch Conservative government in Whitehall, instead of a genuine partnership of local learners, elected officials, providers and employers. This amounts to a huge, missed opportunity and an approach that remains inadequate to tackle the scale of the skills challenges we face post-Covid.

MARK
TAYLOR

Partner in education
team, Eversheds
Sutherland law firm



How the Skills Bill would increase and clarify the government's legal powers

The Skills and Post-16 Education Bill drops hints as to the direction of policy in the sector, writes Mark Taylor

The skills and post-16 education Bill gives us clues as to where the government is headed on policy in the further education sector. Let me talk you through a few points of interest (or, at least, which are of interest to a lawyer...)

Local skills improvement plans

If the legislation had stated that colleges must have a mission to focus on local skills, this could arguably have changed the mission of colleges and even their charitable objects. But by saying there is a requirement on colleges to think of local skills plans, it's not giving them a new mission, but an obligation with which they must comply. Otherwise, college boards might have had to act differently, and there could have been complicated changes under charity law. So the way this new requirement has been phrased is useful.

Colleges already have many statutory obligations, so adding a few more shouldn't change their charitable status. However, it will add to the regulatory burden on colleges.

The obligations are not to absolutely comply with a local skills improvement plan. The obligations are to "have regard" to it and to work with employers to develop it. This should allow some leeway for colleges to not follow every aspect



of a local skills improvement plan, provided that any such decision is properly reasoned.

The risk for colleges is the intervention powers that the FE Commissioner now has into colleges that are not meeting local needs. Modern colleges are not used to being told what provision to deliver. Intervention by the secretary of state purely because of the type of college delivery would be a shock to the system.

It would also potentially raise questions as to whether that college could continue to be classified as a private body, rather than a public body, for Office for National Statistics purposes.

In setting and enforcing a local skills improvement plan, we have to hope that employers and the secretary of state recognise the diversity of mission of colleges.

The strength of the further education sector is not built on an army of clone-like colleges. The sector is stronger because no two colleges are alike. Not every college (particularly specialist designated institutions) will be able to cater for every part of a local skills

improvement plan.

Regulation of independent training providers

The bill gives the secretary of state the power to make regulations around keeping a list of (mainly) independent training providers.

Funding authorities (including devolved ones) will not be able to fund or allow sub-contracting with a provider not on the list.

"The strength of the FE sector is not built on an army of clone-like colleges"

We can take from this that the secretary of state is clearly willing to increasingly regulate devolved adult educational delivery.

The new list will focus on learner protection and concerns about provider failure.

This is a market that clearly

concerns government. We will wait to see what the entry requirements are and how they differ from existing checks.

Mergers and insolvency law

The bill clarifies the government's power to require a college to merge. These are powers which government arguably already had, but did not use.

That the Bill clarifies this shows that, firstly, past failure to use these powers may have been due to an uncertainty within Whitehall over its ability to do so. Secondly, if government feels the need to make clear that it has these powers, then it thinks that it may need to use them in the future.

An intervention regime in which colleges are forced to merge would be another significant shift for the sector.

The Bill also clarifies insolvency law surrounding colleges. While this may not have changed the law, the fact the government is looking to make sure it works shows they're still planning to use it in the future.

Not in the bill

Many elements of the white paper are not reflected in the Bill, such as changes to college governance and funding.

This is likely to be positive for the sector, as legislation for legislation's sake would only add to a college's burden.

However, it does mean that we must wait for funding and policy changes to see what the future holds.

ANGELA
DONKIN

Chief social scientist,
National Foundation
for Educational
Research



New powers in Skills Bill point to radical loss of autonomy for colleges

Government is taking more control but the Skills Bill will only be a success if young people are kept at the heart of it, writes Angela Donkin

The new Skills Bill has been published, with a legal requirement for employers and colleges to work together to fill local skills gaps.

The DfE's press release does a good sell – it cites a skills shortage and research illustrating that 26-year-olds with level 4 or 5 technical qualifications can earn more than those with a degree.

Nevertheless, this is an interesting development. It has long been my view that too much emphasis is placed on the A-Level, degree route. Indeed, I walk the walk. One of my children has been studying a range of BTECs and GCSEs since she was 14, in a university technical college.

That choice was made precisely because the curriculum is linked with the needs of the creative industries in which she is interested in working.

This Bill should make it easier for other young people like my daughter to take that pragmatic step where it suits them.

However, as with any piece of legislation, the devil is in the detail. Let's look at carrots and sticks.

The incentives include an £83 million fund to build facilities in areas where there are shortages of places, given the demographics.

There's also a flexible grant to allow people to afford to be trained.

This makes sense – we need the buildings, and the demand for the courses.

There appear to be more incentives for level 3 or higher qualifications, so we must ensure the Bill does not hinder the availability of alternative level 2 routes where needed.

“We first need to improve the quality of jobs available”

How will this be achieved?

Firstly, a power to sanction FE colleges for not delivering a local skills plan and, secondly, a power to intervene when colleges are failing to deliver good outcomes for the communities they serve.

These are interesting new powers as they point to a quite radical loss of autonomy for

FE colleges.

While the importance of training young people with necessary skills is obvious, it's vital that young people are at the heart of this, and that they have choice.

For this Bill to tackle issues such as social mobility it still requires one vital legal requirement.

While colleges will have sanctions for not delivering, what about employers?

And if sanctions aren't possible or realistic, what about meaningful and relevant incentives?

There is nothing in the Bill regarding sanctioning employers should they fail to offer purposeful opportunities for young people.

As it stands, in local areas with many low-paid workers, we could get to a position where we are sanctioning colleges for failing to train young adults to join the four million who are in work but also in poverty. No one wants that to happen.

So that takes us to the issues of local jobs. We know that opportunities for young adults are

not evenly distributed across the country. This means that in areas with poor prospects, we first need to improve the quality of work available.

Second, we must ensure there is a wider range of courses at different levels to accommodate everyone's different career ambitions. These might not be linked to skills needed in local areas where there are poor prospects.

Third, we must ensure students can afford to travel further away for opportunities to study or work if needed.

I'm hoping that this is a really important step change in skills education. However, we must ensure that young people are kept at the heart of this and that colleges and employers work together for that reason.

We know there are issues around existing apprenticeships, particularly at level 3 and above, currently favouring large employers with subsidised higher level training courses.

Meanwhile, lower level apprenticeships have reduced significantly in number. This has had a disproportionate impact on young adults from more disadvantaged areas and on small employers.

So we must ensure we look carefully at the detail and avoid stumbling into a situation where we have inadvertently exacerbated inequity.



NIKKI DAVIS

Vice principal,
Leeds College of
Building



This is how we can boost the number of girls on construction courses

There's a huge market for female tradespeople to come round and fix the electrics, writes Nikki Davis

Being a college with one specific industry focus – in our case, construction – has lots of advantages. But even with our advantages, it still takes a lot of effort to increase the number of female students on our courses.

Over three years, we have made progress. We've gone from just 33 female apprentices to 190, almost six times as many. But the percentage in the college itself sounds less impressive – that's a move from five per cent of students who are female to seven per cent. Meanwhile, women in the UK construction industry account for around ten per cent of the workforce.

Some of our courses do better than others. Our higher and technical courses, such as civil engineering and transport planning, have more female students on them.

On some of these courses, the split is more like 70-30 male to female. The same is true of the staff, giving a much better representation of females who have come directly from the industry and are doing a phenomenal job.

But there are far fewer female students on the trade courses, such as brickwork,

joinery, plastering, painting and decorating, tiling, electrical and plumbing.

We do have a fantastic female lecturer in joinery, and that's what we need more of. However, it's difficult to recruit female staff in some of these trade courses. This needs to change because there's such a market for tradeswomen. How much more comfortable would women feel if it was a woman who arrived to fix their electrics?

“There are horror stories of girls being directed away from careers in construction”

One of the answers is to tackle the problem much earlier in schools. There's a lot of outreach work needed at both primary and secondary levels. You occasionally hear horror stories of girls being directed away from careers talks on construction, towards a “more

appropriate” presentations.

Students should have their perceptions of the construction industry challenged, too. They see it as brickwork, which can be dirty, dusty and cold in winter. There is a bit of that, it's true, but there is so much more to it.

The sector has a lot of secure jobs that are well paid in many cases. With the government's “Build back better” slogan, this will be a booming industry. Careers advice in schools needs to be much better informed about a career in construction – it should not be assumed that it's a job for low-achieving students.

Another way to tackle the issue is to run women-focused short courses here in college. We do taster sessions, where people can ask questions, and also six-week courses to get the basics in a trade area. It's especially helpful if that's a female-led course.

One of the big advantages of being a purely construction college is our very close links with employers. The college opened

in 1960 because there was a local need for construction workers at the time, with just a handful of staff. Now, we have 400 staff and about 1,200 16- to 18-year-old students, about 2,500 apprentices and adult students too.

I've worked in a mainstream college before this one and the relationship with employers is just different here. They pick up the phone and call us. They work directly with us.

Because we focus solely on construction, we can also offer employers more flexibility – they can send apprentices to us on day release or block release, for example. They can pick a model that suits them.

Employers also help us decipher local skills plans. They can be difficult to understand sometimes, so we work with employers to unpick them in detail.

Being focused on one industry area also lets us attract talent nationally. Because we specialise, we're seen as one of the best.

But that doesn't mean our work in improving representation of students is anywhere near done. The government is expecting employers to do a lot to support the skills system, but the issue of more girls and women choosing construction courses needs to be pioneered within the education sector, supported by employers.

We need to be doing much more, much earlier, to encourage them in.



KARL
PUPETeacher, author
and blogger

Colleges are teaching Generation Z: the 'crisis generation'

The recession, Brexit and austerity have shaped these students' view of the world, writes Karl Pupé

Educators, we are living in crazy times.

In our society, the old rules and protocols of how we live together are crumbling before our eyes. We are living through one of the most turbulent times in human history.

We are witnessing the death-throes of the industrial age as our world deals with consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and how it has radically changed our society overnight.

But the turbulence of 2020 allowed us to witness the sign of things to come: the information age.

We stare in wonder and fear as the internet 2.0 and artificial intelligence transform and shape our societies in ways that our ancestors could not imagine.

Our students are in this brave new world. If you are an educator teaching students born between 1997 and 2012, who are between eight and 23 years old, you are teaching Generation Z.

That places a large proportion of these learners in colleges and further education institutions. At this point, they are close to entering the outside world.

Let me examine three characteristics of this group as you prepare them for the next step.

1. They believe in speaking their minds

In a survey of 13- to 29-year-olds by youth marketing website YPulse,



72 per cent believe that "hashtag activism" has the power to change the world, especially in light of the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

Generation Z are the first-ever human generation who do not know what life was like without the internet. They are known as "digital natives".

Covid-19 will be remembered as consolidation of the information age, and Generation Z are its first real citizens.

Technology, especially social media, has given our students unprecedented opportunities to speak their minds, and have the world listen to them.

The lines between the rulers and the ruled are increasingly blurred and the internet has democratised power and attention.

In our classrooms, students are less afraid to question, debate and, in some cases, confront us about why things are the way that they are.

Educators can no longer rely on simply demanding obedience from our students. We must use "trust-based empathy".

This involves dealing with our students based on mutual respect, shared values and curiosity and creativity in the classroom.

2. They are pessimistic about authority

According to a survey undertaken by consultants Deloitte in 2019, a mere 12 per cent of older Generation Z'ers (aged 18 to 25) believe that the political and economic situation would change over the coming 12 months.

For many of our older students, a great deal of their defining moments were in the wake of the recession, government austerity and Brexit. This has made our young people more cynical and uncertain of the future.

Educators must move from merely giving lectures to becoming their coaches, showing them that education is still a gateway for a better future for themselves and for the world.

We must learn to bridge our subjects to their interests. We must no longer bribe them with the promise of a degree and a steady

job, but inspire them about how they can contribute to a better future for their communities and the causes they care about.

"They are actively looking at ways to make their world a tiny bit better"

3. They expect organisations to care

According to Ipsos Mori, less than 30 per cent of students felt the things they owned said much about their socio-economic status, compared to 42 per cent in 2011.

The report revealed that: "Despite pressure of a harder economic context, there has been a cohort shift away from materialistic values."

Our students have witnessed damning discrimination based on gender, race and sexuality.

After the death of George Floyd, our students are also more conscientious than ever about how companies and institutions affect the world around them. Students support organisations not only for their services or products, but their stances on equality.

The main thing is that Generation Z believes they are a crisis generation. They are actively looking at ways to make their world a tiny bit better.

My advice is to give them a safe space to work their ideas.



READER'S REPLY

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Apprenticeship levy funding: the truth is out there



Is it really true that without expired funds there would be no money to pay for non-levy, functional skills, incentives etc etc? Following that logic would suggest that before the levy, there was no apprenticeship provision as there was no money to pay for it, which is clearly not true. The mechanism for financing an activity (public debt or increased taxation) is not really the issue here. When a financing mechanism itself stifles the participation, then it's legit to question it. Agree that the financials should be published whatever the mechanism, but not just at headline level – a lot is said about directing funding towards economically beneficial sectors, but surely the cost of the training is a fundamental element of calculating that benefit.

Anon, website



Some seem to conveniently forget that not so long ago, there was genuine fear of a massive overspend and a collapse of the system.

Paul Butler, Twitter

Loans provider slammed for accepting 'identical' learner work



I think it is unfair of Ofsted to base guided learning hours on attendance as seems to be implied in the article, following more than 12 months of disruptions owing to Covid-19 work restrictions.

MC, website

Ofsted to review framework's impact on staff wellbeing, new charter pledges



Another document that constantly refers to "schools and colleges". What about all the other education/FE providers?

Gaynor Hunt, website

REPLY OF THE WEEK

Apprenticeship levy funding: the truth is out there



Very good piece. Getting the facts out there so that we can start the debate properly about how we invest in those who don't have the privilege of university courses and need support to start work when young is vital. I look forward to much more on this.

Stuart Lock, website



This is good to hear as I still get wind of far too many instances of providers being asked to produce information in a way that suits inspectors rather than it being in its "natural state" in the provider, as it were. The worst examples involve lead inspectors asking providers to print everything out for them to look at. And, of course, most providers, being eager to please, are only too happy to oblige.

Richard Moore, website

The slow death of adult residential education?



This is an excellent article about the issues facing Northern College. Brilliant point about this being an opportunity for this and other such colleges to be at the forefront of the levelling-up agenda!

Paul Eeles, Twitter

'Skills taxonomy': new algorithm planned to seek out skills cold spots



The significance of this for the post-16 skills sector is more profound than the headline suggests. Bravo to FE Week and Billy Camden for uncovering where the new Bolshevik central planners at the Department for Education might be going next.

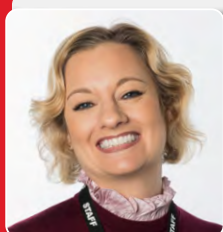
Tom Bewick, Twitter

Bulletin

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Movers & Shakers

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



Melanie Guymer

Curriculum consultant, FE Associates

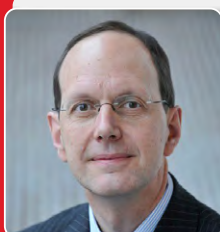
Start date April 2021

Previous job

Vice principal of curriculum planning, United Colleges Group

Interesting fact

She used to run an English Language Consultancy in Hong Kong.



John Cridland

Chair, WorldSkills UK Skills Taskforce for Global Britain

Start date May 2021

Concurrent job

Chair, Transport for the North and the Home Group

Interesting fact

He is an avid fan of Star Trek.



Ian Fitzpatrick

Principal, National College for Advanced Transport and Infrastructure

Start date May 2021

Previous job

Chief executive, Elite Centre for Manufacturing Skills

Interesting fact

He is a qualified diver.

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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