ACTION NEEDED ON COLLEGE FINANCES
Page 22

NEVER FORGET THE NATIONAL COLLEGES SAGA
Page 25

LEARNING AND WORK INSTITUTE HITS 100 YEARS
Page 23

FE WEEK

In-depth, investigative journalism, determined to get past the bluster & explain the facts for the FE & skills sector

FEWEEK.CO.UK | @FEWEEK

FRIDAY, MAY 28, 2021 | EDITION 355

DFE REFUSES TO SHARE FUNDING CLAWBACK EVIDENCE - FUELLING SECTOR SUSPICION

EXCLUSIVE

Page 4

COLLEGES SIGN-UP TO PUBLISH ETHNICITY PAY GAPS

- Milton Keynes, Waltham Forest and Middlesbrough College make commitment
- Croydon College first to reveal mean pay sits at 15.1% higher for white employees
- AoC/ETF diversity director: 'There's a whole story that pay gap begins to tell'

Page 5

FE WEEK — MEET THE TEAM

Nick Linford
EDITOR
@NICKLINFORD
NICK@LSECT.COM

Shane Mann
MANAGING DIRECTOR
@SHANERMANN
SHANE@LSECT.COM

Billy Camden
DEPUTY EDITOR
@BILLYCAMDEN
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

JL Dutaut
COMMISSIONING EDITOR
@DUTAUT
JL.DUTAUT@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Jess Staufenberg
COMMISSIONING EDITOR
@STAUFENBERGJ
JESS.STAUFENBERG@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Fraser Whieldon
REPORTER
@FRASERWHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Simon Kay
DESIGNER
SIMON@FEWEEK.CO.UK

THE TEAM

HEAD DESIGNER	Nicky Phillips
SALES MANAGER	Bridget Stockdale
EVENT MANAGER	Frances Ogefere Dell
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT AND FINANCE OFFICER	Victoria Boyle
OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR	Evie Hayes
OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR – APPRENTICE	Zoe Tuffin

CORRECTION

In edition 353, an article titled 'Banned: 9 firms join the 'suspended' list on the apprenticeships register' listed Aldridge Education as one of the providers on the banned list. Aldridge Education has since contacted *FE Week* to explain their ban was lifted and they are now waiting for the ESFA to update the apprenticeships register to correct this.

Please inform the FE Week editor of any errors or issues of concern regarding this publication.

FE WEEK

Contents

EDITION 355

Learning & Skills Events, Consultancy and Training Ltd
c/o Mindspace,
9 Appold Street,
London EC2A 2AP
T: 020 8123 4778
E: news@feweek.co.uk

News

Secrecy fuels suspicions as DfE refuses to share clawback evidence

BILLY CAMDEN
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

From front | Exclusive

The government has refused to share the evidence used to justify its controversial adult education clawback plans – fuelling suspicion among sector leaders.

Principals have demanded transparency after the Department for Education said that any college or community learning provider which delivers less than 90 per cent of its national adult education allocation this year must repay funds.

The DfE and skills minister Gillian Keegan, who *FE Week* previously revealed was forced into the decision by the Treasury, have repeatedly said their data shows the 90 per cent threshold is a "fair representation of the providers' average forecasted delivery for the 2020/21 academic year".

FE Week requested the evidence to back up this claim under the Freedom of Information Act, but the department has refused to hand it over.

In its response, the DfE admits there is a "general public interest" in disclosure.

However, the request was turned down on the grounds that "it relates to the formulation or development of government policy".

It adds: "We are monitoring the performance of the adult education budget (AEB) delivery during 2020 to 2021 funding year and until the year is fully reconciled the policy is being monitored, lessons will be learnt, and future decisions may still depend on the use of the data as a baseline.

"We will also be using this data as a baseline for future policy decisions, and we believe it is in the wider public interest that we have the space and time to ensure this future work is carried out effectively."

Leicester College faces having to pay back £4 million under the plans and told *FE Week* it also had a similar FOI request rejected by the DfE.

A spokesperson for the college said it was "very disappointing that the Education and Skills Funding Agency has so far declined to provide information that should be readily available to it and is clearly in the public interest".

Ian Pryce, chief executive of the Bedford College Group, previously called for the DfE to share the evidence.

After hearing of the department's secrecy, he said: "There wouldn't be the uproar if the evidence supported the 90% average. Why wouldn't you share the data if it supports that figure?

"From college returns it should be easy to spot colleges whose AEB recruitment has been affected by lockdown and spot any that have simply taken their foot off the gas assuming a low threshold.

"The decision feels arbitrary, and the response doesn't rectify that."

The Association of Colleges collected data itself in April from a third of colleges and found the average performance reported was 77 per cent – amounting to a total clawback of £59 million.

Deputy chief executive Julian Gravatt explained that, while "recognising there are still some months to go, and the DfE hoped the high threshold would encourage colleges to increase activity – it is very unlikely that colleges will be able to make up for the severe disruption caused by the long spring lockdown".

Adult and community learning providers are also being stung by the clawback plans.

Their membership body, HOLEX, recently ran a poll and found the majority of members will hit between 60 and 80 per cent delivery.

Sue Pember, a former director of FE funding in the DfE who is now the policy director of HOLEX, said her organisation had also asked the government to publish its evidence because there is a "suspicion that the data was not disaggregated and therefore the impact on adult community and institutions was not seen".

She added: "It is a shame the DfE refuses to share the information as it is adding to that suspicion."

Since the threshold was announced in March, colleges have written to the prime minister requesting that he intervenes and warning that the plans risk courses being scrapped and jobs lost.

The all-party parliamentary group on FE has also written to education secretary Gavin Williamson to call for a reversal, or at least to allow colleges to submit business cases to plead for a clawback exemption.

News

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

Colleges publish ethnicity pay data in bid to increase diversity

FRASER WHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

From front | Exclusive

Colleges are revealing the pay gaps between their staff's ethnic groups in a bid to tackle under-representation in the sector.

Three colleges in England have so far committed to publishing the data annually as signatories to Business in the Community's (BITC) Race at Work Charter.

Jeff Greenidge, joint-diversity director for the Association of Colleges (AoC) and Education and Training Foundation (ETF), told *FE Week* this is the first instance he has heard of where colleges are choosing to publish ethnicity pay gap data.

He called it a "stepping stone" towards a "comprehensive strategy" with wider implications for "recruitment, retention and progression of individuals".

It comes amid a push from within the sector to increase diversity among staff as well as students.

As well as Greenidge's recent appointment, an equality, diversity and inclusion steering group has been set up by the AoC and Lia Nici, the Conservative MP for Great Grimsby, has been made chair of the government's apprenticeship diversity champions network.

Milton Keynes College is one of the four colleges publishing ethnicity pay data. Arv Kaushal, its equality, diversity and inclusion manager, told *FE Week* the problem they are trying to tackle is the lack of an "evidential approach towards any kind of change".

He said: "There have been various reports and articles in the education sector saying that, for example, representation within leadership in education is not where we want it to be."

Kaushal said he has traced such reports way back to 1976 and all the way up to Department for Education non-executive director Ruby McGregor-Smith's 2017 Race in the Workplace report. There was also a report on diversity by consultants McKinsey last year.

Kaushal added: "My challenge is, why hasn't anything happened as a result of that?"

One of the key aspects, he said, is that for change to happen in our "metric-driven" world, "you have to have a base of evidence to work with".

While "the data itself is not going to do anything", in order for the sector to have a "strategic approach" to tackling underrepresentation, "you have got to know where the problem is to start off with".

Greenidge said there was "a whole story that pay gap begins to tell", especially about the roles ethnic groups hold in the public sector.

He said the AoC and ETF were interested in the data as it could inform how they help sector staff.

Croydon College, though not a signatory to the charter, published its ethnicity pay gap for 2020 last March. It found the mean pay gap between black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) employees and its white staff was 15.1 per cent compared to the London average ethnicity pay gap of 23.8 per cent.

Despite this, the report noted that the college "finds this data concerning and will ensure that, as part of the HR strategy and equality action plan, initiatives are put in to place to address this".

A "serious concern" identified in the report was in the upper pay bracket where there was "only 20 per cent representation for BAME staff".

As such, a key performance indicator has been implemented to increase the percentage of BAME staff in management roles at the college.

Sandra Kerr

Sandra Kerr, race equality director for BITC, said companies began signing the charter in a drive to be "transparent on pay and demonstrate they are committed to making sure everyone's getting the right pay, everyone's getting the opportunity to progress".

She believes publishing ethnicity pay gap data will become mandatory for companies, just as publishing gender pay gap data is for companies with 250 or more employees.

McGregor-Smith's report recommended that all listed companies and businesses or public bodies with more than 50 employees should publish a breakdown by race and "ideally" by pay band.

BITC sent an open letter to Boris Johnson last October, signed by the Confederation of British Industry and the Trades Union Congress among others, calling for the government to make it mandatory for employers to report their ethnicity pay gap.

The other England-based colleges to have signed up to the charter are Waltham Forest College, Middlesbrough College. None have published ethnicity pay gap data so far and there is no set date for publication.

Headline Sponsors

AELP | 2021 conferences NATIONAL CONFERENCE Levelling up skills

AELP'S FLAGSHIP NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR MEMBERS AND THE BROADER SKILLS SECTOR!

Monday 7-Thursday 10 June 2021, ONLINE!

Less than 2 weeks to go!

BOOK NOW!

aelpnationalconference.org.uk

With less than two weeks to go until the AELP National Conference we are excited to share our action-packed agenda across the four days. With over 30 informative and thought-provoking workshops during the conference, the virtual platform will allow delegates the flexibility to choose the sessions to attend on the day, rather than pre-selecting. All sessions will also be available to access on-demand after the conference.

The Daily Agenda breakdown from 09:30 – 14:00

- Registration, Networking & Exhibition
- Keynote Plenary Session
- Themed Expert Roundtable
- Exhibition and Networking Opportunity
- Workshop Sessions
- Exhibition and Networking Opportunity
- Workshop Sessions
- Daily Roundup

During the Conference, we'll have a fantastic range of exhibitors who are ready to network and showcase their organisation. Booth Demos will be taking place across the conference to watch the exhibitors live in action!

We are offering full member organisations five free delegate places (ten free places for patron members) meaning more members of your team can now take advantage of attending this flagship event to listen to the updates and join the debates and discussions.

Registration Sponsor

Skills Training UK training in a different class

KEYNOTES ROUNDTABLES WORKSHOPS

News

How the IfATE is growing in stature

BILLY CAMDEN
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education is "looking forward to playing an even bigger role" following the publication of the Skills Bill. But how will the quango change its operation going forward? Billy Camden explores

Launched in 2017 to spearhead the government's apprenticeship reforms, the then-known Institute for Apprenticeships has seen its responsibilities and workforce expand over the past four years.

"Technical Education" was added to the quango's name and brief in 2019 as the authority also took over the content of T Levels and procurement for awarding organisations.

The institute had around 80 full-time staff in its first year of operation before growing to 160 in March 2019; 186 a year later; and up to 216 by March 2021 – a 170 per cent increase over four years.

And to cater for the sharp rise in workers, the institute's annual budget from the Department for Education has shot up by 184 per cent, from £9.7 million in 2017-18 to £27.5 million in 2021-22.

The organisation appears to be preparing for another recruitment drive as it gears up for new "powers" as set out in the FE white paper and last week's Skills Bill, such as defining and approving new categories of technical qualifications as well as reviewing those already on offer and withdrawing their approval where they are no longer performing as expected.

Two new job-sharing strategy directors, Rachel Cooper and Beth Chaudhary, were announced this week by the institute. The pair previously held the same joint role in the Cabinet Office but will come onboard to help the institute deliver on its new functions.

IfATE chief executive Jennifer Coupland

Their overarching goal is to make sure that "entry level and new higher technical qualifications meet employers' skills needs and support learners into successful careers".

The institute is also in the process of forming three new "employer-facing groups". A job advert has gone out for a person to "lead a team of around 10 delivery experts" in this area.

A spokesperson said the purpose of the groups will be to "make sure that our work is employer facing, and properly understands different parts of the economy…it is about us listening even more to what employers say and helping them to play a bigger role".

They explained that when the institute formed, it was organised into "functional orientated groups" but as it has matured "it has honed its processes" and is moving to a "more route-based structure".

"As we begin to engage in the approval of technical qualifications beyond T Levels, we now believe that we could optimise our performance further by transitioning to a structure that better reflects the communities we work with closely, including sectors of the economy.

"We are therefore working on developing three teams with particular industry expertise that will embrace apprenticeships and all forms of technical qualification in an integrated and coherent fashion, for the benefit of employers, learners, apprentices and the sector as a whole."

The spokesperson said the institute is "still refining our plans" and will be engaging with stakeholders and providing further detail in "due course".

They were unable to give a rough estimate of how many extra staff the organisation will need to hire in total to meet the new functions set out in the Skills Bill.

An impact assessment report for the Skills Bill explained the rationale for handing new powers to the institute.

It said: "Many employers struggle to find people with the skills that they need, and these gaps will be exacerbated as we look to the future – as the pace of technological change continues, our economy adjusts following the Covid-19 pandemic, and we build a green economy.

"To ensure that technical qualifications better meet employers' needs, we intend that they should be aligned with employer-led standards."

The document warned the current system "does not currently have the mechanisms to ensure the reforms can be delivered such that they deliver high quality, rigorous qualifications that meet employers' and individuals' needs, and avoid proliferation and a 'race to the bottom' on quality, as identified by previous reviews of the skills market".

It goes on to state that both Ofqual and the institute have "key roles to play" in assuring the quality of technical qualifications, but the current statutory framework for approval and regulation has "scope for unnecessary duplication, and inconsistency between the two bodies with potential impact on the quality of the qualifications and the burden on awarding organisations".

By extending the institute's approval powers in the Skills Bill, the "risks of duplication and inconsistency are increased".

As such, the institute will be required to cooperate with Ofqual to create a "single approval gateway" for technical qualifications.

The institute's new powers will allow them to determine new qualification categories and approve qualifications against "associated criteria" in the future.

It will also be allowed charge awarding bodies for qualification approval and introduce a moratorium on the approval of further qualifications where there is evidence of proliferation.

Commenting on the new responsibilities, an institute spokesperson said: "We are committed to working closely with employers and everyone across the skills sector to continue the journey of improvement that we are on.

"We are looking forward to building on our successful work so far and playing an even bigger role with employers to build a unified skills system and will make sure that we are ready to deliver."

News

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

College suspends principal just two months before merger

FRASER WHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Exclusive

A college that is being forced into a merger after an audit revealed a £5.35 million overclaim has suspended its long-serving principal.

FE Week has seen an email to Ruskin College staff saying that Paul Di Felice, its principal of nine years, has been removed. A college spokesperson this week confirmed he had been "suspended from his post pending investigation".

The college added that it was "unable to provide further comment on this matter at this time".

Graham Morley, the former interim principal for Hadlow College, has been recruited to lead the college during the investigation ahead of its merger with major college group Activate Learning at the end of July.

Ruskin's 2018/19 accounts have recently been filed with the Charity Commission 311 days late. They reveal that it is not operating as a going concern and there are "inadequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future".

The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) is clawing back £5.35 million, the accounts state, including £1.5 million for that year, £1.85 million for 2017/18 and £1.98 million for 2016/17.

The clawback follows an audit which found overclaims for adult education budget and residential bursary funding. England's three other adult residential colleges have been stung by a similar audit which alleges they have misapplied an uplift that has been in place since the 1990s.

The Ruskin accounts state that the college had "consistently applied the same methodology over many years, so was unaware of the need to align to a different scenario".


Paul Di Felice

Ruskin has also sold off one of its bases of operations, the listed Stoke House, in March 2021 – using the proceeds to settle a debt with the Co-operative Bank after it committed a breach of its covenants. This meant the college had to repay a £2.3 million loan within a year, but this has now been paid off in full.

The accounts say that "critical issues" including the clawback and a "significant" fall in HE learners from 214 in 2017/18 to 161 in 2018/19 "have significantly and adversely impacted on the overall financial and solvency position of the college and the outlook is challenging".

However, the ESFA and the college are in "continuing discussions" about its financial position, and the provider believes "a solution to the cash shortfall prior to the merger will be found" – leaving the door open to a government bailout.

The college hopes Morley can shepherd them through the merger. The all-staff email from Di Felice's personal assistant said: "Graham is a very experienced individual who has extensive experience in college oversight and management, and I've assured him that you will give him your support whilst he is with us."

Morley took over Hadlow and its sister provider, West Kent and Ashford College, in February 2019 after the departure of former principal Paul Hannan and ahead of the colleges being the first to go into education administration.

He was previously interim principal at Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College and principal of Cannock Chase Technical College and South Staffordshire College.

FE Week understands the investigation into Di Felice is being led by Evan Williams, the Association of College's former director of employment and professional services, who now works as a governance and industrial relations consultant.

The management shake-up is another blow to the Ofsted grade 2-rated Ruskin, which has been subject to a financial notice to improve since 2014.

The notice was reissued in November 2020 and the Department for Education placed the college in supervised status following a report by then-FE Commissioner Richard Atkins, published in October, which said the provider faced an "uncertain future".

The Oxford-based college, founded in 1899, currently focuses on adult learners and its offer includes Access to HE diplomas, English courses for speakers of other languages and trade union courses accredited by the TUC.

It has historic links to the city's university and is renowned for educating working class people, especially those in the trade union movement.

As of July 2020, the FE Commissioner reported, enrolments were just over 50 per cent down on 2018/19.

A structure and prospects appraisal was ordered in the wake of the report, which is what led to the announcement in February of the merger with Activate Learning. Di Felice has not responded to requests for comment.

THIS YEAR'S ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENTS - ADAPTING AND EVOLVING IS KEY

This year's alternative arrangements have meant large scale changes to the way we operate across the sector. Adaptations have seen us assessing qualifications in different ways, and both learners and educators adjusting to new ways of working.

Despite this, we have seen some great success stories from those that have flourished and turned learning loss into learning gains. Adopting the right interventions, engagement strategies, and adaptations to delivery and assessment, meant that learning did not have to stop. In fact, it had the opportunity to grow and take on new and interesting forms...

Turning learning loss into learning gains

Birmingham based Swift ACI Childcare offers the NCFE CACHE Childcare Standards in Level 2 and Level 3, as well as delivering Functional Skills through NCFE's Remote Invigilation solution. Jack Edwards, Academy Manager at Swift Childcare, shared his experience of the measures they've taken to combat learning loss, and how we've worked together to get through the pandemic:

"When the pandemic hit, large scale adaptation was required across the board. We had to facilitate remote learning which was something we had never done before - our entire delivery model went out of the window.

"Where learners weren't able to be observed in the workplace, we adapted and asked for further evidence of them putting their learning into practice in different ways, such as photos and witness testimonies from employers. We also used the time to gather more feedback from employers which was so useful and helped us to bridge the gap between employer, provider, and assessor.

"Despite the stress and upheaval, being able to essentially start again with our delivery plan and model was a blessing because we've been able to focus on the things that really work for both learners and employers alike. Remote delivery wouldn't have felt achievable 18 months ago, but now it really works. Learners have more time for self-directed study, it has relaxed time and deadline pressures of exams, and removed the travel burden for students by not having to travel to study every day.

"We have placed significant emphasis on pastoral support to help with everything from cyber security, to mental health and how to manage lone working. We've also had every learner on an individual action plan to see exactly where learning loss could occur and where we can intervene. It's important to us to have that 360-degree view of our learners to ensure that we can support them through their learning journey and keep them engaged in their programmes. Our key message to both our learners and staff throughout the pandemic has been that we've got their back – we'll get through this together, one step at a time. The response to this has generated a strong spirit of collaboration and pulling together towards a collective goal.

"If I were to offer a piece of advice to fellow providers as a result of the lessons we've learned throughout this pandemic, it would be to embrace change and evolve your practices to facilitate what is best for the learner. Check and challenge those practices on a regular basis – even weekly – and also look at what strategies can be embedded long-term, in a post-Covid world. We never thought we could have achieved the changes that we've managed over the past year, but we have and we're stronger than ever – together we can make a real difference!"

Supporting you with Teacher Assessed Grade (TAG) submission

We understand how hard you're working to bring learners successful outcomes and allow them to progress, and we're here to support you every step of the way. We want to share with you some top tips and reminders if you're working with NCFE and are planning to submit TAGs for your learners.

- Ensure your TAG strategy is submitted and you've booked your EQA review
- External assessment TAGs will require you to make a booking for your learner on the relevant assessment
- Use historic data to support evidence gathering
- Don't forget to claim your certificates.

We have a full toolkit available here with demo videos, user guides and reminders.

Thank you

Lastly, let us say thank you. We want to honour both you and your learners for all of the phenomenal work you're doing in a challenging year. Submit your teacher of the year, centre of the year, and learner of the year through our aspiration awards here.

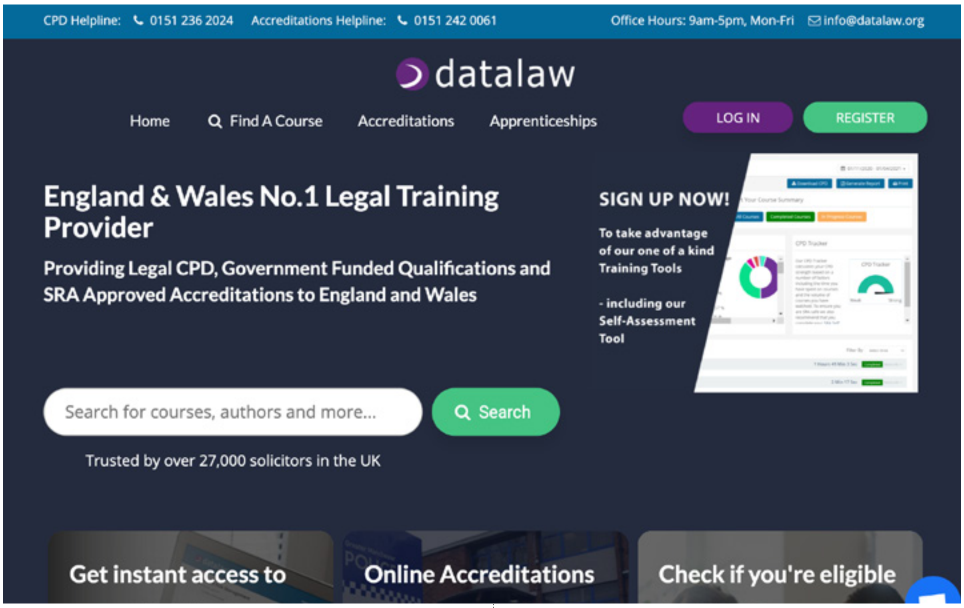
More information

Take a look at our dedicated Covid hub for support, guidance, case studies and more. You can also contact our expert Customer Support team on 0191 239 8000 or by emailing customersupport@ncfe.org.uk.

News

Legal apprentice provider penalised by watchdog

FRASER WHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK



A leading commercial training provider for the legal profession has been reprimanded by Ofsted for being too "inexperienced" to deliver high-quality apprenticeships.

Datalaw Limited, which has provided professional development for law firms for more than 20 years, made "insufficient progress" in two areas of a new provider monitoring visit conducted last month.

The company moved into the apprenticeships market two years ago and trains about 100 apprentices on standards in leadership and management at levels 3 and 5, as well as the level 3 paralegal and technical salesperson apprenticeships.

Under Education and Skills Funding Agency rules, any new training provider that receives at least one "insufficient" score is suspended from recruiting new apprentices.

> **"Leaders do not provide training for coaches on the craft of teaching apprenticeships"**

Ofsted praised the provider's coaches for their experience in the legal sector, but warned they were "inexperienced in teaching apprenticeships".

Inspectors found Datalaw's leaders "do not provide training for coaches on the craft of teaching or the delivery of apprenticeships".

As such, the coaches "do not understand the requirements of an apprenticeships".

Datalaw is based in Liverpool but operates across multiple regions.

Ofsted found that leaders have not ensured its apprentices receive enough training. Rather, the apprentices were "left to learn independently with very little teaching".

Coaches carry out monthly coaching calls to apprentices which, inspectors reported, often last less than half an hour. Between these calls, apprentices are left with little or no support from their coach to complete questions and research.

The watchdog did highlight that the provider had a "clear rationale" for delivering apprenticeships, by focusing on upskilling law firms' administrative staff through the level 3 paralegal curriculum.

But its leaders did not ensure they met the principles of an apprenticeship: not coordinating what apprentices learnt on and off the job, and making them complete units in the same order, regardless of their job.

Due to their lack of knowledge, leaders were not able to challenge the consultants on whom they relied "too much" to set up and run apprenticeships.

Provider bosses had also been slow to identify and engage with assessment organisations, and apprentices were found to have "limited" knowledge of the requirements for their final exams.

Level 3 team leader learners "have not received adequate training and support to prepare them for their final assessment", inspectors warned, despite them nearing the end of their course.

Furthermore, leaders had "no plans" to complete functional skills examinations.

Apprentices were left to do their own research into how to become a solicitor or court advocate, as Datalaw does not provide them with careers advice or guidance.

Inspectors did find that the provider had made "reasonable progress" with its safeguarding measures, with apprentices reporting they feel safe.

Datalaw did not respond to requests for comment.

News

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

City & Guilds offers to pay £50k over 'unfit' qualifications

FRASER WHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Education giant City and Guilds is facing a £50,000 penalty from Ofqual after an assignment for multiple level 3 qualifications from 2018 was found to be "unfit for purpose".

A notice of regulatory action against the awarding body was published by the regulator on Thursday. It states that City & Guilds must also pay all legal costs.

One of the tasks for the level 3 animal management qualifications was "written in a way that potentially made the requirements unclear and ambiguous to candidates", the notice reported.

"This caused some candidates to struggle to access higher mark bands."

The compulsory task was the same across three other qualifications and contributed to the overall grade – but the weighting differed.

The qualifications were held at 27 centres in England and three in Wales. The summer of 2018 was the first occasion these qualifications were awarded by City & Guilds.

In total, 300 of the 2,316 learners who

David Phillips

received results for the qualifications in August 2018 did not get marks which reflected their level of attainment, Ofqual found.

Results for 174 candidates changed from a fail to a pass, one changed from a fail to a merit, 104 from pass to merit and 20 from merit to distinction.

There were no other errors on the synoptic assignment, so the regulator deemed that, overall, the qualifications remain robust.

While it was found that City & Guilds did not notify Ofqual at the time the issues were discovered, it did so within six days.

The notice highlights the "significant steps" the organisation took "to rectify the issue and issued upward grade changes to all affected learners within a month to ensure that no learners were disadvantaged".

The mistake was acknowledged and "no attempt was made to conceal the incident".

Ofqual's enforcement committee intends to accept a settlement offer from City & Guilds, which includes the awarding body admitting that it breached eight of the General Conditions of Recognition – the rules for all the qualifications and organisations regulated by the watchdog.

City & Guilds' settlement also includes an offer to pay a £50,000 penalty and Ofqual's "reasonable" legal costs for this matter.

The organisation was fined £38,000 in August 2016 for failing to issue results in a "timely" manner for qualifications, including paper-based functional skills assessments, to 22,229 learners.

The committee will meet again on or after June 25 to consider any representations and to decide whether to accept the settlement or make another order.

City and Guilds' managing director David Phillips apologised again "to all of our learners and customers who were impacted by the issues flagged by Ofqual regarding four of our animal management technical qualifications in 2018.

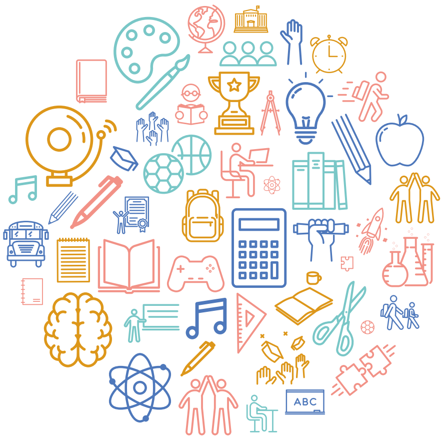
"We dealt with the matter swiftly at the time to ensure that no learner was disadvantaged. However, we accept the findings of Ofqual and have since reached an agreement regarding a resolution to their investigation."

He added: "We have taken the findings from the Ofqual investigation very seriously and, as a result, have implemented further quality assurance measures and controls that ensure the qualifications remain high quality and fit for purpose."

16 - 30 **JUNE 2021** | **ONLINE** | FREE REGISTRATION **NOW OPEN**

HEADLINE PARTNER

Pearson



The annual

FESTIVAL OF EDUCATION

ONLINE | 16-30 June 2021

HAVE YOU REGISTERED FOR A **FRIDAY FEST?**

The 2021 Festival of Education will take place online across two inspiring weeks and will be free for educators across the globe.

Join thousands of educationalists online at one of our Friday Fests. **With over 60 invaluable CPD sessions and discussions to view.**

#EDUCATIONFEST

Our Friday Fests are **FREE TO ATTEND.**

REGISTER TODAY!

18 AND 25 JUNE

educationfest.co.uk

FESTIVAL PARTNERS

BBC Bitesize

COGNITA An inspiring world of education

Teach First

LITERARY FESTIVAL PARTNER

BLOOMSBURY EDUCATION

News

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

Lessons learned from training through the pandemic

FRASER WHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

College leaders have shared the key lessons and insights they have learned from delivering training through the pandemic in a new report.

The Collab Group of colleges has published "Reflections from Further Education Leaders on the Impact of Covid-19" to share best practice from the past year. It is based on interviews with leaders including incoming FE Commissioner and Chichester College Group chief executive Shelagh Legrave, NCG leader Liz Bromley and City of Bristol College boss Andy Forbes.

Here are four key findings from the report…

1. Digital transformation 'disengaged' students

The lockdown in March 2020 pushed colleges into online delivery, with interviewees saying this presented a "challenge" for teachers.

Aside from having to learn new digital skills, a common issue facing lecturers was getting students to engage during class, as learners kept their cameras off, so it was hard to tell if they were paying attention.

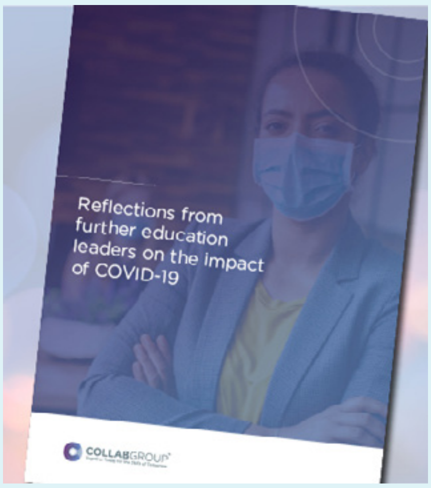
To get staff up to muster, NCG held three days of digital activity training while London South East College Group monitored lessons and addressed staff needs accordingly.

There was "significant" disengagement, the colleges reported, with students on vocational programmes.

While teachers created videos of practical demonstrations to compensate, Legrave said her staff "struggled with those very practical courses" as "however innovative we were, people didn't necessarily engage".

But some students appreciated the transition to digital, with Forbes saying: "Something like 30 per cent of students actually found online learning, which is what they'd switched to from last year, perfectly OK and, in some cases, they thought it was better than what they were getting before."

Adult learners especially enjoyed the flexibility that online learning granted to manage studies alongside other commitments, the report noted.



2. Concerns digital divide 'may exacerbate inequality'

Getting devices and dongles out to students who otherwise would struggle to access internet learning "presented a significant challenge" to colleges.

Chichester College provided 600 laptops for its students while Belfast Metropolitan College repurposed refurbished laptops for students, as well as giving those with limited wifi access a £60 stipend.

Last April, the Department for Education also launched an online portal for colleges to apply for free laptops. But the report reflects colleges' concerns that "digital poverty may exacerbate other forms of inequality".

"The digital divide has shone a very harsh spotlight on societal differences, societal expectations, and a whole generation of young people who have been really disadvantaged because they simply don't have access to the space, the technology or the bandwidth," Liz Bromley said.

3. Central government advice created 'challenges' for colleges

College leaders said they felt supported by government, especially local authorities which helped them access digital equipment and virtual work experiences.

But, while providers were "sympathetic" to the challenges which central government faced early on in the pandemic, "there were occasions where government policy resulted in practical challenges for colleges".

This happened, for example, over arrangements for exams in January, when the sector was left in the dark after it was announced only that the summer's assessments were cancelled.It was eventually revealed that individual centres would have to decide if January exams should go ahead.

"The abrupt nature of this announcement left colleges with little time to implement changes to keep students and instructors safe," the report reads.

Legrave recalled how "for a lot of the students doing BTECs and City & Guilds qualifications they had their qualifications delayed because clearly you can't be certified as an electrician if you can't prove that you can wire as an electrician".

The Greater London Authority was particularly praised for the "Covid-related funds" it made available. London South East Colleges principal Sam Parrett said the authority had been "excellent" as, "although you had to bid competitively for the funds, we accessed around £200,000 from the GLA to help us provide students with digital devices to support online learning.

"They sprang into action really, really quickly to support colleges."

4. Dramatic changes to economies

"Drastic" changes to local economies led to apprentices being furloughed, colleges having to set up virtual work experiences and having to reskill adult workers, the report found.

However, opportunities in some sectors such as health and social care and logistics have continued to rise and, as people begin to be allowed to travel again, colleges reckon this will stimulate skills demand in the sector.

But, with "jobs disappearing" due to the pandemic, college leaders found "a real need to reskill workers, especially adult workers".

London South East Colleges has been trying to stay ahead of changes in the employment market by sitting on the boards of CBI London and the South East London Chamber of Commerce.

However, Andy Forbes warned: "One of the longer-term issues is trying to read whether there are going to be permanent changes to the labour market, which would mean we would have to permanently reorganise our supply of skills into those sectors."

UCAS pledges to help apprentices as 'digital Baker Clause'

BILLY CAMDEN
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

UCAS has promised to act as a "digital Baker Clause" and reform its service to be "as strong for would-be apprentices as it is for prospective undergraduates".

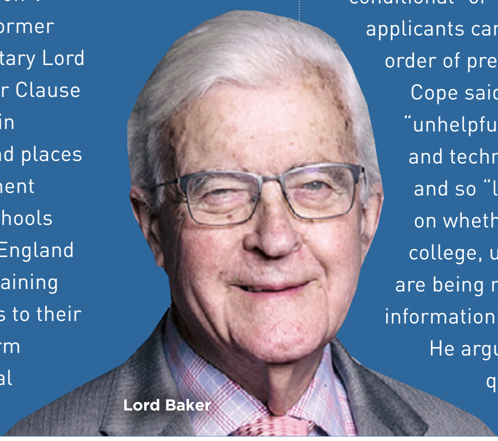
In a report published on Wednesday, the universities admissions service warned that one-third of students are not told about apprenticeships despite it being a legal requirement for schools. And it claimed that only around half of those studying in FE colleges receive their entitlement to information from apprenticeship providers.

A survey by the admissions service also found that three-quarters of students said it was easy to find information about higher education, compared with a quarter who said the same about apprenticeships.

Its report states that, while "most people appreciate that apprenticeships are there as an option, they are not sure either how to get information on them or indeed where they can lead".

UCAS says it is "working hard to improve our apprenticeships offer" and will take an in-depth look at apprenticeships this autumn. It aims to "act as a 'digital Baker Clause', providing comprehensive information, advice and content tools to help students make informed and aspirational choices about the full range of post-secondary options in a single location".

Named after former education secretary Lord Baker, the Baker Clause was introduced in January 2018 and places a legal requirement on secondary schools and colleges in England to allow other training providers access to their learners to inform them of technical qualifications or apprenticeships.



Lord Baker

But non-compliance with the rule has been rife and a lack of government action has led to sector leaders labelling it as the "clause law without teeth".

The UCAS report comes after John Cope, the service's director of strategy, policy and public affairs, told *FE Week* in November that the organisation was working on a plan to level the playing field for HE, FE and apprenticeships.

He said this could in part be achieved through a new post-qualifications admissions system put forward by the government and now under consultation. Currently, applicants to college or university are given predicted grades by their education provider, from which universities can decide whether to make "conditional" or "unconditional" offers. The applicants can then rank their offers in order of preference.

Cope said this creates an "unhelpful split" between academic and technical results and offers, and so "life-changing decisions" on whether to pursue a place at college, university or elsewhere are being made on "imperfect information".

He argued that a post-qualification model could "significantly" level up the playing field for further education and skills providers and create an "offer window" where they and universities could attract applicants at the same time.

This week's report says that UCAS is "not starting from scratch" when it comes to making its service easier to find apprenticeships as the programmes are listed on the "career finder" section of its website, which has been viewed more than a million times in the past year.

UCAS said over half of school-leavers interested in applying for entry in 2022 have registered an interest in apprenticeships, with engineering, computer sciences and architecture, building and planning the most popular.

Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) chief executive Jane Hickie said the government appeared to recognise the flaws with the Baker Clause when it published a three-point plan in its FE white paper to address the matter.

However, the "absence of specific measures in the recently published Skills Bill would suggest we have a plan that's a bark but no bite".

She added: "AELP will be urging parliamentarians to use the Bill to fix this once and for all."

News

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

Employers offered £1,000 to run T Level industry placements

FRASER WHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The government has temporarily increased the cash incentive for employers running T Level industry placements to £1,000.

The Department for Education is keen to encourage businesses to host students for the 315-hour or 45-day placements. In 2020/21, the first year of the qualifications' roll-out, employers were given £750 for every student they placed, up to a maximum of ten students.

The new incentive is "designed to offer support to employers impacted by the pandemic, to ensure they can continue to host placements", this week's announcement said.

Firms will be able to claim for a maximum of 20 students on T Level programmes from 27 May 2021 until July 2022. Three T Levels were introduced last September and a further seven are due to start this autumn.

Skills minister Gillian Keegan said employers "are already recognising the value of hosting a T Level industry placement" as it helps "build the skilled workforce they need for the future".

This "temporary cash boost", she continued, "will help even more employers to experience the benefits, while also providing young people with invaluable first-hand experience in the workplace".

Cash incentives are not the only measure the DfE has used to try and persuade employers to host placements. A new guide was published this week to help businesses understand what is expected of them.

The increased incentive comes on top of an existing employer support package which includes online guidance, case studies and workshops and which is set to continue into 2021/22.

An invitation to tender will be published this summer to extend the package, the DfE has said.

An early engagement notice published last week revealed the package is meant for employers who are "less certain" about industry placements than they are about apprenticeships or work experience.

> **"Will help even more employers to experience the benefits"**

It says employers are particularly unsure about what the placements entail and "how to work with students and providers to structure an appropriate placement".

The pandemic has heightened the difficulty in finding sufficient placements for students. The results of a National Foundation for Educational Research survey published in July 2020 found that employers were "cancelling or not committing to placements".

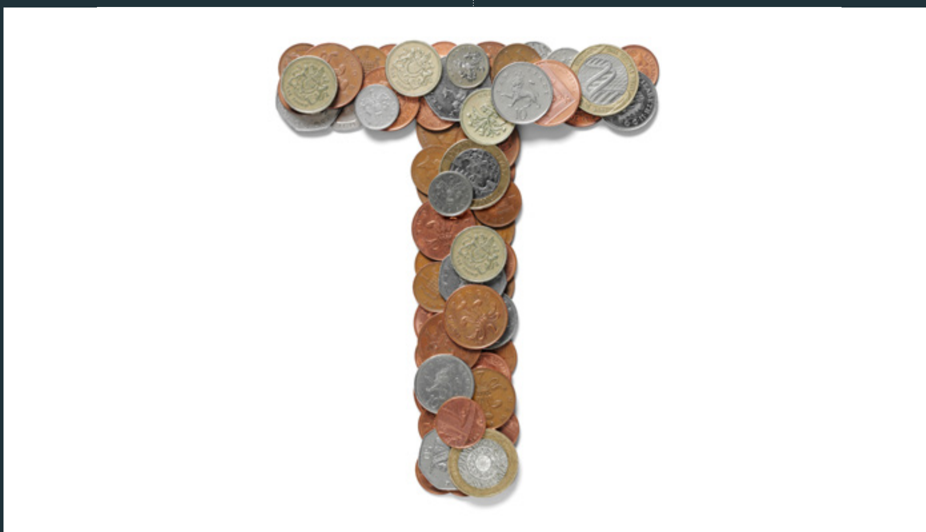
The report went on to say that providers were "most worried" about placements as existing partnerships with employers had been "seriously damaged by Covid".

Some placements have since been delayed. Providers of the early years educator T Level told *FE Week* in January that they had postponed placements to keep students and workplaces safe.

The DfE also cut the minimum hours for placements for level 3 early educator qualifications, including the T Level, from 750 hours to 415 because of the pandemic.

Last week's notice states that the DfE's latest programme of support will include measures to raise awareness among employers, including "targeting specific routes that are proving particularly problematic".

Suppliers of the support will also be expected to provide the DfE with intelligence on employer behaviour and employer patterns. A dedicated response team, and online webinars which can be accessed at any time, will also be expected.



Feature

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

Focus: Commercial income at land-based colleges

Students making cheese at Reaseheath College

'The pandemic has destroyed the commercial side'

JESS STAUFENBERG
@STAUFENBERGJ

From the drop in the price of cream to zero weddings, the land-based further education sector has lost millions of pounds. But innovation is still happening, reports Jess Staufenberg

At Wiltshire College the plans for a new, robotic dairy farm had been in place for three years when lockdown hit. It is an extraordinary piece of equipment: cows enter the automatic milking stations when they want to be milked - rather than at fixed times – and students check high-speed welfare data flooding in about each cow, including any infections, lameness, temperature and weight.

It was part of a £9 million drive to improve facilities across the college, says Ian Revill, the assistant principal. "This is emerging technology that our students need to understand," he explains.

Then Covid-19 arrived. Delays to the building work immediately pushed up the costs of the robotic dairy project. Then, once complete, the new shiny building sat there for many weeks without the college being able to show it off.

"We've done that huge investment, but our recruitment team haven't had the opportunity to showcase that. So we have missed out financially on the bounce factor of that investment," Revill grimaces.

"We've done what we can on social media, but this kind of thing sells itself on smelling, touching, seeing. It doesn't lend itself to an online experience."

'Millions of pounds lost'

At the same time as losing out on face-to-face marketing time, the land-based college sector has lost millions of pounds of income in other ways, *FE Week* can reveal.

The sector – which delivers agriculture, horticulture and other outdoors-based courses – is small within further education and college numbers have dropped since their heyday after the Second World War, and now stand at 36 in England. About two-thirds have joined general FE college groups to ensure their viability.

Unique about these colleges is the significant proportion of their income they raise from commercial operations, which double up as a core part of the student learning experience. Land-based college courses typically receive a funding uplift to support some "specialist" expenditure, such as on animal welfare and equipment, but commercial income continues to be critical.

For example, Revill says that about a third of Wiltshire College's revenue usually comes

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Feature

Focus: Commercial income at land-based colleges

CONTINUED

from commercial activities. The farm alone brings in £1 million a year, including milk for Cadbury's. Other financial impacts soon followed as the pandemic rolled on.

"Commerciality isn't about income – it's about culture"

"We have a small deer farm where we produce venison, and that's tailored for restaurants, so that market completely dried up," Revill says. "People like us who are producing more niche products for farmers' markets have been hit."

The college also has a cat rehoming facility on campus but, with visitors banned, found itself having to take care of more cats as yet another cost. Meanwhile, lambing fairs in March that usually bring in £50,000 have been missed for two years in a row.

At the same time, the costs of running ageing rural sites continue unabated. "A lot of our built space is in old ancestral homes, and the general upkeep is expensive," Revill says.

The college deals with its own sewage, for instance, because it's too remote from the central system. "All this continues 365 days a year. There's a cost of hidden infrastructure that often no one appreciates."

Robotic milking at Reaseheath College

It's a tough outlook after a £9 million outlay on cutting-edge technology.

Revill's words are echoed across the sector. Chris Knell, finance director at Plumpton College in East Sussex, says £1.8 million was lost in commercial income in 2019-20, with an additional half a million pounds lost from "fee-paying" short courses such as licences to practice (for instance, tractor-driving qualifications).

A further million pounds of commercial income has been lost again this year, says Knell, of which £250,000 was from lost residential placements for languages students in summer.

Meanwhile, the price of dairy also plummeted. "The price of milk is set by cream, and that's set by the café and restaurant industry," Knell explains. "So income from milk and cheese sales has dropped."

Thankfully, the college planted a vineyard in 1989 that wins international sparkling wine awards, and alcohol sales did not suffer over lockdown. Waitrose buys about 10,000 bottles from the college every year, and wine sales come to around £200,000 annually, says Knell. The success has also allowed the college to set up new viticulture apprenticeships.

The walled garden at Plumpton College

At Reaseheath College in Cheshire, the losses from not being able to run licence-to-practise courses amount to £50,000. Meanwhile the loss from summer schools was even higher at £142,000.

Cheese sales at local markets would generally bring in about £40,000 a year, which again has disappeared. But the college has a unique facility that would usually bring in more than £230,000 a year and acts as a crucial learning resource for students.

"We've got an industry-standard food hall on site, which companies will use to test a new product," explains Sharon Yates, assistant principal. It is the only college food hall with a double-A star accreditation from the British Retail Consortium, she says.

"A company won't want to take down one of its own production lines to trial a new product, so they come here."

A drinks company, which she cannot name, would want to hire the facilities to try out a new flavouring, for instance. With lockdown easing, bookings are thankfully flooding back in, she says - but it has been a huge hit to take.

Weddings are another area where college income has been reduced to zero. Kingston Maurward College, in Dorchester, was Dorset's wedding venue of the year two years ago, and would normally have 40 weddings a year, according to principal Luke Rake. He estimates an annual loss of between £250,000 and £500,000 due to no weddings.

Overall, in a normal year, the college would bring in about £3 million to £3.5 million through its commercial operations, making up about 35 per cent of its funding. Rake says about £1 million of that was lost last year,

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Focus: Commercial income at land-based colleges

CONTINUED

because the pandemic "destroyed" the commercial side.

But the biggest hit has been around on-site accommodation, explains Alex Payne, chief executive of LANDEX, the membership organisation for land-based colleges.

"The most significant commercial loss has been in residential income [...] due to this element being purely commercial, as residential provision is not eligible for capital support," she tells *FE Week*. "In some cases, contractual commitments to transport providers have also been a challenge."

Reaseheath College, for instance, has lost £667,000 in accommodation income. "For any period where students couldn't come in, we have refunded them," explains Knell.

College leaders say they have made use of the government's furlough scheme, and in at least one case taken out a business support loan. But it is students who lose out when commercial activity drops.

"Effectively, all the money including from the commercial side goes into a single pot and we spend it on the students," says Rake. "If we make a profit, that goes into facilities development."

Learning is also deeply compromised if commercial activities suffer, continues Knell. "Let me put it this way. You don't train an agricultural student in a farm that loses money. You don't train a viticultural student with a product no one wants to buy. For me, commerciality isn't about income – it's about culture."

But the sector has tried to make the best of it. Tough decisions have been made: at Plumpton College, the number of staff with access to the college purchase order system was slashed from 30 to six. "We kept an iron grip on every penny that could be spent," says Knell.

Operations that could be shut down, such as cheese rooms, were while others, such as camping facilities, are set for expansion.

Meanwhile, at Kingston Maurward College, the country estate park is now free to visit, rather than £8 an adult. "We decided it had been a terrible year for everyone and to be more inclusive," says Rake.

This has been a commercial success: footfall has shot up, with coffee sales making the venture more profitable than before. "It's a different way of looking at the business."

Other lessons have been learnt. James Fryer, head of farm estate and grounds at Brooksby Melton College in Leicestershire, said the lockdown coincided with a decision to move away from seeking to raise as much income as possible.

Instead, the college's commercial operations are now more learner-focused, he says. For instance, the college is no longer buying faster-growing cow breeds, but slower growing breeds native to the UK to emphasise sustainability to students.

A student at Wiltshire College

"We've previously expected the farm to make money to fill the college coffers, which perhaps has meant the farm has suffered. Now we want to focus more on the farm as an outdoor classroom."

The idea is that, with less over-stretched facilities, student application numbers will rise. This year the college has 350 more applications for September compared with last year.

Other changes are afoot. Wiltshire College is looking at more partnerships with industry so that the latest equipment can be borrowed, rather than bought every time.

Vineyards at Plumpton College

"This income loss is going to have a long tail"

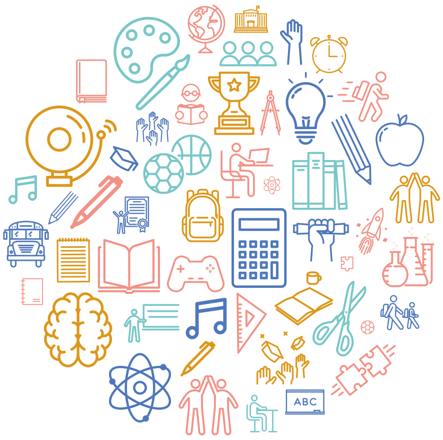
But the sector is still under huge financial pressure. Principals are unanimous in warning that its students will be more needed than ever post Brexit and with climate change and food security concerns at the fore.

"This income loss is going to have a long tail," Revill concludes. "The land-based sector has been underfunded for so long. If we want to train students in skills for the future, the sector needs to be properly recognised."

16 - 30 **JUNE 2021** | **ONLINE** | FREE REGISTRATION **NOW OPEN**

HEADLINE PARTNER

Pearson



The annual

FESTIVAL OF EDUCATION

ONLINE | 16-30 June 2021

Across two weeks, we will broadcast over **20 Festival Keynote Sessions** – all FREE to view!

Visit the Festival website to find out more about our Festival Keynote sessions.

The 2021 Festival of Education will take place online across two inspiring weeks and will be free for educators across the globe.

SESSIONS ANNOUNCED SO FAR INCLUDE:

Deborah Frances-White, Dylan Wiliam, Amanda Spielman, Daniel Willingham, Pragya Agarwal, Paul Kirschner.

FURTHER SESSIONS TO BE ANNOUNCED.

#EDUCATIONFEST

educationfest.co.uk

FESTIVAL PARTNERS

BBC Bitesize

COGNITA An inspiring world of education

Teach First

LITERARY FESTIVAL PARTNER

BLOOMSBURY EDUCATION

Carlisle college

Vice Principal - Curriculum and Quality

Carlisle College

Salary: Circa £70,000

Closing Date: 11 June 2021

Carlisle College is an FE College situated close to the Lake District National Park in Cumbria and near to the Scottish Borders. We are seeking a dedicated, innovative and collaborative individual with a proven track record in FE to join our Principalship Team.

With a focus on curriculum and quality we are looking for someone who has experience of senior leadership in the education sector and who wants to play a key role in driving quality at the College forward as they join us in our journey to excellence. You should be passionate about FE and the difference it can make to individuals and communities and have a thorough understanding of curriculum development as well as quality.

Click here for more information and to apply

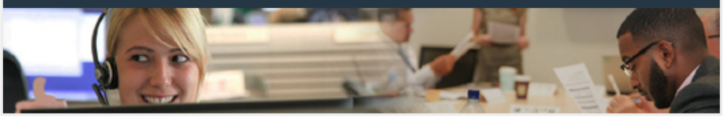
NHBC
Raising Standards. Protecting Homeowners

NHBC has a number of fantastic opportunities for Senior Trainer / Assessors in our Apprenticeship and Industry training teams.

These excellent opportunities are to join our growing Training business who heavily support NHBC's ongoing commitment to providing high quality insights and training to the home building sector. You will deliver relevant, impactful and engaging training to Site Management, trades (most notably Bricklaying) and supporting teams such as customer service, sales and design.

If you are interested in helping make a real difference to the quality of new homes built in the UK then we may have a role for you.

To review our current vacancies and apply please click here



SPARSHOLT COLLEGE GROUP

VICE PRINCIPAL - CURRICULUM

£67,964 - £70,004 per annum.

Relocation support

As a member of the Strategic Leadership Team, reporting directly to the Principal & Chief Executive, the Vice Principal (Sparsholt campus) will work with senior staff to lead and manage the College to achieve outstanding student success, and will be responsible, in liaison with the Principal, for the formulation and implementation of College Policy in respect of the overall management of the College.

The post holder will be responsible for the direction and management of a large curriculum portfolio on the Sparsholt campus (which will include commercial activities), contributing actively to the design, development and implementation of the College's strategic plan and objectives. The post holder will possess outstanding leadership and management skills and have an in-depth understanding of the post 16 Education offer. In addition, the post-holder will be required to join the designated safeguarding team.

The role will involve working with Governors, Senior Post Holders, the Strategic Leadership Team, College Managers and staff, Government bodies and other external partners and networks.

You will be joining a College which is proud of its reputation for excellence in a number of fields, rated 'Good' by Ofsted and 'Good' for financial health by the ESFA, and which is ambitious for our students' futures.

The position offers a very significant opportunity to join a dynamic leadership team and to develop your senior career pathway within the FE College sector in a high quality and supportive environment.

Relocation support / on-site accommodation available. Further details set out in further information document.

Benefits include: Teachers' Pension Scheme, free car-parking, occupational sick pay, ability to access a range of CPD events and activities.

Closing date: Noon on 15 June 2021
Interview Date: 23 June 2021
Application packs are available from:
01962 797309
https://www.sparsholt.ac.uk/college/jobs/
HR@sparsholt.ac.uk

We are committed to equal opportunities for all, irrespective of age, disability, ethnicity, gender, marital status, religion or sexuality. The college is registered with the Disclosure and Barring Service and the successful applicant will be required to apply for an enhanced disclosure

Kingston Maurward College

Deputy Principal

- Can you Inspire?
- Can you Challenge?
- Do you Care?
- Can you do all of the above, together, and carry forward a team of passionate staff to greatness?

If so we'd love to hear from you.

Salary: £80,000

For more details or to apply please visit www.kmc.ac.uk/about-us/work-for-us/

Kingston Maurward College
Dorchester, Dorset, DT2 8PY
www.kmc.ac.uk

Ofsted Good Provider

KINGSTON MAURWARD COLLEGE

eastcoast COLLEGE

Please **CLICK HERE** to find further information and apply.

East Coast College has been through a transformative journey and is now recognised as an Ofsted good provider with a clear aspiration to become outstanding at our next inspection.

This year we have been recognised as one of Britain's best Education and Training providers to work for in a Sunday Times Best Companies list. The next phase of the College's journey brings significant exciting new developments through our involvement with the Institute of Technology, our nuclear and civils projects and our T Level curriculum development all of which require additional expertise to enable us to deliver our strategic plan.

If you are currently in a management role and looking for a new and exciting challenge, or if you are looking for the next stage in your professional development or are interested into stepping in to the further education sector, we would love to hear from you.

Director of Faculty
Lowestoft Sixth Form
Full Time
Band K (£40,726.20 - £45,825.05)

Curriculum Manager - Motor Vehicle, Welding and Fabrication
Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth
Full Time
Band K (£40,726.20 - £45,825.05)

Curriculum Manager - ESOL and Access
Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth
Full Time
Band K (£40,726.20 - £45,825.05)

Curriculum Manager - Civil Engineering
Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth
Full Time
Band K (£40,726.20 - £45,825.05)

Apprenticeships Delivery Manager - Engineering and Construction
Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth
Full Time
Band J (£36,190.13 - £40,726.20)

Quality Lead
Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth
Full Time
Lecturer Scale (£25,660.95 - £34,345.85)

To further support our journey to outstanding we are also looking for Governors to support the College and its governance to become outstanding. We are particularly interested to talk to people who have experience strategically in Finance, Audit, Quality and Curriculum Development. Please contact Wendy Stanger, Director of Governance to arrange an informal chat about this opportunity **w.stanger@eastcoast.ac.uk**

Opinion

MEG HILLIER

Chair, Public Accounts Committee

Government must act now to make colleges financially sustainable

The FE sector will play a vital role in retraining workers and filling skills gaps, writes Meg Hillier, but it cannot do so without more support

The further education sector in England receives around £7 billion of public funding each year, to educate and train around 4 million learners of whom more than half are taught in FE colleges.

The financial health of the college sector has been a cause for concern for many years and too many colleges are financially precarious. In 2018/19, one in three colleges reported an operating deficit.

Financial pressures are having a detrimental impact on what colleges can offer students, including through cuts to mental health and other support services.

Meanwhile, the economic impact of Covid-19 means the sector has become even more important in addressing labour market skills gaps and retraining workers.

The Public Accounts Committee recently examined financial sustainability in the further education sector and, as I highlight in my annual report, our inquiry gave me little comfort that a long-term solution is in sight.

We found that the bodies responsible for funding and oversight have been slow to address the emerging financial and educational risks, despite the potentially serious consequences for learners and local economies.

The college principals we spoke to told us that they had been forced to make decisions that affect the life chances of their learners and limit skills in the local economy. For example, they had closed whole classes, including modern foreign languages and English language provision for those who may lack the linguistic skills to find work; they dropped specific types of qualification, including some A-levels; and they had been unable to upgrade their buildings or invest in online learning.

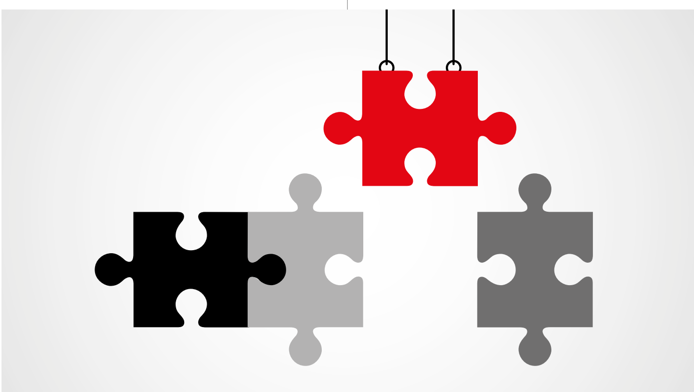
> “Colleges need more proactive support from the centre to manage the challenges they face”

Colleges' autonomy can hamper the central departments' ability to protect learners and safeguard taxpayers' money. For example, colleges are free to borrow sums that they may struggle to repay, and to run with financial deficits year after year. But colleges are also grappling with issues beyond their control.

Perennially late funding decisions, overly complex funding arrangements, and iniquitous VAT rules between sixth-form colleges and other post-16 education all add pressure.

Some colleges also face serious problems arising from the historic Building Colleges for the Future programme. When the programme was suspended, 79 capital project applications had been approved in principle by the former Learning and Skills Council, but only 22 subsequently received final approval. Reductions in funding since then have left some colleges with new premises that are under-used, or large debts that they are struggling to repay.

The National Audit Office reported that, in February 2020, the government was intervening in nearly half of colleges for financial health reasons, and in recent years the taxpayer has stumped up over £250 million in emergency funding, alongside other support, to ensure the continued functioning of colleges.



Oversight arrangements are complex, sometimes overlapping, and too focused on intervening when financial problems have already become serious rather than helping to prevent them in the first place. While the introduction of the Further Education Commissioner has been a positive development, there remains confusion over who is responsible for intervening and in what circumstances.

As the focus turns to rebuilding and reskilling following the chaos caused by Covid-19, this is a chance to develop the proper, integrated vision for the college sector that has been lacking for so long.

The Department for Business, Innovation & Skills and the Department for Education appear to see area-based reviews of post-16 education as a fix-all solution to the current problems, but the reviews do not cover all types of provider and it is not clear how they will deliver a robust and financially sustainable sector.

Colleges need more proactive support from the centre to manage the significant financial challenges they face. Some need to step up their governance as further funding cuts cannot be ruled out. Decisive action and intervention are needed to put the further education sector back on a financially sustainable footing.

Opinion

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

ALAN TUCKETT

Emeritus professor of education, Wolverhampton University

A history of the Learning and Work Institute as it turns 100 today

Through its many incarnations, the LWI has supported initiatives that are still with us now, writes Alan Tuckett

The Learning and Work Institute celebrates its hundredth birthday today. Despite never being blessed with a surfeit of cash, the LWI can look back on 100 years of advocacy and research for lifelong learning.

Along the way it has fostered a range of successful innovations that led to the establishment of major national and international institutions. It has throughout been a critical friend to governments, challenging and supporting policy around adult education.

The LWI was founded as the British Institute of Adult Education (BIAE) in 1921. It was the brainchild of Lord Haldane (who went on to become Lord Chancellor) and Albert Mansbridge, who also created the Workers' Educational Association.

I was an active member from 1974, and led its work from 1988 until 2011. Its membership when it first opened was limited to individuals rather than institutions, drawn from universities, voluntary bodies and local government. They recognised the value of a national voice promoting adult education that could also research and share good practice.

In the 1920s it fought budget cuts and launched two inquiries, one on broadcasting and adult education, and the other on the role of film in national life. These led to the BIAE helping to create the British Film Institute, and the BBC's education advisory council.

In 1934 the BIAE's charismatic secretary, W.E. Williams, noticed the lack of public art in provincial towns and established Art for the People, taking exhibitions of borrowed works to municipal settings.

Parallel initiatives in music led to the creation of the Council for Encouragement of Music and the Arts, which from 1945 became the Arts Council, eventually led by Williams.

Meanwhile, Williams also became chief editor of Penguin Books, and during the Second World War, the BIAE seconded him to run the Army Bureau of Current Affairs, too. The weekly discussion materials sent to soldiers about current affairs are often cited as contributing to Labour's 1945 landslide.

In 1945 local authorities established the National Foundation for Adult Education, with local authorities and other providers as institutional members.

> “Its work has been essential in the fight to limit cuts”

BIAE was strapped financially, and in 1948 the two amalgamated as the National Institute of Adult Education.

NIAE's international work helped create the European Bureau of Adult Education in 1954 and the International Council for Adult Education in 1974.

From 1975 NIAE hosted the government-backed Adult Literacy Resource Agency and its successor bodies, playing an active role in the establishment of English as a Second Language courses.

Throughout the 1980s it also supported activist member committees on gender and race equality, and promoted learners' voices.

Then in 1973 the NIAE became the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, to mark a broadening brief. Until 1991 it hosted two additional innovative government-funded agencies, REPLAN – for unemployed adults – and the Unit for the Development of Adult Continuing Education.

NIACE returned to advocacy with a bang in the run-up to 1992 legislation, where the government threatened to end public funding for community adult education.

Working with the National Federation of Women's Institutes and local government, NIACE co-ordinated a campaign that saw the proposal reversed in just six weeks.

At the same time NIACE launched Adult Learners' Week, to celebrate existing learners and encourage others to participate, with free helplines and in partnership with television companies. It was a striking success, was adopted by UNESCO and spread to 55 countries.

NIACE's annual adult participation surveys have also helped the government to focus on who doesn't participate, and its qualitative studies have put forward solutions.

Its work had a major influence on the expansion of adult opportunities between 1997 and 2003, and has been essential in the fight to limit cuts as public policies have narrowed in the years since.

The latest name change came in 2014, with the amalgamation of NIACE and Inclusion, which was the research organisation that developed from the unemployment unit.

As it celebrates its centenary, the LWI's work is as relevant and vital as ever.

Opinion

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

REBECCA CONROY
Chief executive, East Sussex College Group
SAM PARRETT
Chief executive, London South East Colleges

College collaboration is a gamechanger for driving improvement

An independent project manager helped overcome initial challenges, write Rebecca Conroy and Sam Parrett

"Collaboration" brings to mind teamwork and shared goals. This is what we were thinking of last year when London South East Colleges applied for a grant to work with East Sussex College Group from the Department for Education's College Collaboration Fund.

The £9 million fund was introduced by the government in February 2020 in a bid to improve governance and leadership at colleges.

It followed the Strategic College Improvement Fund, which ended in 2019. Bids of up to £500,000 can be submitted by groups of colleges to "share good practice and expertise" over a 12-month programme.

As with all new relationships, we came up against challenges on the way, but managed to tackle them and achieved more than we had initially hoped.

LSEC led the project and was awarded funding based on a comprehensive bid, focusing on four main areas: financial resilience, SEND quality, leadership and governance and digital transformation.

The DfE's match funding requirement of 25 per cent was covered by LSEC, as we were confident the benefit of the project outweighed these initial costs.

Throughout the project, we have delivered four virtual conferences around our selected workstream. We also developed digital transformation strategies for both colleges, established nine new online courses (focusing on healthcare, digital and warehousing) and collaborated with eight additional colleges to see what further lessons we could learn from them.

Both of our college groups are also on track to reduce costs for subcontracting to zero by the end of 2021-22 to ensure that we are meeting the specific needs of our communities.

We have packaged this programme into a college improvement framework called #ChangeMakers – a comprehensive resource we will share with the sector.

But, as with any new venture, reaching these positive outcomes has required flexibility, lateral thinking and a common purpose.

Initially, it was difficult for ESCG to find the time needed for staff to dedicate to the project. Focus was understandably on the day-to-day running of the college during a global pandemic!

However, we both understood that staff buy-in was crucial and people had to be supported in terms of their time and workload. So we used some of the funding to backfill some roles and free up other staff to commit fully to the partnership.

An independent project manager was also recruited to facilitate conversations across both our colleges. This unbiased oversight proved invaluable by keeping us all on task.

As CEOs, our positive relationship with each other from the outset also helped ensure that our teams were encouraged to work well together.

> "Initially, it was difficult to find the time needed for staff"

We were aware of potential resistance from staff to this new partnership and to the changes being suggested. However, we established a systemised leadership approach, which is about embedding processes you know work, delivered by the people on the ground who have tried and tested the techniques.

For instance, LSEC staff at all levels shared their experiences of what genuinely works for them in practice, while ESCG staff listened, asked questions and fed back. Both teams then came up with solutions together. The staff could see the real value of what we were trying to achieve and felt involved in making changes.

It also provided excellent CPD opportunities for LSEC staff, through mentoring and supporting others.

Having to conduct the entire programme of work virtually had its limitations, particularly in relation to our special educational needs workstream.

LSEC's expertise in this area has helped ESCG to develop a new and consistent offer across its sites – but owing to the pandemic, it was not possible for ESCG staff to visit LSEC's facilities.

We tackled this issue using virtual tour technology, which was adequate but not quite the same. With restrictions now easing, our teams are planning proper site visits.

Our strong college-to-college partnership and commitment of staff has been crucial – but in reality, the project would not have been a success without the funding.

This model is a game changer for FE, facilitating real collaboration and harnessing the expertise and talent we know is widespread in our sector.

TOM RICHMOND
Director, EDSK

The National Colleges debacle reveals Whitehall's goldfish memory

If ministers did the necessary background research, failed initiatives would be less likely to be repeated, writes Tom Richmond

Albert Einstein famously asserted that "the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results".

When the policy memory of many government departments – particularly on education matters – seems about as long as the average ministerial tenure, there is inevitably a risk that the same mistakes could repeat themselves.

Step forward National Colleges.

Launched to much fanfare in 2016 with £80 million behind them (not to be sniffed at in the age of austerity), the five National Colleges were set up to ensure that the UK had enough skilled workers in several industries crucial to economic growth.

The plan was for the Colleges to focus on training at levels 4 to 6 (degree level) to plug the gaps in our skills system.

When they were launched, who would disagree with the concept of a National College for High-Speed Rail to support HS2, or a National College for Nuclear to support Hinkley Point?

Throw in National Colleges for Onshore Oil and Gas, Digital Skills and the Creative and Cultural Industries, and you have a policy that appeared to be in exactly the right place at the right time.

Five years later, and we learnt this month that the National College for HS2 has officially come off the rails after being closed by ministers when facing insolvency.

That's after the College took millions in government funding and even blew £73,000 on a legal challenge over its 'inadequate' Ofsted grade, which it eventually abandoned.

Rather than being scrapped, it has been converted into part of the University of Birmingham.

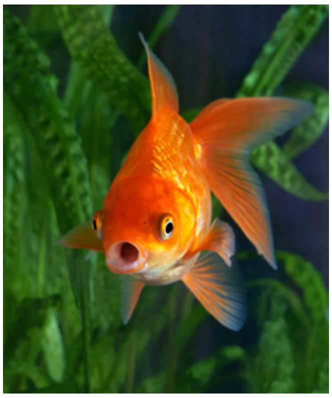
Despite this dramatic rescue, it is just yet another dismal episode in the National College saga.

In 2019 it was revealed the National College for the Creative Industries would be dissolved, despite being set up with £5.5 million and getting bailouts to keep it afloat.

> "The policy rationale was always dubious"

Then this month *FE Week* revealed the National College for Onshore Oil and Gas is being wound up without ever having properly opened.

Seasoned observers may have raised an eyebrow when National Colleges first emerged, not least because it had only been a few years since "National Skills Academies" (NSAs) were unveiled – accompanied by their very own fanfare, naturally.



These Academies, like National Colleges, were supposed to be employed-led centres of excellence that would improve the quality and quantity of vocational training by responding to skills needs in particular sectors.

They were first established in 2006 and subsequently rolled out in industries such as nuclear, and creative and cultural skills (detecting a trend yet?).

Although the idea for NSAs originated in a New Labour government white paper in 2005, the coalition government kept the ball rolling in the early 2010s with new NSAs in "green skills" and health.

Even so, the top-down nature of this initiative coupled with a strong whiff of ministers "picking winners" meant that the policy rationale was always dubious.

The quiet relegation of NSAs in the mid-2010s coupled with the appearance of National Colleges was a subtle switch that was never fully explained or justified.

Spending public money on shiny new buildings for some of the National Colleges and NSAs also raised questions about whether improving existing facilities and colleges would have been a more sensible bet.

It would be wrong to say that National Colleges and National Skills Academies were identical in every respect. Nevertheless, the circular nature of such policymaking does not bode well.

Ministers come and go, as do senior civil servants, with the latter often showing even less interest in policy history than the former.

If the necessary background research had been done before National Colleges were devised, considerable resources and ministerial blushes would almost certainly have been spared.

The latest wheeze comes in the form of "Institutes of Technology" (IoTs), which are yet another attempt to impose a top-down institutional solution on the skills landscape.

That is not to say these Institutes are doomed to fail, nor that the investment isn't welcome (it certainly is). Nevertheless, one wonders whether we will look back in a few years from now on IoTs and ask why nobody pointed out at the time that we were about to make the same mistakes all over again.

Amidst all the uncertainty surrounding the future of the IoTs and the remaining National Colleges, all we know for certain is that Einstein would not have enjoyed a career in skills policy.

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

READER'S REPLY

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

Looks like the new people can't make it work. Hadlow was famous for its commercial work supporting students. My start in life was a result of training in real-life work locations, including experience in Hadlow farm shop. Don't know how it was made to pay before, but the new owners can't do it. A massive hit to students wanting to learn. They don't understand and can't make it work. Such a loss to Kent.

Trevorabrahams, website

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

Key thing I think here is we'll get six weeks' notice and then a month to do it, which is better than most timelines for these things!

Steve Hewitt, Twitter

'Middle-class grab' on apprenticeships confirmed by new analysis

Is there any link between exam results, levels of English and maths achieved and entry to apprenticeships? Is the escalation of disaffected and exclusions, many in deprived areas, a cause of lower applicant numbers in that group and of looked after children or ethnic minorities? Lack of one-to-one career interviews will not have helped either!

Ros Lucas, Twitter

Important piece in *FE Week* – apprenticeship policies have narrowed participation rather than widened. DfE needs to urgently prioritise inclusion, access, diversity in apprenticeships. They do in HE, so why not here?

David Hughes, Twitter

REPLY OF THE WEEK

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

Colleges cannot afford to subsidise unprofitable enterprises or they would be wasting public money intended to deliver education to their learners. That is exactly what has been wrong at so many colleges and private providers. It is astonishing that anyone can suggest it is a good thing to do anything that takes much-needed resources away from the very learners who generate funding from the ESFA in the first place. Those who used the shop will have to find somewhere that is run on a commercial basis. The haemorrhaging of finances has at long last been stopped and the colleges of Kent will all hopefully be there for the residents of Kent for many years to come.

Phil Hatton, website

The shift is two-fold and I'd argue primarily levy-driven rather than standards-driven. One obvious exception being the strange refusal to allow the L2 business administration standard. The problem for the L2 business admin is the L3 business admin is really only about a level 2.5 so is stifling the potential for the one sitting below it. They need to be reviewed together, including the revision of the ludicrous L3 end-point assessment.

Louise Doyle, Twitter

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

Being on the new "list" of post-16 ITPs will be a prerequisite to access a funding agreement whether that is through the ESFA or through a mayoral combined authority or the Greater London Authority - having been given autonomy and control, feels like Whitehall is certainly reigning in aspects of devolutionary control.

Simon Ashworth, Twitter

Right2Learn campaign to host inaugural conference tonight Excellent and inspiring evening and delighted to be part of it

Ann Limb, Twitter

Bulletin

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

Movers & Shakers

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

Vicki Stott

Chief executive, QAA

Start date October 2021

Previous job
Executive director of operations and deputy chief executive, QAA

Interesting fact
She is a "keen" runner and during lockdown last summer, she ran 1,000 miles in a virtual race across Tennessee (and so put more miles in her knees than in her car last year).

Beth Chaudhary

Strategy director, Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education

Start date May 2021

Previous job
Strategy director, Cabinet Office

Interesting fact
She has qualified and worked both as a pool lifeguard and mountain biking guide before joining the civil service in 2004.

Paul Boyle

Chair, Jisc

Start date May 2021

Concurrent job
Vice chancellor, University of Swansea

Interesting fact
He likes to run socially and has participated in the race up the Empire State Building.

Cheryl Smith

Principal, Printworks campus, Leeds City College

Start date April 2021

Previous job
Head of curriculum, Salford City College

Interesting fact
She enjoys "all things digital," including photography and documentary-making, as well as spending time with her son.

Rachel Cooper

Strategy director, Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education

Start date May 2021

Previous job
Strategy director, Cabinet Office

Interesting fact
She was part of the smart energy team in the government who first agreed with Ofgem how large-scale batteries could be licensed within the electricity system.