



FEWEEK

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

PROVIDERS LEFT WAITING

- Adult Education Budget tender results - DELAYED
- Skills Bootcamp Lot 1 tender results - DELAYED
- Traineeship 16-19 market entry opportunity - DELAYED

FEWEEK

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.STAUFBENBERG@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

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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

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Sector leaders warn of 'barmy' delays to 16-18 traineeship expansion

BILLY CAMDEN
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Exclusive

Providers are being blocked from offering traineeships to 16- to 18-year-olds as the government drags its feet on a "market entry exercise" that was promised last October.

Sector leaders are warning that the issue, described as "barmy", will put the nail in the coffin of chancellor Rishi Sunak's target to triple the number of starts this year.

While recruitment of 19-to-24 traineeship learners is reportedly seeing a boost following an albeit delayed tender, the growth of 16 to 18s is faltering as no such exercise for this age group has been forthcoming.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency is understood to be relying mainly on colleges with 16-to-19 study programme contracts to ramp up delivery but is now conceding they will need to expand the independent training provider market to achieve significant growth.

A 16-to-18 "market entry exercise" was promised last year but it is still yet to get off the ground. The ESFA continues to tell *FE Week* that it will be launched in "due course".

Let Me Play Ltd, which won a £3 million contract to deliver 19-to-24 traineeships this year, is one provider pleading with the agency to give it the opportunity to deliver the pre-employment programme to 16 to 18s.

Its co-founder and director, Matthew Lord, said: "We work with 16- to 18-year-olds on NEET contracts in London. We are keen to develop pathways for young people to progress and enter the world of work – traineeships would be one of those options, along with our apprenticeship provision.

"It would make sense to be able to offer them the same opportunities as we can for the 19- to 24-year-olds."

The Association of Employment and Learning Providers claims there have been instances where providers have had to turn 16 to 18s away as a result of having no contract for this provision and

no way of getting hold of one.

GTA England, a membership organisation for group training associations, also told *FE Week* several of its members want to expand into the 16-to-18 traineeship market to fill current vacancies.

Chief executive Mark Maudsley said: "Our challenge is market entry opportunities at 16 to 18 as we have many with vacancies that can't be filled. Opening access would enable those members without traineeship contracts to capitalise on their excellent links with employers and create life opportunities via traineeships to progress on to the apprenticeship programme.

"With the trebling of the traineeships target for starts, members remain very keen and able to respond, but time is of the essence."

There needs to be more than 43,000 traineeship starts between August 2020 and July 2021 to meet Sunak's tripling target, which was set in July 2020 as part of his plan for jobs.

Latest government data only spans the period August to January but shows a total of 8,800 starts.

Compared to the same period in 2019/20, starts for 19 to 24s went up 44 per cent, from 1,600 to 2,300, but starts for 16 to 18s dropped four per cent, from 6,800 to 6,500.

The sluggish take-up comes despite the government reforming the funding rules for traineeships in September, which included increasing the funding rate for 19 to 24s by 54 per cent, from £970 to £1,500, and opening them up to people who already hold a level 3 qualification.

Employer cash incentives of £1,000 for each traineeship learner they take on were also introduced.

A big chunk of the starts needed in the last

half of 2020/21 – around 20,000 – are hoped to come from a £65 million tender for 19-to-24 traineeships.

The procurement was originally planned to get under way last summer but was beset with delays – an issue that *FE Week* understands personally annoyed Sunak, as it hindered his expansion plans.

Steve Latus, the ESFA's head of traineeships, spoke at last month's AELP conference and told delegates that growing 16-to-18 starts numbers was now his "big concern".

"In theory we have got enough capacity to deliver because we have the colleges. But actually, all the evidence says that we will need to grow the programme outside of just colleges.

"That is why we will be looking at coming out in the near future with an announcement about growing the 16-to-18 programme. I can't go any further than that today...but unless we grow the programme with more independent providers, we won't achieve the target."

Simon Ashworth, the AELP's chief policy officer, claimed his organisation is "seeing providers with demand for young people but they can't get hold of any funding to help them". He said opening up the market should be a "no-brainer".

He told *FE Week*: "The ESFA is trying to go to colleges with study programme contracts which allows them to move into traineeships and encourage them to do more 16-to-18 traineeships. But they're not going to triple the numbers with that as a strategy.

"It seems barmy that you open up the 19-to-24 market, you've got providers with young people and good links to employers but nothing on 16 to 18. Unless they open up the market quickly, they're not going to hit the target on their backs."

Ashworth believes the ESFA should give providers that passed the 19-to-24 procurement automatic ability to deliver to 16-to-18 traineeships and then run a "mini market entry event for those that didn't bid".



Tick tock: AEB and bootcamp tender outcomes delayed

BILLY CAMDEN

BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The outcomes of the national adult education budget and skills bootcamps tenders have been delayed.

In a message to bidders of the £73 million AEB procurement on Thursday, the Education and Skills Funding Agency said the results will be issued "very shortly" but not on June 24 as planned.

The agency had told *FE Week* earlier this week they were "on track" to announce the winners this week. Thursday's message provided no reason for the delay.

It said: "We previously communicated that providers would be notified on the outcome of their bids on or around June 24, 2021 via the e-procurement portal Jaggaer.

"We wish to update you that award decision notices will not be issued on June 24, but will follow very shortly."

Bidders to one of the two lots of skills bootcamps tenders are also still awaiting their results, despite being told they should start delivering the courses from this month.

Each tender was worth £18 million. Lot 2 results were communicated in May but the results of lot 1 are still not known.

Asked for an update on the results this week, an ESFA spokesperson told *FE Week*: "We cannot comment at this stage as details regarding the procurement are commercially sensitive and therefore confidential.

"Contracts will be published on the government's Contracts Finder website in due course."

There have been growing concerns about the limited time providers will have to spend the bootcamps funding, considering it must be used by the end of March 2022.

This was exacerbated this month when the bootcamp winning providers from lot 2 were



refusing to sign contracts after finding out the government would be paying research consultants to randomly reject half of all eligible applicants.

Their challenge forced the ESFA into a U-turn.

Commenting on an initial delay to tender results in April, Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief executive Jane Hickie said: "If it goes on much longer, AELP members would find this delay very worrying in terms of being able to start delivery next month and to deliver the expected outcomes in the projected 12-month contract period."

She added that given the "recent track-record" on missed procurement outcome deadlines, an "even bigger worry" would be a delay in announcing the adult education budget procured contracts for 2021/22.

"We really can't afford to see this happen when we are supposed to be supporting adult learners affected by the pandemic's impact."

Bids for a slice of the AEB funding initially up for grabs in 2021/22 opened in February and closed in March.

The ESFA had originally planned to launch the tender in July 2020 but it faced a number

of setbacks. It is a "re-procurement" exercise, and follows roughly the same scope as the controversial AEB tender that caused havoc in 2017 – the contracts for which expire this year.

The procurement includes caps depending on the type of provider applying for the funding to "mitigate significant oversubscription and speculative bidding". A minimum contract value has been set at £150,000 and a maximum of £3 million.

Priority courses for this tender include the new first full level 3 qualification offer for those aged 24 and over as per the prime minister's lifetime skills guarantee, as well as sector-based work academy programmes (SWAPs) – both of which were key features in the chancellor's Plan for Jobs.

The total AEB procurement could potentially reach £157 million if extensions are granted in future years, but these are not guaranteed.

The service start date is set for August 1, 2021.

This tender is just for the national budget, not for devolved combined authorities, which run their own procurements.

High-street names cite cost as they exit apprenticeship training market

FRASER WHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Exclusive

Several major retailers have turned their backs on delivering their own apprenticeships, with one blaming the costs of training as the reason for their exit.

Sixty-four providers made "unplanned exits" from publicly funded provision in 2019/20, as revealed in the impact assessment for the government's landmark Skills and Post-16 Education Bill, published in May.

A freedom of information request by *FE Week* has now uncovered major retailers such as Boots Opticians, Halfords, Thomas Cook and Greggs were among those that stopped delivering.

All of them have now handed training over to external providers.

Halfords, a major retailer of motoring and cycling goods, already canned its level 2 provision, which the vast majority of its apprentices were part of, in April 2019.

It made a full exit from training apprentices in May 2020, with a spokesperson saying they began using an outsourced training provider as it was "a more cost-effective way to deliver apprenticeships and ensure the quality of our apprenticeship programmes".

While the retailer did not expand on its reasons for leaving publicly funded training, it previously said dropping level 2 provision was caused by costs incurred from slashes to government funding.

An internal email seen by *FE Week* in 2019 revealed managers believed the 20 per cent reduction in funding for the level 2 retailer standard from £5,000 to £4,000 in December would "adversely impact on the quality of programme Halfords can offer, impacting the current curriculum, which received praise during our recent inspection".

Halfords received a 'good' grade from Ofsted for its provision to over 1,000 apprentices in 2019.

Boots Opticians Professional Services Limited, an arm of the high-street pharmacists, told *FE Week* it abandoned direct training in May



2020 as the new model means "we can be more responsive to business needs", but refused to elaborate.

It had been graded 'requires improvement' by Ofsted, but made 'reasonable progress' in every area of a monitoring visit covering over 100 apprentices in 2019.

Bakery chain Greggs, which binned its training in 2019, also did not elaborate on its decision not to reapply for the register of apprenticeship training providers that year.

A spokesperson would only say: "We remain committed to supporting the development and growth of our people and continue to run apprenticeship programmes and a number of other schemes to help encourage people into employment across the business, both internally and with external providers."

Holiday company Thomas Cook, which had yet to be visited by Ofsted, entered liquidation in September 2019, the same month it made its unplanned exit.

The following month, its retail arm was acquired by Hays Travel, headed by DfE non-executive director Irene Hays. The new owners offered all of Thomas Cook's former employees a job and a spokesperson told *FE Week* 31 apprentices chose to continue their programme with Hays Travel.

The Thomas Cook brand has since been bought up by Chinese company Fosun Tourism Group and re-established as an online-only service.

A spokesperson for the new brand said they are "absolutely keen to bring in apprentices as the travel industry rebounds.

"We hope that 2022 will bring a more stable holiday-buying pattern so that we can grow sustainably, bringing in fresh talent to our core areas of digital and customer service," though the spokesperson said they would only bring in a "handful" of learners.

While it is not set in stone, the spokesperson indicated they would use a hybrid of in-house and outsourced training delivery.

Virgin Trains ceased trading in December 2019 after it lost the franchise to run train services on the west coast to Avanti, which took on their employees.

Over 100 apprentices came with them, and their training is now being delivered by organisations external to Avanti.

Of the other providers that made unplanned exits from ESFA-funded provision in 2019/20, 19 left after a new-provider-monitoring Ofsted report found them making 'insufficient progress'.

A further eight left after receiving a grade three or four from the watchdog.

Twenty-one had either a grade 2 or had made 'reasonable' or 'significant' progress according to a monitoring visit.

Sixteen did not have a report published when they exited.

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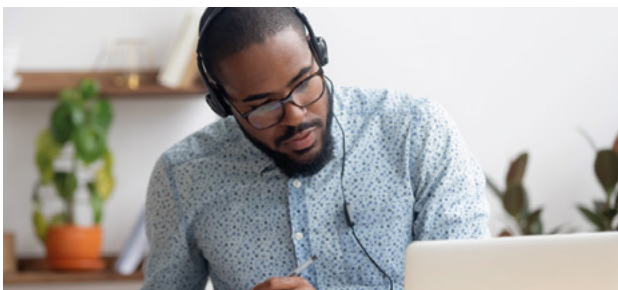
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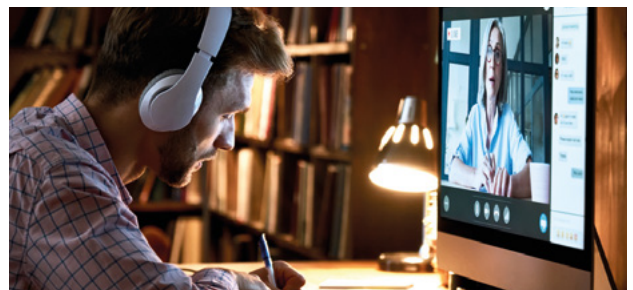
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‘If anyone can sort out this mess, Jo can’ – Williamson adviser favourite to be new Ofqual chief

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Gavin Williamson has put forward his own policy adviser to be the next chief regulator of Ofqual, prompting warnings over the body's supposed independence.

The Department for Education announced last week that Dr Jo Saxton, who founded and ran the Turner Schools academy trust before moving to her current job, was the education secretary's preferred candidate to take up the role from September.

The appointment comes at a time of crisis for the regulator, which has been without a permanent head since Sally Collier resigned last year in the wake of the exam grading fiasco.

Former chief Dame Glenys Stacey initially returned for three months, and ex-exam board boss Simon Lebus has been interim head since January. Ian Bauckham, another adviser to the government, is its interim chair.

The proposed appointment of another close government ally to an independent position has raised eyebrows across the education sector. It follows the appointment of Dame Rachel de Souza, a close friend of former academies minister Lord Agnew, as children's commissioner last year.

Saxton has links to another former academies minister – Lord Nash – who appointed her as chief executive of his Future Academies chain in 2012.

Dennis Sherwood, an exams expert and vocal Ofqual critic, said the appointment of a government adviser to the role “sends shivers down my spine”. He has warned that the regulator is not fit for purpose and should be “disbanded”.

He added: “Appointing someone close to [Williamson] seems to me to signal a fast reversion to the status quo ... when what we really need is a new broom.”

Because the appointment of Saxton would be a permanent one, she must first appear in front of the Parliamentary education committee next week.

Federation of Awarding Bodies chief



Jo Saxton

executive Tom Bewick said the committee would “want to assure itself that the chief regulator can restore Ofqual's status to being a strong independent body, capable of inspiring public confidence in all forms of qualifications and examinations”.

He added: “In the past, being a close confidante and policy adviser to the secretary of state for education would be seen as a straightforward disqualification for a non-ministerial departmental role like this, but clearly the civil service recruitment panel and Gavin Williamson has taken a different view.”

Former colleagues speak highly of Saxton. Mike Buchanan, chair of Turner Schools, described her as “inspiring”, and said she had been “fearless in tackling low expectations and underperformance”.

He added: “I'm sure she will bring similar rigour, clarity and drive in her challenging new role.”

Another Saxton ally, who did not want to be named, said she was “absolutely singleminded about doing everything possible for the most disadvantaged kids”.

“She is whip-smart and doesn't suffer fools. If anyone can sort out this mess, Jo can.”

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the ASCL school leaders' union, said his organisation

had a “very positive relationship” with Saxton “and our experience is that she listens to the views of school and college leaders”.

“This is a crucial appointment at any time but particularly given the challenges ahead with next year's public exams following the disruption caused by coronavirus. We will need Ofqual to be responsive to circumstances, clear in its communications, and to maintain a good dialogue with the sector. We think that is what Jo will deliver.”

Saxton's time at Turner Schools was not without controversy. Set up in 2016, the trust is now made up of five schools, including two that were stripped from the failed Lilac Sky academy trust.

Despite the trust's size, Saxton was paid almost £150,000 a year.

Writing on the Kent Independent Education Advice website, former headteacher Peter Read claimed there was a “chasm” between Saxton's “rhetoric” and the outcomes at Turner Schools.

Only two of the trust's five schools have been inspected since joining. Morehall Primary school was rated ‘good’ by Ofsted in 2019. Martello Primary received a “requires improvement” grade in 2018, though the report did rate leadership as ‘good’ and praised Saxton's “passion to ensure the highest standards”.

At Martello, 41 per cent of pupils reached the expected standard in reading, writing and maths in 2019, compared with 65 per cent nationwide. Folkestone Academy's progress 8 score was -0.61, well below the national average.

Read also pointed to high exclusion rates at the schools in 2017-18. But a trust spokesperson said fixed-term exclusions had fallen from 790 at Folkestone Academy and 21 at Martello in 2017-18 to 106 and three respectively in 2019-20.

A spokesperson said: “Turning around schools that have been struggling for years takes time and, in the early days when expectations on behaviour were being reset, exclusions were high.”

DfE goes back out to advert for Skills Reform Board chair

FRASER WHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Exclusive

The government is struggling to find candidates to chair a "key" new board that will oversee skills reforms.

The Skills Reform Board was formed in March 2021 in the wake of the publication of the Skills for Jobs white paper and prime minister Boris Johnson's announcement of a lifetime skills guarantee.

The board is made up of civil servants and its role is to "provide oversight, decision-making and assurance across the skills reform portfolio to ensure that the key aims of the reform are delivered", according to a Department for Education spokesperson.

It is intended to be the "key governance mechanism" for the skills reform delivery portfolio. The board is meant to thrash out solutions for any problems that arise with the portfolio and advise on decisions that cannot be resolved by individual civil servants.

"Given the importance of the role, we want to ensure that we have the best possible selection of candidates available"

But the hunt for somebody to become the independent chair for this "high-profile" and "exciting" opportunity has proved problematic.

The role, offering a three-year term with £400 per meeting for 12 90-minute meetings a year, was originally opened for applications in April, with a deadline of May 10.



But the department relaunched the advert on June 18.

Asked why they had gone back out to advert, a DfE spokesperson said: "Given the importance of the role, we want to ensure that we have the best possible selection of candidates available. We have therefore extended the advertisement application period to allow for this."

The DfE refused to disclose how many people, if any, had applied in the first round.

Last year, the DfE appointed Sky executive Stephen van Rooyen to lead its new Skills and Productivity Board, advising the government on how courses and qualifications should align to the skills that employers will need following the pandemic.

The Skills Reform Board is different and is being chaired on an interim basis by the DfE's lead non-executive board member, former Co-Operative Group chief executive Richard Pennycook. It has met three times since its formation three months ago.

The government has been recently rolling out a multitude of new skills and further education programmes and reforms.

This includes the entitlement to a first, full

level three qualification; the lifelong loan entitlement; as well as new and revitalised training programmes such as the skills bootcamps, Kickstart and traineeships.

Further reforms, such as new intervention powers for the education secretary and a local skills improvement plans, will be coming in future years once the Skills Bill is put into law.

Applications for the Skills Reform Board chair will close on July 18, and the DfE hopes to announce the appointment in September.

An advert on the Cabinet Office's Public Appointments website reveals the department is looking for "someone who is confident and constructive in their approach, and who can think both broadly and independently".

Candidates have to show experience of working at a high level in business or at another organisation, with senior-level management in addition to, or in place of, board experience.

Extensive experience of risk management is also essential, as is an understanding of how to deliver "complex and board programmes/portfolios" and an ability to think strategically.

Education to 'broaden minds': is Ofsted chief inspector singing a new tune?

FRASER WHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The Ofsted chief inspector appears to have changed her view on using education to direct learners into work, after years of attacking arts courses for their minimal job prospects.

Speaking at the Festival of Education on Thursday, Amanda Spielman said inspections should not focus on a "utilitarian" view of education.

"We do children a great disservice if we see them only as economic units, with education as the path to work-readiness, important as that is," she told the event.

She went on to say: "Back in 2017, I said that education should be about broadening minds, enriching communities and advancing civilisation. About leaving the world a better place than we found it. That's what I believed then – and that's what I believe today."

This argument sharply contradicts the litany of comments she has made in the past, pushing for skills provision to be targeted at job opportunities.

Spielman courted controversy in a speech to the Association of Colleges annual conference in 2018, when she said there was a "mismatch" between the numbers of students taking arts and media courses "and the employment prospects at the end".

She cited course adverts listing potential jobs in the arts, which were "in reality, unlikely to be available to the vast majority of learners but underplay the value of other skills these courses develop".

This suggested the students taking these subjects outnumbered the job openings, she argued. "Ultimately, there have to be viable prospects at the end," she said, much to the consternation of audience members.

Spielman later clarified her remarks by assuring delegates the courses were not



Amanda Spielman

"bad," just that: "When so many people opt for them with little or no prospect, there is a risk of setting up problems."

She later followed up on this theme at the launch of Ofsted's 2018/19 annual report in January 2020, warning providers in a speech against "flooding a local job market with young people with low-level arts and media qualifications, when the big growth in demand is for green energy workers".

This approach would lead to "too many under-employed and dissatisfied young people and wind turbines left idle. We need a clearer focus on matching skills to opportunities."

The report itself argued the apprenticeship system needed to target levy money "more directly at skills shortages".

This was because of a "gap between the knowledge and skills required for our economy and future and current provision", particularly affecting low-skilled workers.

Therefore, the further education and skills sector "needs to work much more in tandem with the government's industrial strategy", which set out plans to invest in skills to guide

people into employment.

The strategy, published in 2017 and now being replaced with the government's Plan for Growth, identified four grand challenges, including pivoting government and industry to being at the forefront of emerging trends such as artificial intelligence, clean growth and the future of mobility (such as self-driving cars).

Challenged on the contradiction after her speech, Spielman said colleges had to "balance" developing young minds while also setting them up for work: "What matters is making sure the path you steer young people is properly suited to their skills, but you don't risk trapping them in a dead end where they suddenly find they spent several years studying a thing, and it's really hard for them to get from that to employment."

She said inspectors had visited providers where the balance had "tilted too far towards collecting funding or stacking up performance table points," where the interests of young people had gotten "lost".

"It's about making sure that that young people are well advised and do the kind of education programme at every stage that both keeps the broadest set of opportunities, but creates some coherent path towards a plausible future for them."

Education secretary Gavin Williamson, who recently handed Spielman another two years as chief inspector, on Thursday told the higher education think-tank HEPI's conference that universities ought to "follow the lead of further education colleges" and offer more higher technical qualifications and apprenticeships, which should be "geared towards real jobs and the actual skills needs of local employers and the economy".

While insisting he was not attacking arts courses, Williamson continued: "We must never forget that the purpose of education is to give people the skills that will lead to a fulfilling working life."

Confusion and heavy lobbying forces Ofsted to 'clarify' Baker clause approach

FRASER WHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Ofsted inspectors will "always" report where a school fails to comply with the Baker clause and "consider" how it affects their grade, the watchdog has clarified following mounting pressure.

Earlier this week, the Commons education select committee recommended schools be limited to 'requires improvement' if they are not allowing training providers to access their pupils, as mandated by the clause.

Ofsted bosses had also provoked confusion last week by contradicting one another on whether inspection grades should be limited if a school is failing to meet its obligations under the clause.

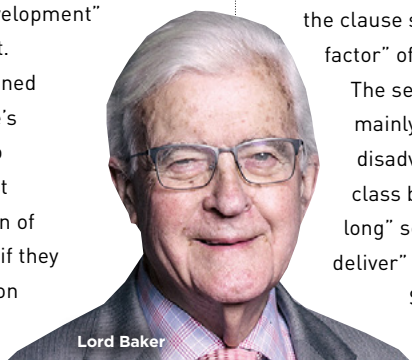
Following the report's publication, an Ofsted spokesperson told *FE Week*: "We'll soon be updating our handbooks to clarify inspectors will always report where schools fall short of the requirements of the Baker clause, as well as considering how it affects a school's grade."

The Baker clause, named after its author, former education secretary Kenneth Baker, was passed into law in 2018.

Ofsted is planning to carry out a thematic review of careers advice in schools, under orders from the Department for Education.

The watchdog's spokesperson stated that "good-quality" careers advice is "really important", and the clause already forms part of the "personal development" grade in an Ofsted report.

Inspectors are also trained to understand the clause's requirements and how to look for them, while most reports include a mention of careers education "even if they don't specifically report on compliance with the



Lord Baker



clause," the spokesperson said.

This clarification came after Ofsted chief inspector Amanda Spielman told the select committee it would be "unlikely" a school could be graded 'outstanding' if it was found to be non-compliant with the clause.

"Updating our handbooks to clarify inspectors will always report where schools fall short of the requirements"

This contradicted the watchdog's deputy director of FE and skills Paul Joyce, who told the Association of Employment and Learning Providers national conference earlier this month that compliance with the clause should not be a "determining factor" of an inspection grade.

The select committee's report, mainly into the educational disadvantages of white working-class boys, found that "for too long" schools have "failed to fully deliver" on the Baker clause.

So, if Ofsted finds a school is not complying, MPs do

not want it to get an inspection grade any higher than 'requires improvement'.

The inspectorate has also been coming under pressure from other government bodies which have expressed concern over schools' low regard for the clause.

UCAS reported last month that one-third of students are not told about apprenticeships, while the chief executive of the Careers and Enterprise Company, Oli de Botton, told the AELP conference it was "true historically that there hasn't been enough access for ITPs or enough information about apprenticeships and technical routes for young people".

Baker, now a member of the House of Lords, is also seeking to amend the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill currently going through parliament to make his clause a statutory duty.

This would mean stakeholders such as parents or providers could take schools to court over non-compliance with the clause.

Speaking about what Ofsted could do about non-compliance, Baker told *FE Week*: "If the school is not actually implementing the clause, and if they're likely to be 'outstanding', they shouldn't be given 'outstanding'."

New provider hits out at validity of Ofsted inspection done ‘on limited contact time’

FRASER WHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

A new apprenticeship provider has expressed its “frustrations” with the validity of an Ofsted report that now threatens its ability to recruit.

MRG Services UK Limited’s 76 apprentices were found to “not develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours” among a litany of criticisms, in a monitoring report published on Tuesday that resulted in ‘insufficient progress’ judgments in every area.

Inspectors discovered “too many cases” where the apprentices, studying the level 5 operations/departmental manager, level 2 fenestration (glass-fitting), or level 3 and 4 business and teaching standards were “simply deepening their understanding of topics and consolidating existing skills”.

But the Merseyside-based provider has hit back, saying that while it accepts the inspection process is “vital” to ensuring improvement, “our frustrations, which have unfortunately continued through the complaint process, centre on the validity of evidence in the one-and-a-half-day visit”.

Inspectors, the provider said, visited while many of the staff were still working from home or furloughed, which “inevitably led to very limited contact time”.

The inspector covering themes one and two of the inspection – ensuring that the provider is meeting all the requirements of successful apprenticeship provision, and ensuring that apprentices benefit from high-quality training that leads to positive outcomes – did so from home, allegedly.

As such, they did not have direct access to any observations of teaching and learning, MRG’s enrichment programme, session evaluations, or action reports, the provider claimed.

The report says leaders “do not have an accurate oversight of apprentices’ progress”, so do not adequately support learners who fall behind.

A lack of challenge from the governing board

meant apprentices receive a “poor” standard of training.

Tutors do not teach the curriculum for the level 5 standard in a “logical order”, with apprentices attending monthly management workshops and having to choose online topics to learn in between them.

Yet MRG says the comments regarding its delivery “are not based upon fact”.

Ofsted also found the provider did not have “effective safeguarding arrangements in place”, and do not carry out “appropriate checks” when hiring new people.

Apprentices did not know who to report safeguarding concerns to at MRG, and only knew how to keep themselves safe in the workplace because of training by their employer, Ofsted said.

MRG Services said they take safeguarding “very seriously”, adding: “We must seek to maintain a robust system.”

However, they also said they would challenge the overarching judgments.

“Thankfully, the due process is for a repeat visit to take place within a very short period of time, when we believe that our frustrations over the validity of this monitoring visit will be vindicated.

“We welcome this further visit at Ofsted’s

earliest convenience.”

The inspectorate did say apprentices nearing the end of their programme understand the requirements of their assessment.

Leaders were also praised for providing subject-specific training for staff, so tutors attend leadership development webinars on “agile leadership”.

Tutors develop their occupational knowledge and provide learners with up-to-date learning.

A provider is usually suspended from recruiting apprentices if they score at least one ‘insufficient progress’ judgment in a new provider monitoring report, in line with Education and Skills Funding Agency rules.

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Five things Gavin Williamson told parliament this week

BILLY CAMDEN
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Education secretary Gavin Williamson was grilled by MPs on multiple occasions in parliament this week. Here are five things we learned:

1 New IfATE powers 'strike the right balance'



The education secretary defended plans to hand new powers to the government's apprenticeships quango, saying it will "strike the right balance" with Ofqual's responsibilities.

Williamson, speaking to the education select committee, called proposals to hand the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education sign-off on approving and regulating technical qualifications a "tidying up measure".

The Federation of Awarding Bodies has warned this would introduce a "material conflict of interest" as the institute is responsible to ministers rather than parliament, and that the measure "sets the scene for a muddled and cumbersome two-tier system of qualifications regulation".

But Williamson told MPs he felt "the right sort of balance" had been struck between Ofqual and IfATE "in order to be able to give IfATE all the powers it properly needs in order to deliver the work it needs to do.

"But I always accept people will have different views and IfATE also seem to have the confidence and belief that they had the tools they need."

He added: "It's important that we have two organisations that are looking at slightly different sectors but there is crossover, and we expect those organisations to all work in harmony and close cooperation together and I think that that's something that can be done and can be achieved."

During the Bill's second reading in the House of Lords last week, Labour spokesperson Baroness Wilcox raised concern about the proposal and said they will "seek to amend the Bill to ensure that Ofqual remains the sole body" in this space.

2 'Accelerated inspections' to help Ofsted tackle Covid backlog



Williamson revealed the government is looking to accelerate the timetable for Ofsted inspections to address the backlog of schools

and FE providers that are due a visit.

Education select committee member and the Conservative MP for Wantage, David Johnston, explained that some schools in his constituency were "living on an old Ofsted judgment where they know they've improved and it would help their admissions if they could show that improvement".

Ofsted's chief inspector Amanda Spielman appeared before the committee last week and raised concerns about the length of time between inspections for 'outstanding' providers.

Principals of grade three colleges are also in uproar after they were excluded from yet another government fund because they are stuck with the rating, with no way to improve, as revealed by FE Week last week.

Williamson said the Department for Education (DfE) "would certainly be looking at a whole range of different options, including accelerated inspection" to tackle this issue.

He added Johnston was "right to highlight" the need for schools and FE providers to progress out of lower grades and the lack of inspections in those rated 'outstanding'.

3 Adaptations for 2022 exams to ensure 'right level of support' for students

The government is looking at a "similar set of measures" for the 2022 exams as those proposed for this summer's series before formal tests were cancelled, Williamson told the education select committee.

He said they "very much hope and intend" for exams and vocational and technical qualifications to go ahead next year.

Last December, ministers proposed that grades for 2021 exams would be as generous as those in 2020, and that students would get advance notice of topics in certain subjects and be allowed to use exam aids. But the measures were ditched in January when exams were cancelled.

Simon Lebus, Ofqual's interim chief regulator, revealed in March that government was considering adaptations "along the lines that had been originally contemplated for this year".

Williamson confirmed the government was considering such measures this week.

Asked what plans government have in place for exams next year, he said: "We are considering what we need to do to ensure that there's fairness and there's the right level of support for pupils as they take these qualifications. I think that's the right approach.

"We had quite an extensive package of measures that was intended for this years'

awarding session and supporting youngsters as they took their exams and we will look at having a similar set of measures that can be brought forward in order to be able to support pupils as they take assessments."

4 University admissions to be rushed through



The government wants to rush through its plans for a post-qualifications admissions (PQA) system for universities "without legislation", the education secretary said.

Williamson told the House of Commons on Monday during education questions that "we really want to bring PQA forward as rapidly as possible", and said he would like to do it "without legislation and in cooperation with the sector".

But the government will still drive the reforms forward even "if we aren't able to have that cooperation", the education secretary said.

The Department for Education launched a consultation in January on proposals to allow students to receive offers from university based on their actual grades, rather than predictions.

The consultation, which closed in May, set out two different proposed models, one which would see pupils apply to university after receiving their A-level results, and another where pupils would make 'pre-qualification' applications but would only receive offers after results are announced.

5 'Very committed' to Catholic sixth-form college academisation



The government changed the rules in 2015 to allow sixth-form colleges to become academies, and in doing so avoid paying VAT.

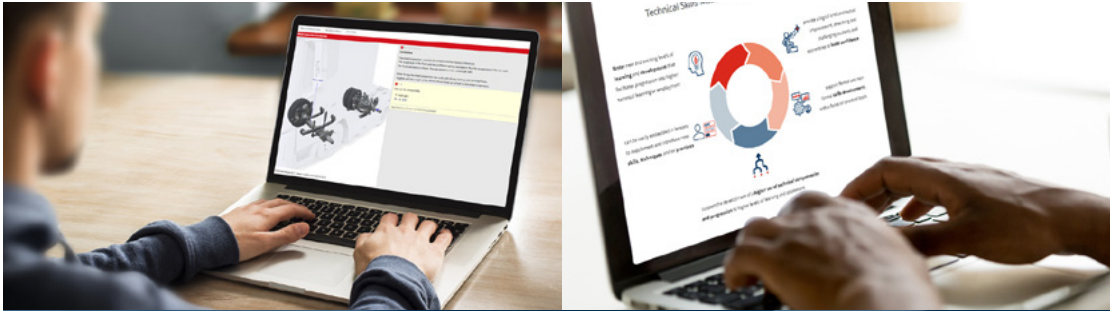
But Catholic sixth-form colleges have complained that they are still prevented from converting because their religious character would not be maintained.

On Monday, Williamson was asked during education questions whether he would allow an amendment to the Skills Bill "to provide an opportunity for Catholic sixth-form colleges to academise with the legal protections they need".

Williamson said he was "aware of how important this is, and we look at all legislative opportunities to see as to how this can best be done and we're very committed at the earliest opportunity to make it happen".

News

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Join the celebration on **Wednesday 7 July 2021 at 2pm** as we award our BTEC stars of 2021.

Find out more at [btec.co.uk/awards](https://www.btec.co.uk/awards)



Silver award winners announced by Pearson Teaching Awards

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Inspirational teachers, leaders, support staff, schools and colleges from across the country have been honoured for their outstanding commitment to changing the lives of their students.

A total of 102 winners have scooped silver awards in the annual Pearson National Teaching Awards. The names were announced on Thursday to coincide with National Thank A Teacher day.

The silver award-winners will now be shortlisted to win one of 15 gold awards. The winners of the final will be announced in the autumn on BBC1's The One Show.

Author Sir Michael Morpurgo, president of the Teaching Awards Trust, said National Thank A Teacher Day "gives us all a chance – children, families, all of us – to pay tribute to those wonderful educators who change more lives than they will ever know".

Sharon Hague, senior vice president of schools at Pearson UK, said she wanted to "say thank you to all the incredible staff who have kept children and young people learning despite unprecedented challenges".

This year represents a big rise in winners. There were 76 last year, and 68 in 2019.

Education secretary Gavin Williamson said the "hard work and dedication" of teachers during the pandemic had been "inspiring".

"While our teachers deserve the country's recognition every year, this year's Thank A Teacher Day is even more significant.

"The support they have provided children, young people and adults has been remarkable, and each and every one of us should be grateful for the part they have played over the past 18 months."



THE 102 WINNERS

The Award for Teacher of the Year in a Primary School, supported by Randstad

Catherine Magee, St Comgall's Primary School
Jacqueline Birch, St Peter's C of E Primary School
Jade Martin, Loscoe C of E Primary School
Jill Stevens, Collingbourne C of E Primary School
Melissa Sladen, Sir John Sherbrooke Junior School
Rebecca Sutton, Whiteley Primary School
Ross Hasler, Honiton Primary School
Ryan Walters, Ernesettle Community School
Stacey Harris, Coed Eva Primary
Tim Eustace, St Peter's C of E Primary School
Yasmin Taylor, Roundhay School Primary Campus

The Award for Teacher of the Year in a Secondary School, supported by Nord Anglia Education

Abigail Chase, Bassaleg School
Andrew Kyprianou, WMG Academy for Young Engineers
Coventry
Emma Beaton, Sandringham School
Hope Vardon-Prince, Northolt High School
Jane Marshall, Rainhill High School
Karen Sims, Solihull Alternative Provision Academy
Lisa Kelly, The Gateway Academy
Mark Bailey, Netherhall School
Matthew Shaw, The Ruth Gorse Academy
Rachel Glasgow, Monkton Senior School
Robert Thorp, Hitchin Boys' School
Ute Steenkamp, The Gateway Academy
Victoria Carey, Mary Immaculate High School

The Award for Headteacher of the Year in a Primary School, supported by Hays Education

Gerard Curley, Neilston Primary School
Jeremy Hannay, Three Bridges Primary School
Navroop Mehat, Wexham Court Primary School
Philip Barlow, Chantlers Primary School
Reema Reid, Hollydale Primary School
David Jenkins, Ysgol Ty Coch (all-through school, joint with secondary)

The Award for Headteacher of the Year in a Secondary School, supported by Hays Education

Alan Pithie, Auchmuty High School
Michael Allen, Lisneal College
Steve Elliott, Wrenn School
David Jenkins, Ysgol Ty Coch (all-through school, joint with primary)

The Award for Lifetime Achievement, supported by DfE

Gerrard Smith, The Jo Richardson Community School
Marie Lindsay, Saint Mary's College
Mary Graham, Kingsdale Foundation School
Rosemary Littler, Liscard Primary School
Sheila Edgar, The Elizabethan Academy
Stuart Maxwell, Eastwood High School
Sue Bailey, The Arthur Terry School

The Award for Outstanding New Teacher of the Year, supported by DfE

Aashna Jethmalani, Haileybury Turnford
Georgina Pennycook, Heathcote School
Hannah Lewis, Troedyrhiw Community Primary
Joseph Gill, Willows High School
Rob Plumby, Swallowfield Lower School
Sam Craggs, Malton School
Zoe Leyland, Summerseat Methodist Primary School

The Award for Teaching Assistant of the Year

Dawn Watts, Western Community Primary School
Dorota Hall, St Edward's School
Ian Clash, New Horizons Learning Centre – Secondary
Madison Bertalan, Fourfields Community Primary School
Mark Berryman, Chiltern Way Academy – Wendover Campus
Ruth Riley, Ballykelly Primary School

The Award for Making a Difference – Primary School of the Year, supported by PiXL

Arthur Bugler Primary School, Arthur Bugler Primary School
Chantlers Primary School
Hudson Road Primary School
Khalsa Primary School
Manorfield Primary School
Roundhay School Primary Campus

The Award for Making a Difference – Secondary School of the Year, supported by PiXL

Casterton College, Rutland
Sedgefield Community College
Wymondham College

The Award for Impact through Partnership

ACS International Schools Partnerships
Haringey Learning Partnership
The Isle of Arran Cluster, Arran High School
The Roma – Narrowing the Gap Team, Queen Katharine Academy

The Award for Excellence in Special Needs Education

Aine Mellon, St Patrick's & St Brigid's College
Rachel Elliott Downing, Kenton School
Sam Newton, The Children's Trust School
Sarah Anderson Rawlins, TBAP Unity Academy
Stephen Evans, Derwen College

The Award for Digital Innovator of the Year, supported by Nord Anglia Education

Calum Coultts, Riverbrae School
Catriona Houston, St Patrick's College
Christian Aspinall, Eldon Primary School
Emma Darcy, Denbigh High School
Joe Yates, Park View Primary School Cambuslang
Michael Law, Park View Primary School Cambuslang
Toby Osborne, Ferndown Upper School

The Award for FE Lecturer of the Year, supported by DfE

Carina Ancell, Newham Sixth-Form College
Gemma Westlake, Basingstoke College of Technology
Jonathan Rogers, Gower College Swansea
Laura Denton, Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education
Melissa Tisdale, Walsall College
Paul Mercer, South Eastern Regional College (Bangor)

The Award for FE Team of the Year, supported by DfE

The Beauty Therapy and Makeup Artistry Team, North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College
The Foundation Learning Team, Telford College
The Hospitality and Catering Team, Eastleigh College
The PE Department, New College Pontefract
The Performing Arts Team, Newham Sixth-Form College
The Sports Department at Wigan and Leigh College, Wigan and Leigh College

The Lockdown Hero Award for Learner and Community Support

All Saints C of E Primary School, Bolton
Blaine Stewart, Derrygonnelly Primary School
Canolfan Elfed Inclusion Centre, QEH School
Eden Academy Trust's Family Services Team, comprising Jan Ahmad, Sophia Barton, Lisa Hatcher, Janet Lobb, Louise Mullins, Kelle Sharpe and Shriti Thompson at Pentland Field School
Edmund Rice College
Frankie Arundel, Firth Park Academy
Ian Sippitt, Aurora Eccles School
Matt Jenkins and Jo Fison, Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education
Rebecca Garratt, The Wyre Forest School
Sarah Gray, ST Mary's C of E Primary
Star Academies
The Poppy Academy Trust, Fair Field Junior School



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Closing date: **Noon on Wednesday 21 July 2021**

Interview dates: **Thursday 29 and Friday 30 July 2021**



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Closing date: Thursday 8th July, 12 noon

Interview date: Thursday 15th July

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- Training Consultant in Hospitality & Catering (North East Based)
- Lecturer in Health & Social Care (North East Based)
- Business Development Consultant (North East Based)
- Recruitment and Engagement Officer (North East Based)

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As an equal opportunities employer, the College welcomes applicants from all sections of the community.



Further information on each of the above posts, along with details on how to apply can be found on our website www.derwentside.ac.uk/job-vacancies

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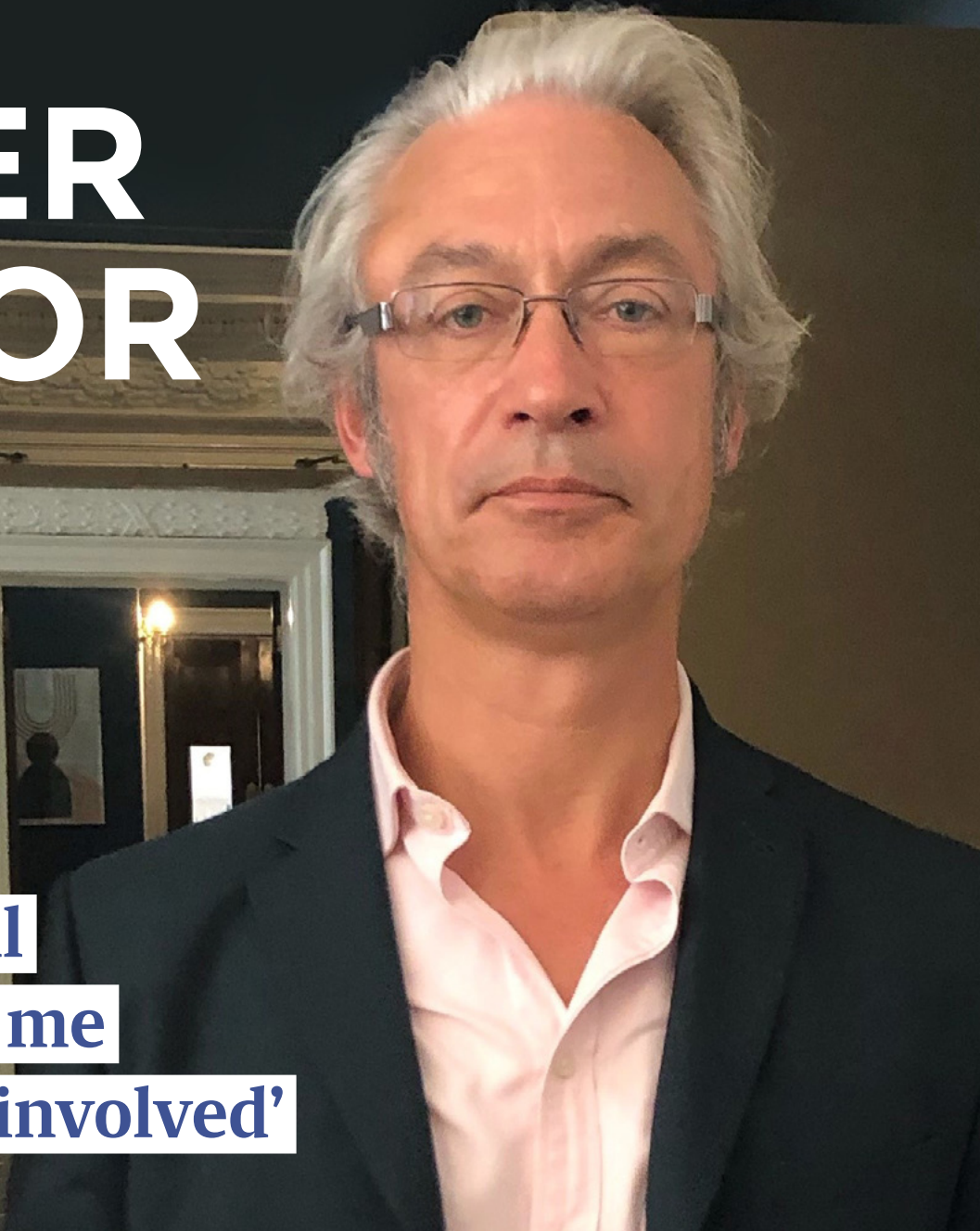
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Introducing

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Former chair,
Ofqual



‘It was painful personally to me to have been involved’

JESS STAUFENBERG
@STAUFENBERGJ

The former chair of Ofqual, who oversaw the grades fiasco last summer, has spent much of his life thinking about transparency and data. Here he says no algorithm would ever have worked – and why BTECs were not the main focus

“An unsolvable problem.” That is how Roger Taylor, former chair of Ofqual, describes what

the regulator was tasked with in 2020. To devise a statistical model for awarding grades when nobody was sitting exams that was accurate, did not cause inflation and was acceptable to the public. “An unsolvable problem,” he repeats.

Since resigning at the end of last year, Taylor has kept quiet. But from last week he has been talking. Because he was not an employee, he is not forbidden by contract from speaking out – a rare privilege among ex-top decision-makers.

It’s a power Taylor has wielded before. He publicly demanded that the education secretary

Gavin Williamson stop taking credit for Ofqual’s decision to switch to teacher-moderated grades (which worked). Taylor also published the non-disclosure agreement Ofqual was asking algorithm experts to sign, after being criticised for its contents. In contrast to ex-chief regulator Sally Collier, who has been almost silent, Taylor has been free to speak up, and even call people’s bluff.

But why speak now? It’s six months since Taylor resigned. No one has been blaming him much for last year’s grading fiasco, including

BTEC results being delayed for weeks. Williamson has taken most of the blame.

Yet Taylor has taken the rather unusual step of publishing an essay last week with the Centre for Progressive Policy, titled: "Is the algorithm working for us?". Chapter One looks at "The 2020 exam debacle: how did it happen?". Of course, by producing a defence, Taylor risks bringing criticism back on to his head. It's a bold move.

When we meet virtually this week, Taylor is sitting at a desk behind which hangs a tasteful painting and two shelves packed with vinyl records. He has a lively, intelligent face and unpacks his ideas rapidly. He's a PPE graduate from Oxford, with an MSc in economics, and is a former Financial Times journalist who reported on tech before moving into data technology businesses.

"It was very, very intense," he says of the period when Ofqual started to design a grading model. "There was an incredible effort made by everyone to try to make something that was workable."

It's important to note that Ofqual said in 2020 the standardisation model it devised was not applied to most technical and vocational qualifications, including BTECs. Many VTQs could use evidence of learners' work completed during the course to calculate results, and in other cases, learners had taken adapted assessments and so a moderation process wasn't needed. However, many students still faced grades they felt were lower than expected in the summer.

But the real fall-out was for half a million BTEC students, for whom results day brought unbelievable stress.

The uproar about the moderated results meant Ofqual switched, last minute, to school-based assessments for GCSEs and A-levels. This in turn meant that Pearson followed suit at the 11th hour with BTECs – pulling all their results the night before to bring them in line with the higher grades being handed to schools. BTEC students faced losing their places in further and higher education, as the clock ticked on for weeks until all results were issued.

Taylor's point is that policymakers didn't realise how much students would feel the government had risked their futures.

He points out Ofqual "is constitutionally obliged under law to prevent grades from inflating". Education ministers were adamant: no grade inflation.

But "from the point of view of the individual



citizen, the problem looks different. They see that the government has denied them the chance to demonstrate that they deserve a university place [...] It has put their future at risk."

With regards the BTECs delay, he adds: "We could have worked out early on that this approach was not an acceptable route and planned accordingly – which would have avoided the distress to students, including BTEC students, as well as the problems for university."

"We could have avoided the distress to students, including BTEC students, as well as the problems for university"

Policymakers assumed they should offer the same number of higher education places as normal, and fill them as accurately as possible. Instead, Taylor says inflation (inaccuracy) should have been allowed, and more places made available.

His argument is essentially one about the difference between accuracy and legitimacy. "People are not willing to accept their lives being affected by a decision-making process driven by predictive algorithms," says Taylor.

"We risk missing this very basic lesson, if we comfort ourselves with the idea that the algorithm malfunctioned."

In a way, Taylor is saying the mistake was basically a PR one; a failure to understand human psychology. "Teacher-assessed grades are in many ways more biased than the moderated grades," he continues. "Their advantage is not that they are less biased; the advantage is that they allow for a significant amount of inflation."

So why didn't Ofqual spot the PR problem sooner?

"That is something everyone involved needs to reflect on." He points out Ofqual's consultation showed a degree of consensus. When asked about "the relative weight that the model should place on historical evidence of centre performance" (a bone of contention for many) 54 per cent agreed, with fewer (33 per cent) against.

Yet even if Ofqual didn't spot the problem earlier, they were told about it later. The education select committee published a strongly worded warning in July, but still Ofqual persisted. Why not drop the model?

Taylor has a curious answer to this. "My view on that is you very quickly risk the regulator getting involved in what are properly political decisions. My own stance on that is quite conservative: politics is for politicians." The answer is a tricky one, as Ofqual is an independent body, accountable to parliament – not a blind executioner of DfE will.

The question of Ofqual's independence continues, as Williamson has appointed his own policy adviser to become chief

Profile

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regulator. Meanwhile, the government's go-to person to lead expert reviews, Ian Bauckham, is now the chair.

Another big criticism levied at Ofqual was a lack of transparency. If Taylor draws a line on how "political" Ofqual should have been, he also draws a line on how transparent.

He himself is an author of a book on transparency, which he self-deprecatingly says "about three people have read". Published in 2016, it is called *Transparency and the Open Society*. It makes the case, says Taylor, for transparency with certain limits. In a sense, it's the same approach Taylor took with the algorithm itself.

Why didn't Ofqual share the algorithm model?

"If you tell everyone about it, there is a risk of it leading to gaming," responds Taylor. But surely sharing it with expert statisticians is not the same as sharing it with "everyone"? Yet Taylor holds that no standardisation model would ever have worked. They are simply unpalatable to the individual.

He is frank, meanwhile, about the focus on GCSEs and A-levels rather than BTECs. He says that at a political level in 2020 "there was a lot more focus on general qualifications" than on vocational qualifications "primarily because of the consequences around university admissions".

Across government, "we are not on the whole focused enough on getting vocational qualifications working the way they need to". It's "not a problem that Ofqual can fix on

their own."

Then there was the delay in communicating what to do about qualifications for occupational competence, such as licences to practice. General qualifications are mostly used to "rank candidates", explains Taylor, while licences to practice must ensure someone has an exact skill set. So estimating grades would have meant "exposing people to risks". The regulator decided these exams should be sat later.

The licences to practice are an example of assessments that Ofqual saw as outside what the algorithm could responsibly do – although in the end, of course, this turned out to be the case for all qualifications: general, vocational and occupational.

Overall, Taylor deserves real credit for trying to make us think about the possibilities and limitations of algorithms, and the difference between accuracy and legitimacy.

He cares about digital technology in public services. He previously founded a company, Dr Foster, which drew data together about hospitals, and he has worked for the Careers and Enterprise Company. He becomes passionately frustrated as he explains the DfE should ensure every student has a "digitised record" of their achievements and qualifications.

It would allow students to keep their qualifications in one place (the biggest request from students to Ofqual are for

copies of certificates, he says) while allowing others to "look at students in context". It could particularly help disadvantaged learners, who often have a "thinner file".

"If you tell everyone about the algorithm, there is a risk of it leading to gaming"

It might even alleviate the 2020 situations of the future, says Taylor, because "if people had richer individual education records and realised their fate didn't hang on a single grade, but a more nuanced judgment, it might be a less pressurised situation".

His belief in the smart use of data made the grading fiasco "quite painful to me personally", Taylor reflects.

"I've spent most of my life looking at [...] how do we use data that is fair to people and particularly in ways that empower individuals." Instead the "government was using data in a way that was deeply and massively insensitive to individuals". The son of a philosophy academic, Taylor seems to have been genuinely mulling the philosophical problems – and opportunities – of statistical modelling since he departed.

There are some holes in his answers. There is also a hole in his solution: this week, teachers warned that students with top grades had got no higher education offers, because universities had awarded too many places last year. In a way it goes to show, algorithm or no algorithm, every solution was deeply flawed.

I ask Taylor why he stepped down.

"Whatever you think about 2020, my view is that Ofqual is a world-class organisation. There's not many organisations that understand assessment." He laughs. "2021 is going to be a difficult year. It wasn't going to help Ofqual's case to have the same grey, old bloke in place."

Perhaps, however, Ofqual has lost one of its most open communicators.



On the BBC discussing death rates in hospitals as part of his work with Dr Foster

JANE HALLAS

Solicitor and head of team, Ellis Whittam law firm



Here's what you need to know about staff with 'gender critical' views

A landmark judgment has ruled that it is lawful to hold a belief that may offend or shock others, writes Jane Hallas

It is unlikely that Miss Jean Brodie would have cared very much whether she could express her admiration for Mussolini as often as she does in the classic novel by Muriel Spark.

But today college leaders have to be ever mindful of how far they can allow freedom of expression and belief in colleges.

Under Section 4 of the Equality Act 2010, religion or belief is a "protected characteristic". Section 10 of the Act defines "belief" as any religious or philosophical belief (or a lack of belief).

But how far can an individual express their own beliefs, before it potentially clashes with someone else's protected characteristic? Such philosophical as well as legal conundrums can lead to real challenges in colleges, particularly over employment prospects, discrimination claims, as well as the "no-platforming" of individuals.

Where does free, healthy, open debate in a democratic society end and hate speech – where people feel marginalised, threatened and afraid – begin?

A landmark judgment from the Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT) has now ruled that in a free-thinking and democratic society, it is lawful to hold a belief that may offend or shock others.

In *Forstater v CDG Europe*, Ms



Forstater held the belief that gender is an immutable biological fact; a person is born either male or female.

Previously, in 2010, the EAT had given guidance about the types of belief that should be protected, referring to Article 9 of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) which allows freedom of thought, conscience and belief. The EAT's criteria were that:

- The belief must be genuinely held;
- It must be a belief, not an opinion or viewpoint;
- It must relate to a "weighty and substantial" aspect of human life and behaviour;
- It must attain a certain level of cogency, seriousness, cohesion and importance; and
- It must be worthy of respect in a democratic society, not be incompatible with human dignity, and not conflict with the fundamental rights of others.

There has been increasing debate and media coverage over freedom

of speech in relation to the issues of gender identity and gender fluidity. In Ms Forstater's case, her fixed-term contract was not renewed after she publicised on social media her belief that a trans woman is not in reality a woman.

She also said that while a person can identify as another sex and ask other people to go along with that choice, and can change their legal sex, this does not change their actual, biological sex.

"This case doesn't give people freedom to harass or discriminate against members of the transgender community"

Such postings attracted complaints.

Ms Forstater brought her claim on the basis that she had been discriminated against because of her beliefs. She lost at the Employment Tribunal stage and appealed.

The Employment Appeal Tribunal noted that freedom of expression is one of the essential foundations of a democratic society, which cannot exist without pluralism, tolerance and broadmindedness.

It didn't think it was for the court to look into the validity of a person's belief and felt that the state should essentially stay out of such arguments and instead look to make sure there was tolerance on both sides.

Beliefs that were an affront to ECHR principles, such as propagating Nazism or hateful speech against minorities, were not protected. But beliefs that upset or shocked others are capable of being protected in a liberal society and are capable of respect in a democratic society. This includes what have been called "gender critical" beliefs.

The ruling essentially underlined the importance of the right to express a belief that is contrary to someone else's belief and which they find offensive.

It is important to note that this case doesn't give people freedom to harass or discriminate against members of the transgender community; college leaders must still ensure that they do not tolerate such actions in the workplace.

However, the court emphasises freedom of speech and belief. For these reasons, it is worth reviewing any relevant training or policies to check they are compatible with this ruling.

KATIE BELL

Executive director
for apprenticeships,
UCAS

A 'digital Baker clause' will help students make informed post-secondary choices

Students will expect to access all the information about their future options in one place online, writes Katie Bell

This week, the education select committee recommended that schools be limited to a 'requires improvement' grade if they do not allow training providers to speak to learners.

It's an effort to ensure they are in line with the Baker clause, which exists to enable colleges and training providers to go into schools to tell them about vocational and technical courses and apprenticeships.

At UCAS we know that young people are increasingly interested in these routes. The number of higher and degree apprenticeship starts (those at level 4 or above) has risen from 39,300 in 2018-19 to 51,400 in 2020-21, according to government data. They now make up more than three in ten starts across all apprenticeships.

We also know these numbers will climb, as the boom over the past decade in children entering primary and secondary education is about to hit post-16 education.

The number of 18-year-olds in the UK is set to increase consistently over the next ten years, and by 2025 we forecast there will be one million applicants globally applying for higher education in the UK.

As the 18-year-old population grows, so will the competition for these opportunities. It is only right that these students are able



to assess their options in a way that ensures they make the right decision for themselves.

Last month we published *Where Next? Improving the Journey to Becoming an Apprentice*, the latest in our "Where Next?" series examining the student journey. It showed that of those looking to apply to higher education in 2022, half are interested in receiving information about apprenticeships.

"We still see evidence that students don't understand the potential value of apprenticeships"

The most common apprenticeship areas of interest are engineering, computer sciences and architecture, building and planning. They are also more likely to be from geographical areas with the least participation in higher education.

The report also highlighted the challenges faced by students when exploring these opportunities. For

undergraduate routes, students are able to go to a central digital location, view engaging content and compare various opportunities like-for-like.

However, the experience for students exploring apprenticeships is not comparable. Only around a quarter (26 per cent) of those interested in apprenticeships told us they found it very or somewhat easy to find information about apprenticeships, compared to almost three-quarters (73 per cent) looking at university options.

But the challenges in understanding these opportunities start even earlier. Of a self-reported sample, only around one-third of students reported receiving their legal entitlement to information from apprenticeship providers or FE colleges, despite the Baker clause.

As Ofsted were warned again this week, our report indicates that students are not receiving information about the full range of options available to them.

We also see evidence that students don't understand the potential value of apprenticeships.

Students report that they viewed a university degree as most prestigious and more likely to lead to a good job.

Again, this underlines the importance of students being able to understand and assess their options fully, and the value they provide.

So we now have a clear ambition to act as a "digital Baker clause". We want to provide comprehensive information, advice and content tools to help students make informed and aspirational post-secondary choices.

That's why we've launched the UCAS Hub.

We know teachers and advisers are working hard to inform students about their options (we work with over 4,000 directly every single day) and we know how complex this maze can be.

And those pathways are continuously changing. Through the Skills for Jobs white paper, and subsequent Skills and Post-16 Education Bill, the government plans to bolster higher technical qualifications at levels 4 and 5.

Students will expect to be able to access information about these in a single location.

Apprenticeships listed on the "career finder" tool of the UCAS site have already been viewed over 1.2 million times in the past 12 months.

We want our service to be as strong for would-be apprentices as it is for prospective undergraduates, bringing true parity to the student journey.

NIGEL GENDERS

Chief education officer, Church of England



The Church of England wants to serve a new generation as we have always done

The Church of England isn't trying to infiltrate FE colleges in some secret plan, as suggested by two secularists, writes Nigel Genders

Further education institutions transform lives by preparing people to enter the workplace, go on to further study, retrain or change careers and provide the skilled workforce we need for the future.

Their importance is affirmed in the Church of England's recently published vision for FE Vocation, Transformation & Hope, which talks about the ways the Church wants to be more involved in FE colleges.

Colleges are communities strengthened by staff and students of all faiths and beliefs working and learning together. It is right that our ambitious aim to build a family of Church of England FE colleges should be subject to proper consideration.

So what's in it for us? Quite simply, an opportunity to serve, and to meet a genuine need.

Our experience gives us something distinctive and important to offer – we have been an education provider at a national level for nearly 200 years. The Church of England provided a free education some 70 years before the state, and today runs almost 5,000 schools in partnership with local authorities and trusts. We're also involved with universities and teacher-training institutions.

Of course, we also have much

to learn. The Bishop of Durham acknowledged recently that the Church of England itself must become younger and therefore do more to engage with younger people.

An article in FE Week last week by the National Secular Society rather bizarrely tried to argue that this was part of some secret plan. On the contrary, we are unapologetic about seeking to engage with and serve a new generation, as this is what we have always done.

Suggestions that spiritual guidance and support offered by chaplaincies is either unwanted or a niche provision also miss the mark.

A recent ComRes poll showed that almost half of adults (44 per cent) say they pray. And one in four people pray regularly (at least once a month) – a number that has increased six percentage points since a pre-pandemic survey.

Positive responses are even higher in the 18-to-34 age group, with 30 per cent saying they pray regularly, and 34 per cent having

watched a broadcast religious service during the pandemic.

By this measure, the idea that faith has no place in modern society is decidedly pre-pandemic in its worldview, especially among younger age groups.

“The idea that faith has no place in modern society is decidedly pre-pandemic”

Staff and students don't leave their faith or beliefs at the college gates. They face the same questions about their lives and their purpose as anyone else, encountering grief and loss, joy and success, celebration and mourning.

So while chaplains will share some ground with counsellors, support officers and others providing pastoral care, they have a unique role in helping students and staff to explore those areas that have a spiritual dimension.

That's why we are challenging our own church to engage much more systematically in this sector that educates over 2 million people every year.

This will mean more chaplains working with their FE college and local diocese to offer more coordinated support.

Colleges have valued the contribution of chaplaincies in providing pastoral support for students, working alongside student services, linking colleges with communities, contributing to curriculum enrichment, religious literacy and to good relations on campus.

Meanwhile, far from constraining what is taught, theological insight can enable a lively and holistic approach to forming the curriculum and the values which underpin it.

Our recommendations are simply about doing more of what we already know works; reaching out to all those who are trying to serve the common good, to tackle injustice and, in the current phrase, to build back better from the pandemic.

We do so from our profound conviction that everyone is a person of value, made in the image of God, and that society urgently needs that sense of human dignity and worth to be embodied in all our social institutions.

Among these we count our own church, and are determined that it too will become younger and more diverse.



PROFESSOR SONIA BLANDFORD

Director, Achievement for All



The DfE is focused on learning but a tsunami of need is upon us

At the Westminster Insight SEND conference, Sonia Blandford says the government is ignoring a worrying rise in SEND and CAHMS referrals that we are not prepared for

Strange. Challenging. Unprecedented. Just a few of the words we have all used to describe the period since Covid-19 has impacted on all of our lives. But while it's been difficult enough to understand from the position of a secure family home with no prior needs, there are many for whom it has been simply devastating.

In our work with education settings all over the country, we are detecting a major seismic event: a tsunami of referrals to SEND teams and CAMHS provision that will overtop the flood defences.

Let me talk you through some of the situations students we work with have found themselves in. (All names have been changed.)

Kadija is 18 and shares a bedroom with her mum, a single parent who survives by working and claiming benefits. Her older sister has had mental health and drug problems, so living at home is a trial.

Kadija was to have taken A-levels. But her mocks, disrupted by family trauma, resulted in a C, E and U, against predicted grades of A*, C and C.

She is getting little additional income through occasional shifts in the pub near her house, and she has little or no motivation to continue with her ambition

to go to university to study medicine. Kadija is vulnerable and disadvantaged but does not fall within educational, health and care plan (EHCP) or free school meals support or subsidies.

Then there is Tess. She is 16, with high-end physical and cognitive disabilities, and significant emotional needs. Tess is disabled and vulnerable, but she lives in a rural area and her support system – including specialist teaching and learning services – located 90 miles away. They take over two hours to get to her.

Finally, Tom has profound and multiple learning disabilities and has been living with his single mother as the primary carer along with four other siblings. One of them has the same condition as him. His mother was diagnosed with a mental illness two years ago and since then, has been out of the house, so his older brothers have been the main carers.

Kadija, Tess and Tom share a common situation, which makes them vulnerable and disadvantaged – they do not have

the normal points of reference shared by so many of their peers. Their world is different, needing significant structure and support.

“Specialist help is not a luxury, but an absolute and immediate necessity”

For all young people, it is home that provides the benchmark for their lives. The pandemic has caused us all to revalue the meaning of home and the importance of the quality of shelter, food, safety, personal growth, health and love that it holds. We know that 'home' is where we develop and nurture our core strength.

So have Kadija, Tess and Tom. But for them and thousands like them, watching the news or scrolling social media, trying to seek support when the structure of their lives has disappeared has

been traumatic.

Education institutions and third-sector organisations have stepped in to care for vulnerable and disadvantaged young people over the past 16 months.

Teachers have provided daily one-to-one support, checked that meal vouchers arrived and that there is somewhere to sleep, clothes to wear.

In the meantime, government's key focus has been on learning. But in truth Kadija, Tess and Tom have a long way to go before this is their priority.

Their teachers, carers and support networks face the challenge of providing new stable reference points before any form of learning can take place.

Physical and emotional security, love and belonging are their priority, so our key question must be this: how will we get them the highly specialised and urgent support they need to overcome the social, emotion and mental health issues caused by lockdown?

Some of these young people would have been on a road towards more positive life outcomes, overcoming ACEs (adverse childhood experiences) through the care and support of their college communities.

But many have been re-traumatised. And for them, specialist help is not a luxury, but an absolute and immediate necessity.

And supporting that ought to be the government's priority.



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READER'S REPLY

Should length of tenure for CEOs and chairs be limited?

It is also interesting that the long-servers, me, Paul, Sally, Shelagh and Corrienne all run very different entities to when we started, usually now a collection of colleges, so our jobs are significantly different to when we started

Ian Pryce, Twitter

The U-turn on randomised control trials is bad news for FE

Really interesting article. I'm fully on board with the argument that "if we want the FE sector to be the best that it can be, we need more research, not less", but I'm just not sure that randomised control trials are the best way to research education outcomes, or are fair for learners involved.

Abi A, Twitter

Lords line up to challenge new law on provider insurance

Perhaps if ITPs were treated in the same way as the rest of the sector there would not be the need. Current policy actively destabilises ITPs. The most vulnerable organisations within the sector, often working with some of the most vulnerable in society, are yet again being discriminated against and being singled out. Soon you will only have large organisations, which will not be able to be as flexible and meet the needs of the most disadvantaged. Then maybe the government and its department will wake up, albeit too late.

Mark Pike, website

Once again it will be the providers that are operating ethically who will have to bear the costs for the unscrupulous. If learners need to be transferred with no remaining funding, but no progression, then surely the ESFA should be clawing back the funding that has been erroneously claimed?

Gaynor Hunt, website

Time and money would be better spent policing current provision. Do they not realise that claiming on an insurance policy of this nature typically takes weeks if not months, all

REPLY OF THE WEEK

Should length of tenure for CEOs and chairs be limited?

I don't think limiting the length of tenure is the solution, but fixed-term renewable contracts would allow us to retain the best if it was mutually agreeable to do so. I think it's equally important to review the role of governance, strengthening boards to ensure they effectively manage the CEO and senior leadership teams. Board members should be chosen for their current complementary skills, knowledge and experience, paid and held accountable for their role. Only then will we see consistent improvements

Noel Johnson, website

of which will simply add a further layer of red tape and will not help at all? A better system may be a strengthening of the current achievement payment system or an introduction of a system that truly links progression to payment. We have seen all too often apprentices with little or no funding left at point of transfer, yet they have not significantly progressed. This can't be right.

Alan Green, website

The Church of England offensive in FE colleges must be resisted

As someone who works in the FE sector, the best way to prevent problems is to maintain a strict secular stance. Students can follow whatever faith they choose, but the college follows none.

Ian Keating Travis, Twitter

Of course, what the Church of England views and this report failed to mention is that there are already 14 faith FE colleges doing very well thank you in England and Wales and, would you believe, able to function without the wild doctrinal beliefs of their chaplains and principals. The Association of Catholic Sixth-Form Colleges (the majority outstanding) have been serving their communities, providing education to learners of all faiths or none (indeed, the vast majority of students at these colleges are not Catholic), for a number of decades. With a sensible, balanced approach and dialogue with all, we are able to function as church/order-led institutions perfectly adapted to the 21st century.

Mike Hill, website

Bulletin

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Lesley Shepperson

Trustee, VTCT

Start date June 2021

Concurrent job

Managing director, Shepperson and Shepperson Consultants Ltd

Interesting fact

She has been wild camping on a bike in South Island, New Zealand.



Katy Quinn

Trustee, VTCT

Start date June 2021

Concurrent job

Principal, Strode College

Interesting fact

One of her first jobs was working as an overseas rep in Tenerife, which she says gave her "excellent transferable skills".

Movers & Shakers

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



Palvinder Singh

Principal, Kirklees College

Start date June 2021

Previous job

Group deputy principal, NCG

Interesting fact

He "had the honour" to take part in the celebrations in India for Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the 550th birthday of the founder of Sikhism.



Andrew Mondon

Trustee, VTCT

Start date June 2021

Concurrent job

Chief finance officer, Change Grow Live

Interesting fact

He has climbed most of the peaks in Britain, and his next challenge will be Ben Nevis, "although this may be one climb too many!"

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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