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# FE WEEK

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chief sits  
down with  
*FE Week*



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# Fears of FE budget cuts grow as Treasury seeks 5% savings

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EXCLUSIVE

The Department for Education has been asked to find savings of "at least 5 per cent", leaving it facing cuts that could amount to £4.5 billion and prompting fears of an impact on FE budgets.

The Treasury revealed this week that the spending review, a plan for public spending over the next three years, will accompany the autumn budget on October 27.

Ministers have announced plans to increase funding for health and social care in the wake of the pandemic by raising national insurance contributions, but they are looking to find savings elsewhere.

Given the impact of Covid-19, the Treasury said spending plans would be "underpinned by a focus on ensuring every pound of taxpayer funding is well spent, so that we can continue to deliver the highest-quality services to the public at the best value".

Departments have "therefore been asked to identify at least 5 per cent savings and efficiencies from their day-to-day budgets as part of these plans, which will be reinvested in our priorities".

The instruction, which is similar to one given in early 2020 before the pandemic began, has prompted unease within the FE community. Spending on FE represents just 6 per cent of the DfE's £89.6 billion resource budget, and a 5 per cent cut based on 2021-22 spending would leave the department having to find almost £4.5 billion.

Julian Gravatt, deputy chief executive of the Association of Colleges (AoC), warned that colleges have already made "hundreds of millions of pounds of efficiencies" in recent years as a result of government



Rishi Sunak

decisions to fix funding levels in cash terms "regardless of cost" – at an annual efficiency gain of 2 per cent a year for the past decade.

"We have said to the DfE and Treasury for years that there are areas where the education system could be more efficient, but government needs to be careful about using a fixed percentage target for these exercises," he said.

Areas that the AoC highlights for savings include "administration, assessment and the duplication of A level provision".

Sue Pember, a former director of FE funding at the DfE and now policy director of adult education network HOLEX, said the department will be considering what system it is going to use to make the savings.

Officials could, for example, "salami slice" – taking 5 per cent of everybody's budget – or enforce targeted cuts such as removing "dead weight activity and letting others pick up the tab".

She said: "They will look at the non-statutory budgets, such as early years, the adult education and HE support, and trawl the work of their agencies and look at development funds like the £600 million qualification reform."

However, Pember added that these budgets are "not big enough to give this level of saving, so they will need to look at

more radical solutions such as reducing the graduate repayment level or adding 1 per cent to the apprenticeship levy".

Tom Bewick, chief executive of the Federation of Awarding Bodies, said the government's decision to use future tax rises to support health and social care does not "bode well for those of us who have consistently been calling for more investment in further education".

While he had "no real idea" where the DfE might go for the efficiency savings, there is "no doubt in my mind that in recent years the quango state in skills has become rather bloated with over-the-top senior salaries and far too many non-jobs being created in areas like inclusion and strategy officers".

Bewick suggests the department should "pare back the ambitions of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, which is planning to spend millions of pounds on a needless dual regulatory system of approving and managing vocational qualifications".

He added: "Given the dissatisfaction of many MPs and parts of the FE sector of the poor performance of the Careers Enterprise Company, I can't really see that lasting out any major cull."

Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief executive Jane Hickie said the "reported large skills shortages in certain key sectors mean that the DfE needs to have a sharper focus on how it spends its current budgets, which includes adult education becoming more effective in retraining adult workers".

She added that AELP would "strongly resist any opportunistic calls to divert the current apprenticeship levy underspend to other programmes because the underspend is simply a result of the lockdowns and workplaces being closed".

# News

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## No national insurance help for colleges despite support for schools

BILLY CAMDEN  
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FROM FRONT

EXCLUSIVE

The government will not compensate colleges for national insurance contribution increases even though it is helping schools, *FE Week* can reveal. The “indefensible” move will hit college budgets by an estimated £30 million.

Boris Johnson this week set out plans to increase national insurance contributions from both employees and employers by 1.25 percentage points from next April.

The so-called “health and social care levy”, which the government said would raise around £12 billion in extra funding each year, will be used to “tackle Covid backlogs” and reform adult social care.

However, the government will use £1.8 billion of the £12 billion to “compensate departments and other public sector employers” in England at the next spending review for the “increased cost of the levy”.

But in a move that makes “no sense” to the membership body for the sector, the Treasury told *FE Week* that colleges would not benefit from the

compensation scheme even though schools and all other public sector employers will.

A spokesperson said this was because colleges are technically classified as private sector organisations by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Janet Meenaghan, chief executive at Inspire Education Group, which includes Peterborough and Stamford Colleges, said this was “yet another indefensible example of unfair treatment against colleges”. She called on ministers to reverse the decision “immediately”.

She added: “Not only have we taken more than our fair share of funding cuts, we also face a relentless onslaught of rising costs which are completely out of our control. The Treasury is penalising my staff and students just because we’re not a school”

Julian Gravatt, deputy chief executive of the Association of Colleges, was also outraged. He said: “There is no sense in government using an accounting technicality to justify excluding college students from the benefits of the national insurance compensation arrangements when these benefits are being provided to students in government-controlled academies.

“We have seen this differential treatment in the

past, but we had seen signs of a change.”

Early analysis by Gravatt found that the national insurance contributions increase will cost colleges around £30 million, or 0.45 per cent, of their £6.6 billion estimated total income.

He warned that the costs which college leaders will face will “inevitably force difficult cuts elsewhere”.

A Treasury spokesperson tried to defend the decision by summarising the investment it has put into FE in recent years.

“Our support for further education colleges includes nearly £300 million in last year’s spending review and a commitment to £1.5 billion of capital funding to bring all college estates in England up to a good condition,” they said.

“The health and social care levy will raise £12 billion a year for the NHS and social care. Everyone is being asked to contribute, in a fair and progressive way, including businesses and workers.”

The ONS originally classified college corporations as private sector organisations in the 1990s but reclassified the sector in 2010 as general government organisations, alongside maintained schools and academies.

They were then reclassified again as private sector organisations in 2012.

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# ‘Alarming’ lack of BAME students in first year of T Levels

FRASER WHIELDON  
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EXCLUSIVE

Black, Asian and minority ethnic students were “alarmingly” under-represented in the first year of T Levels, *FE Week* can reveal. But some colleges report a rising uptake among non-white learners starting the second wave of the flagship qualifications this month.

The Department for Education (DfE) told *FE Week* in answer to a freedom of information request that 14.2 per cent, or 193, of the 1,363-strong overall cohort for 2020/21 were from a black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) background.

Eighty-four per cent of students, or 1,145, were from a white background, while the ethnicity of 1.8 per cent was “not provided or unknown”.

Of the three qualifications introduced last year – education, digital and construction – the latter had the lowest proportion of ethnic minority learners, at 10.2 per cent.

The digital T Level performed the best with 22 per cent of its students from a BAME background while 11 per cent of education and childcare learners were non-white learners.

Black Training and Enterprise Group chief executive Jeremy Crook said *FE Week*’s findings showed “low levels of ethnic minority participation” which “should ring alarm bells for the government”.

While the mandatory industry placement, which must run for a minimum of 315 hours, in a T Level was “positive,” Crook warned that this was “where



Jeremy Crook OBE

racial discrimination can occur, especially in sectors with historical low levels of ethnic minority representation, such as construction and engineering”.

According to Education and Skills Funding Agency data updated in June, 22.8 per cent of participants in FE overall were from BAME backgrounds in 2018/19.

An impact assessment report the DfE published in its response to the level 3 qualifications review showed 25 per cent of 16 to 19-year-old enrolments on level 3 qualifications were BAME in 2019/20.

Providers began to deliver the second wave of T Levels, with seven additional qualifications on offer, this month. To get a picture of what was happening, *FE Week* contacted providers that had successfully recruited for the first wave last year.

Havant and South Downs College (HSDC) reported that 11.9 per cent, or five, of its 42 T Level students in the first year were from a BAME background.

Of its 207 T Level students recruited up to now, 12.6 per cent, or 26, are from a BAME background. This is higher than the proportion of BAME students across the whole college – 9.4 per cent, or 588 of 6,268.

Vice principal Suki Dhesi said HSDC was “pleased that not only is our T Level BAME student recruitment on an upwards trajectory, it also exceeds the college student percentage”.

Dudley College of Technology had an average of 31.25 per cent of BAME learners across its three T Levels last year. This compares with 33.5 per cent this year, although it did not provide total student numbers.

Of Derby College’s 32 T Level learners from 2020, three (9 per cent) were BAME. But 38 per cent of its total of 192 T Level students now recruited are from a background other than white, the college said.

A spokesperson explained that the college had been “doing a lot of digital and print marketing across the whole FE and HE offer to highlight BAME-positive role model students and staff – particularly those who have now progressed onto good careers – and our work with secondary schools, particularly in the inner city, has continued throughout the pandemic”.

The DfE has promised to work “to ensure the qualifications represent the country as a whole” as more students can take the qualification.

A spokesperson stressed that the rollout has “always been gradual,” starting as it did with three qualifications at 44 providers. “This means that the first year’s cohort is not necessarily representative of the students that will take T Levels in future.”

Pearson, the awarding body for the construction and digital T Levels introduced last year, launched race and ethnicity guidelines in March to help qualification authors, reviews and editors represent minorities and challenge racial stereotypes and prejudices.

A Pearson spokesperson said the sector and wider society “needs to work together to encourage and support a diverse cohort of learners to take up these pathways”.

NCFE, which awarded the education T Level for the first wave and is offering five others for the second wave, said the qualifications had been “designed to be a viable and accessible option for students from all backgrounds and ethnicities”.

## ETHNIC BREAKDOWN OF T LEVEL STUDENTS

Source: Individualised Learner Record (ILR) and School Census data June 2021

ETHNIC GROUPINGS	EDUCATION AND CHILDCARE T LEVEL	DIGITAL PRODUCTION, DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT T LEVEL	DESIGN, SURVEYING AND PLANNING FOR CONSTRUCTION T LEVEL	TOTAL STUDENTS
White English/ British/Irish or other white background	597 (88%)	309 (75.4%)	239 (86.9%)	1,145 (84%)
Not provided/ unknown	7 (1%)	10 (2.4%)	8 (2.9%)	25 (1.8%)
Black and other minority ethnic groups / mixed	74 (11%)	91 (22.2%)	28 (10.2%)	193 (14.2%)
Totals	678	410	275	1,363

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# Mystery surrounds departure of experienced principal

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EXCLUSIVE

An experienced principal has been mysteriously replaced following an FE Commissioner check-up.

Andy Forbes left City of Bristol College days before the start of the new academic year and has since revealed he was diagnosed with type-2 diabetes last year, but stressed this had not stopped him working.

Deputy principal Richard Harris has replaced him on an interim basis, with the college remaining tight-lipped over the exact circumstances of Forbes' departure.

"Andy Forbes has left City of Bristol College. Rich Harris is the chief executive/acting principal," was all a spokesperson would say in response to *FE Week's* questions about Forbes leaving.

They confirmed the college had received a diagnostic assessment follow-up visit in June 2021. When asked if Forbes' departure was related to this, the spokesperson referred back to the same statement and said the college would not comment any further.

During a diagnostic assessment, members of the FE Commissioner team work with a college to look at its improvement plans and whether they are fit for purpose.

Their plans are then either endorsed, or commissioners suggest how they can be improved. Occasionally a college may undertake a structure and prospects review following a diagnostic assessment, or on rare occasions they may lead to formal FE Commissioner intervention.

Reports from these largely-supportive diagnostic assessments, which can be requested by colleges, are not shared publicly and do not typically lead to a change in leadership.

Announcing his departure in a swiftly deleted LinkedIn post, Forbes said: "I've left City of Bristol College 'by mutual

agreement'.

"I'm proud of what we've achieved over the past couple of years throughout the extraordinary challenges of the pandemic."

Forbes posted again on his LinkedIn page on Monday to say he has been coping with type-2 diabetes since last March and had been classed as "clinically vulnerable" during the pandemic.

But he had managed to continue working "with remarkably little problem" through flexible hours and video conferencing and is

## "I've left City of Bristol College 'by mutual agreement'"

now feeling "fighting fit," having pushed the condition into remission.

He noted how the education sector and "enlightened employers" were now "so much better" at adjusting work patterns and methods so disabled people can "thrive" at work.

"My personal experience has made me much more appreciative of what needs to be done to help people overcome health and disability barriers," he added.

Before taking the reins in Bristol, Forbes led City and Islington College, College of Haringey, Enfield, and North East London, and Hertford Regional College. He also co-founded the BAME Principals Group.

Forbes was named principal of Bristol in November 2019 after Harris led it on an interim basis. Harris stepped in after college leader Palvinder Singh pulled out of the role before his



Andy Forbes

start date.

Forbes left his role last month, a matter of weeks before his two-year anniversary.

Despite facing financial problems, including breaching loan agreements with the ESFA and their bank, City of Bristol looked to be recovering after Forbes took over.

An Ofsted monitoring visit in March 2021 found it making 'reasonable progress', with a report crediting governors and leaders for "having initiated a number of changes to improve the quality of education for students and apprentices".

The college's latest financial statements record how "continued improvement" in the quality of its delivery and students results, including an uptick in classroom-based qualification results, has been "led by Andy Forbes since his appointment".

Unusually, neither the statement received by *FE Week*, the college's news page nor communications announcing Forbes' departure to local stakeholders seen by *FE Week* thank Forbes for his work while serving as principal.

A DfE spokesperson confirmed the college is no longer in formal intervention, after its financial health notice was lifted in April 2020.

The college's board minutes reference numerous visits by the commissioner since then, including one in October 2020 where the college had made "good progress".



City of Bristol college



# UCU fires warning shot over use of recorded lessons

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A data protection expert has urged colleges to revise their privacy agreements after a union raised concerns about the safeguarding and legal implications of reusing recorded lectures.

In the aftermath of the pandemic, when in-person provision was shut off and virtual delivery became the norm, the University and College Union (UCU) is worried that colleges and universities now have hours of tutoring recorded and stored. This could see lectures repeatedly replayed for classes in future without updating the teaching or reimbursing the lecturers for using their work.

The union and the University of Exeter are in dispute about performance rights over recorded material for lecturers and UCU has produced guidance for staff members about their rights to their recorded work.

## “Colleges should be looking to update their privacy notices”

UCU negotiating official Jenny Lennox warned that recorded and online lectures could also “potentially” create safeguarding and quality problems for FE.

This is a particular issue in “income generating” areas such as apprenticeships, she said, where she could see “a college thinking they can recycle content a lot more in that sphere”.

Quality issues could manifest themselves, she said, in simultaneous online and in-person delivery: “Are people getting a decent learning experience? Can you genuinely offer something to students in a classroom and online at the same time? I suspect not.”

Safeguarding could also be a concern as



Jenny Lennox

recordings of the lectures could include sensitive information about students or identify vulnerable students and those who have yet to reach adulthood.

While she believes that most higher education institutions have policies on recording students, Lennox has been told by FE members and representatives that “nobody has really even discussed this. There’s nobody saying, ‘you mustn’t do this’.”

The union is not opposed to recording lectures or running them online, as it can be of use to vulnerable learners who cannot get into classes.

“The genie is out of the bottle” on online and recorded lectures, Lennox said. “Let’s agree the ground rules, let’s make it a positive experience which works for staff and for students.”

Joanne Bone, a partner at legal firm Irwin Mitchell specialising in data protection, urged colleges to look again at their privacy notices to “stop this becoming an issue in the future”. However, she was unhappy with some of the “overly strict” UCU proposals.

When recording learners who are disabled or dressed in a certain manner, Bone said

the data does not necessarily need to be protected as sensitive if it is incidental.

In terms of colleges reusing recordings of lectures, where the UCU has proposed that colleges delete personal data in recordings once lecturers leave, Bone countered that the provider does not have to delete every recording the lecturer has done just because they have left.

“It may well be reasonable, if the content of it is still relevant, to be able to still run it,” she said. “The UCU interpretation is very strict, overly so, in my view.”

Before speaking to *FE Week*, Bone presented a webinar which will be going on a YouTube education service that she does not regard as being just for the people who registered for it.

She also thinks lectures could be used for more than one cohort of students, but added: “It is a question of being clear. Transparency is a key part of data protection compliance and employee privacy notices need to be clear.”

## “You need to be clear how you intend to use personal data going forward in the new environment”

“My expectation is that it is generally applicable. So, it’s all down to expectations and clarity.”

“As things have changed through the pandemic, and teaching has gone more online, colleges should be looking to update their privacy notices.”

“You need to think about what has changed with the new ways of working and reflect that in an updated privacy notice. You need to be clear how you intend to use personal data going forward in the new environment.”

# News

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## WorldSkills finals to take place at venues across the country

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More than 400 students and apprentices will take part in 64 skills competitions around the country for the WorldSkills UK national finals in November.

After a year without competitions, the finalists will be competing for gold, silver and bronze medals between November 9 and 18.

In contrast to previous years, where the finals have been held in Birmingham, this year the finals are going on the road to 25 venues. The industrial robotics final will take place in Ballymena, Northern Ireland, while the heavy engineering competition will be held in Cardiff.

Weston College in Somerset will host the web design competition and health and social care will take place at Shipley, in West Yorkshire.

Dudley College's institute of technology will hold both the automation and mechatronics contests, while Moreton Morrell College in Warwickshire has been given the floristry contest.

Myerscough College in Lancashire will hold part of the landscaping contest, with North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College getting digital media production and visual merchandising. Meanwhile Reaseheath College in Cheshire will host the butchery finals.

Sector skills body Skills for Security based in Worcester will be hosting the electronic security systems tournament while Manchester training provider Kaplan will help to host the partly online accountancy technician event.

The finalists for the foundation skills



Jack Devine, a previous Worldskills finalist

tournaments for special educational needs and disabilities, additional learning needs or who require additional support will not be announced until October.

WorldSkills UK deputy chief executive Ben Blackledge said he was "really excited" that this year's finals will be hosted by colleges, training providers and employers across the UK.

He added: "We hope seeing the finals will inspire young people at those venues to keep developing their technical and employability skills and recognise what can be achieved by developing excellence through skills."

He congratulated all those who took part in the finals programme this year "after a year without competitions due to the pandemic". The fact that 3,000 people applied in April and May to take part was "really encouraging", he said.

The winners will be announced at a ceremony hosted by Steph McGovern on the set of her Channel 4 show Packed Lunch on November 26.

The competitions have been designed by industry experts. WorldSkills UK says they are intended to enhance the practical skills and knowledge

taught on training courses through assessment of an individual's employability attributes against criteria in a competitive, timed environment.

The last national finals were held at Birmingham's NEC in November 2019. The winners got the chance to be selected for the squad that will become Team UK and compete at WorldSkills Shanghai in 2022.

The 2019 finals were, as with previous years, combined with WorldSkills UK LIVE, a major careers and skills event.

It was cancelled in 2020 and replaced with a virtual event consisting of careers talks and speeches from sector leaders. The LIVE careers event has also been cancelled in 2021 and will be replaced by a two-day virtual event in October.

You can find details on this year's competitions and for all the competitors [here](#).



Ben Blackledge

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# Legal risk to providers over lack of non-binary options

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EXCLUSIVE

Providers are warning they face “massive” legal and reputational risk because the Education and Skills Funding Agency continues to make students choose a sex rather than their gender to enrol on courses.

Currently, the individualised learner record, which providers have to fill in with a student’s information to access funding, mandates learners choose either male or female for their sex.

This means those who recognise as neither male nor female cannot have their decision respected.

Speaking for Dynamic Training, an independent training provider based in London, finance director Emma Lambert says the issue poses a “massive risk” to providers’ reputations.

“The ESFA’s old fashioned attitude to gender identifies not only risks damaging the provider reputation, but it will undoubtedly end up in complaints and possibly legal action, which will be left with the provider to deal with.”

The 2010 Equality Act includes protections for people looking to change their sex and a 2020 employment tribunal ruled those protections apply to people who are not comfortable with being either male or female.

While learners are prohibited from choosing their gender in the ILR, the new FE workforce data collection includes a question on gender which allows staff members to select either male

or female, “identifies in another way” or prefers not to say.

The Higher Education Statistics Agency’s information on students’ sex also lists options for sex including male, female, other or not known.

The ESFA does acknowledge in the ILR data collection specification there is “interest to be able to receive protected characteristics of learners such as gender”.

But guidance published by the agency said it did not have an operational use for these characteristics which “justifies increasing the administrative burden”.

It instead insists the “onus” is on providers to collect this data.

Dynamic, which provides apprenticeships including for NHS nurses and functional skills courses for the Greater London Authority, believes enabling learners’ gender identity to be recognised is “one small step that can have a positive impact on apprentices”.

Lambert says they ask learners what pronouns they use and manually enter it into documents, “because there’s no way on the ILR system you can put anything other than male or female”.

She is “frustrated” by the lack of action from the ESFA, because of the risks to providers, but also because “I think it’s wrong anyhow” to not let learners select their gender.

The provider has raised the problem multiple times with the ESFA helpdesk, but has only ever received non-committal answers.

But it is not just providers who ought to be worried about legal action.

FE funding and data expert Steve Hewitt, who raised this problem with the ILR in an opinion piece for *FE Week* two years ago, says the narrow selection of options leaves the DfE open to a direct discrimination claim.

He supposes that if someone tries to enrol at a college but refuses to choose either male or female, the college could say they will have to charge them the full fee for the course.

“At which point, they are directly discriminating

Sex and gender:  
What’s the difference?



**Sex** relates to the biological and physiological characteristics defining males and females, says the World Health Organisation, including sexual organs, chromosomes, and hormones.

**Gender** covers the social expectations for men and women including, the WHO says, norms, roles and relationships between groups of women and men. People who do not use a gender identity of either male or female are described as **non-binary**.

against somebody purely because of their gender identity”

Though he doubts it will go that far, because a college would have to be willing to take the “bad publicity and strain to their relationship with the ESFA” to play ball with a court case.

He believes the ESFA has not changed the entry options because the field is an “anchor” for the rest of the form.

But Hewitt believes it “wouldn’t be difficult” to change the field to reflect a wider choice of gender options, as the ILR regularly changes fields for other characteristics such as ethnicity.

Yet there has been no “meaningful shift” towards such a change, and Hewitt says there is no process for requests to change the ILR apart from within the agency or other governmental departments.

Association of Colleges chief executive David Hughes reasoned that the ESFA and Department for Education are “working within limitations,” but the challenges should not be “insurmountable”.

Eleven years on from the Equality Act, he said, “it seems timely for those characteristics protected by law to be reviewed and expanded in light of over a decade of societal change”.

The DfE told *FE Week* there is no legislation that would enable protected characteristics to be collected via ILR and the data is not needed for its purposes.

Whereas data for the FE workforce collection is gathered for different purposes and is covered by different regulations such as the public sector equality duty which gives the DfE a legal right to collect gender.



The non-binary pride colours

## Investigates

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# ESFA accused of 'hidden agenda' as AEB providers reveal 'horrendous' bid rejections

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FROM FRONT

EXCLUSIVE

The government has been accused of using the adult education budget tender process to "manoeuvre its hidden agenda" of shrinking the private provider market – as leaders spoke out about "horrendous" bid rejections.

Several long-running providers told *FE Week* they were left "infuriated" after their applications were denied owing to "missing" documents that were in fact attached. Others were rejected for using abbreviated words that are typically used in procurements.

## "There was no no consistent approach across the country"

Another was rejected because one of the many documents requested was corrupted, others cross-referenced near-identical bids which received completely different outcomes, and many were denied full marks despite receiving "ridiculously" positive feedback.

The providers, some of which are now being forced to close, believe this was the Education and Skills Funding Agency's (ESFA's) first step in slashing the independent training provider market, which was described as "crowded" in this year's *FE* white paper.

A few providers considered launching legal challenges but decided against the action owing to costs.

Results for the heavily delayed national adult education budget (AEB) procurement were finally communicated to the sector



in mid-June – just two weeks before contracts commenced.

In total £74 million was allocated, which was down by a fifth on the £92 million in the last AEB tender from 2017.

*FE Week* analysis shows the number of private providers with a direct ESFA AEB contract has now shrunk by almost 60 per cent, from 208 to 88. In total, 581 providers submitted bids.

Half (44) of the 88 winners did not previously hold a procured AEB contract with the ESFA. Of these, 14 did not hold any contract with the agency last year and have never been inspected by Ofsted.

### ESFA claims bid marking was 'fair'

After being shown the provider complaints by *FE Week*, the ESFA said the procurement was a "fair and open competition" and maintained that all bids were "assessed in line with the published evaluation criteria and methodology".

It added that the agency had "communicated our intention" to have

"fewer, larger direct ESFA-funded AEB contracts at market engagement events in January 2021 and as part of the invitation to tender".

The ESFA claims that by having fewer, larger contracts, providers will be "better able to support the quality of the learning, dedicating funding to the front line, rather than management costs and maximising the opportunity that AEB offers learners as they progress to higher-level qualifications and employment".

Despite the agency's desire for there to be substantially less subcontracting in *FE*, most training providers who spoke to *FE Week* and previously held direct contracts said the ESFA's own officials were now encouraging them to start subcontracting instead.

Although most wished not to go on the record for fear that the ESFA would make it harder for them to win contracts in future, a few were able to discuss their tender experience anonymously.

"We dropped very few marks and all

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## CONTINUED

the feedback was ridiculously positive on what we submitted, however we didn't get any funding," one said.

"We hit a brick wall when trying to get further feedback on how we dropped marks or getting a re-mark. Basically, there was no real rationale or consistency and no consistent approach across the country."

### “The feedback we got was infuriating”

"It is well known we do a lot of subcontracting with incredible achievement, amazing learner and employer satisfaction, and really positive partner feedback. Surely this was the chance for the ESFA to help a shift to direct delivery."

### ‘The feedback we got was infuriating’

One long-running training provider told *FE Week* it was denied a contract because it abbreviated some words to combat the "crazy" low character count – 3,500 – it could use for each question. For example, it wrote "vs" rather than "versus".

The ESFA also told the provider that

the bid was "missing" some documents, which were actually attached to the bid when the provider challenged this.

"The feedback we got was pretty horrendous and infuriating," the provider's chief executive told *FE Week*.

"I was quite animated with the agency because they were saying there were bits not in there which were. And our team always abbreviates words in tender bids and we have never had a problem with that before."

In its appeal to the ESFA, the provider also cross-referenced its AEB bid with its one for traineeships, which was successful. Despite some of the answers being "almost the same" and the provider spending "more time" on the AEB bid, the agency refused to remark its bid.

As a result of the contract rejection, the provider had to make its AEB team redundant just days before they were meant to start the academic year.

The chief executive said there was a "hidden agenda" to shrink the independent training provider base in AEB.

"The agency has allocated billions out to the FE college sector and only £73 million to the ITPs. They made a conscious decision to shrink the allocation at a time when the country needs more adult provision. I think they have tried to use the bid process to manoeuvre this.

"Even with providers that have got great track records in delivering AEB, they found reasons – not valid reasons, but

reasons for kicking them out."

Another provider which has delivered government-funded adult education courses for 15 years told *FE Week* its bid was rejected because one of its files was "corrupted".

"The agency never tried to contact us to ask for it to be re-sent," the provider's chief executive said.

He appealed against the process after being informed that this was the reason it was rejected, rather than because of the quality of the bid.

The chief executive explained: "There's no 'woe is me' here. I appealed on the basis that you would expect a provider of 15 years with a good track record, if they have miss-submitted a file, to receive a phone call to say, 'hey, you have not submitted that right' and ask for another.

### “They made a conscious decision to shrink the allocation at a time when the country needs more adult provision”

"I would have no problem with being turned down after that. Just give me a chance to have the same process as everyone else."

The chief executive said he "understood" the drive by government to push the AEB towards colleges, but it would be "nice if that was an overt policy so that everybody knew where they stood. We could stop wasting our time bidding for these things."

### High Court challenge was debated by provider

One provider that has been running for more than 20 years told *FE Week* its bid was rejected due to insufficient detail in the volumes of delivery it proposed. However, there was a spreadsheet on



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**CONTINUED**

volumes attached to the bid that the ESFA asked to be submitted separately.

"Why would I use my 3,500 characters for this question by repeating what I've put in the volume spreadsheet?" a spokesperson for the provider said.

On top of this, the chief executive of this provider reviewed a near-identical bid and found disparities in the ESFA's assessment.

"The bids received different outcomes from each of the questions. We had the same statement in both bids. One of them said, 'the bidder has demonstrated how they will deliver this' and the other said it 'lacked detail'."

The provider's spokesperson said it felt as though the agency had an "agenda from the start and they've done what they can to make it fit their purpose. It's not a fair process. The only way that I can possibly fight it is to employ a barrister and take it to the High Court, which we can't do."

A small Nottinghamshire-based training provider called CEATA, which delivers both engineering apprenticeships and adult education courses to the unemployed, has had to close after the ESFA rejected its bid.

Seven staff have lost their jobs and 35 apprentices are trying to find alternative providers to complete their training.

The provider's general manager, Karen Hodgson, told *FE Week* that the ESFA's feedback was "nit-picky" as she believes they failed on "word-search checks".

She explained: "There was a question about remote and part-time learning. I explained that our health and safety resources are all available on a remote platform on demand and described our delivery model as flexible. But, because I

didn't use the word they wanted – part-time – they claimed our answer was not clear."

Hodgson added: "Being denied an AEB contract has impacted the business' capacity to carry on. So our really good apprenticeships, with above 90 per cent achievement rates, are also gone."

She believes the ESFA was "just out to reduce the number of ITPs that were getting direct funding, and they have succeeded".

## "This was a bad case of misguided dogma"

### Bid writers disagree about the agency's alleged 'hidden agenda'

David Kitchen, managing director of consultancy firm The Leadership Team, which was used by several providers in this tender to write bids, told *FE Week* that the feedback structure from the ESFA varied "significantly from provider to provider seemingly marked very differently in each region". It was "inconsistent", he added.

He said his company's view was that there is a "drive to reduce the number of ITPs and this procurement process is evidence of that".

But Jim Carley, managing director of Carley Consult Ltd which also helped many applicants to write their bids, disagreed.

"I've not seen anything that would suggest that the design of the ESFA's AEB

procurement this time around put bidders at a disadvantage compared to previous competitions, or that the ESFA may have had some form of hidden agenda to reduce the ITP market," he said.

He added: "With a high volume of bids, the ESFA probably had a large team of evaluators, and a resultant very challenging moderation task.

"This very likely resulted in some instances of inconsistency in the scoring process between different evaluators. Bidders could, of course, appeal their original scores, which some successfully did. It is therefore very hard to say whether or not any isolated scoring inconsistencies had a material impact on the competition as a whole."

In fact, the ESFA used more staff in this procurement than the last AEB and non-levy tender debacles despite receiving fewer bids, according to data supplied by the agency to *FE Week* via a freedom of information request (see table).

Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief executive Jane Hickie described the "deliberate reduction" in the number of ITPs delivering AEB as a "bad case of misguided dogma when employers and adult learners need a good spread of provision across sectors and the country as part of the pandemic retraining and recovery effort".

Asked if it was concerned that 14 of the 88 winning bidders had never been inspected by Ofsted, the DfE reiterated its policy that new providers will normally have an early monitoring visit from the inspectorate, but that these could take two years to be conducted.

The DfE added that, as the government transitions to the reforms set out in the Skills for Jobs white paper, ITPs will "continue to have an important role to play in delivering adult training and skills".

### ESFA PROCUREMENT STATS

Source: Data obtained via FOI request

	AEB TENDER 2017	NON-LEVY TENDER 2017	AEB TENDER 2021
No. of bids received	682	1,046	581
No. of winning bids	290	714	88
No. of ESFA staff who marked bids	0	0	37
No. of agency staff who marked bids	30	40	14

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# Pandemic took significant toll on FE students, review reveals

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Awareness of apprenticeships has declined, mental health has deteriorated and pass rates for adults from BAME communities took the biggest hit during the pandemic, according to a government-commissioned review of the FE sector.

The International Public Policy Observatory (IPPO) published a rapid evidence review yesterday which pulled together studies on the harm done by Covid-19 to further education in 2020. These are the key findings:

## 1 Changes to assessment harmed vocational students more than academic



The first national lockdown in March 2020 saw college and training provider campuses close until the new academic year. Exams were subsequently cancelled, and GCSE and A-level students ultimately received centre-assessed grades (CAGs).

For vocational and technical qualification learners, awarding bodies were left to decide whether they could also receive a CAG, or whether their assessments should go ahead but be adapted or, as a last resort, be delayed.

Using Association of College analysis of "college performance benchmarks", the IPPO found that pass rates were down by up to 5 per cent in a range of vocational courses including engineering and construction in 2020 compared with 2019.

Meanwhile, there were "significant" increases in A-level pass rates over the same period averaging 10 percentage points.

When looking at the largest learning aims, there were "notable" declines in level 1 diploma construction (5.6 per cent) and transport maintenance (10.7 per cent); level 2 electrical installation (8.1 per cent) and light vehicle maintenance (10.1 per cent).

## 2 'Particularly vulnerable' FE students hit hardest

Among FE students aged 19 or



above, the IPPO found the decline in pass rates had been most notable in students from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities (3-4 per cent, compared with 1.3 per cent for white students).

When FE student pass rates were "mapped against indices of deprivation, this reveals a 'class gap' of 7 per cent between most and least deprived".

From interviews that supplemented the research review, the IPPO said vulnerable learners were found to have been most disadvantaged by the "absence of close teacher support, loss of study habit and discipline, a loss of 'agency' and increased feelings of alienation".

## 3 Decline in awareness of apprenticeships



Closing FE colleges and training providers during the pandemic led to a fall in the number of young people completing apprenticeships in 2020 – down to 25 per cent from 37 per cent in previous years, because their "skills acquisition needed to progress to the next stage could not be verified".

The number of young people starting new apprenticeships also went down, by 46 percentage points in 2020 compared with 2019, with particular falls within the health and social care, business management and hospitality sectors.

The IPPO review found evidence from a survey of 2,000 parents and young adults conducted by construction firm Redrow of a "decline in the awareness of apprenticeships during the pandemic among potential new students".

It found that, with less time spent in school, the number of young people who had information on apprenticeships given to them dropped from 63 per cent in 2018 to 57 per cent in 2021, a four-year low.

## 4 Mental health and wellbeing of FE students 'worsened'



The IPPO found the pandemic increased worry among young people about their "course performance, particularly on vocational courses, opportunities for work placements, and future job opportunities".

In one survey reviewed, 24 per cent of young people claimed that the pandemic had "destroyed" their career aspirations.

On mental health concerns, 41 per cent of colleges reported a "significant increase" in referrals and 90 per cent of colleges saw an increase in students diagnosed with mental health conditions over the past 12 months.

### How will the DfE tackle the issues?

Responding to the report, a DfE spokesperson said: "Our priority is making sure students get the support they need to recover from lost learning and training due to the pandemic. In February we announced a further £102 million to extend the 16 to 19 tuition fund into 2021/22, which will build on the successful approach of this in 2020/21.

"Eligibility for the 16 to 19 tuition fund in 2021/22 is being broadened to include economic disadvantage in addition to low prior attainment. Including these students allows providers to offer tuition to all disadvantaged students who have been impacted by the pandemic, while still maintaining focus on low prior attainment.

"We are also making some adjustments to the fund, based on feedback from providers, to allow some flexibility in the number of students included in a small group for the purposes of the fund and we will be introducing a number of enhancements to strengthen accountability of the tuition fund."

The spokesperson did not say how those aged over 19 would be supported.



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FE HEROES OF OLYMPICS & PARALYMPICS



Alumni make up a fifth of Team GB medal haul

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Past and present FE students brought home more than a fifth of Team GB's medal haul from this year's Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo.

FE Week has looked at the education background of our 189 gold, silver and bronze medal winners at both events and found 40 who went to an FE or sixth-form college.

The college with by far the most medal winners was Loughborough, which educated six of this year's successful Olympians and Paralympians. Principal Jo Maher hailed the achievement, saying it "gives the entire community such a sense of pride to see our students and alumni competing on the international stage".

She said it was "crucial for our sector to recognise and celebrate student success".

Paralympic gold medal-winning sprinter Thomas Young went to Loughborough for a level 3 BTEC in sports coaching. Balancing his sporting career with study was "really fun", he said.

The college based his lessons around his training schedule, which meant that he could still be part of the "friendly" environment.

Martyn Rooney, who won a bronze in sprinting at the 2008 Games in Beijing and now oversees Loughborough's athletics academy, said the college offered "an opportunity for students to come to be a full-time athlete at a young age without as much pressure".

The approach is "study first, with sport fitting in around that" and Loughborough's coaches and tutors communicate from the start so that, when a student needs to attend a warm weather training camp, there is a "cohesive relationship" to make it work.

A former Loughborough student



Thomas Young

himself, Rooney said the situation is now much better than it was for him, as he "didn't have the lifestyle skills to do both properly".

He added: "The college has really been assisting athletes with their routines and scheduling"

Runshaw College in Lancashire was another big contributor to Team GB's success, with three medal winners across both games: Anna Hopkin won gold in the 4x100m mixed medley relay

while Holly Bradshaw took bronze in the pole vault. Olivia Broome was a bronze medal-winning powerlifter at the Paralympics.

Head of sport Darren Zoldan said it was particularly good for the college as staff who taught the three were still working there.

Former A-level pupil Bradshaw and BTEC student Broome both went through the college's gym academy programme for sports without an established competition series. While the academy does not coach their sport, it does give students access to a strength and conditioning coach.

Hopkin, meanwhile, had begun to drift away from swimming before agreeing to represent Runshaw at the Association of Colleges' national sport championships. Zoldan said this "reignited her interest" and provided a gateway back into competition and eventually the Olympics.

She is now inspiring the next generation of athletes, he explained, as his daughter



Adam Peaty



Jordanne Whiley



Olivia Broome



Frazer Clarke

had been encouraged by her success to push ahead with her own swimming.

Olympic Taekwondo bronze medallist Bianca Walkden and Paralympic swimming bronze medal winner Ellie Challis both went to The Manchester College. Deputy principal Christine Kenyon congratulated them on their success.

She said the college was "fully committed to supporting students achieve their aspirational goals, both in terms of the careers they want and their endeavours that take place outside of the college time".

This includes flexible programmes of study which fit around training schedules and ensure delivery "is tailored to support them to achieve their full potential".

Ex-Loughborough student Young had a message for any student aiming for Olympic or Paralympic glory: "Always have fun and, of course, enjoy sports."

He is planning a tour, including to colleges, over the coming months and is directing anyone interested in a visit towards his social media channels.

## FE HEROES OF OLYMPICS &amp; PARALYMPICS



## FE college medallists at 2020 Olympics and Paralympics

## OLYMPICS

MEDAL	ATHLETE	SPORT	COLLEGE
	Thomas Pidcock	MTB, men's mountain bike	East Northamptonshire
	Matty Lee	Diving, men's Synchronised 10m Platform	Notre Dame Catholic Sixth Form
	Adam Peaty	Swimming, men's 100m breaststroke	Derby College
	Georgia Taylor-Brown	Triathlon, mixed relay	Ashton Sixth Form
	Stuart Bithell	Sailing, men's Skiff - 49er	Hopwood Hall
	Anna Hopkin	Mixed 4x100 metres medley relay	Runshaw
	Bradly Sinden	Taekwondo, men's -68kg	Loughborough
	Lauren Williams	Taekwondo, women's -67kg	Loughborough
	CJ Ujah	Athletics, 4x100m relay	Sir George Monoux
	Luke Greenbank	100m swimming medley	Loughborough
	Keely Hodgkinson	Women's 800m	Loughborough
	Reece Prescod	Men's 4 x 100m relay	Loughborough
	Richard Kilty	Men's 4 x 100m relay	Loughborough
	Chelsie Giles	Judo, women's -52kg	Walsall
	Bianca Walkden	Taekwondo, women's +67kg	Manchester
	Frazer Clarke	Boxing, men's super heavyweight	Burton and South Derbyshire
	Holly Bradshaw	Athletics, women's pole vault	Runshaw
	Daryll Neita	Athletics, women's 4x100m relay	Oaklands & Loughborough

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MEDALLISTS

## PARALYMPICS

MEDAL	ATHLETE	SPORT	COLLEGE
	Dame Sarah Storey	C5 3,000m individual pursuit	Cheadle & Marple Sixth Form
	Corrine Hall	B 3000m individual pursuit	Esher Sixth Form
	Jessica-Jane Applegate	Mixed 4x100m freestyle relay S14	Easton and Otley
	Thomas Young	T38 100m	Loughborough
	Sophie Hahn	T38 100m	Loughborough and Brooksby Melton
	Hannah Cockroft	T34 100m	Calderdale
	Lauren Rowles	PR2 Mixed double sculls - PR2Mix2x	King Edward VI
	Chris Skelley	Judo -100kg	Hull
	Jonathan Coggan	Wheelchair rugby	Southend
	Andrew Small	T33 100m	South Cheshire
	Phoebe Paterson Pine	Archery individual compound open	Cirencester
	David Smith	Boccia: Mixed Individual - BC1	Tresham
	Ellie Challis	50m backstroke S3	Manchester
	George Peasgood	Men's Triathlon PTS5	Loughborough
	Jordanne Whiley	Wheelchair doubles tennis	Harrow
	Hannah Taunton	1500m T20	Bridgwater and Taunton
	Olivia Broome	Powerlifting women's -50kg	Runshaw
	Columba Blango	T20 400m	Christ The King Sixth Form
	Victoria Rumary	Archery women's individual W1	John Leggott
	Olivia Breen	Women's Long Jump T38)	Loughborough
	Aaron McKibbin	Class 8 Table Tennis	Loughborough
	Ross Wilson	Class 8 Table Tennis	Loughborough

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MEDALLISTS

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# ESFA opens up claims against AEB clawback

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Colleges and learning providers facing adult education budget clawbacks have four weeks to make their case to keep unused funding.

Six months after announcing the controversial 90 per cent threshold for 2020/21 adult education budget (AEB) reconciliation, the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) is now open to receive business cases from affected grant funded providers.

To be eligible, a provider must have delivered less than 90 per cent of its AEB allocation for 2020/21 and must explain why meeting the threshold was not possible in its local area.

Documents published by the ESFA on Wednesday confirmed that “a small number of cases” had been identified through year-end submissions where the planned clawback of funding could destabilise an institution’s finances.

Business cases allow affected colleges and learning providers to claim that “eligible costs” should be retained, rather than clawed back. To be successful, applicants must provide detailed explanations against a series of questions about specific local circumstances, plans that were in place to mitigate against risks to under-delivery, and the financial impact of the clawback on the institution.

For several months, the ESFA resisted

pressure from colleges for local circumstances to be considered. In March, the agency told the sector that there “will not be a business case process”, a decision that Julian Gravatt, deputy chief executive of the Association of Colleges, described as “self-defeating”.

One of the colleges hardest hit by the decision to set the tolerance threshold at 90 per cent was Leicester College. Speaking to *FE Week*, the principal, Verity Hancock, said she was “pleased to finally make our Leicester-specific case” and that “the reference to looking at previous AEB delivery performance was welcome”.

Business cases must be submitted by 11.59pm on October 7. Outcomes are expected by November 15.

# No colleges to get CO2 monitors for at least three weeks

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EXCLUSIVE

The Department for Education cannot say when colleges will get promised carbon dioxide monitors after the first delivery schedule showed that none would receive them within the next three weeks.

Last month education secretary Gavin Williamson announced that his department would provide around 300,000 CO2 monitors to all state-funded education settings from September to help tackle poor ventilation. He said on Monday that the first deliveries would start this week, with priority given to special schools and alternative provision in the first phase.

All eligible settings are “expected” to start receiving monitors during the autumn term, and the DfE said schools should get their full allocations in one delivery. But the picture is different for colleges.

The first official delivery schedule showed that, at present, 1,008 schools are due to

receive around 13,241 monitors over the next three weeks.

When asked by *FE Week* why no colleges were on the list and when they could expect monitors, the DfE could not offer a date. It said colleges should expect to receive “at least partial allocations” this term.

The spokesperson added that the schedule sent out by the DfE provides a forward look of deliveries covering the next three weeks and that specialist FE colleges will be prioritised “in one of the next delivery schedules”.

As previously revealed by this publication, independent training providers are excluded from this Covid-19 safety scheme.

Analysis by *Schools Week*, *FE Week*’s sister publication, shows that the delivery of CO2 monitors in the first three weeks of this term will cover less than 5 per cent of the 21,602 state schools in England, and include just over 4 per cent of the total number of devices promised.

The news comes after unions questioned the government’s decision to wait until

the start of the academic year to begin distribution.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said: “While we welcome the provision of carbon dioxide monitors, the fact is that this programme should have happened a lot earlier and it has taken an eternity to reach even this modest point on the issue of ventilation.

“The fact that this was only announced just before the start of the autumn term has meant many colleges and schools will not receive devices until deep in the autumn term, when they really need every possible mitigation in place as soon as possible.”



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Our renewed and continued commitment to FE and skills



SHANE CHOWEN SHANE.CHOWEN@FEWEEK.CO.UK

New editor Shane Chowen has three overarching goals for FE Week as it enters its second decade in production.

The start of an academic year naturally comes with a sense of optimism and renewal. It is an opportunity to bask, however momentarily, in the potential of what is to come. After all, despite the disrupted and sometimes chaotic experience in education over the past 18 months, and with little promise of a "normal" year this year, staff have come back for another adventure in further education.

Students beginning their post-16 journey deserve the best experience the sector has to offer. Colleges and providers will be mindful of the fact that, more than in any previous year, prior attainment means precious little and the temptation of an £11-per-hour job in an Amazon warehouse will, for some students, be too hard to resist.

Recovery and reform are my watchwords. While pleasantly alliterative, both are complex for our sector in many ways. Just what role should FE play as factors such as Brexit and Covid-19 coalesce on the economy?

How can FE leaders lobby most effectively for the sector as the Skills Bill reaches the House of Commons and a spending review

looms in the near-distance? Who wins as the economy recovers and FE reforms are passed, and who does not?

But it is going to take more than a deadly global pandemic to dampen the sector's resolve to get the job done – and do its bit for students and the recovering economy. It is that resolve and ability to adapt and change when times get tough that keeps us coming back and is why we love FE.

At FE Week, we need to adapt too. Taking over as editor as FE Week marks 10 years serving the further education sector was too enticing an opportunity to pass up. I firmly believe that a committed and independent press makes the sector stronger, and a strong FE sector means it can provide more people with the lifechanging opportunities in and out of the classroom that it did for me.

My job as editor is to dispassionately steer FE Week into the heart of the issues that matter most to our readers. Building on its first 10 years, I have three overarching goals for FE Week.

Through breaking news, expert analysis and diverse commentary, we will contribute to good decision making in FE. We will work tirelessly to cut through the noise and keep you informed about what is going on. We will give you thoughtful insights and fresh perspectives on what is to come and hold those with power to account by being forensic about the facts.

FE Week began as a weekly, printed newspaper but is now delivered to

subscribers electronically. The paper is complemented by a newly redesigned website and will, from next month, be accompanied by The FE Week Podcast.

Through the paper, the website and the podcast, FE Week can achieve my second overarching goal: to foster a sense of community across FE. With brand new features, you will see more diverse voices, on-the-ground insights and provocative opinions across all platforms.

Finally, FE Week will remain unapologetically pro-FE. In a sector as diverse and as multi-faceted as ours, there will probably be times when you do not agree with something you have read in our pages. Having your opinion or perspective challenged must be part of a strong sector press because it is how we collectively grow stronger. And, in a sector renowned for constant change and churn, FE Week will be reliable and resolute in its mission, with zero chance of being abandoned by faceless global shareholders.

The coming weeks and months will not be short of challenges and difficulties, but nor will they be short of moments of inspiration and growth. So, whether you have been with us since day one or are coming to FE Week with fresh eyes, join me on this journey by subscribing today and keeping in touch.

FE Week through the years...



# CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



**Responsible to:** Chair of OCN London Board of Trustees  
**Salary:** Competitive  
**Location:** OCN London offices, Islington

OCN London is seeking a committed, visionary and enthusiastic Chief Executive Officer who can work with its Board to increase the impact of OCN London as a national awarding organisation and Access to HE Diploma Validating Agency across the country. OCN London is a distinguished and well-respected national awarding organisation, regulated by Ofqual, and is one of the longest established Access Validating Agencies licenced by the QAA.

With a customer base spread across the country, we have been working with further and adult education providers and third sector organisations of different sizes for over 30 years offering a flexible framework of qualifications for learners at different levels.

You will have recent experience of working in post 16 education and a knowledge of accreditation and regulation is desirable. You will have the personal skills to build strong trust and relationships with all our stakeholders. To lead us into the next stage of our development, you will also need to demonstrate sound business acumen and the ability to steer an organisation through change.

You will be reporting directly to the Chair of the Board of Trustees and supported by an experienced and dedicated team.

The post holder will be based in our offices, in City Road, London EC1, within easy access of Angel underground station and London Kings Cross/St Pancras mainline stations. There will be a requirement for occasional travel in the UK.

Further information about OCN London can be found at our website: [www.ocnlondon.org.uk](http://www.ocnlondon.org.uk).

**The closing date for receipt of applications is 28 September 2021.**

**Interviews will take place 20/21 October 2021.**

OCN London requests no contact from agencies

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## Group Vice Principal - Finance

**Salary - £80,000 to £95,000**  
(subject to experience)

**Location - Grimsby**



The TEC Partnership consists of the Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education together with Colleges at Scarborough, Skegness, a Regional Employment Training Team, a National Apprentice Training team, a Maritime and Logistics Company (Modal) and other satellite offices throughout Lincolnshire and Yorkshire. In 2020 we welcomed East Riding College (Beverley/ Bridlington) to the Group.

TEC Partnership, with a £57 million turnover, is a successful and ambitious educational organisation offering excellent education at all levels to our learners.

Our current Director will shortly be moving to a new role outside the Partnership and we are now seeking a new Group Vice Principal – Finance to join us.

This exciting opportunity will suit an individual with a strategic perspective together with the

intellectual and technical capacity to undertake the diverse needs of this role, which will also include responsibility for Purchasing and Risk Management. You will also actively explore new opportunities for funding and diversifying our income streams and play a key role in our investment and commercial strategies.

We are looking for a qualified accountant with a successful track record in setting business direction and converting long term objectives into action. You will thrive in a fast paced and challenging environment and demonstrate proven ability to lead and advise colleagues on all financial matters. It is likely that your career to date includes significant experience of leading a broad resources function within a large and complex organisation. Further Education experience would be a distinct advantage but this should not deter outstanding candidates who are able to quickly get to grips with the sector.

If you wish to have an informal telephone discussion with our Chief Executive, Gill Alton for this role please email [goodhewp@grimsby.ac.uk](mailto:goodhewp@grimsby.ac.uk) to arrange a convenient time.

Full details of the role can be found on the Group's website at: <https://vacancies.tecpartnership.com/>

Detailed CVs in the first instance should be sent to: **Stephen Butler, Group VP Employee Services, TEC Partnership, Nuns Corner Grimsby DN34 5BQ** E-mail [butlers@tecpartnership.ac.uk](mailto:butlers@tecpartnership.ac.uk)

The closing date for receipt of applications is **Friday 1st October 2021**. The selection process will take place on **Wednesday 20th October 2021**.

Located on the edge of the Lake District, Furness College is the largest FE College in Cumbria offering an extensive range of courses with a particular emphasis on technical learning, apprenticeships and Higher Education, in addition to the broadest A' level offer in Cumbria. We have strong partnerships with local employers and universities, and we are the sponsor of South Cumbria Multi-Academy Trust. Furness College is a vibrant, innovative and fast-paced college judged to be good by Ofsted in March 2019 and with outstanding financial health. The College is ambitious about its future and is looking to appoint exceptional individuals to these posts.



**Head of Area, Craft Engineering**  
**Full Time, £43,485 to £47,510**

This is an exciting opportunity for an experienced manager to lead our Craft Engineering team. The team delivers level 1 to 3 qualifications across a breadth of engineering subjects, with a team of over 30 staff delivering to over 750 students and apprentices each year.

The post holder will provide leadership and management to deliver an efficient, effective and high-quality curriculum which results in strong student outcomes and a positive student journey.

**Closing date for the above positions is Monday 20th September**

**We also have a number of lecturer vacancies at the College, across our Engineering disciplines, including Motor Vehicle and in Catering.**

**Health & Safety Manager**  
**Full Time, £34,343 to £37,519**

We are seeking an experienced and suitably qualified professional to lead on all aspects of H&S across our sites. Working proactively to promote a positive safety culture, you will support the College by ensuring the safety arrangements are efficient and effective.

As the recognised expert within the management team for H&S, you will work to further develop and enhance the H&S framework, ensuring the College is compliant with legislation and with specific reporting and record keeping requirements.

 [Click here for more information and to apply](#)



**Area Relationship and Development Leads - South East, East and London**

**£40,000 - £45,000 per annum, Permanent**

**35 hrs pw – Home-Based**

The Education and Training Foundation is the government-backed, sector-owned professional development body for the Further Education (FE) and Training sector. Our role is to grow the strength and capability of the FE profession; enhance its leadership capacity; inform its decision-makers with expert input; and develop FE professionals to excel in their roles and develop their careers.

We are now looking to appoint an Area Relationship and

Development Leads in the South East, East and London regions, who will support the professional development of Further Education providers and their staff through an effective account management service.

If you are an exceptional candidate who would like to make an impact and enjoy working in a vibrant and cooperative environment, we will welcome your application.

[Click here for more information and to apply](#)



Bradford College

[Click here for more information and to apply](#)



**Assistant Principal – Student Services**  
**£61,204 – £66,355**

We are seeking to appoint a highly visible leader with an engaging and empowering style, who can set strategic direction and articulate a clear vision in this role, which oversees Student Services, Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Additional Learning Support (ALS).

The successful candidate will have demonstrable experience of delivering an outstanding student services provision in a college environment, which underpins the delivery of outstanding learning, teaching and assessment. This involves implementing a

high-quality careers education and guidance service as well as ensuring that the college has appropriate levels of pastoral support in place. You will be knowledgeable about the funding mechanisms relating to student services and ALS. You will understand the importance of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in an educational environment. You will have a track record in devising and implementing appropriate strategies to deliver an outstanding student services department.

Closing date: **Provisionally Friday 24th September 2021**

Dispatches from the frontline of FE

# THE STAFF ROOM

Got views from the classroom?

Anecdotes about apprenticeships?

Insights into how the sector really works?

Get in touch with us about The Staffroom!

Statistics and policy documents can only ever tell part of a story. The Staffroom is the place where policy and practice collide.

This is a brand-new column from FE Week, in which your thoughts will be read by thousands of readers. You will offer on-the-ground perspectives on and experiences of the issues of the day.

Importantly, we are looking for contributors in teaching, learner support and professional services roles across the breadth of FE and skill providers and institutions.

#### Why do it?

If you've ever stopped while doing your job and thought to yourself, "I can make this work better", now is the time to consider writing for us.

You will get to boost your professional profile, shake the sector up a little, make your colleagues laugh and prompt senior leaders to think hard about your insights from the frontline.

There are opportunities to become a semi-regular columnist and to share your views on a range of topics such as:

- the curriculum
- subject and training areas
- leadership and management
- diversity and inclusion on campus and in the workplace
- environment and sustainability
- pastoral and safeguarding issues
- widening participation
- addressing achievement gaps
- student experience

#### Introduce yourself to us

We want to hear from everyone, and would particularly welcome pitches from people from an under-represented or minority background. Do tell anyone who might enjoy giving it a go to get in touch with us.

In exceptional circumstances we could discuss you writing under using a pseudonym.

Anyone who wishes to become a Staffroom opinion writer should pitch their ideas to the contact details below. We will then help you to make it take shape!

Write to commissioning editor Jess Staufenberg on [jess.staufenberg@lsect.com](mailto:jess.staufenberg@lsect.com) or find her on Twitter [@StaufenbergJ](https://twitter.com/StaufenbergJ)



# THE STAFF ROOM

Dispatches from the frontline of FE

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

## My advice to management: trust your staff and back them when they innovate

**Last year was exhausting for the sector and this year staff need to be able to stay positive and pace themselves, writes Laura Kayes**

Like my colleagues across the sector, I ended last year fuelled by the vapours of forgotten coffee and the stumbling velocity of an entire sector trying to regain its balance atop a treadmill of pulled rugs.

It was a year that we could never have anticipated. Looking back from a slightly safer distance, I am struck by the near-constant stress of changing goalposts. It felt like that funfair attraction when you try to hit a moving target with a football as coarse, atonal music increases in speed and volume.

The fluctuating flow of changeable information from the government was strenuous. Planning for a grand return to the classroom, then adapting to deliver in my living room, was exhausting.

Ending for summer in an eerily empty college felt like a sad contrast to previous years. Campuses are usually bustling with student celebrations, with people clearing out lockers and promoting proms.

Often your desk will have cards from students you have taught for years. This year there was nothing but discarded masks and crusty hand sanitiser. I left feeling deflated.

So, had someone asked me in June if I fancied hiking up Ben



### LAURA KAYES

Creative arts teacher, Leeds City College

Nevis this summer, I would have had to remove them and their toxic negativity from my life forever. Yet on a camping trip I found myself doing exactly that thanks to the whimsical tendencies of my wayfaring partner.

I learnt a few lessons on that mountain.

### “Support staff to trial innovation”

Around 5.30am we emerged from the tent bleary-eyed and approached the base of the mountain. It was already thronged with hiking groups and I was immediately struck by the huge range of equipment on display.

I considered my own and felt a little apprehensive. I compared myself with everyone around me as we set off. I felt embarrassed as people strode past me. I wondered why everyone seemed far less out of breath than I did. I fretted so much about this that I saw very little of my upwards journey.

As fate would have it, we passed a woman resting by the path at

my lowest ebb. She grinned at an unseen hiker behind me and joked about the length of time it had taken her to get there.

A voice shouted back that it was irrelevant, because “the journey belonged to no one but her”. That one sentence sparked a change in me.

Bolstered by the words of a stranger I pondered my internal beration. I thought back to occasions when I had pleaded with my learners to be kinder to themselves.

I remembered how viciously they had scolded themselves against perceived criteria that omitted all their strengths. I spent a great deal of time thinking of them as I renewed my stride.

I considered how many arrive at college as apprehensive as I felt at the foot of the mountain. How many feel ill-equipped and vulnerable in ways that are not immediately obvious? I made a note to seek out those braving new landscapes.

I recognise that my colleagues

are also managing anxiety about the year ahead as uncertainty lingers behind clouded regulations. We have flexed and adapted tirelessly.

We must remember that we have developed skills we will carry forever and are better prepared for the unexpected as a result. My experience also reminded me that we have the potential to make things a bit easier for our colleagues too, with a helping hand and just a few kind words.

Finally, my request to management on our return would be to trust your staff this year.

My own management have been exceptional in these trying months. I have had their unfaltering trust in new strategies

that I wished to try, and a safe space for authentic reflection when those strategies fell apart around me.

The need to succeed with every try can suffocate creativity. So show faith in your staff, and support them to trial innovation.

At the summit of Ben Nevis, the celebratory atmosphere was contagious. It occurred to me that I did not recognise a single one of the climbers around me from our ascent. I had no idea when they had set off, nor did I care. We had paced ourselves.

Pace yourself this year, too.





Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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# Numbers have to rise for T Levels to change things for the better



**ED REZA SCHWITZER**

Associate director,  
Public First

**If BTECs continue to be perceived as easier, institutions will always be tempted to teach them, says Ed Reza Schwitzer**

Government gets a lot wrong. I worked in the Department for Education for six years, and for every new policy we introduced there was always a group that disagreed (and it was sometimes proved right).

But the skills agenda is an exception. You struggle to find people who disagree that England needs to dramatically improve its technical education. Complaining that we treat vocational professions as second class is a bit like complaining about the weather.

A-levels remain the default route for academically minded children. But apprenticeships are increasingly part of the mainstream - 80 per cent of time spent on the job and 20 per cent on training.

The challenge is whether 16 is too early for young adults to make a binary decision between academia or a vocation. It's a question even high-performing technical education systems grapple with.

Enter T Levels. These blend the two, keeping learners' choices open.

T Levels flip the 80/20 proportions, with 80 per cent of time spent in education and training, and 20 per cent on the job.

In principle, great.

But much of the criticism has centred around delivery.

It's fair to say that the DfE initially shared some of these reservations. Jonathan Slater, the department's former permanent secretary, took the rare step of asking for a "letter of direction" from Damien Hinds, the then-education secretary (read: "you need to publicly tell me to do this, because I don't think it's doable").

Detractors also point to the difficulty of sourcing work placements that total 45 days.

It's right that the permanent secretary seek additional clarity when concerned about the effective use of public money.

But given decades of heel-dragging on vocational education from the political and Whitehall class (which, let's be honest, wasn't educated in FE colleges), shouldn't we commend politicians for injecting some urgency?

The broader challenge from the sector on delivery is right, but not insurmountable.

The delivery of work placements definitely will

be difficult.

You don't want a scarcity of placements, leading to a poor quality experience, with learners doing the photocopying and coffee rather than developing new skills.

**"T Levels have a classic delivery problem – critical mass"**

Much of this criticism is informed by research the department itself commissioned. In layman's terms, it finds that subjects that are easy to find placements, such as hair and beauty, "have a long history of offering young people work experience" and tend to be local.

Conversely, "digital and creative and design routes [were] the most difficult" because they have neither a track record of work experience nor much local availability.

But the fact it's hard is exactly why it needs to be done.

If T Levels gave us the same work experience opportunities as before, what would be the point?

We need providers to link to industries such as tech and design if we're to genuinely revolutionise the system and put it on a par with A-levels.

To get there, T Levels have a classic delivery problem – critical mass.

Once employers really understand what T Levels are about, it will be easier for them to offer placements (and post-Covid, location should be less of a barrier).

But to get there, you need enough students doing T Levels. Fortunately, this is in employers' interests, as they will benefit most from higher quality entrants to their industries.

It's also true that the blended approach behind T Levels will put greater onus on apprenticeships to deliver the fully vocational route.

Which leads us to the final criticism, around BTECs. I sympathise with educators standing by qualifications they teach.

But for T Levels to change things for the better, they must have the numbers going through them to build that critical mass.

And, whether true or not, if BTECs are perceived as easier, their existence will always tempt institutions to use that route.

If the department gets it right, this could be a big step forward in truly fixing our skills problem.



## Opinion

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# We need to talk seriously about a 9-1 grading system



## MARK DAWE

Chief executive,  
The Skills Network

**If we don't act on grading soon, higher education providers will start to set their own entrance exams, writes Mark Dawe**

With the new academic year in full swing, it's vital the education sector looks back at all we've learned over summer 2021.

There's no debate that the pandemic has created challenges for those obtaining their education, causing rifts and controversy around grades that ultimately impact their entire future.

A-levels have seen two exceptional years when it comes to results, with the latest figures showing a substantial increase in A\* and A grades, building on an already significant increase in 2020.

**“If the pandemic has taught us anything about grading, it's that we need to hit the reset button”**

However, we now need to think about the year ahead and the years to come. Should we keep letter grading, return to the percentage system, or come up with a future-thinking approach?

There is no perfect solution for the future, just as there wasn't when we entered this unprecedented period.

After five years as chief executive of exam board OCR, to me one thing became clear, very quickly.

We must look for the best in what will always be an imperfect system full of compromises.

### What are the purposes of A-levels?

While designed to build knowledge and skills in a particular area of interest, ultimately, A-levels rank thousands of students specialising in one area.

It was recently agreed the primary purpose of A-levels is university entry. But 45 per cent of A level students achieved an A or above in 2020 (25 per cent in 2019), with 37 per cent of students getting at least three As.

So our capacity to rank students based on their A-level results alone has diminished significantly.

Do we really want a system where each university has its own entrance exam because our national system is failing them? This is the inevitable consequence if we don't make changes.

I would suggest we do not want this.

### How do we move forward?

If the pandemic has taught us anything when it comes to grading, it's that we need to hit the reset button.

It won't come without upsetting either Covid or post-Covid students to some degree.

But moving to a 9-1 grading system, like the current GCSE approach, along with widening the skillset taught at A-level stage, will enable us to differentiate between our students again.



It's designed to distinguish those working at a higher level, using harder exam questions and the need for more coursework to be delivered.

The current letter grading system, however, uses assessments at the end of modules throughout the year. It's a system that is much more reliant on exams and results in more people achieving higher grades.

This is making it harder for universities and employers to spot those who truly excel in their areas of expertise.

### Additional courses

Many have also argued that A-levels aren't broad enough, don't cover the "soft skills" such as communication and teamwork and don't produce a rounded individual with an easy pathway into work.

Surely every student should have digital skills plus an understanding of the workforce and issues like sustainability and low carbon when they leave education?

So with online learning increasingly popular, it's more possible than ever to provide a blend of core A-levels alongside a whole range of online courses to add value to a student's development.

In fact, these additional courses are now even more essential when it comes to both university entry and employment.

At The Skills Network, we use AI to determine our students' individual strengths and gaps to pinpoint exactly what additional programmes they should undertake to support their development.

From there, an individualised online learning plan provides the young person with access to a whole range of additional skills unique to their current skillset.

This also doesn't add further strain on already overworked teachers.

Going forward, let's build a better system for grading, and focus on the other skills our students need to help get them prepared for the working world.

# Leading From the Middle



The mentoring was invaluable and it complimented the course. It helped provide continuity between the primer sessions and the focus on self-development was refreshing. I have experience in other management and leadership programmes that only focused on tackling particular issues rather than improving myself as an individual.



The Education & Training Foundation Leading from The Middle programme is the Further Education and Skills sector's high impact development programme for middle managers. Designed and delivered by FE Associates, the programme focuses on the skills, behaviours, competencies and awareness to succeed in middle leadership and management roles.

The programme adopts an innovative and personalised approach to improving the professional effectiveness of this important tier of sector leadership. This is a solutions-focused programme that will encourage you to think and act differently.

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to book your place**

## What Participants Have Said About the Programme

**"It has helped me reflect on the kind of leader  
I am."**

**"Helped me recognise my strengths and  
areas for development."**

**"It has improved my confidence  
immensely."**

**"I feel I have developed a new positive  
mindset."**

**EDUCATION & TRAINING  
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INTRODUCING

# JONATHAN SLATER

Former permanent secretary, DfE



‘Civil servants spend too much time in a room with other civil servants’

JESS STAUFENBERG  
@STAUFENBERGJ

After four years in the job, Jonathan Slater was unceremoniously sacked as permanent secretary of the Department for Education. Now he's calling for better accountability within the civil service

Jonathan Slater, former permanent secretary at the Department for Education, is on the phone

to one of his daughters. He and his family have just moved house to south London, he tells me, and his 13-year-old is now braving the local bus route. On both the occasions we chat it's around hometime, and Slater picks up with lightning speed whenever she rings. "It's the first time she's done it, it's no big deal," he says, airily, checking again whether she needs a lift, before adding with a sheepish grin, "I'm probably overdoing it."

It's been quite a time for Slater. In late August last year, after a chaotic year of late-in-the-

day government communications during the pandemic, and following the public outcry over the grading fiasco, he lost his job. Boris Johnson said the DfE needed "fresh official leadership" (although Slater was not blamed personally) and Slater was gone. He's said he only learned of his possible imminent departure because of a Times journalist's enquiry.

Since then, however, Slater has been careful to remain sanguine in public, saying, "When you become permanent secretary, part of that is the

# Profile

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risk that you might be asked to step down.” He’d lasted for four years of his five-year term, and had lost his job alongside several other permanent secretaries. None too impressed, one civil service union boss accused the government of being “prepared to throw civil service leaders under the bus without a moment’s hesitation”.

But Slater, as in all of our interview, is determinedly politer about his former bosses, adding only, eyes twinkling: “One of the advantages of the prime minister having had enough of me is I have more time with the family.” When we speak he’s returned from visiting his mum, a former children’s social worker, and later this month his family are celebrating the life of his dad, who passed away last February and was himself a teacher across schools, further education and university. Both his parents were Guardian readers and life-long public servants, says Slater.

“I felt very proud of dad my whole life. It did mean when I went into the department, I was always thinking, I wonder what dad makes of what I’m doing.”

Since leaving, however, Slater continues to be bugged by what the public – including teachers like his dad – think about government decisions and how they are impacted by them. He says a key question he used to ask new civil service recruits is what teachers and students would miss if the DfE disappeared tomorrow. “Half a billion pounds would be saved. Would schools and colleges rejoice, or regret the fact there wasn’t a

central organisation to disseminate best practice? The point is we have to be the latter.”

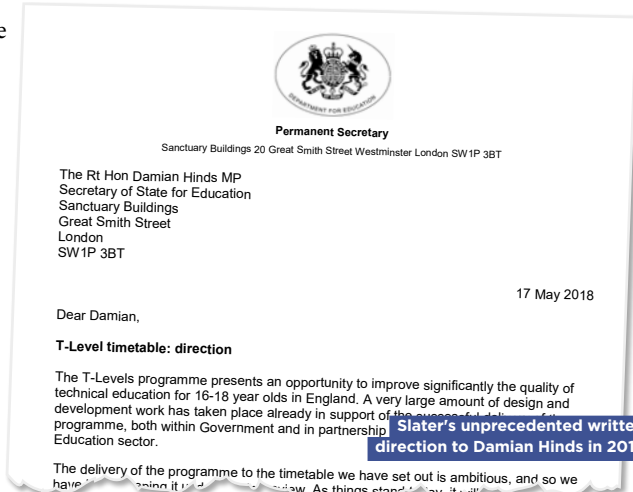
Slater believes there’s an issue facing civil servants and ministers, which can cause decisions not necessarily matched to what’s needed on the ground. On this, he is refreshingly blunt: “Civil servants spend too much time in a room in meetings with each other and ministers and not enough time with families, teachers, parents.”

Was this a big problem during the pandemic, I ask? After all, many colleges and schools were largely infuriated with the government’s last-minute communication of decisions. There was even one explosive report from the Institute for Government, where Slater sits on the board, that said the government’s decision not to make any contingency plans for college and school closures in the event of another lockdown has been its “single biggest failure”.

## “There is an insufficient focus on what will work for the public”

Does Slater agree? He will not be drawn on pointing the finger. “I don’t want to comment on whether ministers made the right decisions, contingency plans or anything else,” he says. “I have my own views but they are views I want to hold onto.” But, he says, “if you look back at the pandemic, what you find is an insufficient focus on what the public at large will find acceptable and will work for them”.

Take for instance, he says, the DfE’s decision only to allow certain groups of learners into colleges and schools during lockdown. “A different approach” would have been to let parents and carers decide whether to send students in, having told them only half of the usual placements in colleges and schools were



available. “There are some students for whom it’s more important to go in than others, and it may depend on circumstance.” It would have been an alternative way of approaching the issue that might have worked better for the public, he says.

Similarly, the government told leaders they didn’t need to close their college or school for a day to clean after a student had Covid, in line with scientific evidence. “But that’s us looking at it from a theoretical point of view. In practice what leaders were doing was working out how to ensure parents were confident.”

OK, I say. But the DfE can’t pretend it wasn’t sometimes warned what the public reaction to a policy might be. What about the warnings from staff months ahead of results day about the grading algorithm for A-levels?

Slater answers slowly. “So I would say [...] these are difficult decisions, that ministers should be allowed to make. The lesson is that at the DfE and more generally across government, we should be more mindful at looking at things from the perspective of those on the ground”.

There does seem to be a contradiction here: knowing a policy will be more effective if stakeholders are more deeply consulted, but also holding onto the civil-service idea that a politician has every right to come up with a different, technically sound argument if they wish to.

To Slater’s credit, however, he’s calling for an increase in civil servant accountability around decisions like this. This partly arises from his experience as a director of education at Islington council, where he says he felt more accountable



Jonathan Slater, former permanent secretary at the DfE, at Charles Dickens primary school, part of the Charter Schools Educational Trust in south London, where he is a trustee

# Profile

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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than when he was in Whitehall.

“At the council, my job was to go to a public meeting and have to explain directly why we had to close this school. Contrast that with the civil service model, where [...] I work for the minister, and it’s my job to explain what the minister thinks. In local government I had to explain what I think.”

Meanwhile in central government, one of the very few ways in which the permanent secretary is publicly held accountable is through a “direction”, Slater continues – a public letter written to a minister when they have rejected civil service advice that a policy is not good value for money or lacks feasibility. “It’s to make sure I feel properly accountable, and it works both ways.”

The ‘feasibility’ category of a written direction was only introduced a decade ago, says Slater, and he soon discovered he was the first permanent secretary ever to use it. In 2018, then-prime minister Theresa May and former education secretary Damian Hinds both wanted T Levels to be ready from 2020. Slater’s written direction to Hinds reads “it will clearly be very challenging to ensure that the first three T Levels are ready...to a consistently high standard”.

“That’s one of the most difficult things I did,” says Slater, explaining he had asked the Treasury for previous examples of feasibility directions and was told there were no precedents. “It felt hard, going against the prime minister and secretary of state.” Slater did allow himself “a moment of humour” later on, when former skills minister Anne Milton also publically criticised the

unrealistic timeframe, just as he had.

One consequence of civil servants rarely being on public record giving advice must be that it’s quite easy for ministers to ignore that advice, I ponder. How often do ministers listen? I ask (after all, T Levels still rolled ahead on the original schedule).

Rather than abandoning a policy or its timeframe, says Slater, “they might change the language around it”. Using a schools policy as an example, he describes Hinds’s goal to halve the vocabulary gap among five-year-olds by 2030, because of the evidence this determines so many later life outcomes. But Slater’s team challenged the proposal on feasibility terms. So Hinds called it a ‘moonshot ambition’ instead.

“That’s a minister not making a cast-iron commitment. That’s the sort of thing that would happen,” he says.

Now Slater has taken up a new role as a visiting professor at King’s College London, where he will look into this very issue: “civil service accountability” or as he puts it to me, “why the civil service is not as accountable as it should be”. A lecture on his findings is due in November.

His solution for now is that government should be using “more qualitative rather than quantitative information” before making decisions and measuring impact. One of the policies he’s proudest of is Opportunity Areas, and he doesn’t believe their impact should be measured against targets. “It’s a relatively recent phenomenon, this idea that you judge the success of something on a numerical target. That’s a modern new public management invention.” The

advantage is that ministers can say “tick, it’s done, but the disadvantage is it might not relate to reality and how people are actually finding it on the ground.”

## “I have my own views, but they are views I want to hold onto”

In some ways, it’s surprising Slater lasted so long at the Department. He praises ministers for listening with respect – including schools minister Nick Gibb, who he says was the “most determined” minister he worked with, with “strong views”. But with his public service parents and values, it would be easy to see him as a bit “proggy”. He was his department’s diversity and LGBT champion, having himself proudly supported one of his stepdaughters through transition in her 20s. He also made efforts to increase minority ethnic representation in the DfE. Did his careful challenges cause him to fall out of favour?

Again Slater won’t be drawn, but he does say later, “certainly No 10 has a strong influence on all the government departments at the moment”. One of his last acts was to meet with the prime minister and advise that if the government wished to take ‘levelling up’ seriously, it might consider evidence that “the attainment gap is the same whether you are an ‘outstanding’ or ‘inadequate’ graded institution.” “Clearly you can imagine a system in which you can’t be outstanding if that is the case,” explains Slater. He didn’t hear back on the proposal, before he was fired.

It turns out Slater’s daughter does need picking up, and, like any doting parent, he must go. He’s determined to stay involved in education, he says, but now, like his parents before him, at the grassroots level. He leaves me with a parting shot about the system he has left. “My concern about the civil service is it’s spending too much time in meetings with itself - and not enough time on the frontline.”



Slater in front of the public accounts committee in March 2020

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# READER'S REPLY

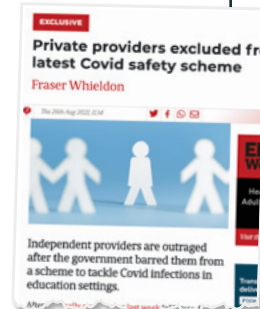
## REPLY OF THE WEEK

### Private providers excluded from DfE's latest Covid safety scheme



Absolutely outrageous. As a provider with learners in both workshops and classrooms, how can it be acceptable to support colleges but not ITPs? We must challenge to secure a more level playing field especially around the health, safety and wellbeing of all learners.

Steve Cressey, website



### Sustainability issues could be prioritised in qualifications to break down barriers to teaching



I can't speak for other vocational areas, but my industry has been all over sustainability issues for at least a decade. It's not just about making sure it's included, but that it's taught well – current industry expertise among their teachers is the very least learners should expect on this.

EngTech Tutor, website



There needs to be some changes in learner conversations and projects that can incorporate sustainability matters - which is actually really easy to contextualise organically in so many sectors and standards.

Alex Miles, Twitter

### DfE refuses petition's call to back down from defunding BTECs



I remember how well the introduction of diplomas went. With few schools and colleges being able to deliver T Levels compared to the greater capacity of BTECs, I am afraid the future for T Levels looks equally bleak. Schools and colleges will have neither the staff nor the equipment to properly deliver T Levels. Nothing changes in education. Great policies are very poorly implemented.

Dh, website



If we don't take action to protect these qualifications now, when we have a rise in youth unemployment and the lowest number of apprenticeships since the 80s, we will see a generation of young people

consigned to poverty and zero-hour jobs. We must #protectstudentchoice.

Niamh Sweeney, Twitter

### DfE puts out 'Fire It Up' campaign



I have spent decades in education marketing and still wonder where and why they dream up these absurd campaigns. Fire It Up... is it surprising this fails? It's total BS. And that's without all the other issues, eg levy etc.

Stefan Drew, website



The lack of apprentices is due to lower demand by smaller employers and schools telling parents to keep their kids on at school to catch up on missed learning, because many schools did not adapt quickly enough. However, I don't think the campaign was an effective one either as none of the apprentices I talk to about how they became an apprentice have ever mentioned it. Ofsted talks about poor careers advice but needs to carry out a survey to really tell government what is happening in schools and the FE sector.

Phil Hatton, website

# Movers & Shakers

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



## Jen Hope

Area director for East and West Midlands, Association of Colleges

**Start date:** August 2021

**Previous job:** Member services manager, Midlands and East, AoC

**Interesting fact:** In between lockdowns last year, she climbed Snowden as part of a group challenge.



## Vanessa Rhodes

Director of HR and partnerships, Protocol

**Start date:** August 2021

**Previous job:** Assistant principal (support services), Cheshire College South and West

**Interesting fact:** She followed in her father's footsteps when she joined FE in 2004. Her father was a college principal until he retired in 1998 and FE is still the topic of conversation when they get together.



## Adam Warsop

Executive director of sales and marketing, Remit Training

**Start date:** June 2021

**Previous job:** Head of sales, marketing and business development, PwC

**Interesting fact:** He has run multiple triathlons at a range of distances and is a Princess National Ambassador focusing on supporting young people in the 14-19 prepare for the world of work and find the career that inspires them.

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