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MINISTERIAL MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS



Alex Burghart MP

Michelle Donelan MP

Nadhim Zahawi MP

- Former apprenticeship ambassador Nadhim Zahawi acquires top education job
- Keegan leaves skills brief in promotion to health department
- Burghart alludes to skills role, but Donelan expected to take on some of Keegan's former duties

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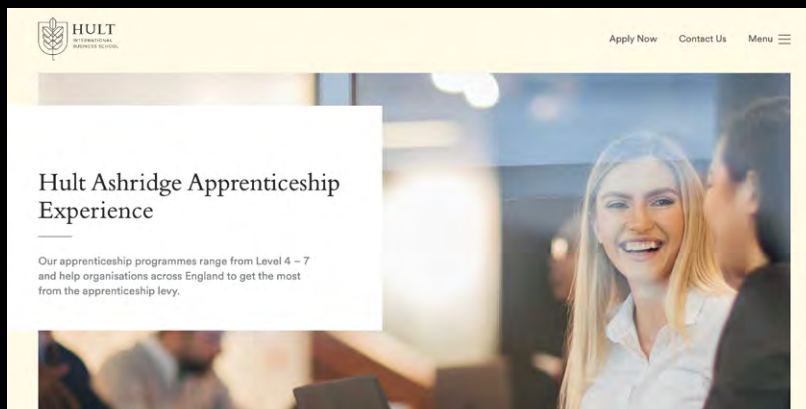
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News

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CABINET RESHUFFLE

Zahawi back at DfE as Williamson's replacement

BILLY CAMDEN
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FROM FRONT

Apprenticeship champion Nadhim Zahawi has been appointed as education secretary in Boris Johnson's reshuffle. He replaces Gavin Williamson, who was sacked on Wednesday.

It will be Zahawi's second stint at the Department for Education (DfE). The MP for Stratford-upon-Avon was children's minister from January 2018 to July 2019.

He served the then prime minister David Cameron as apprenticeship adviser in 2016.

Following his appointment, the new education secretary said: "Education is a crucial part of our levelling up agenda so it's an honour to be back at the Department for Education as secretary of state."

"From my own experience, I know what a beacon of opportunity this country can



Nadhim Zahawi

be and I want all children, young people and adults to have access to a brilliant education, the right qualifications and opportunities to secure good jobs. That's both vital for them and also our economy and is more important now than ever before."

The move is seen as a reward for Zahawi's role overseeing the roll-out of Covid jobs as the government's

vaccines minister.

He was born in Iraq, but his family fled Saddam Hussein's regime and Zahawi came to the UK when he was nine. He is the first non-white education secretary.

Zahawi co-founded the well-known research firm YouGov, where he was chief executive until 2010. He was also chief strategy officer for Gulf Keystone Petroleum until 2018.

In 2018, Zahawi was reportedly "dressed down" by a government whip for attending the Presidents Club charity dinner, after the event was rocked by sexual harassment allegations. He kept his job at the time but David Meller, the co-chair of the event, resigned from the DfE's board in the aftermath.

During an *FE Week* interview in 2016, Zahawi said he wanted to "get to a place where, when the envelope lands on the carpet with an offer from Oxbridge or an apprenticeship, you as a parent are just as excited and as happy for your son or daughter to go down the apprenticeship route".

ZAHAWI REACTIONS

Jane Hickie,
 chief executive
 Association of
 Employment and
 Learning Providers



"Nadhim Zahawi has a strong reputation for competence and delivery which is just what we need in the DfE when skills are so important to driving the economic recovery. We expect him to be in lockstep with the Chancellor in continuing the progress made under the Plan for Jobs where apprenticeships and traineeships play a vital role."

Lindsey Stewart,
 acting principal
 Stratford-Upon Avon
 College (part of Solihull
 College and University
 Centre)



"We are very pleased to congratulate Nadhim on his new appointment. Nadhim has always been a good friend to Stratford-upon-Avon College. He is passionate about the skills agenda and totally committed to the role of apprenticeships. For a town hit badly by the impact of the pandemic, his support has been invaluable."

David Hughes, chief executive
 Association of Colleges



"Nadhim Zahawi knows the college sector well and I absolutely expect that he continue to champion colleges and their role in recovering from the pandemic and the levelling up agenda. With the Spending Review imminent, it's imperative the new Education Secretary appreciates the need for investment in colleges to be able to deliver on the government's agenda. Beyond that, the ongoing Skills and Post-16 Education Bill will also provide a key opportunity to help colleges deliver even better learning opportunities across the country."

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CABINET RESHUFFLE

Much-criticised incumbent returns to backbenches

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After holding the role for just over two years, most of which was dominated by a global pandemic, Gavin Williamson has lost his job as education secretary and returned to the backbenches.

Shortly after being fired, he said it had been a "privilege to serve" in the role, adding that he was "particularly proud" of the "transformational reforms I've led in post-16 education: in further education colleges, our skills agenda, apprenticeships and more".

Williamson will be remembered for heading up the DfE during times of big change for FE and skills, including launching the FE white paper, the skills bill and the initial roll-out of T Levels.

A Downing Street source said he had played a "key role in transforming the skills agenda" and the prime minister was "grateful for his loyalty and service".



Gavin Williamson

But Williamson has faced heavy criticism for his handling of the pandemic's impact on schools, colleges, training providers and universities.

This includes the way school and FE

provider closures were planned, the lack of contingency planning for exam cancellations and the confusion caused over January's BTEC exams. Colleges were also originally included, then excluded, then included again in catch-up funding.

As of last week he had a net approval rating of -53 among Conservative Party members. He faced repeated calls to resign from Labour and education unions, and even the Institute for Government think-tank urged him to go last year.

Williamson served in the role for 785 days, making him the 17th longest-serving (or the 19th shortest-serving) education secretary. He beat his predecessor Damian Hinds by 222 days but did not make it to the average length of term for an education secretary, which is 850 days.

ZAHAWI REACTIONS

Jo Grady,
general secretary
UCU

"Gavin Williamson will be remembered by university and college staff as a disastrous secretary of state who caused deep and lasting damage. The next Secretary of State for Education has an opportunity to build a new relationship with the staff and students in our universities and colleges, but they must commit to repairing the damage that has been done by Gavin Williamson."



Larissa Kennedy,
national president
National Union of Students

"NUS welcomes Nadhim Zahawi MP to his new role as Secretary of State for Education. The last 18 months have exposed and exacerbated longstanding issues in our education system, and it is time that we grasped these problems at the root.

We welcome comments Mr. Zahawi has made in the past about putting students at the heart of our education, but we now invite him to go further. We would be happy to meet with him at his earliest convenience to talk about a new vision for education. One that is fully funded, accessible, life-long, and democratised."



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CABINET RESHUFFLE

Who will lead on FE and skills?

BILLY CAMDEN
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Apprenticeships and skills minister Gillian Keegan has left the role in Boris Johnson's reshuffle – as questions remain over whether a direct replacement will be appointed.

The MP for Chichester, who has been a parliamentary under secretary in the Department for Education since February 2020, was promoted to the Department of Health and Social Care as a minister on Thursday.

Sources inside Westminster told FE Week that universities minister Michelle Donelan had been telling staff she would be responsible for all post-18 education after being confirmed as a DfE minister and promoted to attend cabinet.

The sources also claimed the dedicated skills minister role would be abolished.

But late on Thursday evening Alex Burghart, the MP for Brentwood and Ongar, and Will Quince, the MP for Colchester, were announced as new parliamentary under secretaries of state in the DfE.

Burghart then tweeted an image of him holding the Skills for Jobs white paper with the caption "here we go".

It is not yet known what roles the pair will take on. The DfE may split and rejig roles and responsibilities, as it has in the past.

Reaction to the prospect of a joint HE and FE minister has been mixed. David Hughes, chief executive of the Association of Colleges, said the move would mirror the "direction of travel" in Wales and Scotland, "where tertiary is the focus, bringing colleges, universities and apprenticeships into the same frame".

He added that his association "would welcome that move".

John Cope, the strategy and policy director at UCAS who also sits on the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, said breaking down the "artificial divide" between apprenticeships, FE and HE would be "very welcome indeed".

But Toby Perkins, Labour's shadow FE and skills minister, said scrapping the dedicated skills minister post would show that the prime minister "isn't serious about reskilling our workforce for the future" despite his "warm words".

Merging the HE and skills minister roles would fit with government policy reforms. Philip Augar's landmark

post-18 education review had an overarching call to rebalance the relationship between the two sectors.

Numerous policy proposals from Augar have since been adopted, including most recently a "lifelong loan entitlement" that will enable people to access four years' worth of student loan funding across further and higher education providers to study modular provision throughout their lifetime.

If Johnson does axe the skills minister role, it would be the second time he has done so since becoming prime minister. Gavin Williamson, who was sacked as education secretary on Wednesday, took on responsibility for the brief when he was appointed in July 2019.

Following a sector-wide backlash, however, Johnson appointed Keegan to the role in February 2020.

Donelan, the MP for Chippenham since 2015, was appointed as universities minister in February 2020 and previously sat on the education select committee.

Following her promotion, Keegan tweeted: "It has been an incredible privilege to serve as the apprenticeships and skills minister, working to level up opportunities across the country.

"It has been wonderful to work with so many exceptional teachers, colleges, learning providers, businesses and most of all students."



Gillian Keegan

Former wrestling PR to take cabinet seat

FRASER WHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

From marketing at World Wrestling Entertainment to a seat in cabinet, who is the new senior education minister Michelle Donelan?

Having been appointed universities minister in February 2020, Donelan is expected to take over some skills policy responsibilities from Gillian Keegan.

The last government minister with full responsibility for further and higher education was Labour's David Lammy, who was parliamentary under-secretary for innovation,

universities and skills from 2007 to 2008.

Michelle Emma May Elizabeth Donelan was raised in Cheshire and educated at state school. She addressed a debate on devolution at the Conservative Party conference at the age of 15.

She went on to study history and politics at the University of York and worked in PR and marketing for, among other organisations, World Wrestling Entertainment.

The 37-year-old failed to win a safe Labour seat in South Yorkshire at the 2010 general election but defeated an incumbent Liberal Democrat to become MP for Chippenham in 2015.

Elected by MPs to serve on the Commons education select committee, she was made a government whip in 2018, before covering for parliamentary under-secretary for children Kemi Badenoch while she went on maternity leave.

Donelan has previously spoken in the Commons in favour of enabling nursing degree apprenticeship schemes to be offered in larger further education colleges so that counties such as Wiltshire, which have no university, could still provide them.

While serving as a minister, she has also represented the Department for Education in numerous debates about further education.

News

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Business school rapped by Ofsted for poor management apprenticeships

BILLY CAMDEN
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A high-profile business school that made millions of pounds by quickly recruiting more than 800 management apprentices has been criticised by Ofsted.

The Ashridge (Bonar Law Memorial) Trust, an arm of Hult International Business School, faces a government ban from taking on new apprentices after inspectors found it had made "insufficient progress" during a new provider monitoring visit.

Leaders were pulled up for not knowing the progress that apprentices were making, for failing to liaise with employers, weak governance and a failure to take account of apprentices' prior learning.

But the provider did receive some praise for the quality of its training and safeguarding.

Ashridge (Bonar Law Memorial) Trust had 810 apprentices on its books at the time of Ofsted's visit in June, all of whom were on management apprenticeships from levels 4 to 7.

The firm boasts that it is "ranked within the top 20 business schools worldwide" and is among "less than 1 per cent of institutions to be triple accredited" by the management institutions EQUIS, the Association of MBAs and the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business.

The provider is also audited by QAA, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. The agency's latest review of Ashridge's provision was published in 2017 and found the provider was meeting all expected quality standards.

Ashridge moved into the apprenticeships market in 2019. The firm's latest accounts state that "most" of its qualification revenue, which totalled £4 million in 2020 and £5.8 million the year before, relates to apprenticeships.

The accounts, which also show

reserves totalling £16.6 million, add that the company deems the collection of this revenue to be "low risk" because it is funded through a government agency.

Hult International Business School offers management courses in Boston, New York, San Francisco, Dubai, Shanghai and London. They typically cost tens of thousands of pounds.

Mark Coleman, the senior vice-president for enrolment at Hult International Business School, told *FE Week* that the Ashridge (Bonar Law Memorial) Trust had seen a "great increase in interest" by employers for its management apprenticeship programmes over the past 18 months.

Management apprenticeships have grown to dominate the sector since the levy reforms in 2017 and now sit among the most popular sectors in terms of starts.

Several prominent sector figures, including Ofsted chief inspector Amanda Spielman, have expressed concerns about the rise in management training as apprenticeships.

Spielman warned in 2018 that graduate schemes were "in essence being rebadged as apprenticeships", which kickstarted the decision for Ofsted to inspect level 6 and 7 apprenticeships. The courses were the responsibility of the Office for Students until April 2021.

In 2019, the National Audit Office reported that levy-payers were "replacing their

professional development programmes – for example, graduate training schemes in accountancy or advanced courses in management – with apprenticeships".

But the move to publicly funding management courses has been defended by Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education chief executive Jennifer Coupland, who said in January 2020 that the practice was "perfectly legitimate".

Ashridge (Bonar Law Memorial) Trust's Ofsted report criticised leaders and managers for not having "effective oversight of the skills that apprentices develop".

They also "do not liaise with employers to design apprentices' training programmes" or to "ensure the training employers provide reflects the requirements of the apprenticeship standard".

The board of directors also "do not receive feedback on the quality of training that apprentices receive" and are "unable to challenge senior leaders and managers to provide training that meets the requirements of successful apprenticeships".

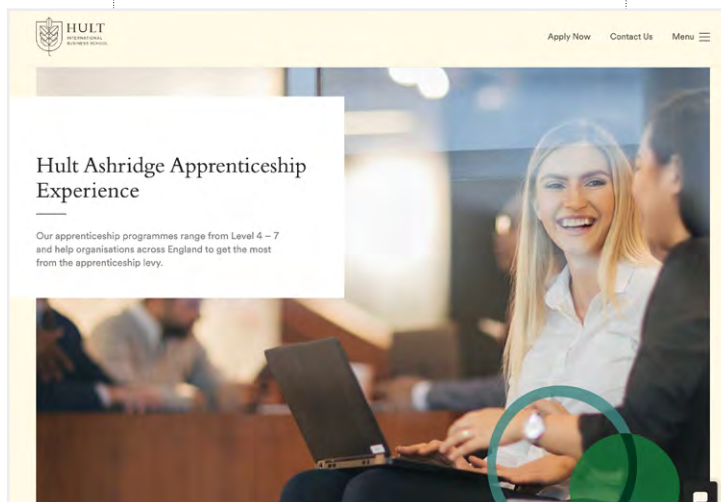
Managers, meanwhile, "do not assess the starting points of apprentices accurately" and "do not explore what apprentices can already do or have a good understanding of".

Praise, however, was given to the provider's workplace mentors who "usually have an appropriate understanding of the

topics that apprentices learn in their theory sessions" and provide "good support" to apprentices.

Under Education and Skills Funding Agency rules, any provider with at least one "insufficient" rating in one of Ofsted's new provider monitoring visits is banned from taking on any new apprentices until the grade improves.

Coleman said his provider "will work closely with Ofsted in preparation for a full inspection".



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Fast growing apprenticeship firm goes bust after ESFA stops payments

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One of England's fastest growing apprenticeship providers has gone bust, owing nearly £4 million, after the government terminated its skills contracts when hundreds of unemployed apprentices were discovered.

Personal Track Safety Ltd, which trades as PTS Training Academy, went into liquidation on 25 August – a year after the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) banned new apprenticeship starts and stopped making payments.

“The director found making the 32 employees redundant particularly difficult”

The Northampton-based firm, which employed 32 people, considered restructuring to stay afloat but could not find a viable way forward.

Insolvency documents filed on Companies House show its debts include £825,000 to the ESFA, £1.5 million to Lloyds Bank, £500,000 to HMRC and £161,000 to staff.

The company also owes £70,000 to Northampton Town Football Club, which it had a deal with to sponsor the club's stadium and shirts until it ran into financial trouble last year.

Liquidator Gary Pettit told *FE Week* that PTS Training Academy took legal advice after the ESFA stopped payments but “despite a positive Ofsted inspection earlier this year, ESFA declined to change their stance”.

He added: “It would not be out of place for me to say the director found making the 32 employees redundant particularly difficult.

“My role as liquidator is to maximise realisations for the creditors. To this end, I shall be looking at the known assets to see how best they can be realised while also making other appropriate enquiries, which I am unable to discuss at this present time.”

PTS Training Academy's owner, Matthew Joyce, did not wish to make a separate comment.

The training provider began recruiting apprentices in May 2018 and within two years had more than 2,500 on their books – worth around £6 million – in sectors such as food, care, rail, management, accounting, engineering, sport and prison services.

Its ESFA contracts were terminated on July 10, 2021, following an investigation that found many of their apprenticeships were ineligible for funding.

Joyce previously told *FE Week* that the



PTS owner Matthew Joyce

firm grew too rapidly but placed the blame for the unemployed apprentices with an apprenticeship training agency (ATA) with which it partnered.

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

“Despite a positive Ofsted inspection, ESFA declined to change their stance”

Joyce claimed that, when he partnered with the ATA, the apprentices had signed employer agreements, but later found out the jobs were gone when the Covid-19 pandemic struck.

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

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



Northampton Town FC stadium, sponsored by PTS Training Academy

News

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Colleges denied chance to speak out over free speech legislation

FRASER WHIELDON
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Colleges and FE student unions have been left out of discussions about new free speech legislation which would leave them open to legal action for “de-platforming” controversial speakers.

The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill is currently being considered by a special committee of MPs, before the legislation goes back to the wider House of Commons.

Universities, the National Union of Students’ higher education vice-president and the Free Speech Union set up by right-wing commentator Toby Young were all invited to give oral evidence to the committee.

Yet MPs have not heard evidence from any FE representatives and a committee spokesperson said that oral evidence sessions for the bill “have concluded”. It means FE providers and student unions will not get the chance to speak.

“The decision as to who is invited to give oral evidence is made by the committee itself following discussions by the whips,” the spokesperson said, adding that written submissions can still be emailed in.

MPs on the committee include DfE minister Michelle Donelan, former Conservative skills minister John Hayes and ex-DfE special adviser Richard Holden.

When asked whether it had consulted the FE sector about the legislation, the Department for Education (DfE) said it had engaged with the sector following the publication of its policy paper.

However, it refused to name any providers or representative bodies with which it had engaged.

A DfE spokesperson did point out that the bill committee had heard from Office for Students (OfS) chief executive Nicola Dandridge, “and the OfS’s remit is all registered providers, which includes FE colleges delivering HE”.

‘Appalling’ government not giving FE chance to debate bill, says NUS
Salsabil Elmegri, the National Union of Students’ vice-president for further education, said she was “incredibly concerned my FE members have had their voices silenced”. Colleges and their student unions “cannot be ignored”, she added.

“It is appalling, given the lack of opportunities and protections for free speech in FE, that the government is not giving us a platform to talk about the issues that impact us.”

The bill allows a person to bring civil legal proceedings against an FE provider registered with the OfS, or a students’ union, if they deny the use of their premises to anyone based on their ideas, beliefs, or views. The college student unions which now could face expensive legal action are noticeably smaller than their university counterparts.

FE Week was able to find on the Charity Commission register, which students’ unions must sign if they have an income of at least £5,000 a year, just two college unions: Bradford College Students’ Union and Derby College Students’ Union.

DfE says legislation will not be a ‘disproportionate’ burden
Association of Colleges deputy chief executive

Explainer

What will the freedom of speech bill mean for colleges?

The governing bodies of all higher education providers registered with the OfS must “secure freedom of speech” for students, staff and visiting speakers.

They, and student unions, must not deny use of their premises to anyone based on their ideas, beliefs or views and must produce a code of practice for running meetings and activities on their sites.

The government has acted after repeated instances where speakers have been prevented from speaking on campuses by people opposed to their views.

Julian Gravatt tweeted last week: “170 colleges and their (unincorporated) student unions are covered by these new duties and face the same legal risks despite there having been few/no cases in the sector warranting the extension of regulation.”

An impact assessment for the bill said the government had decided against keeping FE providers out of the legislation as that “would make regulation for the OfS much more complicated going forward”.

As FE providers “already have to meet the current duties for all students”, the DfE believes “it should not be a disproportionate burden for them to comply with the strengthened duties”.

Gravatt sarcastically noted that this would be “reassuring” to an “18-year-old T Level student in 2025” when they are facing legal action.

Anyone wishing to submit written evidence to the committee has until 23 September to send it in a Microsoft Word document to scrutiny@parliament.uk.

Paragraphs need to be numbered, but pages should not be numbered. Essential statistics or further details can be included as numbered annexes, the committee said, but submissions should not exceed 3,000 words.



Apprenticeship and trainee targets missed in Sunak's Plan for Jobs

BILLY CAMDEN
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The government has missed its target to triple the number of traineeships by more than half, a new report has revealed.

And the number of new apprenticeships created following the launch of employer cash incentives fell 15,000 short of the government's 100,000 target.

The Treasury revealed the two figures in a progress report about chancellor Rishi Sunak's Plan for Jobs, which was launched in July 2020 to tackle unemployment post-Covid-19. Here are the main findings:

1 Traineeships target missed by half

The Plan for Jobs provided £111 million for up to 36,700 additional traineeships in 2020/21, including paying employers £1,000 for providing work placements for trainees.

This would triple the number of starts on the pre-employment programme after 14,900 were achieved in 2019/20.

But this week's report showed that, as of July 2021, "over 17,000 young people" started a traineeship in 2020/21 – 46 per cent of the target and just a 14 per cent increase on the year before.

The figures will come as no surprise to the sector, however, as the government delayed the rollout of a procurement to expand the 19 to 24 traineeship provider base, and will not launch a market entry exercise for 16 to 18 traineeships until later this month (see page 11).

Despite the figures in his own report, Sunak tweeted in celebration this week, claiming that "we've tripled the number of traineeships".

2 85,000 apprenticeships hired with new incentives

The government is encouraging employers to hire new apprentices in England by giving them £3,000 for each one they recruit before 30 September 2021. Funding for around 100,000 new starts was set aside in the Plan for Jobs.

So far, "more than 85,000 apprentices have been newly hired under our new incentive payments", this week's report said. It added that 75 per cent of these new recruits are below the age of 25.

The Treasury said it will keep this incentive scheme "under review" beyond 30 September amid calls for it to be extended.

3 63,000 start a kickstart job

The chancellor's Plan for Jobs also promised a new £2 billion "kickstart" fund to create "hundreds of thousands of high-quality" six-month work placements aimed at those aged 16 to 24 who are on Universal Credit and deemed to be at risk of long-term unemployment.

Funding covers 100 per cent of the relevant national minimum wage by age group for a minimum of 25 hours a week. For a 24-year-old, grants typically reached £6,500.

This week's report said that, across Great Britain as of 31 August 2021, "over 63,000 young people have started kickstart jobs and over 2,500 young people are now starting a kickstart job each week".

4 65,000 enrol on a SWAP

The Plan for Jobs also included £17 million to "triple the number of sector-based work academy (SWAP) placements in 2020-21".

The scheme, run by the Department for



Work and Pensions (DWP), typically lasts up to six weeks and includes pre-employment training, a work experience placement and a "guaranteed" job interview.

This week's report said that last year, "almost 65,000 job seekers enrolled on a SWAP to help them gain new skills and start a career in a new industry – an average of more than 1,200 per week".

According to DWP statistics, 330,000 SWAP starts were recorded between August 2011 and November 2017, but the department then stopped publishing the data.

It is therefore hard to ascertain precisely the recent popularity of SWAPs, and the DWP previously refused to say how many starts would be required this year to meet the chancellor's target of "tripling" their number.

The Plan for Jobs progress report said the government is looking to create "80,000 more" SWAP opportunities this year, and "over 30,000 job seekers have been supported since April 2021".

5 Reports of kickstart displacing traineeships

Responding to the Treasury's report, Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief executive Jane

Hickie said: "Providers complain that the arrival of kickstart has led to a noticeable reduction in Jobcentre Plus referrals to traineeships which doesn't help to

achieve the chancellor's desire to see traineeships triple in volume."

She added: "It's very encouraging that the progress report said that the government will keep under review the employer incentives for apprenticeships and we believe that they should be continued to encourage recruitment of young apprentices."



Rishi Sunak



News

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ESFA to finally launch 16-18 traineeships tender

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A market entry exercise to expand the number of providers offering traineeships for those aged 16 to 18 will finally be launched “later this month”, the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) has said.

The announcement came two days after the Treasury revealed that the government had missed its target to triple the number of people taking the pre-employment programme by more than half.

Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief executive Jane Hickie said news of the 16 to 18 procurement was “better late than never”.

The ESFA has been promising a 16 to 18 traineeship market entry exercise all year but has been slow to get it off the ground. This is despite the agency running a procurement to expand the 19 to 24 traineeship provider base, although that was beset with delays.

In its weekly update, published on Wednesday, the ESFA said the new exercise will be open to training organisations “not currently contracted or allocated delivery of 16 to 19 study programme activity or 16 to 18 traineeship provision”.

The agency is “particularly interested” in applications from training providers “ready to deliver traineeships and which have the capacity to deliver a high-quality programme to young people”.

To be eligible, providers must be rated by Ofsted as either “outstanding” or “good” and hold another ESFA contract for the 2021/22 academic year.

However, the agency said it will “consider

existing traineeship providers that have a 19 to 24 traineeship 2021 to 2022 contract without an Ofsted grade one or two”.

Providers must not be in formal intervention, must not have been issued with a notice to improve, not be subject to an investigation for breach of contract and/or failed audit in the past three years, and not have a financial health grade of “inadequate”.

A progress report for the chancellor Rishi Sunak’s Plan for Jobs, which earmarked £111 million for up to 36,700 additional traineeships in 2020/21, was published this week and revealed that there were only 17,000

traineeship starts last year – 46 per cent of the target.

There were 14,900 traineeship starts in 2019/20 – meaning numbers only increased by 14 per cent last year despite £1,000 incentives being offered to employers and a changes to funding rules to make the programmes more flexible.

Hickie said the 16 to 18 procurement must take place “quickly and the contract awarding process has to keep to schedule”.

She added: “Otherwise the chancellor’s faith in the programme will not be repaid in the way that it should.”

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Jane Hickie

News

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PeoplePlus boss quits

BILLY CAMDEN
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The boss of one of England's biggest training providers has resigned with immediate effect.

Simon Rouse's decision to quit as managing director of PeoplePlus comes weeks after the firm failed to win any funding in the government's adult education budget (AEB) tender. It is also less than a year since the company sold its apprenticeships business.

PeoplePlus held the largest national AEB contract among all independent training providers last year, with an allocation of £5.6 million.

A spokesperson for the provider, which is part of Staffline Group, refused to say whether Rouse's departure was directly linked to the unsuccessful AEB bid.

She said: "Simon Rouse has stepped down

from his position as managing director of PeoplePlus. He will be seeking new opportunities outside of the group.

"Simon has been with PeoplePlus for four years and has supported the leadership and organisation over some challenging times, including the pandemic. PeoplePlus is now well positioned for further growth in its key service areas."

Albert Ellis, chief executive of Staffline Group, will assume Rouse's responsibilities until a successor is appointed.

The provider was delivering courses to around 8,000 adults and training to around 3,000 apprentices last year. It is also one of the largest providers of prison education in the country.

PeoplePlus's latest financial



Simon Rouse

statements show that it recorded turnover of £63.3 million and was paying Rouse £400,000 a year.

The accounts also show the provider sold its "loss-making" apprenticeship business to Babington Business College for "a nominal sum" in December 2020.

PeoplePlus was one of the many casualties from the ESFA's AEB tender. As reported by *FE Week* last week, many other providers believe the procurement was the agency's first step in shrinking the private provider market, which was described as "crowded" in this year's FE white paper.

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

FE Week analysis found the number of private providers with a direct ESFA AEB contract has now dropped by almost 60 per cent, from 208 to 88.

In total, 581 providers submitted bids.

College seeks 'positive disruptor' to champion EDI policy

FRASER WHIELDON
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A "positive disruptor" is being sought by a college to become its new vice principal for equality, diversity and inclusion. The proposed hiring is thought to be the first of its kind.

Bradford College is looking for applicants from within and outside the further education sector to fill the £80,000 per year role.

Principal Chris Webb told *FE Week* he wants to "fast track" EDI issues at the college. The postholder will be expected to make conversations between senior leaders about advantaged versus disadvantaged learners "the norm, not the exception".

Bradford is "hugely diverse," said Webb, with the

largest proportion of people of Pakistani ethnic origin – 20.3 per cent – in England. In 2-17, 63.9 per cent were of white origin.

So "anything that helps us to support our diverse community has got to be a good thing", Webb added.

EDI policy is becoming increasingly prominent in the FE sector. The Association of Colleges has created a dedicated EDI steering group led by Kirklees College principal Palvinder Singh, and the Black FE Leadership Group has been formed to add its voice on race equality issues in the sector.

The Department for Education is also coming under increasing pressure over the lack of black, Asian and minority ethnic take-up of T Levels and apprenticeships.

Webb said he was seeking someone who is "an expert, emotionally intelligent, who is going to come in and be challenging, supportive, but disruptive".



Recruitment for the role is being led by FE Associates. Managing director Matt Atkinson said the "positive disruptor" would be "talking to the finance team about policies and accessibility of student support, talking about how accessible the curriculum is for different aspects of the Bradford community, and they might be talking to Chris about workplace practices".

The Association of Colleges told *FE Week* it believed the role was the first of its kind in a college.

Applications close on 13 October. Anyone wishing to apply should visit <https://www.fea.co.uk/bc-vpedi/>



Chris Webb

News

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Reformers demand action in face of yet another prison education review

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Prison reformists have demanded the government act to fix prison education in the face of yet another review into the "extremely poor" provision.

Ofsted and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons announced last week they will be conducting a joint review of prison education this autumn, starting off by looking at reading skills.

Having already had Dame Sally Coates' landmark review of the provision in 2016, and as the education select committee prepares its own report, sector bodies are instead calling for action.

"It seems there are plenty of prison education reviews knocking about, but prison education itself is in short supply," said Frances Crook, chief executive of the Howard League for Penal Reform.

While she welcomed the Ofsted-HMIP review, Crook argued prison education "is at the mercy of larger forces which the Ministry of Justice has little desire to tackle".

"Indeed, the Ministry of Justice seems set on continuing restrictions to prison regimes that were introduced during the pandemic, restrictions which will see prisoners locked up in their cells for longer.

"These are the very conditions which prompted this latest review in the first place," Crook said, referring to how Ofsted had found on remote and monitoring visits that prisoners were learning from in-cell work packs, with little face-to-face teaching or feedback.

Due to the pandemic, face-to-face teaching was called off in prisons for six months, which Ofsted-HMIP found meant some prisoners had little to no education until September 2020.

Although prisoners could access phones and providers set up hotlines

for them to access educational support, prisoners were not aware of the service, and some had to resort to writing letters to their teachers.

Prison Reform Trust director Peter Dawson welcomed this latest review, saying: "There is no shortage of policy ambition for education in prisons."

But he said the issue was "whether policies ever get turned into reality or are simply superseded by a new announcement by a new minister.

"The inspectorates are ideally placed to answer that question," Dawson believes.

Coates' review, 'Unlocking potential: a review of education in prison', led to prison governors being handed responsibilities to hire providers, rather than the then-Skills Funding Agency.

This is after she found three-fifths of prisoners leave custody without an identified employment, education or training outcome, and more than half of prisons were rated 'requires improvement' by Ofsted.

Alongside the announcement of a review, Ofsted published a joint commentary by Ofsted chief inspector Amanda Spielman and her counterpart at HMIP Charlie Taylor stating that "little improvement has been made in the quality of prison education" since Coates' review.

This is based on 25 remote visits to adult prisons in early 2021 and 10 progress



monitoring visits undertaken by Ofsted between May and July this year.

In the last five years, the pair wrote, around 60 per cent of prisons have been graded inadequate or requires improvement for education, skills and work, compared to 20 per cent of FE providers overall.

As the pandemic closed off face-to-face tuition, as well as workshops and employment opportunities for vocational education, "prison education is in a very poor state and it is time to give it the attention it deserves," the commentary reads.

The education watchdog hopes "to encourage a much-needed focus on prison education — including from government — through the review," a spokesperson said.

The joint review will differentiate itself from the previous ones, they added, by focusing on the quality of education.

The details of the inquiry have yet to be confirmed but Ofsted has promised to consult with the FE and skills sector throughout the initial look at reading in prisons.

The education select committee is looking to run further evidence sessions for its own prison education inquiry, with a report due out later this year.



Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Too many reviews, too little action... and let prisoners have a say


JON COLLINS

CEO, Prisoners Education Trust

This country has a history of reviewing prison education, but failing to make real and significant change, writes Jon Collins

Education in prison has suffered more during the pandemic than education in the community.

Prison lockdowns and a lack of access to digital technology have led to an almost complete hiatus that is only now beginning to ease.

The new year-long review by Ofsted and HM Inspectorate of Prisons into prison education will be an opportunity to take stock. It can explore how, as prisons recover from the pandemic, the education provided can better meet the needs of all prisoners.

This is not, however, the first review of prison education, even in recent years.

In 2016 a major government-commissioned review by Dame Sally Coates was published.

It set out proposals for radical change, intended to put education at the heart of the prison system. This review led to some limited changes, but not the overhaul that was anticipated.

That was the latest in a litany of reports and inquiries on prison education in this country. But real and significant change has been rare.

Until the early 1990s, prison education was funded by the Home Office and delivered under contract by mainstream local providers. This localised system gave prison governors

significant discretion.

Then in 1992 external providers bid for contracts to deliver education in groups of prisons across a wider geographical area. Local flexibility had been traded for consistency.

“More money is not enough. Leadership is also key”

To a large extent, structurally this is the approach that remains in place today.

In 2001, responsibility for prison education was transferred to the then Department for Education and Skills, a move intended to shift prison education into the educational mainstream.

But following the publication of the Coates review this was reversed, moving responsibility for prison education back to the Ministry of Justice.



This was intended to enable the implementation of Coates's recommendations, which had governor autonomy at their heart.

But, in fact, the four providers who in 2019 won contracts to deliver education in the 117 adult prisons in England and Wales under the new Prison Education Framework were the same four providers who had held the previous contracts.

They are committed to prison education and improvements have been made. But prison education is still not good enough.

So what changes are needed?

First, more resources are required, both for education provision and for prisons generally.

Good-quality education in an environment as challenging as a prison cannot be provided on a shoestring. Meanwhile, education provision will inevitably suffer if there aren't enough prison officers to bring learners from their cell to the classroom.

More money is not, however, enough. Leadership is also key. Prison governors must prioritise education, not just in classrooms, but across their whole prison.

If they demonstrate that education is a priority to them, its provision will be seen as a priority by staff throughout the prison.

A broader, more varied offer is also needed. At present most mainstream education in prison covers basic literacy, numeracy and IT skills. This is necessary

for many prisoners, but is simply not enough.

GCSEs and A-levels should be made routinely available, as should a broad range of vocational and other educational opportunities.

To help deliver this, prisons need to move out of the digital dark ages.

In-cell technology and internet access must become the norm. This must complement, and not replace, face-to-face teaching.

Finally, this review and any ensuing reforms must draw on the expertise of former and current prison learners.

The input of people with lived experience of prisons is vital for ensuring that any changes are informed by those who understand the system best.

“Prisons need to move out of the digital dark ages”

Prison education is currently too limited, too cumbersome in its delivery, and often not of sufficient quality.

We need to put this right if we want a justice system that genuinely helps people to turn their lives around.

This review is another opportunity to set out a proper roadmap for much-needed reform – officials must make sure it doesn't become another dead end.

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- ➔ Cumbria LSIPs Trailblazer Update from **Mike Smith OBE, Northern Skills Network**

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News

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Relief for colleges as residential funding uplift is confirmed for this year

BILLY CAMDEN
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Adult residential courses will retain their funding uplift for at least the 2021/22 academic year, the Department for Education has confirmed.

Officials began reviewing the uplift, which multiplies funding for residential courses by nearly five times as much as the normal rate, in February 2020.

Four residential adult education colleges in England are affected by the decision and have been eagerly awaiting the outcome.

When asked for an update this week, a spokesperson for the DfE could not say when the final decision about funding in future years would be made, simply telling *FE Week* that it would be in "due course".

However, they did confirm that the residential funding uplift will "remain in

place for the 2021/22 academic year".

The four colleges – Northern College in Barnsley, Fircroft College in Birmingham, Ruskin College in Oxford, and Hillcroft College in London – will technically be funded by their respective combined authorities if they are based in areas with devolved adult education funding.

Yultan Mellor, principal of Northern College, which was facing a battle to survive earlier this year partly owing to the national review, said: "Northern College is pleased to report that, through working closely with us over the last year, Sheffield city region have agreed to continue with the residential uplift for the next three years, and West Yorkshire and the Education and Skills Funding Agency for at least the 2021/2022 academic year."

A Fircroft College spokesperson told *FE Week* that it was "working closely with the

West Midlands Combined Authority to find a long-term solution for the sustainable funding of residential adult education in the West Midlands".

Ruskin College and Hillcroft College did not respond to requests for comment at the time of going to press.



Yultan Mellor

IoD takes over governor leadership training

SHANE CHOWEN
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Subsidised training for chairs of boards will be run by the Institute of Directors from next month, the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) has announced.

The Further Education Chairs Leadership Programme has been run by the Oxford Saïd Business School since 2018. The change reflects "an adjustment in the direction to meet the needs of those operating in governance today", according to the ETF.

The Skills for Jobs white paper, published in January, said the government would be taking a "clearer position" on governance and leadership in the sector.

Provisions within the Skills and Post 16 Education Bill, currently in the House of Lords, include tougher laws that will require corporations to review education and training provision against local requirements, and gives the education secretary more powers to

intervene if local needs are not being met.

The first cohort of at least 15 chairs on the new IoD programme will gather this October for a two-and-a-half-day residential course in Stratford-upon-Avon. Full IoD membership, usually costing £415, will also be included in the programme's £750 fee.

Fiona Chalk, the ETF's national head of governance development, told *FE Week* that the vision for the programme was to "enhance the value chairs add to the board and the wider organisation".

Asked about the change from Saïd to the IoD, Chalk said: "The IoD is the only institution that runs internationally recognised qualifications for board members. Those involved in designing and delivering this programme will bring real-life business and FE practice."

Gary Headland, group chief executive at Lincoln College Group and chair of IoD East Midlands, described the new programme as a "fabulous collaboration". He added: "I have

personally completed the IoD's company direction programmes as well as the role of the chair course.

"The quality of these courses has been absolutely first class and I feel confident that this new partnership between the IoD and the ETF will add greatly to the capability and capacity of governors across the further education sector."

The ETF commissions leadership programmes for sector providers on behalf of the Department for Education. A tender to deliver governance development programmes worth up to £600,000 for two years was issued by the ETF in June 2021.

A parallel IoD programme will also be offered for clerks and governance professionals, which comes with associate IoD membership, a two-and-a-half-day residential course and ongoing networking for £650. Both programmes are expected to attract cohorts of 15 to 20 chairs and governance professionals each per year.

News

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Measure college success by social outcomes as well as students' jobs, report says

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New accountability measures for colleges should be extended to cover learners' social as well as employment outcomes, the Learning and Work Institute (L&W) has recommended.

A new report commissioned by the Association of Colleges (AoC), Focus on results: How a greater focus on outcomes could contribute to England's learning and skills systems, is looking to build on the government's plans to judge providers on outcomes.

Report author and the institute's chief executive Stephen Evans said the proposals, outlined in the Skills for Jobs white paper, "need to go further" and they want to "see social outcomes included alongside economic outcomes".

Under the Department for Education's white paper proposals, ringfencing and reporting requirements would be relaxed for providers. They would instead have to plan delivery around local employer need and possibly scale back oversupplied provision.

Under the L&W's proposals, colleges could choose social outcomes to measure including students' mental wellbeing, the number of social contacts or groups they join, or their confidence.

This will build on the proposals in the white paper, currently being turned into law through the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill, for providers to be held accountable for employment outcomes for their learners.

"Measuring key economic and social outcomes builds the evidence for increased and sustained investment and the case for greater flexibility in delivery," the report reads.

It recommends a total of four outcomes to be measured:

1. employment six months after completion;
2. median earnings six months after

completion;

3. progression to further learning six months after completion;

4. social outcomes; and meeting employer need.

For social outcomes, the L&W says learners' confidence could be measured by assessing how much people believe they can achieve their goals, despite difficulties; social capital could be measured by looking at how many friends a learner makes or social groups they join through their learning.

These would be measured at a provider and local level for all participants and for priority groups, like the long-term workless and those living in deprived areas. This data would then be compared to a national average.

The report wants added value measures, such as comparisons with outcomes in areas with a similar economy, to be developed.

International comparisons

The L&W has backed up its recommendations with evidence from Australia, Canada, Ireland and the USA.

Australia has a National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development which focuses on outcomes, including aiming to halve the proportion of 20 to 64-year-olds without a level 3, as well as improving skills, opportunities and training opportunities.

Ireland has a Further Education and

Training Strategy which identifies six outcome measures: finding work after a course; progressing to other learning; certification at levels 1-3; learners aged 25-64; key skills qualifications; and new apprenticeship and traineeships.

Labour market and skills agreements

The L&W argues for Labour market and skills agreements (LSAs) between national and local government, identifying priorities for those areas, devolved budgets, types of provision eligible for funding, analysis of target groups, outcome measures, and a strategy for evaluating impact.

Each college and large provider should then have an outcome agreement which would include funding for three years and detail expectations against the four outcomes.

AoC chief executive David Hughes said it was "appropriate" for college accountability systems to cover a wider array of outcomes. He voiced support for an outcomes-based funding model before the education select committee in September 2020, saying it would be better than using "bums on seats".

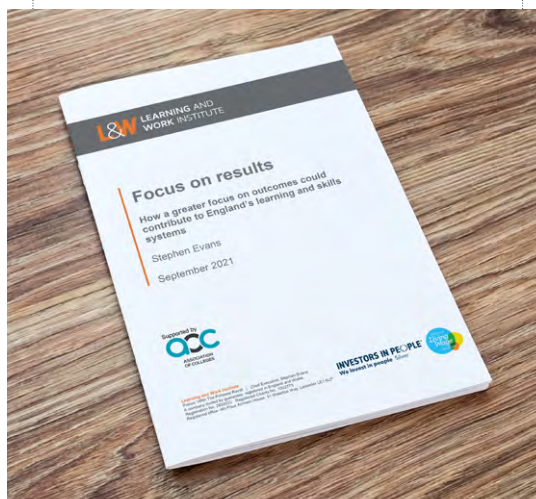
Today he said an outcomes-based system, combined with simplified multi-year funding and joined-up policymaking, "would lead to high-quality opportunities for all, stronger communities and better economic growth".

He added: "The fundamental pitfall that I hope the government avoids is to look solely at wage outcomes, as if that does anything to measure the impact of colleges.

"Working with colleges and other stakeholders in developing a new approach is essential to get this right."

A DfE spokesperson was "grateful" to the L&W "for their contribution to the discussion on how we create an improved funding and accountability system for further education".

They said the DfE's consultation on FE funding and accountability was ongoing until 7 October and welcomes responses, which the department will "consider carefully, adapting our proposals as needed, and will set out our approach in more detail in due course".



Opinion

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Any focus on learning outcomes needs a long-term learning strategy


STEPHEN EVANS

 Chief executive,
Learning and
Work Institute

Nadhim Zahawi needs to think carefully about what outcomes we want to measure and what the long-term plan is, writes Stephen Evans

Nadhim Zahawi has arrived in post at a crucial time. We are weeks away from a spending review, various reforms are already in train to implement the skills white paper, and it is more crucial than ever that we ensure everyone has access to high-quality learning options.

It is the funding and accountability consultation I want to focus on. The government proposes a greater focus on the outcomes of learning. This will include accountability agreements setting out how colleges will meet local and national skills needs, and a new skills measure looking at the employment outcomes of learners.

“Why don’t we publish outcomes data for colleges like the US does?”

For me, some of this is in the right direction. But it is not ambitious enough.

A new report from the Learning and Work Institute and the Association of Colleges looks at what we can learn from other countries. First, what do we mean by outcomes?

I would say we should focus on more than just employment

outcomes of learning. What about the social impacts, such as improved health and wellbeing, social contacts and increased earnings?

We need to look beyond the headlines, which can be distorted by local economic circumstance or demographics.

Let’s also look at value-added measures, including economic and social outcomes for groups such as disabled people who too often miss out.

Second, what are we using data on outcomes for?

It should be about more than central government holding colleges to account.

Why don’t we publish outcomes data for colleges like the US does, so it can help inform people’s and employers’ decisions about what and where to learn?

So we are arguing for a new employment and skills data lab, building on the Ministry of Justice Data Lab, which makes it easier for providers to check if their projects are reducing reoffending.

We have the data, because individual learning records are linked to HMRC data.

We also have an employment data lab in development in the DWP. We should expand and accelerate this.

In other words, data should be open and contextualised – it can be a powerful tool for people, employers and providers.

Third, what is the scope? The government seems to be looking fairly narrowly at the adult education budget and National Skills Fund. I would argue for a much broader look across



the whole learning, skills and employment systems.

The government should also be more ambitious in devolving funding to local government. This would be underpinned by outcome agreements on how this will deliver improved results, building on the Canadian model of Labour Market Development Agreements.

The current partial devolution of a single funding stream (AEB) leaves everyone with one arm tied behind their backs.

Independent evaluation shows the Canadian approach led to more people finding work and improving their skills.

That is one for the new secretary of state to pick up with Michael Gove in his new role focused on “levelling up” at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

None of this will be possible without increased, longer-term, simplified funding. The two must go hand in hand.

The good news is that the consultation recognises that. The

bad news is that ministers will always be tempted to announce a new fund for a pet initiative that then takes time to develop, bid for, deliver and manage.

More fundamentally, the spending review feels unlikely to be one where everyone is a winner: the Treasury wants to limit public spending and there are huge calls from all public services for more money.

We have argued for an extra £1.9 billion per year to get adult participation in learning back to 2010 levels (of course, we would like to go beyond that too).

But I won’t be betting the mortgage on that happening.

Extra money won’t solve everything, but reforms cannot fix the challenge without adequate investment either. Which brings us back to the start: the new secretary of state faces many of the same challenges as his predecessors.

A focus on outcomes is the right thing to do, but it needs to be alongside a long-term lifelong learning strategy, backed by investment.

Editorial

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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New secretary of state, new choices

SHANE CHOWEN
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It was no surprise to see Gavin Williamson announce his own departure from office before any official statement from Number 10. After all, after two years of own-goals, blunders and indecision, many have at times had to wonder how bad it would have to get before Boris Johnson would bring the axe down.

Gavin Williamson appeared to be the bulletproof education secretary, so it is only fitting that he should be the one to fire the starting pistol on his own departure.

As you read this, Nadhim Zahawi's inbox will be filling up with invitations, well-wishes and offers of meetings and speaking opportunities. But how much power and influence can a new education secretary wield this close to a spending review, where the battle lines have already been drawn?

The prime minister will have to appoint someone who he can be confident will toe the line and front up some unpopular spending decisions. Yet, responses to the Stratford-upon-Avon MP's appointment seem to have ignited a long-lost sense of hope and optimism.

Of course, every new cabinet minister will want to make their own mark but a new boss at the DfE is more likely to gently swerve than slam on the brakes on any major policies or reforms. This is particularly the case in further education at the moment with Number 10 itself heavily invested in keeping the DfE and other departments in check for the delivery of its priority reforms around



Gavin Williamson

"levelling up", pandemic recovery and the post-Brexit economy.

Protecting student choice

With fresh eyes can come fresh perspective. A good first move for the new education secretary would be to do what his predecessor failed consistently to do – show that they are listening. In our view, a good place to start would be to commit to protecting student choice at level 3.

To accuse the Williamson administration of being completely deaf to the sector might be overly harsh, but it did take six months to U-turn on AEB business cases and 14 months between the AELP arguing for more traineeship providers and a procurement finally being launched.

Education leaders, students and unions are unusually unified behind the Protect Student Choice campaign, launched in June this year, with a simple proposition; that T Levels and applied general qualifications can co-exist peacefully and the removal of funding for the latter would deprive huge numbers of

young people with a viable level 3 option. *FE Week* proudly supports the campaign.

On level 3 qualifications, the landscape has shifted slightly from a completely binary A or T Level proposition for 16-year-olds to something that is definitely better, but by how much is not yet clear. In the House of Commons last week, Gillian Keegan said that BTECs that "meet new quality criteria for funding approval" may be allowed, in response to a question from one of many concerned MPs. But we don't know what that criteria will look like. With young people making decisions about their futures now, this prolonged ambiguity is not good enough.

It is possible to look too closely into these things but, in his first statement following his appointment, Zahawi said he wanted students to have access to "a brilliant education" and "the right qualifications".

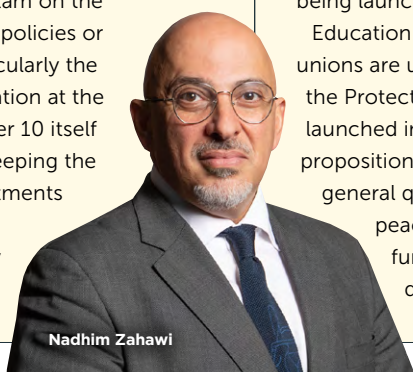
On the one hand, he does not have to be as unilaterally wedded to T Level exclusivity as his predecessor. On the other, why reference qualifications at all unless you had a position?

In the meantime, show the new administration that this is not an issue that will go away by signing the petition on [protectstudentchoice.org](https://www.protectstudentchoice.org).

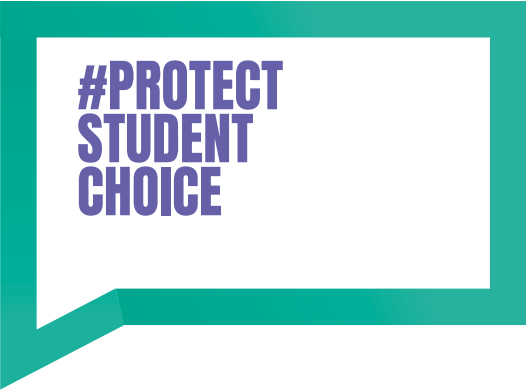
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#PROTECT
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CHOICE



Nadhim Zahawi



#PROTECT
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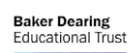
DON'T SCRAP BTECS

The Government has recently completed a review of Level 3 BTECs and other applied general qualifications in England. The main proposal is to introduce a twin-track system of T levels and A levels at Level 3, where most young people pursue one of these qualifications at the age of 16. As a result, funding for the majority of BTEC qualifications will start to be removed from 2023.

#PROTECTSTUDENTCHOICE

The **#ProtectStudentChoice** campaign coalition of 15 organisations that represent and support staff and students in schools, colleges and universities is deeply concerned about this proposal. We urgently need your support to protect the future of BTECs and other applied general qualifications:

- Sign our petition on the Parliament website and share with your colleagues, governors, students and parents – petition.parliament.uk/petitions/592642
- Write to your local MPs to secure their support
- Tweet support for the campaign [#ProtectStudentChoice](https://twitter.com/ProtectStudentChoice)



To find out more visit www.protectstudentchoice.org

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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

The closing date for receipt of applications is **Friday 15th October 2021**. Shortlisted candidates will be contacted week commencing **25th October** with the selection process taking place on **Tuesday 2nd November** and **Wednesday 10th November 2021**.

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Dispatches from the frontline of FE

THE STAFF ROOM

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Anecdotes about apprenticeships?

Insights into how the sector really works?

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

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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 or find her on Twitter [@StaufenbergJ](https://twitter.com/StaufenbergJ)

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THE STAFF ROOM

Dispatches from the frontline of FE

I have sometimes felt I am just a money generator for the college

A “bums on seats” mentality in FE can result in more focus on spreadsheets than on human relationships, writes Jason Boucher

Although I have been a teacher of sorts for 19 years, I have only been in FE since 2016. What a journey it has been.

A military man beforehand, I bring a particular perspective to the meaning of teamwork and leadership.

From my experience of numerous senior leadership teams (SLTs) in FE, they could learn quite a bit from the Royal Air Force.

When you step into a leadership role in colleges, the institution will generally expect a level 3 or even a level 5 management qualification, plus a certain level of experience. However, theory is only one side of the very complicated skill of leadership. The job requires a deep emotional intelligence.

A major issue is that people are not assets to be used and then thrown away. Yet I have seen many college staff burn out because of the demands placed on them.

In my first year in FE, I had 80 level 1 students, 40 level 2 students, and a class of 20 level 3 students. Many reading this will recognise the huge academic load alone for a teacher with that many students.

It gets harder when you



JASON BOUCHER

Lecturer in engineering maintenance

include all of the other responsibilities expected of a lecturer, such as course admin, discipline, pastoral work and helping with employability skills and work experience.

I found it incredibly hard and sometimes in the past I had little support. If I had done all of the above, I would not have made it away from my desk.

“It must be really difficult to be a college principal at the moment”

One of the major pressures on me was the “bums on seats” mentality, which in some colleges can seem to matter more to management than anything else. In some colleges, I have felt I am just a money generator for my institution.

As long as my dots kept moving in the right direction across the management Excel spreadsheet, they were happy –

but there was too little interest in the personal costs to staff.

In short, the best SLTs care more about their staff.

In the Army at Sandhurst, they foster the concept of servant leadership. Their philosophy is: how can you lead your men if you have not learnt how best to serve your men? The best SLTs take this approach.

In the RAF, the officers had to be accustomed to dealing with uncertainty and ambiguity. This made us flexible and adaptable to circumstances and open-minded in dealing with the reality of situations.

The best SLTs make an effort to understand their staff and be flexible and adaptable enough to see each of them as different. One size does not fit all.

But there remains a system-wide problem in FE. With tighter government accountability measures,

Ofsted and funding pressures, a “project manager” type mentality has sprung up, with a business-focused drive for performance outcomes – what you might call managerialism.

It is important for a college to be financially stable, and under these pressures it must be really difficult to be a college principal right now.

But we risk losing the human elements of our work at times. The result can be a loss of trust among staff in an SLT, and a feeling that they are not trusted in turn.

We could counter this with leadership qualifications that are a package of developing people skills. This could include much more training in emotional intelligence, motivation, wellbeing and how

to get the very best out of people.

There are also great books out there such as *Fish!* by Stephen Lundin, Harry Paul and John Christensen, which look at institutional morale.

This book shows us that, in the best places to work, bosses create a person-focused culture built on empowerment and trust.

Management is about how to move dots. But leadership empowers and inspires.



Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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The number of ethnic minority learners on the construction T Level is actually relatively good


HASSANA AHMED

Senior qualifications liaison manager, Chartered Institute of Building

The number of ethnic minority students on the construction T Level is above the industry average – but scrapping the BTEC could be a problem, writes Hassana Ahmed

Since the Department for Education introduced a move from BTECs to T Levels in 2020, there has been low uptake for construction.

Take June this year: the design, surveying and planning for construction T Level had the lowest uptake in comparison with the other pathways, including education and childcare and digital, production, design and development.

“Industry will need to increase the number of learners it converts from FE courses”

This is not entirely unexpected, for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the construction courses, along with the other aforementioned courses, launched in September 2020. A further seven T Levels are launching in September 2021 and the remainder in the following two academic years.

This meant there was a tight timeframe for the new pathways to be marketed to students, and especially not face-to-face.

The phased implementation of these programmes also means that the current data is not

representative of the initiative as a whole.

There is also a lack of funding for transport. Those students living in rural areas or at an economic disadvantage will struggle to access colleges running T Levels and work placements far away from them.

Another factor is the huge impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the construction industry.

The industry overwhelmingly requires a physical presence, so the ability to take on apprentices has been greatly hampered as the number of actual workers on-site has fallen.

Of course 20 per cent of the construction T Level is placement-based, meaning that these courses have also largely been unviable while social distancing measures have been in place.

A document published by the DfE in July 2020 admitted that, due to the pandemic, “we may not be able to engage the employers needed to deliver the industry placements”.

Meanwhile, figures from this newspaper show that the percentage of ethnic minority backgrounds studying the construction T Level as of June 2021 stands at just above 14 per cent.

As *FE Week* has reported, Jeremy Crook, chief executive of the Black Training and Enterprise Group, said this reveals “low levels of ethnic minority participation” which “should ring alarm bells for the government”.

However, we must remember this figure is still marginally higher than the proportion that currently make up the ethnic minority average of the construction industry.



According to the ONS, in 2019 just 5.4 per cent of construction workers were from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds (BAME).

It is also higher than the overall percentage of BAME students in further education, which stands at 9.6 per cent.

But, while the figures are not a surprise in one sense, we hope that more is done to attract students of minority ethnicities to the sector.

The government also needs to think carefully about its moves to scrap BTECs.

The Social Market Foundation that found 37 per cent of black students enter university with only BTEC qualifications.

The government must look again into the impact of scrapping BTECs so soon after introducing T Levels, otherwise BAME students could suffer.

In the meantime, making sure that students are aware of T Levels is now vital. A survey from the Chartered Management Institute in 2019 showed that only 29 per cent of parents of 11 to 18-year-olds were aware of T Levels.

An advertising campaign was launched by the DfE but was

suspended during the pandemic. The suspension lasted from March 2020 until two months before the launch of the construction T Level.

This decision will have had a critical impact on student awareness of T Levels.

Additionally, this route must properly equip graduating students for industry.

According to the Construction Industry Training Board, more people than usual are expected to start FE construction courses because of a lack of apprenticeship recruitment opportunities as the SMEs who employ 72 per cent of apprentices continue to recover.

So, to maintain access to a skilled workforce, industry will need to increase the number of learners it converts from FE courses.

Currently, of the approximately 36,000 students per year who undertake construction courses in FE, only 41 per cent move directly into an industry job or apprenticeship.

It is crucial that the government ensures there are diverse routes for BAME students to join construction courses and transfer into industry – and find they are in an inclusive environment when they arrive.

Feature

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Focus: College turnaround



‘The days of putting out a nice prospectus in glorious isolation are over’

JESS STAUFENBERG
@STAUFENBERGJ

How do you improve a college with a demoralised staff, a financial notice, a bad Ofsted and a haemorrhaging learner roll? Jess Staufenberg speaks to those with the huge task of college turnaround

Everyone can name the scandals in further education. Leaders who perhaps once gained recognition, but later had to step down as their college’s governance, finance or quality of education let down learners and staff alike, often with career-limiting consequences.

Failure is an important story to tell. It’s an attempt to learn from honest mistakes,

complacency, incompetence or egotism and, by sharing, prevent its repetition.

But the failure story can be a relatively simple one. The most straightforward involve blatant bad practice and a failure of governance controls, such as a principal spending £40,000 on a corporate credit card (as at West Nottinghamshire College until 2018). Failure can be complex too, of course, involving funding changes and administrative oversights over many years.

But even more complex than failure, and often treated as less compelling, is the story of putting a college back together again. How exactly does that next Ofsted become a grade 1 or 2; FE Commissioner intervention lifted; financial notices to improve closed?

Now *FE Week* has looked at colleges which improved their Ofsted grades over the past three years and achieved closed financial notices in the past two. We also asked sector experts where the turnaround stories are. Here are lessons from the front line of college improvement – with the caveat that every college always has more to do.

‘Be place-based’

When Dame Asha Khemka resigned in 2018 after overusing a corporate credit card at West Nottinghamshire College, interim principal Martin Sim had to make

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tough decisions to deal with the college's £22.5 million debt. A company owned by the college, BKS B, was sold off and 220 people were made redundant in 2018-19. By the time new principal Andrew Cropley arrived in May 2019, "people were at breaking point".

Staff needed to feel clear on the college's purpose again, Cropley says, and his team also needed to streamline its "busy business model". It had become the country's largest college provider of apprenticeships and subcontracted 80 per cent of its adult education budget provision.

"Our local communities needed a college properly focused on them again," says Cropley. "Before, the local community was a lower priority than it is now."

Since the end of 2017-18, the college has slashed its subcontractors from 44 to just nine, and now only subcontracts 38 per cent of its AEB provision ("and that's dropping," says Cropley).

Finance director Jon Fearon explains: "It's

just too easy to be distracted, when you've got this big England-wide business. The only priority we've got now is the local area."

To that end, the college entered a new partnership with Nottingham Trent University whereby the university will offer nursing qualifications at the college from this month. Learners living in Mansfield will no longer have to travel to Derby, Sheffield or Lincoln to become a nurse, but can train locally.

Cropley also became chair of the Making Mansfield Place Board, which brings stakeholders together, while vice principal Louise Knott joined the equivalent in Ashfield. Concerns around the impact of automation on jobs locally prompted the college to fund a new 'automation and robotics centre of excellence' in the existing engineering centre, and to offer a new pathway focused on robotics in the engineering BTEC from this month.

Its financial notice to improve, first issued by the government in July 2018, was lifted in June after 33 months. It's longer than the average 18 months it took colleges to close notices across 2020 and 2021, but Cropley says his team chose to keep investing instead of trying to pay off the debt all at once.

"We've invested, even when we've had debt," says Cropley. "It's so easy in financial



Wes Johnson, principal,
Lancaster & Morecambe College

crises to get mired in the here and now, but people need a future to believe in."

A focus on being place-based has also driven Wes Johnson, principal at Lancaster & Morecambe College since April 2017. The college got a grade 3 Ofsted report the year before, and Johnson had to contend with a second grade 3 report in March 2018, almost one year into his tenure.

"It's so easy to get mired in the here and now, but people need a future to believe in"

But two years later in March 2020, Ofsted returned a grade 2, praising leaders' "clear vision for the college" and how they had "reshaped many elements of the curriculum offer" to be more work-focused.

Johnson's first move was to create a

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



KATE HILL

Ofsted HMI and specialist advisor
in policy, training and quality

**"Know the FE inspection handbook"**

"The one thing we look at more than anything else is the quality of the education and training. I think for all those that have made the improvements they need to, they've been really clear about using the criteria in our handbook to do that – they have a copy of the Further education and skills inspection handbook. You know when you speak to them whether they're fluent with the handbook or not, because of the language they use.

"The most important thing is that they're getting the curriculum right, and it's acting in the best interests of learners. It's not just the same offer, year after year. It's very important they're responsive to increased interest or more opportunities in an area. And are there clear progression routes between courses too?

"Finally, it doesn't come down to every single last lecturer. What we're looking for is a strategic vision coming from the top with strong leadership and management, which has developed a positive and thriving culture not just for students, but for staff too."

Feature

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Focus: College turnaround

CONTINUED

director of employer engagement and apprenticeships role, to get feedback about the college's offer. He learned, for instance, that construction firms didn't need learners with the level 1 bricklaying qualification as much as a multi-skills construction worker qualification, so the college altered the course accordingly.

Similarly, career possibilities at nearby Heysham Nuclear Power Station led the college to adjust its level 3 engineering qualification in 2020 "so it's overlaid with a nuclear specialism", says Johnson. "It's about recognising that the specific skills needed locally aren't necessarily going to be delivered by an off-the-shelf qualification."

The college has also won an award from the Association of Colleges for setting up the 'Morecambe Bay curriculum'. In response to a big ecology project, Eden Project North, planned in the area from January 2022, the college designed a cross-sector curriculum with primary and secondary schools around climate change,

sustainability and eco-citizenship. It links to the college's new "Eden traineeship", which aims to help learners gain entry to "those green collar jobs emerging on our doorstep".

It's important to have a "place-based curriculum", says Johnson. "The days of just putting out a nice prospectus in glorious isolation are over."

'Smoother, clearer processes'

Not to be underestimated in improving colleges is the power of clear, easy-to-use processes, according to leaders.

A failure to properly record safeguarding information was behind UTC Portsmouth's grade 4 in February 2020 (in which



Carpentry and joinery students at West Nottinghamshire College

and secondary schools, and by April we'd adopted the new system. It was important to use new software as well, because there had been a loss of faith among staff in the old one."

Like Johnson, he created a new post to ensure clear responsibility, appointing a safeguarding lead assistant principal. Not satisfied with the grade 2s in other categories, he and his team also designed a clearer process for employers, termed 'Project Pipeline'.

"Before we didn't have a model, but this shows employers exactly how to engage with students." There are three 'levels' of engagement: executive partner, primary partner or associate partner. At the top level, employers set students an industry-related project and deliver face-to-face sessions and employability workshops.

The caveat to introducing smoother digital processes is not to lose the "small college feel" in which everyone still shares information face-to-face, warns Doherty. "The balance for me is how to keep that. We have an atrium where all staff each lunch together, and that really helps."

Tighter digital processes were also introduced by Nichola Newton, principal at Warrington & Vale Royal College in Cheshire. She and her team were facing a

**SAM PARRETT**

Chief executive, London & South East Education Group, and a national leader of further education

**"A culture of shared accountability"**

"The single most important thing a leader has got to do is engender a new culture of shared accountability. Leaders have got to set a real tone around behaviour, expectations, communication and trust. It's about creating a sense of order and priorities.

It's also important to find the good things and celebrate them. In most colleges labelled as failing you always find beacons of good practice - the challenge is often that practice is inconsistent and there aren't mechanisms for sharing and celebrating good practice - this is the key to turnaround in many colleges.

What stands out in our sector are the colleges where the existing staff and leaders who have been in a college where performance has dipped have then turned it around. The psychological and performance changes that you see in colleges that have been on this journey, owned the problem and delivered significant improvement are the most impressive."

'leadership' got a grade 4 and all other categories were given a grade 2). James Doherty, formerly the vice principal, stepped up as principal the same month. By June this year, Ofsted gave the UTC a grade 1 in all categories.

The first thing Doherty did was consult others on safeguarding, he says.

"In March 2020 I spoke to a lot of FE colleges

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Focus: College turnaround

CONTINUED

hefty challenge: the college formed in 2017 from a merger of Warrington Collegiate, with a grade 3, and Mid Cheshire College, with a grade 4. An FE Commissioner report from 2019 warns of a "total reliance on the ability of the college to dispose of sites within a given timescale" to ensure financial stability. This in turn prompted unfavourable BBC coverage of selling off a campus.

However, by 2019 the college got a grade 2, and its financial notice to improve closed in March this year.

Newton was particularly trying to drive up attainment, which had been criticised by inspectors. First, the college moved to easier-to-use data dashboards.

Rebecca Welch, assistant principal for quality, says: "The implementation of the dashboards was a huge culture change. In the past, you'd have to remember to go and look at a report and it was often too late. Now it's the first thing we look at in the morning and we can do something straightaway."

Newton also appointed 'directors', which she

says was the "biggest change" towards improving outcomes.

"Before we had curriculum managers, but now we have directors who are focused on cohorts and improving outcomes in those cohorts." If the dashboard flags a particular issue, a director will be "deployed" to take a closer look, compare them to other cohorts, and report directly back to the senior leadership team, she says.

The college says it is now ranked in the top 10 nationally for pass rates.

'Values and positivity'

Underpinning all these approaches is inspiring staff again, say leaders. They each consulted with staff to decide the values and purpose of their institutions, some of which, like Lancaster & Morecambe College, have been around for 200 years.

For staff, feeling listened to seems key. Michael Rhodes, tutor in creative media production at West Nottinghamshire College,



Nursing students at West Nottinghamshire College

said Cropley has introduced an "open door" culture in the college. "I'm not just saying this because he's going to read this, but he's a very positive character. He's the kind of principal who will wander around the college and talk to the students, and knows all the members of staff's names, which is really important to me."

"It's about visibility and an open-door policy"

Welch, assistant principal at Warrington & Vale Royal College, says: "There was a big difference pre- and post-Nichola. It's about visibility. She has an open door policy, and she always wanted to take on feedback."

These are just a few of many stories of college improvement across England. The story of improvement is, even more than that of failure, complex and often slow.

"You can only improve at the speed which people can take," concludes Johnson. "The most challenging bit about improvement is getting the balance right between driving performance improvement, and keeping the staff with you."



Nichola Newton, principal, Warrington & Vale Royal College



Lancaster & Morecambe College



READERS REPLY

Legal risk to providers over lack of non-binary options

f Been raising this as issue for years now, the ESFA has always refused to budge on this one, so learners are forced to put something they don't necessarily agree with.

Mary Holmes, Facebook

Numbers have to rise for T Levels to change things for the better

t He wants to come to where I teach and see if BTEC engineering is easier than an A level.

Hermie3, Twitter

t Nah, we need to keep choice

Waking Kraken, Twitter

No colleges to get CO2 monitors for at least three weeks

t It's probably fair to say the people running the Department for Education haven't a clue what they're doing...

Alastair Thomson, Twitter

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

t Fabulous to see a new space to hear Laura's voice. Bravo @FEWeek (who needs TES?)

Lou Mycroft, Twitter

REPLY OF THE WEEK

Legal risk to providers over lack of non-binary options



Good to see this covered! It impacts HE as well, where we collect male/female/other as a minimum, but have to revert to M/F when submitting apprentices to ILR. Having to ask students to pick is excruciating for all involved.

Marian Hilditch, Twitter



'Indefensible': No national insurance help for colleges despite support for schools



Colleges are considered public sector organisations when the government wants them to be.

Simon East, Twitter



Once again colleges are discriminated against. The rhetoric and the reality are so different with this government. Any chance that Gillian Keegan will advocate for colleges and ensure they also get same consideration schools get?

Toby Perkins, Twitter



This is just punitive. @peterkyle please stop this absurdity!

William Baldwin, Twitter

Bulletin

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

Movers & Shakers

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



Amanda Hart

Senior recruitment consultant, FEA

Start date: September 2021

Previous job: HR director, NCG

Interesting fact: Her last meal on earth would be Thai green curry followed by Ben & Jerry's Phish Food ice cream.



Stephen Exley

Head of public relations and public affairs, LTE Group

Start date: September 2021

Previous job: Director of external affairs, Villiers Park Educational Trust

Interesting fact: Stephen spent two summers working in a chocolate factory – and was allowed to eat as much chocolate as he wanted. He says the novelty soon wore off.



Liz Barnes

Chair, Achieve Training

Start date: September 2021

Previous job: Vice chancellor, Staffordshire University

Interesting fact: She was awarded a CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours list in 2019 for services to higher education.

If you want to let us know of any new faces at the top of your college, training provider or awarding organisation please let us know by emailing news@feweek.co.uk

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