




# FE WEEK

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

## I FULLY ANTICIPATE USING *FE WEEK* TO CAUSE TROUBLE: MEET THE NEW EDITOR

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-  FESTIVAL OF LEARNING AWARDS
-  PEARSON BTEC AWARDS



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- New apprenticeship provider investigated over unemployed apprentices
- Owner blames Apprenticeship Training Agency after rapid expansion
- Personal Track Safety Ltd raked in £6m by July 2020 but could go bust

# FEWEEK

## MEET THE TEAM



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# Shane Chowen announced as new *FE Week* editor

FE WEEK REPORTER  
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Shane Chowen has been appointed as the new editor of *FE Week*.

He will take the reins in August from Nick Linford, who is returning to writing FE funding and data blogs, publishing technical guides and expanding his workshops and webinars.

Chowen is currently the East and West Midlands area director at the Association of Colleges. He previously worked as head of policy and public affairs at the Learning and Work Institute and as a policy officer at the Institute for Learning.

**“I’m really excited about joining the team at such a critical moment for our sector”**

He is also a former vice president for FE at the National Union of Students and was a governor at Capital City College Group until May 2021.

Chowen will take over as editor of *FE Week* ten years after its launch.

He said: “It’s an enormous privilege to be leading *FE Week* into its second decade, and I’m really excited about joining the team at such a critical moment for our sector.

“I’ve been a passionate champion for FE throughout my career,



Shane Chowen

and *FE Week*’s role in bringing the sector breaking news, expert analysis and inspiring features has never been more important.”

Nick Linford said: “*FE Week* launched in 2011 and after more than 350 editions, I will be handing over the editorial reins to a well-known figure in the sector.

“My focus will return to writing FE funding and data blogs, publishing technical guides and expanding the workshop and webinar offer that I have been running since 2007, when a director at Lewisham College. “I’m very confident *FE Week* under new leadership will continue to go from strength to strength. I wish Shane the best of luck.”

And Shane Mann, managing director of *FE Week*’s publisher Lsect, added: “*FE Week* will celebrate its tenth birthday in September. Nick has been instrumental in *FE Week*’s success over the past ten years. His energy and tenacity have helped *FE Week* become the leading news provider in the FE and skills sector.

“Shane will have the opportunity to help shape and grow *FE Week* as it enters its next decade. I have known Shane for almost 15 years. I’ve always been struck by his passion for the further education sector. I can’t wait to see what Shane does with *FE Week*. It’s going to be another exciting decade for *FE Week*.

“I look forward to working with Nick as we continue to invest in and grow our broader organisation.”

Go to page 21 for a full profile of Chowen.



Nick Linford

# ESFA terminates rail provider

**BILLY CAMDEN**  
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From front

Exclusive

Owners of a new apprenticeship provider that quickly raked in £6 million have had their contract terminated after hundreds of apprentices were found to be unemployed.

Personal Track Safety Ltd, which trades as PTS Training Academy, began recruiting in May 2018 and within two years had started more than 2,500 apprentices in sectors such as food, care, rail, management, accounting, engineering, sport and prison services.

But the firm was forced to stop starts in July last year by the Education and Skills Funding Agency following allegations that some of its apprentices did not have jobs and were therefore ineligible for an apprenticeship.

The agency stopped all payments from October 2020 and has since issued a termination notice, which comes into effect on July 10.

PTS Training Academy has cut its staff numbers over the past year from around 125 to 35. The remaining staff are now all at risk of redundancy as the company is on the brink of collapse.

PTS owner Matthew Joyce told *FE Week* the firm grew too rapidly but places the blame for the unemployed apprentices with an apprenticeship training agency (ATA) it partnered with.

ATAs launched in 2009 to hire apprentices and then place them with various host companies that would pay the agency to cover the salaries and administration costs.

PTS claims that when they partnered with the ATA in question the apprentices had signed employer agreements, but later found out the

jobs were gone when the Covid-19 pandemic struck.

Joyce said the firm had received around £2 million for the unemployed apprentices, which the ESFA then deducted from future payments.

The ESFA declined to comment on its investigation into PTS and the ATA.

PTS Training Academy, based in Northampton but with offices in London, Doncaster and Somerset, set up in 2012 and was a subcontractor until 2017. It was visited by Ofsted in January 2019 and was found making 'reasonable progress' in all areas of an early monitoring report.

Joyce took over the firm in 2015 and his business partner Charlie Smith, with whom he runs multiple other companies, joined in 2019.

The pair formerly set up and ran an awarding body called AoFA Qualifications, which was subject to an Ofqual investigation in 2018 and told to stop issuing certificates after failing to comply with the regulator's conditions.

It rebranded as EQ Qualifications but took the business decision to surrender its status as an Ofqual-recognised awarding organisation in October 2020. Joyce claims this was unrelated to the ESFA's investigation into PTS Training Academy.

It was around the time of Ofqual's first investigation that Joyce and Smith ramped up their apprenticeship start numbers.

Despite having 20 years' experience in only the rail sector, their first apprenticeships were on the level 3 custody and detention officer apprenticeship after it landed a partnership with Sodexo Justice Service.

Even though Sodexo was itself an employer provider on the government's apprenticeship register, it chose to act as a subcontractor to PTS and deliver the training itself, using PTS for functional skills training.

Sodexo told *FE Week* that it partnered with PTS because it was, at the time, the only provider registered to deliver the plan apprenticeship standard.

A spokesperson said the subcontracting partnership was seen as a "low-risk stepping-stone to allow them time to gather knowledge and a fundamental understanding of the standard, ESFA processes and quality assurance requirements in readiness for direct delivery under the Sodexo Ltd employer provider status". Its contract with PTS was terminated for new starters in September 2019.

It wasn't until November 2019 that PTS delivered its first rail apprenticeships.

Joyce told *FE Week* his provider entered into a relationship with an ATA a month later which led to its exponential growth.

"These guys were going to guarantee apprentices work on the railway – that's the difficult part because normally it's quite a transient workforce. So this is exactly what we were looking for," he said.

"We weren't concerned back in December time – we weren't expecting the apprentices to be out working yet. By around February-March time, we had concerns and we were sort of really pushing to say, 'Where's the new jobs coming in? Where are these guys going out to work?' And obviously, we got hit with Covid. The ATA furloughed its workers and said apprentices cannot go out to work."

Joyce says he complied fully with the ESFA when its officials started asking questions, but they swiftly suspended starts and then cut off funding.

"The ESFA found that the learners weren't eligible because the ATA didn't actually have any work for them. They had no employer engagement," he explained.

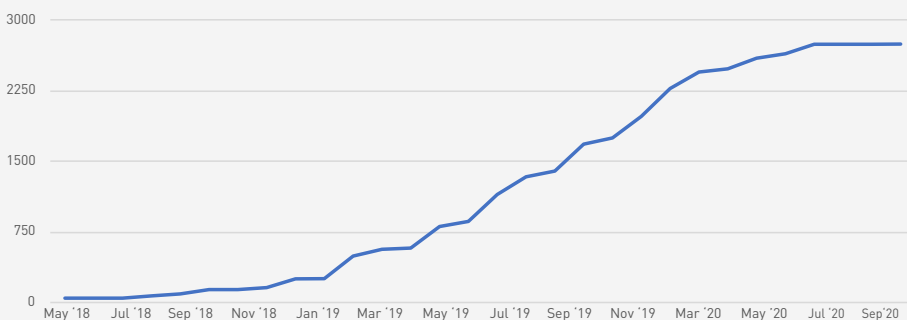
"I admit, we grew too quick. We thought we'd hit the solution to the railway sector's problems because we found an ATA that had fantastic links to the railway.

"The mistake we made is we put lots of people on very quickly."

Joyce says that while he has to respect the ESFA's decision and "move on", he wants to keep his firm running in some form because "we don't want to give up on helping people into work, especially now".

The provider still has around 120 apprentices on programme and promised to support them to complete their training.

PTS Training Academy's apprenticeship starts growth



# Harmful?

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The DfE branded subcontracting practices as 'harmful' in the *Skills for Jobs* whitepaper. **We agree**, in some cases, subcontracting is **poorly managed** and a **misuse of funding** that absolutely does not have learners best interests at heart. But we want to reassure our Learning Curve Group customers that **your learners are in safe hands with us**.

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# New rule will stop providers assessing apprentices for learning difficulties

FRASER WHIELDON  
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Exclusive

Apprenticeship sector leaders have attacked a new funding rule concerning apprentices' learning difficulties assessments, slamming it as "totally wrong".

The new rule, due to take effect from August, would mean providers will not be able to assess apprentices for funding for any learning difficulties as a standard part of enrolment.

"Providers must not put apprentices through a generic needs assessment, where there is no prior assumption of need, to solely result in a need being found and payment requested," the rules, published last Friday, state.

Independent provider Learning Innovations Training Team, based in Yorkshire, has hit out at the ESFA for "perhaps being cynical" by implying assessments were being used to claim unnecessary payments.

Director Jay Luke says the agency "fundamentally mistrust and suspect the sector".

Until now, many providers ran the assessments as part of their enrolment process, to identify barriers to learning, for example, being disorganised.

Providers could apply for a monthly £150 for learners with additional needs from the Learner Support Fund, to cover costs such as extra tutor time or supportive software.

Association of Employment and Learning



Providers chief executive Jane Hickie warned the ESFA has got it "totally wrong" with this rule change.

She says if it wants to ensure the £150 is being used correctly, "it needs to check there is robust supporting evidence at that point of the provision."

"From an auditing perspective, the agency should be focusing on the treatment, not the prescription.

"The end result will be poorer outcomes and the disadvantaged being further disadvantaged."

Chris Quickfall, chief executive of Cognassist, which provides digital assessments to identify learning needs, has criticised the rule change.

He was only diagnosed with dyslexia when he got to university and called the change "an attack on learners with hidden needs and an attack on social mobility".

Sector groups have warned the rule could even go against their duty to identify needs and make reasonable adjustments for their learners under the Equality Act.

Providers are also concerned that not being allowed to run these assessments as a matter of course could conflict with Ofsted guidance providers must establish apprentice's starting point.

An Ofsted spokesperson said initial assessment should "make sure a learner is on the right programme, can quickly acquire the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to make progress, and has appropriate support".

As such, "it is clearly best for learners if a specific learning difficulty or disability has been diagnosed at the outset.

"The ESFA guidance appears to be addressing situations where that has not happened, and a

learning support need is identified during the course of the programme."

Herefordshire-based Riverside Training, like Learning Innovations, has made its learners sit Cognassist's test to identify any barriers to learning. Head of essential skills Lara Latcham says learners will come from school without additional needs having been diagnosed.

Luke says it "makes sense to screen all learners at the outset," instead of identifying needs if they become clear, or relying on assessors who may not have the skills to do so.

Up to one-fifth of Learning Innovations' learners and little under one-third of Riverside's have additional needs identified through the Cognassist test.

Apprentices "highly value" the assessment, Luke argued, as tailoring delivery more accurately "improves the effectiveness of apprentices and thus their value to the employer".

But without the assessment, Latcham believes it will increase their dropout rate because "we don't know what we're working with. We're working blind."

Learners will feel "discouraged" because "they feel they're not getting the support" and may leave the programme.

Latcham would "understand" if the ESFA was phasing out the funding for post-16 and making all schools do the test instead, but worries: "A lot of the people we're working with have been failed by the education system.

"They've come out with no maths, no English, and haven't been able to go to further education, so they've taken the apprenticeship route. And now we're making it difficult for them to achieve in even that route."

A Department for Education spokesperson said the rules were still in draft "so we can receive comments/feedback from the sector prior to implementing version 1 of the rules in August.

"Over the next week we will continue to collate and take on board feedback around all the funding rules update, as well as speaking with provider representative bodies."



Jay Luke



# GLA adult education admin costs soar to meet new corporate overhead charges...

**BILLY CAMDEN**

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The cost of managing and administering the Greater London Authority's adult education budget may soon reach almost £6 million.

Mayor of London Sadiq Khan was criticised by college principals in 2019 after he took control of the AEB for the capital but announced plans to top-slice £3 million of it annually to hire and pay the wages of over 50 new bureaucrats to dish out the fund.

New agenda papers for an AEB mayoral board meeting that was set to take place on July 8 have now revealed that expenditure for the job has hit £5.5 million.

The increase has in part been put down to "newly introduced corporate overhead charges".

The breakdown also includes funding for staffing, the authority's Learner Survey pilot and main rollout, AEB Roadmap work



Sadiq Khan

(including stakeholder consultation), legal services, provider audits, and research and evaluations.

Additionally, if endorsed by the board, an extra £302,500 will be used to outsource AEB procured compliance checks which will be funded from the unallocated funds, increasing the administration budget to £5,814,380.

The increased costs come despite the GLA dishing out less funding than anticipated as

colleges and training providers struggle to spend their allocations (see story below).

*FE Week* asked the GLA for details of the new corporate overhead charges and the reason why they needed to outsource procured provider compliance checks, but the authority failed to respond at the time of going to press.

The GLA's annual AEB allocation it receives from central government totals £360 million.

Its management and administration costs are controversial because it siphons funding from frontline learning to cover the wages of its own administrators, as well as external consultants.

At the time that the original administration cost was revealed by *FE Week*, London South East Colleges chief executive Sam Parrett said it was "shocking and hugely disappointing that this has been allowed to happen and divert £3 million from this underfunded sector to pay for administrative officers".

## ...yet London colleges struggling to spend funding

**BILLY CAMDEN**

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London colleges are struggling to spend chunks of their adult education budget – leading to fears that the Greater London Authority's future allocation from central government could be slashed.

Agenda papers for an AEB mayoral board meeting this week revealed that £110.6 million (60.7 per cent) of the £182 million dished out to grant-funded providers this year had been spent by the end of April 2021.

In comparison, independent training providers with procured GLA contracts spent £21.4 million (87.2 per cent) of their £24.5 million AEB allocations.

The agenda document warns that the underspend "may result in a reduction of the GLA's future AEB allocation from central

government", which currently sits at £360 million.

A number of colleges and training providers in London have also rejected the opportunity to receive funding for the government's new level 3 adult offer, as part of the prime minister's lifetime skills guarantee.

Of the nine independent training providers for which mayor Sadiq Khan approved National Skills Funding allocations for the 2020/21 academic year, only four presented business cases to be funded.

It means that of the £1,408,367 total ITP allocation for 2020/21, only £300,735 was allocated.

A "number" of AEB grant providers also declined National Skills Fund allocations, according to the agenda papers. Of the total £4,123,694 offered, so far only £3,171,809 has been allocated.

With the GLA struggling to spend its funding, it has introduced a ten per cent increase to the funding rates for all adult education budget qualifications up to and including level 2.

It is not just London where colleges and providers are turning down the opportunity to gain funding to deliver the new level 3 adult offer.

The West Midlands Combined Authority told *FE Week* that three of its providers rejected the funding. This money was, however, reallocated to other providers in the region and a spokesperson said their full National Skills Fund allocation will be spent.

There are 387 courses available in the level 3 adult offer, which are fully funded for individuals yet to achieve their first full level 3 qualification – equivalent to two full A-levels.



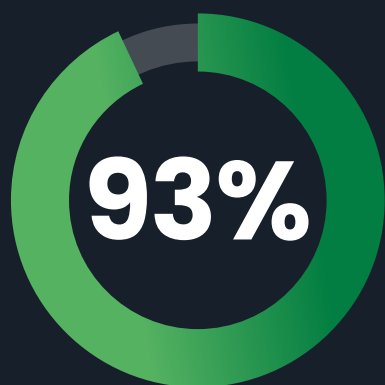
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# Winners of delayed £18m skills bootcamp tender revealed

**BILLY CAMDEN**  
**BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK**

**Exclusive**

The training providers and colleges chosen to deliver the remaining national skills bootcamp programmes have finally been named.

FE Week this week revealed that 24 organisations have won funding in the government's £18 million tender.

Among them are 13 independent providers, six colleges, four mayoral combined authorities or local enterprise partnerships, and one university.

FE Week analysis shows that ten of the providers appear out of scope of Ofsted inspections, while four have never had a

full inspection. Two of the winners are rated 'requires improvement', six are 'good' and two are 'outstanding'.

The winners announced this week bid for lot 1 of the tender that totalled £36 million. Winners of lot 2 were announced in May. Contracts were supposed to start at the end of March but have suffered delays.

No reason for the delays has been forthcoming from the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

The lot 1 tender is currently in a ten-day standstill period, in case any of the unsuccessful applicants to the tender wish to challenge the results.

Lot 1 providers will be delivering 12- to 16-week digital skills courses to adults aged 19 and over across the nine geographical regions in England.

Lot 2 winners will be covering additional sectors such as electrotechnical, nuclear and green energy, at a local or national level.

The ESFA anticipates that at least 75 per cent of all bootcamp trainees will "move into a new job or role within six months of completing training".

Skills bootcamps were announced by prime minister Boris Johnson in a speech at Exeter College

last September. He said they were a response to the "huge number" of people who are "going to have to change jobs – to change skills – and at the moment, if you're over 23, the state provides virtually no free training to help you".

This year's Skills for Jobs white paper pledged the government to run bootcamps as "a flexible way to gain high-quality skills that are relevant to employers".

Before this tender came two waves of pilot bootcamps launched last year with £8 million of funding in areas including Derbyshire-Nottinghamshire, the south west and Leeds.

These were inspired by programmes run in Greater Manchester, and the West Midlands Combined Authority's 'Beat the Bot' scheme.

## LOT 1 TENDER WINNERS

- BCTG
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority
- Chichester College
- Croydon College
- D2N2 LEP
- Founders & Coders C.I.C
- Gateshead College
- HotSW LEP
- Isle of Wight College
- Just IT Training
- Learning Curve Group
- Liverpool City Region Combined Authority
- Local Education and Development (LEAD)
- Makers Academy
- Northcoders
- QA Ltd
- The Developer Academy
- The Growth Company
- The Landing at MediaCityUK
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# ‘Reckless’: UCU slams July 19 easing of Covid restrictions

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A college union has attacked government plans to relax Covid restrictions on campuses as showing a “reckless disregard for health and safety”.

However, representatives of college leaders have given the move a cautious welcome, albeit with concerns about requirements for on-site Covid testing and keeping classrooms ventilated.

The Department for Education released guidance on Tuesday telling colleges and training providers, from July 19, to relax the need for students to keep to consistent, “bubble” groups, or for the start and end of the college day to be staggered.

Face coverings and social distancing will no longer be necessary in either classrooms or in communal spaces from that date, and contact-tracing duties will be transferred to NHS Test and Trace.

Also, learners under 18 will no longer be required to self-isolate from July 19 if they are contacted by Test and Trace as a close contact of a positive case.

Unvaccinated adult learners will need to self-isolate if identified as a close contact, the guidance adds.

University and College Union general secretary Jo Grady has accused the government of “scrapping health and safety measures in education while cases are climbing rapidly”.

The government’s summary of Covid cases from Wednesday showed the number of cases in the UK rose by 42 per cent between June 24-30 and July 1-7.

Grady said the “shocking outbreaks” that had been seen in colleges and universities over the past academic year show that



Jo Grady

education settings “act as Covid incubators”.

“Worryingly, it appears the government has learned nothing, and is set to repeat the same mistakes, abandoning important safety measures too early and showing a continued reckless disregard for health and safety.”

She said “robust” Covid health and safety measures were necessary, and the majority of students needed to be vaccinated.

Despite relaxing many Covid regulations, some protective measures, including enhanced hygiene and ventilation, will remain in place for the autumn term.

Colleges will be asked to provide two on-site tests to their students at the start of the new academic year, with regular home testing continuing until the end of September.

Association of School and College Leaders general secretary Geoff Barton welcomed the government moving test and trace responsibilities to the NHS and the removal of bubbles.

He said the relaxation of regulations “will understandably be greeted with some trepidation after the events of the past 15 months.

“But we have to put an end to the educational disruption that has blighted the lives of children and young people during the pandemic and it simply would not be fair to them to continue with the current controls when the adult population is largely vaccinated.”

He said ASCL was concerned over the requirement for on-site testing, as it “is a huge logistical exercise which has once again been landed on leaders and staff without much thought”.

He called for “significant support” from the government to deliver the requirement, something ASCL will be pushing for.

The organisation also wants financial support for colleges to be able to invest in “high-quality” ventilation systems for when colleges have to keep classrooms ventilated “in the middle of winter, when it is too cold to keep windows and doors open”.

Education secretary Gavin Williamson, announcing the relaxation of measures to the House of Commons on Tuesday, said it meant “children and young people will be able to get on with their education and lives while we continue to manage this pandemic”.

# MPs give green light for Gav's aide to be new Ofqual boss

SAMANTHA BOOTH  
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Education MPs have endorsed Dr Jo Saxton as the new chief regulator of Ofqual, after she batted away independence concerns saying she's interested in "policy, not politics".

Gavin Williamson named Saxton, his policy adviser and a former academy trust boss, as his preferred candidate for the role. The interim chief regulator, Simon Lebus, leaves in September.

In a report published yesterday (Thursday), the education select committee endorsed Saxton for the post. She appeared before MPs at a pre-appointment hearing on Tuesday.

But the committee asked for "reassurance that qualification standards will be maintained and that employers, institutions and learners will continue to have confidence in them.

"We will hold regular accountability hearings to examine this issue. A strong leadership team must work with the chief regulator to take Ofqual forward."

At the hearing, Labour MP Ian Mearns asked whether Saxton was "too close to government" to lead an independent regulator.

"Anyone who knows me knows that I am not afraid to speak my mind and act independently," the former Ofqual board member replied. She added that she had an "entirely professional relationship" with the education secretary.

"I'm not a member of a political party, I was involved



Gavin Williamson



Dr Jo Saxton

in the Labour Party review of the national curriculum. For me, I'm interested in children, young people and learners, I'm interested in policy, not politics."

Robert Halfon, the committee chair, said the exams chaos last year raised "a number of questions" about the relationship between the Department for Education and Ofqual, including "who had the ultimate authority and accountability".

Saxton said that Ofqual needed to question government policy if it had concerns about capacity. "I would absolutely speak out if I felt that any government decisions were going to undermine the interests of children, young people and learners."

She added that independence did not mean that "you can't have effective working relationships" with government.

Saxton was in charge of Turner Schools, which she established in Kent in 2016. She was also chief executive of

Future Academies, the trust set up by Lord Nash, a former academies minister.

She told the committee that the appointment of a former school leader "who has good relationships with other school leaders is the thing that Ofqual needs". This would reassure the wider sector that it understood what school leaders needed and what the young people they served needed.

Labour this week claimed Saxton was unqualified for the post. But she defended her CV, saying she had management and accounting officer experience.

"I'm so fascinated by regulation that I've studied it at the London School of Economics in my spare time. So, while I don't have as much experience in being a regulator, I have worked in highly regulated sectors."

Asked about the regulator's diversity, she said it could be improved. She also backed exams going ahead next year, with the caveat that the lesson of the pandemic was its unpredictability.

Saxton would also like a student panel and said she would explore that with the board.



# Lowest paid and least qualified most likely to miss out on training, says report

**FRASER WHIELDON**  
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Degree-level learners are over four times more likely to access further training throughout their life than those with no qualifications, a new report has found.

Learning at Work: Employer Investment in Skills, published on Wednesday by the Learning and Work Institute, found almost one-third of graduates undertook training in quarter three of 2020, compared to one in 13 workers with no qualifications.

People in the lowest-paid occupations were also being left out of training. Just 11 per cent of workers in "elementary occupations" and "process and plant operative" jobs participated in training in quarter three of 2020, compared with 34 per cent of people in "professional occupations".

Learning and Work Institute chief executive Stephen Evans believes the economy is being "held back" because "the lowest paid and those with the fewest qualifications are most likely to miss out" on training.

The report, sponsored by NOCN, found that an extra 1.2 million people would receive training every year if those with low qualifications participated in training to the same extent as learners qualified to degree-level.

It also found that declines in employer training over the past decade mean workers get 20 million fewer training days each year than if training had stayed at 2011 levels, with the report saying these days are now "lost".

The average employer's investment in skills is also just half what it is in the EU, at £1,530 per worker, and it would take £6.5 billion a year for employers to make up the difference.

The report partly lays the blame on government apprenticeship reforms and adult education cuts. It states that the levy system, introduced in 2017, increased higher-level apprenticeships for older workers while felling opportunities for lower-level courses for younger workers.

There was a 5.4 per cent rise in apprentices aged over 25 between 2017/18 and 2019/20, coinciding with 4.8 per cent drop in apprentices

aged under 19.

This is linked to a "sharp growth," albeit from a low level, in degree-level training and steep declines in level 2 apprenticeships.

Spending on adult education has also been cut by 50 per cent in real terms, since 2009/10. Work-based learning for adults has seen an 18 per cent fall in real-terms overall spending since then.

This has meant "fewer opportunities for people to learn at lower levels", leading to a 40 per cent drop in participation in adult basic skills provision in the past five years.

While the government has launched its lifetime skills guarantee and a new level 3 entitlement, the report says: "Growing level 3 and above learning is a good aim, but if it comes at the expense of basic skills and level 2 then it risks limiting opportunity."

The Learning and Work Institute has said it will set out recommendations for increasing employer investment in skills and addressing inequalities in access to workplace learning in its next report.

Coronavirus is blamed for some more recent falls in employer training, with the report finding young people have been impacted by large drops in training during the pandemic, particularly if they work in the private sector.

Rates of participation in job-related training dropped most for those aged 16 to 24 of any age group, slightly more than for those aged 50 to 64. Participation by private sector workers fell for 16- to 24-year-olds far more

than any other age group.

NOCN chief executive Graham Hasting-Evans has said the new report "highlights not only how the pandemic has affected investment in training but also identifies pre-pandemic issues of inequality and declining employer investment for skills.

"Skills investment from employers and the government is critical to 'building back better' from the pandemic and reducing inequalities in access to workplace learning."

The findings on graduates accessing training far more easily than workers at lower levels are likely to heighten fears within government of a "middle-class grab" on the apprenticeship programme.

Skills minister Gillian Keegan told the Commons education select committee in May the government was "fearful" that degree apprenticeships were being chosen by people "who would have gone to university anyway", which was "squeezing out" disadvantaged groups.

Her comments paralleled those of her predecessor Anne Milton, who told a House of Lords inquiry in 2018 that "fears of a middle-class grab on apprenticeships" were "valid".

Association of Colleges chief executive David Hughes said, in response to a report by think tank EDSK on the rise in degree apprenticeships, that their growth "has been at the expense of chances for younger people looking for their first opportunity in the workplace".

A Department for Education spokesperson said it had "put reforming skills at the heart of our plans to recover from the pandemic". The DfE highlighted the increase in apprentice incentives to £3,000 per learner and the £2.5 billion being put into the National Skills Fund "which will help adults to train and gain the valuable skills they need to improve their job prospects".

The new level 3 entitlement, the spokesperson added, will affect an estimated 11 million adults in England, who will have "the potential to boost their career prospects and wages, while supporting the economy and building back better".



Stephen Evans



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## AWARDS SEASON: AAC

# FE Week-AELP Annual Apprenticeship Award winners 2021 announced

**FRASER WHIELDON**  
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The elite of the country's apprentice employers, providers and sector leaders were honoured at the *FE Week-AELP Annual Apprenticeship Conference Awards* on Thursday.

Twenty-three winners across different apprenticeship routes were recognised, and there were additionally awards for SEND, diversity, special recognition, outstanding contribution, promoting apprenticeships and overall apprentice provider and employer awards.

Shane Mann, awards organiser and managing director of *FE Week* publisher Lsect, said: "The quality of the overwhelming number of applications from across the sector was, as always, very high.

"But tonight's awards recognised and celebrated the very best work by apprentice employers and providers.

"I would like to congratulate all the winners and thank our amazing judging panel, sponsors and partners. We couldn't have done it without them."

Acacia Training was named apprentice provider of the year, while the large apprentice employer of the year gong went to Merseyside Police, with Pendennis Shipyard Ltd being handed the small employer honour.

The employer, provider and individual awards for outstanding contribution to the development of apprenticeships went to Health Education England, Bridgwater & Taunton College, and Performance Through People Training chief executive Rob Colbourne, respectively.

Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief executive Jane Hickie, who co-hosted the event with Mann, said in this "extraordinary year," she liked to think: "Our award winners have all been beacons of best practice throughout the pandemic.

"Means of training delivery have had to

change, often with limited or no additional funding support, and yet we have a new generation of apprentices stepping into the skilled vacancies that employers are keen to fill.

"In my view, this year's winners are truly exceptional."

Special recognition awards were handed to apprentice advocate Anthony Impey and Coca-Cola European Partners HR business partner Sharon Blyfield.

Impey, a serial entrepreneur, has "ploughed and invested his transformative abilities into the centre of the apprenticeship and skills sector," said Mann.

He has served as apprenticeship policy chair at the Federation of Small Businesses and as chair of the government's Apprenticeship Stakeholder Board.

That is in addition to implementing local apprenticeship strategies, including his time as chair of the GLA Apprenticeship Advisory Board. He also led the development of Investors in People's apprenticeship quality mark.

Blyfield, an AELP board member, made "outstanding efforts" with Coca-Cola Europacific Partners during the pandemic "to minimise the negative impact on the prospects of young people, especially among under-represented groups," Hickie said.

She pushed ahead with business outreach programmes and creating a virtual application masterclass video for the Sutton Trust's summer work experience programme.

Blyfield also "spearheaded" a drive on equality, diversity and inclusion among AELP's members.

The judges for the awards included Hickie, former skills minister Anne Milton, UCAS' director of strategy John Cope, Health Education England's national programme manager for apprenticeships Jane Hadfield, and City & Guilds' director of policy Patrick Craven.

The event was run in partnership with VTCT, BCS the Chartered Institute for IT, One File,

Skills and Education Group, City & Guilds, and ILM.

The virtual Annual Apprenticeship Conference was held in April, where the award nominations were announced by impressionist Rory Bremner.

A gala dinner where the awards would be presented had been planned for this week, but this had to be cancelled due to Covid regulations.

## THE FULL LIST OF AAC APPRENTICESHIP AWARDS WINNERS:

### SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARDS:

Anthony Impey MBE and Sharon Blyfield

**AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENTAL AND ANIMAL CARE:** Myerscough College

**BUSINESS AND ADMINISTRATION:** Abingdon & Witney College

**CARE SERVICES:** Paragon Skills

**CATERING AND HOSPITALITY:** Bournemouth and Poole College

**CONSTRUCTION:** Kirklees College

**DIGITAL:** Gower College Swansea

**EDUCATION AND CHILDCARE:** Exeter College

**ENGINEERING AND MANUFACTURING:** Gower College Swansea

**HAIR AND BEAUTY:**

London Hairdressing Apprenticeship Academy

**HEALTH AND SCIENCE:** Skills Training UK

**LEGAL, FINANCE AND ACCOUNTING:** Workpays

**SALES, MARKETING, PROCUREMENT:** Lifetime Training

**TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS:**

Performance Through People Training

**APPRENTICESHIP DIVERSITY:**

Coach Core Foundation

**SEND APPRENTICESHIP CHAMPION:**

Devon County Council

**PROMOTING APPRENTICESHIPS CAMPAIGN:**

Weston College

**OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF APPRENTICESHIPS:**

- Employer: Health Education England
- Provider: Bridgwater & Taunton College
- Individual: Rob Colbourne, CEO, Performance Through People Training

**APPRENTICE EMPLOYER:**

- Large employer: Merseyside Police
- Small employer: Pendennis Shipyard Ltd

**APPRENTICESHIP PROVIDER:** Acacia Training



## AWARDS SEASON: BTEC

## 11th annual BTEC awards recognises outstanding commitment

**FRASER WHIELDON**  
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

An emergency services volunteer and a carer who juggled looking after her disabled sister and studying are two of this year's BTEC Awards winners.

The eleventh annual awards were held on Wednesday, virtually for the second year running, and recognised 19 winners across the swathe of BTEC subjects and centres.

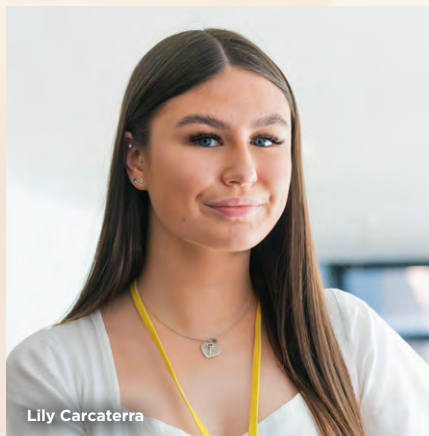
Awarding body Pearson's senior vice president for BTEC and apprenticeships Cindy Rampersaud said it had been "another extraordinary year for learners, tutors, teachers, colleges and schools.

"The hard work and commitment demonstrated by our award winners, all of whom have achieved great things during a time of unprecedented disruption, is extraordinary and I am proud we are able to celebrate their achievements."

The ceremony was co-hosted by sports presenter Gemma Care, and presenter of the United View, YouTube influencer and BTEC ambassador Flex.

The winner of the young learner and business and enterprise learner awards is Lily Carcaterra from Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group, who has been juggling caring for her disabled sister with studying for a level 3 extended diploma in business.

Pearson says she "shone through as a person of great strength", who advocates for



Lily Carcaterra

her classmates and even found time for work experience.

"Powered by the determination to build a bright future through sheer hard work and academic achievement, she is independent, empathic, high-achieving, resilient and remarkable," the awarding body said.

Another of the honourees this week is Jamie Smith from East Surrey College. He has won adult learner of the year after standing out to the judges with his dedication to becoming a public servant, exemplified through his work as an emergency service volunteer and his activities with the student-led donation drive at a local food bank.

His teachers call him "outstandingly calm", with a "compassionate disposition, too".

A number of winners were from BTEC centres around the world, including creative media learner of the year Tiago Bastos Nunes from Portugal and performing arts learner of the year Wilbert Kapinga from Tanzania.

Department for International Trade skills specialist Jonathan Ledger gave his "huge congratulations" to the winners, adding that: "For me, BTEC qualifications are a game changer. They change lives and they help people improve and contribute to business and society in a big way."

In addition to the award winners, the ceremony also included the 2021 Showstopper Challenge, a chance for students to showcase their performing talents.

Performances this year came from Bishop Challoner Catholic College, Jackie Palmer Academy, Clevedon School and D16 Performing Arts College.

Clevedon School won an audience vote on their performances.

There was also an honorary award for Rod Bristow, Pearson's outgoing president for global online learning & UK, for his support for BTECs.

The judges of the awards included Rampersaud and her Pearson colleagues Jane Baker, vice president, higher education qualifications; Derek Richardson, vice

president and senior responsible officer for quality services and governance; Claire Riddle, vice president, marketing, BTEC and apprenticeships; as well as Shane Mann, managing director of FE Week publisher LSECT, and Kasim Choudhry, ThinkFest national director.

## THE FULL LIST OF BTEC WINNERS

- BTEC art and design learner of the year** – Lily Robinson from Kirklees College
- BTEC business and enterprise learner of the year and young learner of the year** – Lily Carcaterra from Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group
- BTEC child, health and social care learner of the year** – Aliyah Black from South West College
- BTEC construction learner of the year** – Joseph Kizhakechethipuzha from Dudley College of Technology
- BTEC creative media learner of the year** – Tiago Bastos Nunes from ETIC, Portugal
- BTEC engineering learner of the year** – Dean Hargreaves from Blackpool and The Fylde College
- BTEC hospitality, travel and tourism learner of the year** – Caitlin Tohill and Caoimhe Tohill from St Patrick's College, County Derry
- BTEC IT and computing learner of the year** – Rey Poh from Sandbach High School and Sixth Form College
- BTEC land-based learner of the year** – Kira Newey from NPTC Group
- BTEC music learner of the year** – Rowan Scourfield from The Priory School
- BTEC performing arts learner of the year** – Wilbert Kapinga from Braeburn International School, Arusha, Tanzania
- BTEC public service learner of the year and adult learner of the year** – James Smith from East Surrey College
- BTEC science learner of the year** – Jacob Cook from Bristol Free School and Sixth Form
- BTEC sport learner of the year** – Megan Piechowiak from Jumeirah English-Speaking School, UAE
- BTEC college of the year** – Abingdon & Witney College
- BTEC international centre of the year** – IVS Alliance, Netherlands
- BTEC school of the year** – The Bourne Academy
- BTEC teacher of the year** – Eren Büktel from TED Atakent High School, Turkey
- BTEC tutor of the year** – Nathan Smith from Chichester College Group



## AWARDS SEASON: FESTIVAL OF LEARNING

# Resilience and determination rewarded at the Festival of Learning Awards

**FRASER WHIELDON**  
**FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK**

A domestic abuse survivor and a learner who retrained in engineering after losing her chef career following a motorbike accident are among this year's Festival of Learning Awards winners.

Twelve students, tutors, colleges, providers and employers were recognised at a virtual ceremony on Tuesday, run by the Learning and Work Institute (LWI), and have been congratulated by skills minister Gillian Keegan.

"These awards shine a light on the power of education to change people's lives," she said. "I hope the inspirational stories of the outstanding adult learners motivate others to fire up their own learning journeys."

One such story belongs to Nikki-Ann Wyatt, who worked as a pastry chef for a Michelin star restaurant before "life-changing" injuries to her legs sustained in a motorbike crash. This meant she could no longer spend hours at a time on her feet in a busy kitchen, and so that career came to an end.

While the LWI says it took Wyatt time to come to terms with losing her career, she has won its new directions award after embarking on a career in civil engineering through Trafford College Group. She is currently studying for a master's degree.

The return to learning award was won by Kirsty Young, who faced domestic abuse from a young age. But following help from the police, she started a new life with her three children and was encouraged by her mum to study at East Riding College.

Kirsty is now progressing on to a degree and will shortly begin her PGCE.

The winner of the patron's award, chosen by LWI patron Princess Anne, was Matthew Turner from Bradford. He won for refusing to be held back by his autism and progressing from level 1 to 3, gaining employment and volunteering in the autism community.

The president's award was won by what the LWI called an "innovative and holistic" English



First row: Nikki-Ann Wyatt, Paul Ackroyd  
Second row: CARAS ESOL, Kirsty Young  
Third row: Rosie Wainwright, Hasan Jasim

as second or other language project led by London charity CARAS; it was chosen by the institute's president, Nick Stuart. The project helps young people and adults who are seeking asylum or have a refugee background to progress in learning.

This year's outstanding individual award was given to Rosie Wainwright who, after a "tumultuous" start in life, where her dyslexia meant she had to retake her GCSEs three times, now has a degree in law and runs a programme supporting young people in care.

The winner of the employer award is West Midlands-based company Salts Healthcare, which over the past six years has created career pathways to upskill workers to become fully qualified engineers. This has created "exceptional growth and productivity, aided retention within the business, and supported staff to overcome personal and professional barriers".

A tutor and distance learning coordinator at HMP Pentonville, José Aguiar, took home the tutor award after acting as a mentor for prisoners enrolling in higher education. He continued to play a "huge role" in prisoners' mental health and wellbeing throughout the pandemic, returning to work a week after lockdown started.

The learning for work award went to young mother Naomi-Louize, who took matters into her own hands after her son struggled to get a haircut: she has now completed a level 3

in barbering and is self-employed, cutting the hair of young children with learning difficulties or special needs.

After being diagnosed with a life-changing condition, Paul Ackroyd enrolled on a range of level 2 courses to improve his understanding of it and to help vulnerable customers he meets as a bus driver for First Group; he has now won the learning for health award.

Positive Progressions, an employability project delivered by Craven College, has won the learning provision award. Its learners are parents and carers not currently in work, some of whom have never worked or are long-term unemployed, who the project "encourages and empowers" to continue learning and to find work.

The online learning award went to Daya Mohindra, who enrolled on a digital learning preparation course when the pandemic struck. With the course under her belt, she started arts skills courses again and has now completed several online courses during lockdown.

This year's English language learning award winner is Hasan Jasim, who fled Iraq with his family to England, but could not speak a word of the language. "Through hard work and diligence," the LWI says he has progressed from ESOL entry level 1 to 3, has passed his driving test and trained as a tiler, "transforming the life of his family".

Learning and Work Institute chief executive Stephen Evans said the award winners "show just how powerful learning can be and the difference great tutors and providers can make".

The awards were judged by an array of sector leaders, including NOCN managing director Graham Hasting-Evans, the Education and Training Foundation's Catherine Manning, WEA chief executive Simon Parkinson, and Skills and Education Group boss Paul Eeles.

The award sponsors were NOCN, the ETF, City Lit, Skills and Education Group and the WEA.



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Profile

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Introducing

# SHANE CHOWEN

Incoming editor,  
*FE Week*

**'I fully anticipate using the full force of *FE Week* to cause trouble'**

**JESS STAUFENBERG**  
**@STAUFENBERGJ**

Shane Chowen, currently an area director at AoC, will become *FE Week's* new editor in August. He talks to Jess Staufenberg about his vision for the paper

Shane Chowen, incoming editor of *FE Week*, remembers the "activation moment" which switched him on to issues in the sector. He'd had some practice speaking up for his peers as a class

representative at the tender age of eight – "by year 4, I was ready to lead", he chuckles – and by 16 was at City College Plymouth. His A-level biology teacher had left and the class was enduring supply teacher after supply teacher, so Chowen headed down to the HR office.

"She said, 'it's really hard to recruit teachers in colleges, the pay isn't as good as schools. We're trying our best, Shane, but we just can't get any.'"

That HR vice principal was a "certain Sam Parrett", grins Chowen, referring to one of the sector's now best-known leaders and chief

executive of London South East Colleges. "That was an activation moment for me." Spurred on, he wrote a motion for the National Union of Students in 2008, pointing out school staff should not be paid more than college lecturers. The NUS noticed him, and the rest is history. He grins again. "Sam Parrett has a lot to answer for."

By 2011, *FE Week* had caught up with Chowen in an interview as vice president for FE at the NUS, not long after he'd run for the presidency as the first-ever candidate from an FE background. Bravado didn't come naturally

# Profile

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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– one stressful Sky TV appearance sent him “into cold sweats for years afterwards” – and he was on the back foot convincing thousands of university students why an FE student should represent them. He lost that campaign, but didn’t forget the issue at Plymouth College that had so frustrated him.

The same year, Chownen became a policy officer at the Institute for Learning, a professional body for FE practitioners (now replaced by the Education and Training Foundation). With his team he convinced the new government to put qualified teacher status (QTS) and qualified teacher in learning and skills (QTLS) on a par. “You could teach in a college with QTS but you couldn’t teach in a school with QTLS. We changed that! That was really exciting.”

By now just 24, Chownen was already scrutinising the FE sector more closely than most people ever get to: from both the viewpoint of students, and of practitioners. This included practitioners and learners outside the usual college settings, such as prisons. “That was a whole new world for me, working closely with prison education providers and training providers. The government had realised it was costing something like £200,000 a year to keep young offenders but the reoffending rate was really high. I’m very interested in that.”

The IfL were advocating for a “good-quality education pathway” by “putting the teachers’ perspectives front and centre of those debates”. Chownen leans in with enthusiasm. “That’s the thing, it’s such a diverse profession. It’s not just prison education, but teachers of ESOL (English for speakers of other languages), adult education, in special educational needs and



Shane's mum and nan visiting London from Plymouth, around 2012

disabilities too.”

Here we come to one of Chownen's top priorities for *FE Week* under his editorship. Himself a former columnist for the paper, he wants to bring unexpected voices on to its pages. “The FE sector has a bit of a habit of talking to itself, and one of the things I want to do is bring new voices into the debate.

“It’s not their fault, but it’s often the same names,” he adds, eyes twinkling.

“Throughout my career I’ve met so many people with ideas and perspectives, who are just as charismatic, funny and intelligent as the go-to people. It’s important to show that diversity. It’s important for readers to see *FE Week* as an avenue for influence.”

Given Chownen has so often worked on campaigns, will he be a campaigning editor? I ask. And given the bruising Sky experience, how does he feel about the occasional anger directed at journalists?

“When you’re the editor of a national newspaper covering a sector, you can’t please everyone, and it’s not my job to please everyone. News doesn’t work like that,” he says. “At its best *FE Week* has done some excellent national campaign-type activities, particularly around student rights and adult learner loans. I think you have to pick your battles carefully, but when the time comes, I fully anticipate using the full force of *FE Week* and its readership to cause trouble.”

While one senses Chownen can’t wait to apply this principle to the government, he’s also conscious of not “causing trouble” for providers without fully understanding their context – perhaps a result of his two latest roles. After IfL, he joined the Learning and Work Institute (then called the National Institute of Adult



As a toddler, foreshadowing a career at the headwinds of further education news...

Continuing Education) as head of policy and public affairs, where he got a further insight into the complexity of the FE system. “I had to learn about a whole new set of providers – particularly how the Department for Work and Pensions and the employment system need to work much better with the Department for Education and FE system.”

## “The picture is always more complicated than you think”

The challenge facing providers in navigating that system was further brought home during his almost four-year role as the Association of College’s area director for the East and West Midlands, where he has worked with 50 college leaders.

“It opened my eyes to all the factors you have to weigh up when running education institutions,” he explains. “When I was at the NUS, I would be outraged at things. But the AoC experience has proven to me, a lot of people would do those more radical things if they could. The number of things you have to weigh up...” he shakes his head. “The picture is always more complicated than you think.”

For that reason, Chownen doubts he’ll bring back *FE Week*’s ‘Ofsted Watch’ when inspections return. “A drop from grade 3



Campaigning against education cuts as vice president (FE) of NUS in 2010



# Profile

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to 4 tells you they're having problems, but not much more. Is it a problem affecting just them? Or is it a problem in the system? Let's see what's beneath the numbers."

## "The FE sector has a bit of a habit of talking to itself"

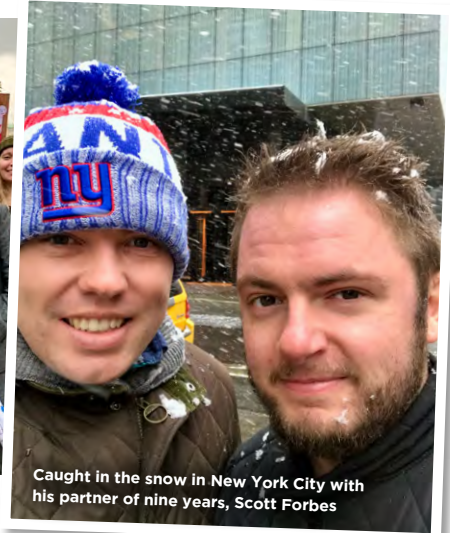
He then comes out with a rather moving pronouncement. "I view the office of the college principal as like a civic figure. You're in a community leadership position – it's on a par with being a local MP or leader of a council, in my eyes." Of course, this means when it goes wrong, it goes very wrong. "These are incredibly powerful figures locally."

I ponder out loud that journalists often have a morbid fear of appearing compromised or 'bought', and so can veer towards reporting the bad rather than the positively impactful. Chowen reflects on this. "One of the things that's kept me in FE is when I've been moved by a story. A teacher who's gone above and beyond, or a provider or senior leader who's taken a bold decision. Working in FE is hard, it's difficult. Let's make people feel something." He laughs. "I guess my fluff threshold is lower than you're used to."

He has a point, though: I note the editor



In Parliament Square with campaigners at 2018's Love Our Colleges demonstration



Caught in the snow in New York City with his partner of nine years, Scott Forbes

of the only publication greater in the land than *FE Week* – Ian Hislop at *Private Eye* – has always said a winning combination is "news and jokes". Is there something in that?

"Interesting. I've been thinking about the website being a place you would spend more time on, so you click on one story, and then something else catches your eye. So I've been thinking about what's acceptable in terms of fun stuff. There's stuff like the wider student experience, that doesn't happen anywhere else."

Another voice Chowen is keen to include in the pages is employers, in part to counteract the way the government talks about them, he says.

"I'm quite interested in how we can broaden the readership into employers more. Let's find out what is and isn't

working from an employer angle." One issue he has is how "employers and the sector are often portrayed as being at each other's throats." Gillian Keegan, skills minister, "is the worst for this," he continues, raising his eyebrows. "She will say, 'employers tell me this, therefore providers must do that'. You can't homogenise the employer voice like that. It should be a criminal offence," he hoots.

"There's more to be done demonstrating when employers and colleges are on the same path, not just different paths." It will be interesting, he adds, to see whether employers feel properly represented in Local Skills Improvement Plans, and how that affects the government's skills agenda. Both Keegan and Gavin Williamson need to listen much more closely, he says.

Chowen does not just dish out criticism, but has shown he acts when he can't support a decision. He was one of two governors who resigned from Capital City College Group last month over expenditure on a course with no teachers and a "sink or swim" student admissions model. At the time, Chowen said the plan wouldn't "have an impact on the communities I believe the college should be focusing on". He may be brave enough to talk about fun and fluff in news, but colleges should be under no illusions he doesn't think deeply about poor decisions.

"It will take a while for people to see what I'm trying to do with *FE Week* and create opportunities for them – we can do that steadily," he concludes. "I want a two-way dialogue with the sector."



Briefing the Secretary of State ahead of his speech at the 2020 Midlands Colleges Parliamentary Reception

Opinion

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JOHN HYDE

Executive chair,  
HIT Training



The ESFA should hire risk managers to root out problems in training providers

Making providers get insurance will solve neither incompetence nor fraud, writes John Hyde

“Taking a sledgehammer to crack a nut” was how Lord Aberdare, speaking at the second reading of the Skills Bill, described the decision to require independent training providers to buy insurance and pay to join a new register.

He warned such moves could destabilise ITPs at a time when the economy desperately needs more skilled staff as we move out of lockdown and as the effects of Brexit on the labour market are felt.

ITPs deliver three-quarters of all apprenticeship, traineeship and adult education budget programmes. How many ITPs have failed in the last decade, to warrant introducing these draconian conditions?

Why has the Department for Education and ESFA decided insurance cover and new registration conditions will solve this problem?

Exactly what must be insured has yet to be defined by ESFA. Most ITPs already hold public liability insurance as a requirement to contract for NHS apprenticeships. But it appears DfE also wants insurance against failure. Of course, insurance underwriters will insure any risk, but at a price – as DfE officials will soon discover.

As this insurance cover will be mandatory, it will become a cost of delivery and so will ultimately paid by the taxpayer. Debating the Skills Bill, politicians will have to decide if

this is an effective use of taxpayers’ money or whether more cost-effective solutions exist.

Are there systemic failures in the DfE and ESFA control systems that need resolving, for instance?

There are just two reasons for ITPs’ failures: incompetence and fraud.

Incompetence ranges from misunderstanding the detail and nuances of the programmes delivered, poor or insufficient allocation of resources, inept management, untrained delivery staff and insufficient financial resources.

For new entrants, these problems should be identified at the register of apprenticeship training providers (RoATP), and afterwards, at the initial Ofsted inspection visit.

More frequent inspections would identify problems before greater numbers of learners are affected. Serious breaches result in providers having to cease trading.

For grant-funded organisations, intervention by the FE Commissioner precedes the institution being closed or merged.

To provide “a single unified

system of protection for learners” as described by Baroness Wolf, should a Commissioner for ITPs be introduced?

The commissioner could have powers to suggest or demand mergers between ITPs or between ITPs and grant-funded FE colleges; and, on a cost-effective basis, could have access to funds to finance these mergers.

Now on to fraud. With ITPs

“Are there failures in the DfE and ESFA control systems that need resolving?”

this includes claiming funding for “ghost” or ineligible learners, deliberate cheating in examinations and assessments, bribery of employers and inappropriate use of government funding.

The ESFA has live data of all provider and learner activity. Simple algorithms would show

up anomalies of some providers against the norm to highlight potential fraud.

Could the ESFA follow the Ministry of Defence’s example where on larger defence contracts, a civil servant is seconded to sit on the board of the company awarded the contract?

Similar arrangements could be introduced for ITPs receiving ESFA funds in excess of £10 million. This would give government line of sight of the provider’s financial position, policy decisions, implementation of delivery and overall competence.

It would also give the civil service, collectively, a much clearer understanding of the day-to-day running, decision-making and interpretation of ESFA rules.

Dealing with provider failure needs rethinking, but insurance claims are unlikely to solve it.

Incompetent provider failure might be insurable for a substantial fee, but fraud would invalidate any insurance premium. Funds would need to be available to support learners transferring from a failed provider.

I fail to see how enhanced liability insurance and more stringent entry registrations will have any impact on provider failures, or add more protection to learners. Meanwhile, it risks destabilising the entire ITP sector.

The ESFA should try employing risk management professionals to discover the real issues within ITPs and implement processes to mitigate these.





# GEENA VABULAS

Policy manager for assistive technology, Policy Connect



## Many teachers are unaware of assistive technology for disabled students

Staff lack proper training, and information about assistive technology is hard to navigate, writes Geena Vabulas

In an age when digital is no longer optional for finding work, it is crucial that students with special educational needs leave school with the skills and kit necessary for full digital access.

This isn't just about writing a CV. Digital access is needed to search for jobs, fill out applications, complete virtual interviews and access training and employment support opportunities.

The reality is that tech skills are more in demand than ever and most jobs, including those not in the technology sector, require a "basic" level of digital knowledge.

However, research from Policy Connect and the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Assistive Technology shows that disabled students are leaving education without the digital skills needed to succeed in the workplace.

In particular, they lack knowledge of work-based assistive technology funding and support. They also often don't have the confidence needed to navigate these issues when starting a new job.

Through our research, we have heard many difficult stories from people unable to apply for work or forced to leave careers as a result of gaps in provision.

But there is hope as we have also heard heartening success stories. These include the dyslexic



counsellor who was able to shift her practice online throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

First, though, what is assistive technology?

Assistive technology (AT) is any digital technology designed to remove a barrier for a disabled person – such as screen readers for people with vision impairments.

**“We have heard many difficult stories from people unable to apply for work”**

But assistive technology is not just for computer- or desk-based jobs. Some examples of mobile AT include scanning pens, which help with reading text on paper, and Brain in Hand, an app to support autistic people throughout their day.

The reason it's so important now is because Covid-19 has accelerated digitisation across the fields of education, training

and apprenticeships, as well as in disability employment support. The massive shift to remote working represents amazing opportunities for disabled people's inclusion in the workforce.

This includes people with travel limitations, for example, or who struggle with sensory input in work environments and who may particularly benefit from working from home.

However, greater unemployment across the country means competition for jobs will naturally be higher. So urgent action is required to ensure the future world of work is accessible to all.

Yet our research has found that education providers do not know enough about AT, the funding available for it, or inclusive digital practices. Teachers and specialist staff often do not have any training in AT and don't know how best to support their students.

For instance, many educators are unaware that "Access to Work" funding can be used to support disabled students on work placements. This is a publicly funded employment support

programme that aims to help people with disabilities start or stay in work.

Meanwhile, careers services and disability services are often not joined up and employment advice for students can miss out on crucial information regarding access to digital.

And although there are many sources of information out there, these are disparate and hard to navigate. Importantly, there is a lack of clear guidance and direction from the government.

It's important to remember that disabled staff themselves could benefit from inclusive digital practices.

Many assistive technologies come at no additional cost and are present in commonly used software, such as the immersive reader function built into Microsoft Word, or voice typing in Google Docs.

Raising awareness of these problems and solutions can benefit everyone, not just students with SEND. It's against this background that the report makes recommendations to government, education providers and employers.

The UK, already a world-leader in the development of AT, must harness the power of these tools and inclusive practices.

If our government and society can get digital inclusion right, these new technologies can hugely help "level the playing field" for disabled people and open the world of work up to them.

# CERIAN AYRES

National head of technical education, Education and Training Foundation



## Colleges have a huge impact on the pipeline of talent towards ‘blue technologies’

Some of the most innovative marine technology businesses in the world call the UK home, writes Cerian Ayres

This summer, all eyes turned to Carbis Bay in Cornwall as world leaders met for the G7 summit to address some of the great challenges of our time – climate change, world health, Britain’s exit from the European Union, and the post-Covid era.

Blue technologies refers to technologies used in marine environments. Sometimes also called the “blue economy”, it can encompass renewable energy and digital technologies based around the maritime sector, industries and ecosystem.

In the UK we have world-leading industry sectors with global reputations for developing high-quality products and innovative design solutions. Those reputations are built on people and their training and skills, supported and enabled by the further education sector.

It was therefore fitting that the G7 summit was hosted in a county with 400 miles of coastline, where no one is more than 20 miles from the sea and where the maritime sector sustains 800 businesses and 15,000 jobs.

Worth more than one billion pounds, blue technologies play a vital part in the economic development of Cornwall and the wellbeing of its coastal communities. The Cornwall Marine Network in particular plays an



important role in community cohesion.

Some of the most innovative marine technology businesses in the world call Cornwall home. These include ‘workfloats’, which are floating platforms and boats used to harness wind energy that realise the potential of wave power for direct energy production and the production of hydrogen for fuel cells.

Another example is the use of sustainable materials in super yacht manufacture at Mylor Yacht Harbour, which is now one of UK’s busiest boat yards.

Thanks to cutting-edge technology, high-quality design and manufacturing, and innovation, those businesses are thriving, making the most of the natural opportunities for global maritime business and exporting around the world.

The sector has been built by past generations, but it will be driven forward by this week’s learners and their knowledge, skills and competencies as they progress to higher levels of technical study and employment.

Many of these businesses have

collaborated with schools and colleges in order to secure the technical talent pipeline to meet their industries’ future skills needs.

In this talent pipeline, the impact of the teacher or trainer in ensuring positive outcomes for their learners cannot be overstated. That is why the recruitment of teachers and trainers and investment in their professional development is so important.

### “The spotlight on Cornwall this summer reminds us of the opportunities”

It is why we are delivering support such as our T Level Professional Development and Apprenticeship Workforce Development programmes.

The former, introduced in 2019, prepares colleagues for T Level delivery. It offers subject specialist support that addresses blue and green technologies for the engineering and manufacturing route.

It also features opportunities for teachers and trainers to gain insight and experience of the technologies used in industry through work placements, shadowing and employer workshops. These help create a clear line-of-sight to work and the relationships that foster learning opportunities, industry and work experience openings for learners.

We also have teacher resource improvement projects which are fostering the creation of new teaching materials for classroom and workplace teaching and training.

The Apprenticeship Workforce Development offer, launched last year, offers a similarly broad range of opportunities, from courses on technical teaching pedagogy to professional practice updating, to curriculum design and planning.

Both programmes facilitate learning from blue and green technologies not just from Cornwall of course, but from across the country – for instance, from the Humber region, home to the UK’s largest offshore wind farm.

This bringing together of education and industry improves the quality of technical teaching, develops learners’ skills, knowledge and behaviours, and inspires their career choices.

The turning of the spotlight on Cornwall reminds us that we are ready to build brighter futures and harness the sustainable technologies that will underpin them.

Our sector has a vital role to play.

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# READER'S REPLY

### ESFA chief executive Eileen Milner to stand down

The way the Civil Service recruits means the revolving door of clueless experts will ensure a senior civil servant from another area will be drafted in to do more damage before parachuting out to wreak havoc somewhere else.

Gavin Brain, website

Perhaps they could sub-contract the job to an expert provider!!

Anonymous, website

### UTCs could survive by extending year groups beyond age 18

Great idea. We could call them, um... FE colleges!

Keith Holness, website

I like this idea from David Phoenix

Mary Curnock Cook, Twitter

### 'Important' new FE data collection will start this month

The ESFA has already been told by the Information Commissioner that its data collection was a shambles and also told it had to work to GDPR. Also, with Ministry of Defence papers being left behind a bus shelter and people leaving data on trains and taxis. Then of course, people have to update the data. Who is paying if you have 1,000 staff and then win a contract and do not win two?

Steve Lawrence, website

### The need to put young people with SEND at the heart of recovery couldn't be clearer

To me, the sadness about inspection was that Ofsted tried to not make a separate judgment on high-needs provision when inspection moved to the EIF two years ago. Luckily, the sector did not support that stance. Things have improved dramatically since the first days of FEFC inspection, when high-needs learners were often housed in temporary buildings towards the back of main sites, being kept 'occupied' rather than educated, with no qualifications being taken. Expectations rose, and today things are very different. However, this could all easily change if

## REPLY OF THE WEEK

### ESFA chief executive Eileen Milner to stand down

Whoever replaces Eileen Milner needs to be a good listener to the sector and institutions the ESFA funds. The role is a tricky one, caught in the middle between ministers/Whitehall and the sector itself, but equally it's an influential role and operates best with informed, practitioner-led policy and practice – yes civil servants advise and ministers decide, but if that advice is rounded and comes from a place of practical, not just analytical knowledge, it surely helps challenge some of the more illogical decisions that come out from time to time.

It feels very "us and them" at times, and actually the sector will always respond, but a chief executive who takes the time to really understand what rubs the sector up the wrong way, or how we actually implement things on the ground, would be hugely beneficial. It's time for the ESFA and civil servants to get out more, and a senior leader who leads from the front and ensures his/her staff thoroughly understand who they're funding (not just what they're funding) will be a positive move.

Paul Griffiths, website

inspections do not continue to encourage high expectations. My biggest regret from inspecting the area and general learning and skills is that the numbers going on to mainstream courses and apprenticeships continues to still be too low. It is good to see Paul and Ofsted shining a light on the whole SEND educational agenda, especially following the constraints and isolation resulting from the pandemic.

Phil Hatton, website

### Speed read: draft statutory guidance on local skills reviews published

This government is fixated on delivering what local industry needs (if they know?) with little regard to the individual learner who wants to widen their options. Narrow options do not give equal opportunities to young people in depressed areas to look wider for their career choices.

Derek Tilley, website

### Sixth-form students' art exhibit tackles fake news

Wonderful to see our visual arts student Susie Sergison's work on the front page of FE Week.

Runshaw College, Twitter



# Bulletin

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## Movers & Shakers

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



**Heidi Fraser-Krauss**

Chief executive officer, Jisc

**Start date** September 2021

**Previous job**

Executive director of corporate services, University of Sheffield,

**Interesting fact**

In 2017, she was named female chief information officer of the year by Computing Magazine.



**Ali Hadawi**

Board of Trustees, AGA

**Start date** July 2021

**Concurrent job**

Principal, Central Bedfordshire College

**Interesting fact**

Ali says he came to the UK as an international student and got stuck. He came from the ancient city of Babylon.



**Cat Draper**

Principal, Kidderminster College

**Start date** May 2021

**Previous job**

Interim principal, Kidderminster College

**Interesting fact**

She once went to a tea party with the Dalai Lama.



**Ben Blackledge**

Board member, WorldSkills Europe

**Start date** September 2021

**Concurrent job**

Deputy chief executive, WorldSkills UK

**Interesting fact**

He would secretly love to take part in the cooking competition at WorldSkills, as he's always harboured a secret desire to be a chef.



**Julia Howe**

Principal, Weymouth College

**Start date** September 2021

**Previous job**

Interim principal Weymouth College

**Interesting fact**

She suffered from kidney disease at an early age and discovered that she had three kidneys.



**Neil Calvert**

Principal, The Co-operative College

**Start date** July 2021

**Concurrent role**

Vice chair of governing council, University of Derby

**Interesting fact**

He previously worked as a headteacher, has given evidence in Parliament and once lectured at Western Kentucky University.



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