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College boss
welcomes Eton
'elite' sixth form
on his patch

Page 4

THE STAFFROOM

Socio-political
education should
be embedded in
the FE curriculum

Page 30



EXIT INTERVIEW: Sally
Dicketts shares leadership
legacy as she retires from
Activate Learning

Pages 23-24



How to reduce
apprenticeship
trainer workload

Page 32



OFSTED POLICES APPRENTICE PAY

- Provider downgraded after ESFA tip-off
- 'Surprise' second visit leaves charity 'confused'
- Frustration over blurred ESFA and Ofsted roles

Page 5

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Plans for tactical subcontracting abandoned in combined authority

Page 8



Apprenticeships in green skills sectors require joined-up thinking
Page 19



Parents of older learners will be very sceptical about the SEND review
Page 31



Apprenticeship reform starts with the school calendar
Page 34

EDU WEEK JOBS

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News

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Conflicting principal views on Eton's elite sixth form plans

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EXCLUSIVE

A college principal and government social mobility adviser has welcomed the idea of Eton opening an elite sixth form on his doorstep – but the prospect concerns his counterparts in other affected areas of the country.

Three towns – Dudley, Middlesbrough and Oldham – have been picked by the all-boys public school to open selective sixth forms in partnership with multi-academy trust Star Academies.

Announced last week, the colleges will be designed to give disadvantaged young people who “have done well in their GCSEs the opportunity to achieve the A-levels they need to go to Oxbridge and other elite universities”.

Eton claimed that the colleges’ small size will allow them to target a “very specific academic education” and will ensure that they “do not disrupt the existing pattern of local post-16 education” – a statement challenged by education experts.

But Oldham College boss Alun Francis, who is also the vice chair of the government’s social mobility commission, told FE Week he was supportive of the plans. He said they would provide “elite routes” for those growing up in Oldham who want “to move out to move on” of the area while education providers like his “focus on routes to high skills for those who stay here”.

“Oldham needs excellent provision of both kinds,” he told FE Week.

However, a group of principals in Middlesbrough, and the surrounding area, warned they are already facing high levels of post-16 competition and called for more investment in existing providers.

The news of Eton’s sixth forms comes after sector leaders expressed concerns that government plans to introduce “elite” sixth forms as part of its levelling-up agenda into areas with “weak” education outcomes could put pressure on existing provision.

Francis said Oldham needs organisations



Eton College

like Eton who see their core business as part of a “bigger jigsaw puzzle and who are willing to engage in the wider challenges of levelling up”.

Eton College and Star Academies intend to bid in the next wave of the Department for Education’s free schools programme, with a view to welcoming their first students as soon as 2025.

The colleges would admit 240 students per year and will offer many of the educational and co-curricular opportunities available at Eton, including “knowledge-rich teaching from subject-specialists; access to talks, academic essay prizes and debate clubs; Oxbridge-style tutorial sessions and the chance to learn Latin”.

A spokesperson from Eton told FE Week that should their bids be successful, the new colleges will not be highly selective.

“They will be sixth form colleges, which are, by their very nature, selective. They will be 16-to-19 colleges with specific criteria for admission – just like pretty much all 16-to-19 colleges and sixth forms in the country.

“The admissions policies at these new colleges will not be designed to be exclusionary – they will be designed to ensure that the young people we admit are suited to the kind of academic curriculum and pedagogy we are designing.”

The spokesperson confirmed that students would not be required to take special entry examinations.

Putting pressure on existing providers

While Eton claimed its new sixth forms would not disrupt the existing pattern of local post-16 education, a group of principals of colleges including Stockton Sixth Form, Prior Pursglove Colleges, Middlesbrough College, Hartlepool College, Darlington College, Stockton Riverside College and Redcar and Cleveland College issued a joint statement to FE Week expressing some concern at the plans.

“We are aware that Star Academies and Eton College plan to bid through the ‘free school’ process to develop a new sixth form in Middlesbrough,” the principals said.

“We would hope that the free school assessment process will take into account the quality and high progression rates of existing post-16 providers as well as the conclusions of the local area review carried out in 2016 which highlighted poor key stage 4 outcomes and high levels of post-16 competition already in existence across the Tees Valley.”

The principals cited the fact that 19 school sixth forms and seven colleges were highlighted as offering A-levels to a

population of less than 700,000.

“We would collectively welcome any additional investment in the existing A-level provider network across the Tees Valley to support our current ‘raising aspirations’ programmes as part of the levelling-up agenda,” they said.

A spokesperson for Dudley College of Technology said the college is waiting for discussions with elected officers at the council and Star Academies to “fully understand the proposition and to gauge its impact on the communities the college serves”.

The idea that Eton’s new colleges would not disrupt the existing pattern of local post-16 education was challenged by Sam Freedman, an ex-government adviser now at Ark Schools.

He told FE Week that if you open a selective institution at any age group, anywhere, you will “suck out the young people who have got the best grades from other institutions”.

“That just has to happen by definition. And it will have a negative effect on those institutions,” he said.

“It’s great to have Eton contributing more to the state sector. They’ve got a lot of expertise and a lot of money. But I’d much rather see them try and run a sixth form or a school that was inclusive.”

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News

Ofsted downgrades new provider after ESFA apprentice pay tip-off

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FROM FRONT EXCLUSIVE

Ofsted has downgraded a new provider following a surprise follow-up visit after the Education and Skills Funding Agency tipped the watchdog off about alleged illegal apprentice wages.

The case, believed to be the first time the inspectorate has policed apprentice pay, has raised questions about which government arm is responsible for audits. The membership body for private providers has called for clarity on this “inconsistent” approach.

London-based charity Uganda Community Relief Association (UCRA) is challenging Ofsted after its monitoring visit report resulted in ‘insufficient progress’ judgments in two areas – an outcome that has led to a suspension on new starts.

The watchdog claimed the provider’s 27 junior content producer apprentices “are not in suitable employment, are not paid an apprenticeship wage and too many do not receive monthly pay”.

However, the provider claims an original monitoring visit took place in early December that resulted in ‘reasonable progress’ provisional judgments across the board, and involved no questions about apprentice pay.

UCRA told FE Week that Ofsted returned to re-inspect the provider unexpectedly, with a different inspection team, in mid-January at the request of the ESFA after the draft report was shared with the agency.

The ESFA began conducting its own investigation into the provider in November after one of its employers submitted a request for apprenticeship incentive payments in which financial information was shared.

UCRA told FE Week the employer in question, which has been denied the cash incentives, was unable to pay its employees, including the apprentices, in October following a downturn. But this issue has since been resolved and all payments have been made, UCRA claimed.



The provider also denies that the apprentices are paid anything less than the apprenticeship minimum wage and insists evidence of this has been shared with the ESFA and Ofsted.

“This is a very confusing and frustrating situation,” an UCRA spokesperson said. “Ofsted was very happy with what they saw during their first inspection in December – the feedback was so good it blows your mind. They spoke to the learners and were so impressed.”

The spokesperson questioned why Ofsted was made to effectively audit their provider – a job that typically lies with the ESFA.

“Is this Ofsted’s writing or is it the ESFA’s? They are supposed to be two separate bodies. The ESFA audits, not Ofsted,” they said.

“I am 100 per cent sure apprentices are paid the minimum wage because I have seen their payslips and have given them to the ESFA.

“Ofsted looks at the quality of education, not apprentices’ payslips. This is the ESFA talking”

Apprentice pay is not an issue that

Ofsted usually reports on, and nowhere in the inspection handbook does it say this source of information could be used during inspections.

But a spokesperson for the watchdog told FE Week that inspectors do not rule out “the different sources of evidence we might need to gather at different times to carry out an inspection effectively”.

They added that any concerns from providers should be raised through Ofsted’s complaints process.

The Association of Employment and Learning Providers said it was not aware of Ofsted auditing apprentice pay before and called for a more consistent approach.

Director of policy Simon Ashworth said: “AELP strongly believes in provider accountability. There must be strong measures in place to protect and safeguard the interests of apprentices, regardless of how any concerns are raised. We would, however, ask that a consistent approach is taken, so that in future providers understand what the respective responsibilities of ESFA and Ofsted are.”

The ESFA said it would not comment on

individual cases.

UCRA, established in 1984, has previous experience of providing training as a subcontractor. It also offers a range of other services to the community, including immigration advice and casework and guidance on how to operate a foodbank.

The charity began teaching its own apprenticeships to adults in August 2020 and has been delivering adult education courses since January 2021. It currently has 32 adult learners, as well as 21 traineeship students. All training is taught online.

Ofsted’s report is full of praise for all of the provider’s courses, barring the junior content apprentices.

Of the four judgments, two were judged as ‘reasonable progress’ in the final report. “Leaders and managers have a clear rationale for the curriculum they offer,” Ofsted said, for example.

UCRA told FE Week it is now challenging the report and wants to stay in the apprenticeship delivery market despite this setback.

News

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Universal credit training flexibility extended again

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A flexibility allowing universal credit claimants to undertake training for up to 16 weeks has been extended for a second time.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency announced this week that the flexibility will now last until April 28, 2023. It had been set to end next month.

The flexibility, originally announced as a six-month pilot in March 2021, increased the amount of time claimants could study full-time, work-focused courses while still receiving benefits from eight weeks to 12 weeks.

This then went up to 16 weeks if the claimant was on a skills bootcamp and now applies to all types of work-related training if the person is in the "intensive work-search group" for universal credit.

"This is a great opportunity for FE providers to work with their local Jobcentre Plus"

"Universal credit claimants in the intensive work-search group will be able to attend full-time, work-related training

opportunities lasting up to 16 weeks across Great Britain as part of their work-search activity. This flexibility has now been extended until April 28, 2023," an update from the ESFA said.

"This is a great opportunity for FE providers to work with their local Jobcentre Plus and partnership managers to offer full-time, work-related training courses."

Universal credit claimants will need to get agreement from their work coach to "ensure this is the right support for them and appropriate for the local labour market".

The previous eight-week universal credit rule was heavily criticised by the FE and skills sector. In June 2021,



the Association of Colleges published a report saying the rule meant claimants are "prevented from developing skills that would allow them to get into better-quality, more stable, better-paid employment over the longer term".

Latest Department for Work and Pensions data shows 5.6 million people were receiving universal credit in January 2022.

ESFA invites bids for new £85m round of strategic development funding

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Colleges in every area of England will soon be invited to submit bids to another round of the new strategic development fund (SDF), the Education and Skills Funding Agency has announced.

Colleges have this week been given advanced warning of the upcoming opportunity that will be worth £85 million in total next year. They will, however, only have, at best, nine months to spend the money.

In an update, the ESFA said that applications will open on April 1 for SDF bids for the 2022/23 financial year. The agency "anticipates" that funding will be confirmed by June but says it must be spent by March 31, 2023.

A £65 million pilot for the SDF comes to an end this month and will be replaced by a national £85 million programme. About 60 per cent, £50 million, will be set

aside for capital, and the remaining £35 million for revenue.

To be successful for this year's round of funding, bids must "include or be endorsed" by every FE college within the bid's defined geographic area.

The SDF was introduced last year as part of the 'skills accelerator' package, which invited applications for the first local skills improvement plans. It provides capital and revenue funding so providers in a local area can better align their provision to local skills priorities.

Applications to the £85 million SDF must be based on analysis of local skills needs, including the emerging plans being developed by the local skills improvement plan trailblazers in 2021/22, and mayoral combined authority or local enterprise partnership analysis of local skills needs, the ESFA said.

Unlike last year, when it was left to employer representative bodies to

determine appropriate geographies, the ESFA said it expects this year's bids to align to mayoral combined authority or local enterprise partnership boundaries.

As well as the support of every college, employer representative bodies must also be on board. The education secretary is seeking powers through the skills and post-16 education bill to officially designate employer representative bodies. That legislation is

likely to receive royal assent in the coming weeks.

Independent training providers, sixth-form colleges, institutes of technology and universities can be included in the SDF bids and can receive funding, but they cannot lead an application, nor can colleges without a grade one or two overall effectiveness judgment from Ofsted.

Bids will open on April 1 and will close on May 13, 2022.





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Plans for tactical subcontracting abandoned in combined authority

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EXCLUSIVE

An education charity has pulled a tactical subcontracting deal worth up to £350,000 of adult education funding after a mayoral combined authority intervened.

According to a tender published on the government's contracts finder website last week, the WEA was seeking subcontractors to deliver almost a quarter of its £1.5 million adult education budget (AEB) allocation in West Yorkshire for the last four months of the 2021/22 academic year.

“WYCA have been in touch to clarify that their rules do not permit us to subcontract”

Bids had to be submitted by March 18 for the contract, which would run from April 4 to July 31.

The short duration and last-minute nature of the tender suggests it was a tactical move to use up unspent funding from the AEB.

West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) funding rules are in line with those for the national AEB administered by the Education and Skills Funding and state that providers “must not subcontract to meet short-term funding objectives”.

The WYCA has a three per cent tolerance threshold in its AEB – meaning providers will need to use up at least 97 per cent of their allocation to avoid funds being clawed back.

On Monday, the same day FE Week enquired about the tactical nature of the subcontracting opportunity, the combined authority contacted the WEA and informed the grant-funded provider that it is not allowed to continue with the proposed subcontract.

However, the WEA claims this was only



because the charity is technically classified as an “out of area” provider.

A WEA spokesperson said the combined authority had provisionally signed off on the subcontract during a previous meeting – despite it appearing to be a breach of funding rules.

“We had proposed subcontracting to WYCA in a recent partnership meeting and the procurement was actioned after this meeting,” the spokesperson said.

“The WEA does work in partnership with other charities, local employers and community organisations to gain specialist expertise and connections into local jobs and hard-to-reach communities. Normally these are long-standing partnerships to achieve common goals, and this was a model we were hoping to replicate in West Yorkshire.

“However, WYCA have been in touch to clarify that, as we are classified as an ‘out of area’ provider, despite our long-held footprint in region, their rules do not permit us to subcontract. As such, we are in the process of rescinding the procurement and finding alternative ways to deliver the specialised reach intended.”

“We monitor subcontracting closely and providers have to get our permission to make changes.”

The WYCA refused to comment on why it allegedly signed off on the tactical subcontracting deal initially and later

rescinded its approval.

A spokesperson would only say: “We monitor subcontracting closely with regards to our adult education budget and providers who have to get our permission to make changes.

“Changes will be considered if there is a strategic rationale which is aligned to the West Yorkshire AEB strategy and our priorities.”

The ESFA has attempted to stamp out tactical subcontracting for many years. It launched a fresh crackdown on subcontracting overall in 2020 which made clear that “entering into subcontracting arrangements for financial gain” would not be acceptable.

Mayoral combined authorities that have control of the AEB for their area mostly follow ESFA funding rules including for subcontracting, but they have the power to make their own amendments.

From the brink of collapse to Ofsted 'outstanding'

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EXCLUSIVE

An apprenticeship firm hit with a damaging 'insufficient progress' judgment from Ofsted in 2019 has been rated 'outstanding' after its first full inspection – a feat no other new provider has achieved.

Wiser Academy Ltd was on the verge of collapse after it was suspended from recruiting apprentices following an early monitoring visit in July 2019 that resulted in two 'insufficient progress' judgments.

During Covid-19, the provider's leaders expressed frustration after Ofsted paused inspections – something that meant their inability to take on apprentices was prolonged.

However, they were able to turn the company's fortunes around, with their latest inspection resulting in 'outstanding' judgments in four out of five categories.

"I'm absolutely over the moon," Wiser Academy's director Crescens George told FE Week.

"Considering in 2019 when we had our first visit, of course we couldn't recruit learners, and then came the March 2020 lockdown for the pandemic, so the business couldn't grow.

"We were still in the lockdown, so trying to transform a business to get it to a 'good' rating is itself challenging... Amidst all the challenges we all faced, getting an 'outstanding' is really something we are proud of as a team.

"Going from the verge of the business going bust to an 'outstanding' is an incredible feat," he added.

Wiser Academy is based in Hampshire but trains apprentices in the insurance and financial services sector across the country.



Crescens George

The provider offers insurance-based apprenticeship standards at levels 3, 4 and 6 nationally. At the time of its inspection there were 97 apprentices in learning.

Under government rules, providers that are new to apprenticeship delivery receive an early monitoring visit from Ofsted within 24 months of being funded.

If they score 'insufficient progress' in one or more themes they are temporarily banned from recruiting apprentices until they can score at least 'requires improvement' in a full inspection.

Wiser Academy was expecting a re-inspection by March 2020, but this was postponed due to the pandemic, something that put significant financial pressure on the company.

"Basically [we] were on a journey towards diminishing cash flow. Towards the later part of the year, we had to dip into our reserves to support the learners and ensure they were still supported," George told FE

Week.

Ofsted eventually came to do a second monitoring visit in October 2020 – where Wiser Academy was judged to have made 'reasonable progress' in all three themes.

Around a year and half later, the provider was rated 'outstanding' by the regulator.

Analysis of Ofsted data by FE Week found that no other new provider has made such a jump.

In a report published this week, inspectors said that Wiser Academy provides "high-quality, highly personalised training.

"Leaders have made it their mission to train the apprentices so that they are the highest qualified insurance specialists," the report added.

This contrasted sharply with the provider's initial report where Ofsted found that leaders and managers did not plan the apprentices' training programmes well enough.

George told FE Week how he managed to achieve such an

impressive turn around. "We stripped everything back and started rebuilding everything from scratch – in terms of our ethos, our values, team processes, systems, engagement strategies... everything.

"We had about four key areas that we were prioritising... What we first did was change our delivery model. We went from the typical once a month touch-point interaction to a weekly interaction with all our learners.

"Our training method is not the typical apprenticeship delivery where you meet with your assessor once every four weeks or eight weeks or whatever."

He explained that all of Wiser Academy's learners have weekly face-to-face or live virtual training sessions. Each apprentice has at least two and a half hours of training time with their trainer.

"The core message that I give my team is 'don't worry too much about the paperwork, the bureaucracy, the tick-box exercises'. Our mantra was, focus on the learners, and everything else will follow," George added.

DfE's 'bizarre' BAME apprenticeships strategy

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The Department for Education will strengthen ethnic minority representation in campaign imagery and make use of "influencers" to tackle low numbers of diverse young people taking apprenticeships.

But experts have warned the action does not go far enough, with one group saying it is "simply bizarre" to think that racism and inequality will be fixed by just running a better advertising campaign.

The government included the commitments this week in its response to the Sewell report on race and ethnic disparities, which was published last year and shone a spotlight on the low number of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) young people in apprenticeships.

The commission claimed that "prejudice and ignorance" within ethnic minority families led to a low take-up of apprenticeship starts in their communities.

FE Week analysis shows that ethnic minority 16-to-18-year-old apprentices made up 7.8 per cent of starts in 2018/19, 7.7 per cent in 2019/20, and 8.1 per cent in 2020/21. BAME people made up 14.3 per cent of apprenticeships starts for all ages in 2020/21.

The Office for National Statistics said in 2019, 84.8 per cent of people in England and Wales were white.

All three of the government actions pledged in the response to the apprenticeship concerns in Sewell's report are based on previous announcements by ministers and focus on raising awareness of apprenticeships among ethnic minority communities – in line with what was recommended by the commission.

Since November 2021, for example, the DfE has worked with the Department for Work and Pensions to use a "range of mechanisms to attract more ethnic minority starts identified

in the commission's report, such as events in schools with strong minority representation, relatable role models, employer testimonies, data on potential earnings and career progression".

The departments will also explore the impact of factors that influence a young person's career choices, this week's response said.

And in January the DfE launched a "major" communications campaign Get the Jump: Skills for Life, which will target young people aged 14 to 19 about the full range of options available.

"It will help to tackle disparities by featuring a diverse range of young people in the campaign imagery, through case studies, influencers and through media targeting," the government said, adding that the DfE will continue to measure and publish participation levels of people from ethnic minorities, including a breakdown by age.

Jeremy Crook, chief executive of Action for Race Equality (formerly known as the Black Training and Enterprise Group), said the real barrier to increasing BAME representation in apprenticeships is employers' "poor recruitment practices, especially in the ICT, construction and engineering sectors".

This was echoed by Imani Brown and Le'Shaé Woodstock from the National Society of Apprentices, who in a joint statement said "racism, endemic low pay in apprenticeships and a consistent base of bad employer behaviour around off-the-job training are simply ignored".

The pair added: "It's simply bizarre to think that racism and inequality will be fixed by just running a better advertising campaign. Where is the action on pay gaps, on what we learn and how we learn it?"

Under-representation of BAME people in apprenticeships is by no means a new revelation. But the DfE's public attempts

to redress low ethnic minority take-up haven't gone well in the past.

"The real barrier to increasing representation is employers' poor recruitment practices"

Former education secretary Justine Greening was accused of being "all talk" in 2017 after telling the education select committee that the government had a "big focus" on encouraging "a higher proportion of BAME young people going into apprenticeships" with little to show for it.

Andy Forbes, a former college principal and now head of development at think tank ResPublica, said the biggest weakness in the DfE's strategy is the lack of clear targets for recruitment of ethnic minority apprentices.

"In my view, there should be an overall target and targets for each occupational area and level, from intermediate to degree apprenticeships," he told FE Week.

"The measurable progress of employers and training providers in attracting and recruiting ethnic minority applicants should be a factor in evaluating their quality in Ofsted reports and added in to the standard reporting of employers in relation to race pay gaps."

Crook said that despite the Black Lives Matter protests, there are "still too many employers reluctant to address race equality in their companies.

"It's time for the government to use its levers, such as public procurement, to increase the pace of change," he added.



Jeremy Crook and Andy Forbes

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News

2024 T Levels registration launched: here’s what providers need to know

BILLY CAMDEN
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The Department for Education has launched the registration process for providers to deliver T Levels from 2024 – the final year of the flagship qualification’s rollout.

Here are the key things you need to know before applying.



2024 will be the fifth and final year of T Level rollout and will from this point become part of the mainstream offer for all students aged 16, 17 and 18.

The DfE confirmed that all providers currently funded to deliver 16-to-19 study programmes will be eligible to deliver all of the available T Levels from September 2024.

Providers who have a contract to deliver apprenticeships or adult provision only are not eligible to apply.

In previous years, strict criteria around Ofsted grades and financial health had applied to prospective T Level providers. These restrictions have now been lifted.

Providers have over a year to apply but get extra support if they’re quick

Providers may submit their registration form from now and up to July 31, 2023. This is the final date to register and be eligible to receive an up-front funding allocation



for T Level delivery for 2024/25.

After July 2023, the DfE has said that any unregistered T Level delivery will be funded through the in-year growth process applicable in 2024/25, subject to affordability, so long as this is correctly coded on the individualised learner record or school census.

The DfE said it encourages providers to register as early as possible “so that they can take advantage of the support that will be offered to providers”.

If providers register by July 29, 2022 they can access a range of support to assist their delivery preparations,



such as conversations with the DfE’s T Level support team, guidance on capital funding, access to up-front funding for additional T Level delivery hours and industry placements.

Full suite of T Levels available

There are 23 T Levels, across 11 T Level routes that will be available for delivery in 2024/25. They encompass 81 different occupational specialisms between them.

The 11 routes are: agricultural, environmental and animal care; business and administration; catering and hospitality; construction; creative and design; digital;



education and childcare; engineering and manufacturing; hair and beauty; health and science; and legal, finance and accounting.

What you need to register

Through a registration form, providers will be asked about any recent structural changes or whether they have converted to academy status.

Providers will also need to list the T Levels they plan to deliver in 2024/25, along with planned student numbers.

Whether the provider is also interested in delivering the T Level transition programme will be another question.



News

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City Lit finances on the mend after Covid-19 plummets enrolment fees

BILLY CAMDEN
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

A well-known adult education charity has insisted it is on the road to recovery after the FE Commissioner warned of deteriorating finances caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The City Literary Institute said it was the first-ever college to produce more than half of its income through enrolment fees in 2018/19 – a feat that was short lived when multiple lockdowns caused a significant reduction.

“City Lit has been proactive and flexible in adapting its curriculum offer”

The 100-year-old charity, which is the largest provider of community learning in Europe, saw its fee income drop by 27 per cent, falling from £10.1 million prior to the pandemic to £7.4 million in 2020/21.

As a result, City Lit this week received a financial notice to improve from the Education and Skills Funding Agency due to ‘inadequate’ finances.

In a report also published this week, the FE Commissioner said that in its team’s opinion the college’s financial recovery plan is based on “sound analysis” which will see fee income recover to pre-pandemic levels of around 30,000 enrolments by 2023/24.

The report also points out that City Lit has no long-term debt and is asset rich because it owns its main campus in London’s Covent Garden, meaning the college is “not insolvent”.

Speaking to FE Week, City Lit’s principal Mark Malcomson said his college is “far from” becoming financially unviable and insisted that “things are slowly getting better” for both daytime and evening



courses.

He explained that his provider’s 5,000-odd courses were all delivered face-to-face prior to the pandemic and the switch to online learning was impossible for some areas, particularly practical subjects, such as performing arts.

But around 1,300 courses were successfully transferred online, predominantly provision for languages, humanities, creative writing, wellbeing and even music, once the pandemic struck.

Successive lockdowns continued to disrupt enrolments and led to some tough decisions around restricting staff and provision. Malcomson said his staff base has fallen by between ten and 15 per cent since the pandemic, while an external “interpreting service” function offered by the college has had to close.

The FE Commissioner’s report is,

however, full of praise for governance and leadership at City Lit. It says: “City Lit has been proactive and flexible in adapting its curriculum offer and delivery in response to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions and challenges that have predominated since March 2020.

“The college has remained committed to promoting and maintaining its learners”

“The college has remained firmly committed to promoting and maintaining the engagement and

participation of its learners, with the rapid development of online learning providing a viable alternative to face-to-face delivery for many programmes.”

The report also applauded the college’s quality of provision, giving the example that achievement outcomes on accredited programmes “improved substantially” in 2020/21, with “further improvements” likely in 2021/22.

This week’s report makes clear that the impact on fee income through the pandemic has been the “primary factor” in the “deterioration of the college finances”, which has reported two years of “significant operating deficits and are likely to see a third year of this in 2021/22”.

Malcomson said he was “proud” of the way his college has responded to the unprecedented challenge of the pandemic and is “happy” with the “supportive” approach taken by the ESFA and FE Commissioner.



THE FE WEEK PODCAST PRESENTS
...||| EPISODE 2 |||...
DISABILITY:
THE HIDDEN DIVERSITY ISSUE?

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STAFF
BY
STAFF**

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New national leaders announced - but diversity concerns remain

SHANE CHOWEN
SHANE.CHOWEN@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The Department for Education has refreshed its roster of national FE leaders following its latest recruitment round, but has been unsuccessful in making the teams more diverse.

Five new national leaders of further education (NLFE) and two new national leaders of governance (NLG) have been appointed from high-performing institutions to step in and support colleges in need of improvement.

Sector commentators have been critical in recent years of the lack of diversity among DfE's top teams of FE specialists; including the FE Commissioner's team of deputies and advisers, as well as the national leaders of governance and national leaders of further education.

In an FE Week interview last year, new FE Commissioner Shelagh Legrave regretfully insisted that this was "reflective of the small number of BAME leaders in the sector. I think it's really sad that we haven't got as diverse in our leadership in FE as we should have. And I will certainly work with everybody to try and ensure that there is a greater diversity," she told us in November.

"There remains no non-white national leaders of further education"

There remains no non-white national leaders of further education. The group was gender balanced, but now has three more men than women. One member of the NLG team is from a BAME background.

The national leaders programme



sits alongside the further education commissioner's office as part of the government's support and intervention regime for colleges. NLFEs work with senior leaders to provide strategic mentoring and advise on the development and delivery of improvement plans.

To be eligible to become an NLFE, applicants need to have clocked up at least five years as principal or chief executive and have achieved at least 'good' judgments in overall effectiveness, leadership and management and teaching, learning and assessment at their most recent inspection.

The roles are unpaid, but an NLFE's college receives a £10,000 per year bursary to cover costs for travel, staff cover and professional development. According to the latest annual report from the FE commissioner, the NLFEs and NLGs were working with 40

colleges in academic year 2020/21, down from 50 in the previous year.

Leaders who were appointed to NLFE roles this week are:

- Ian Pryce, principal and chief executive of Bedford College Group
- Gill Worgan, principal of West Herts College
- John Laramy, principal and chief executive of Exeter College
- Ellen Thinnesen, chief executive of Education Partnership North East
- Kate Roe, principal and chief executive of Darlington College.

Four college leaders have stepped down as NLFEs, including former TEC Partnership chief executive Gill Alton, who retired earlier this year;

Tyne Coast College's Lindsey Whiterod; Huddersfield New College's Angela Williams; and Nelson and Colne's Amanda Melton.

The DfE's latest NLG appointments increase the total of governance experts from eight to ten. David Wright, chair at Notre Dame Catholic Sixth Form College, and Charles Buchanan, chair at EKC Group, join the existing members of the team.

As with NLFEs, the NLG group was gender-balanced before this latest round of appointments.

NLGs receive a day-rate of £350 for their work and must be a serving chair of governors, governor or governance professional from a 'good' or 'outstanding' college. They are typically appointed for two-year terms.

Applicants are subjected to a "rigorous" assessment process, according to DfE guidance, including scenario-based exercise and a formal interview.

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News

WHOS'S WHO? MEET
THE NATIONAL LEADERS

The national leaders of further education, and national leaders of governance, are called upon to help colleges improve. Here is the full list of all of those currently in post, including this week's new appointments.

NATIONAL
LEADERS OF
FURTHER
EDUCATION



PETER MCGHEE
Principal, St
John Rigby
College



**GRAHAM
RAZEZ**
Chief executive,
East Kent
Colleges Group



PAUL PHILLIPS
Principal and
chief executive,
Weston College



PHIL COOK
Chief executive and
group principal,
Education Training
Collective



SAM PARRETT
Group principal
and chief executive,
London South East
Colleges

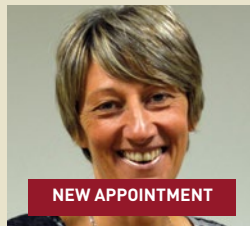


COLIN BOOTH
Group chief
executive,
Luminate
Education Group



NEW APPOINTMENT

IAN PRYCE
Chief executive,
Bedford College



NEW APPOINTMENT

GILL WORGAN
Principal and
chief executive,
West Herts
College Group



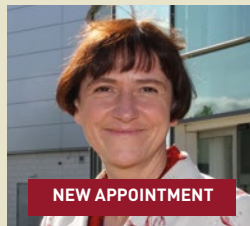
NEW APPOINTMENT

JOHN LARAMY
Principal and
chief executive,
Exeter College



NEW APPOINTMENT

ELLEN THINNESEN
Chief executive,
Education
Partnership
North East



NEW APPOINTMENT

KATE ROE
Principal and
chief executive,
Darlington
College

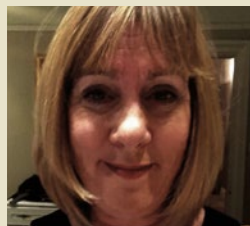
NATIONAL
LEADERS OF
GOVERNANCE



**ANDREW
BAIRD**
Chair, East
Surrey College



**HEATHER
CROSS**
Clerk, Wiltshire
College



CAROLE DRURY
Director of
governance,
Kendal College



**SIMON
PERRYMAN**
Chair, Barnsley
College



JENNIFER FOOTE
Company
secretary and
general counsel,
LTE Group



ELTON D'SOUZA
Chair, West
Suffolk College



SANDRA PRAIL
Chair, Brighton,
Hove & Sussex
Sixth Form
College



ROB LAWSON
Chair, Education
Partnership
North East

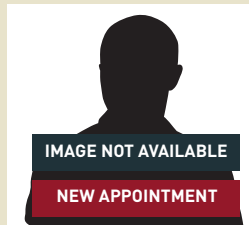


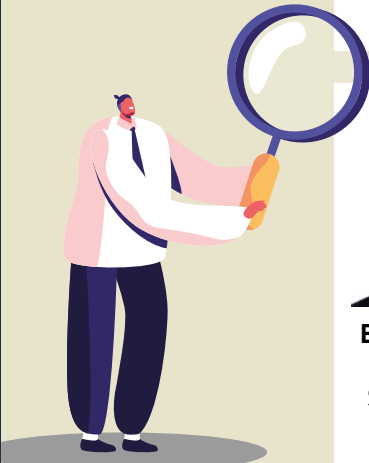
IMAGE NOT AVAILABLE
NEW APPOINTMENT

DAVID WRIGHT
Chair, Notre
Dame Catholic
Sixth Form
College



NEW APPOINTMENT

**CHARLES
BUCHANAN**
Chair, East Kent
College Group



Employer groups call on Sunak to reform levy funds in his spring statement

WILL NOTT
WILLIAM.NOTT@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Employer groups are calling on the chancellor to allow apprenticeship levy funds to cover the cost of apprentice wages and transport expenses in next week's spring statement – but there are conflicting views on whether other training programmes should become eligible.

The apprenticeship levy was introduced in 2017 and aimed to help increase investment in training. However, many levy-paying businesses have found it challenging to use for their training needs.

A 2020 report from the Confederation of British Industry said that many businesses that pay into the levy – those with an annual pay bill of over £3 million – claimed it had become a "barrier" to increasing their investment in training.

At the time, the CBI recommended the government turn the apprenticeship levy into a "flexible skills and training levy", which could be used for short modular courses, pre-apprenticeship programmes, product training, professional courses and soft skills training.

“Bringing about more flexibility in the apprenticeship levy would not cost government or businesses a penny”

However, to date, these calls have fallen on deaf ears, and joint minister for FE and HE Michelle Donelan told FE Week last month that there were no plans to introduce big changes to the system any time soon.

Despite this, employer groups are continuing to call for reforms ahead of chancellor Rishi Sunak delivering his



Rishi Sunak

spring statement on March 23.

The British Retail Consortium (BRC) wrote to secretary of state for education Nadhim Zahawi urging the government to use the statement to introduce "much-needed flexibility" to the levy.

"Bringing about more flexibility in the apprenticeship levy would not cost government or businesses a penny but could help bring about an estimated 8,000 new apprenticeship places across the retail industry," Helen Dickinson, chief executive of BRC, said.

BRC said the government should allow levy funds to cover associated training costs – including transport, or backfilling roles to free up staff for off-site training.

Like the CBI, the BRC also said the government should allow a wider range of courses to be supported through levy funds – allowing funds to be used to support more young people through "vital" pre-employment and pre-apprenticeship programmes.

Make UK, a group that represents manufacturers in the UK, wants to see a portion of levy funds being spent on apprentice wages and meeting other costs, such as capital expenditure.

"Make UK has called for simple

changes to the apprenticeship levy to make it work better for employers," said Jamie Cater, employment senior policy manager at Make UK.

"While apprenticeship starts in manufacturing and engineering have recently increased significantly – a trend we expect to continue this year as employers recover from the impact of Covid – the government could do more to support businesses to recruit and retain apprentices.

"Allowing a portion of levy funds to be spent on apprentice wages and meeting other costs, such as capital expenditure, would remove some of the immediate barriers to employers investing more in apprenticeships and reduce the amount of unspent funding returned to the Treasury."

Using unspent funds from the apprenticeship levy to cover apprentice wages is a policy switch favoured by the Labour Party.

Other employer groups highlighted how the government needed to do more to meet employers' needs.

"Many of our businesses are small and medium-sized and do not necessarily understand the scheme and how it can be applied to their business, or deem it overly

bureaucratic," Claire Steiner, chair of education and training at the Institute of Travel and Tourism, told FE Week.

"More 'how to' communication aimed at smaller businesses would be beneficial to encourage take-up and investment in skills in the workplace."

While groups were calling for change, the Federation of Small Businesses warned against "well-intentioned" reform of the levy.

In a letter to Sunak, the FSB said the levy should not be turned into a broader training levy if this leads to levy funds drying up for those smallest employers.

"We would ask you to apply appropriate scepticism to superficially attractive changes to the levy which will not lead to positive results in the small firms in which the majority of the employed population work," said Mike Cherry, national chair, and Martin McTague, national vice chair, policy and advocacy, at FSB.

Surprisingly, none that spoke to FE Week called for employer cash incentives, which were introduced to help recover apprentice starts post-Covid-19 at a price of £3,000 each, to be extended. The cash bonuses end this month.



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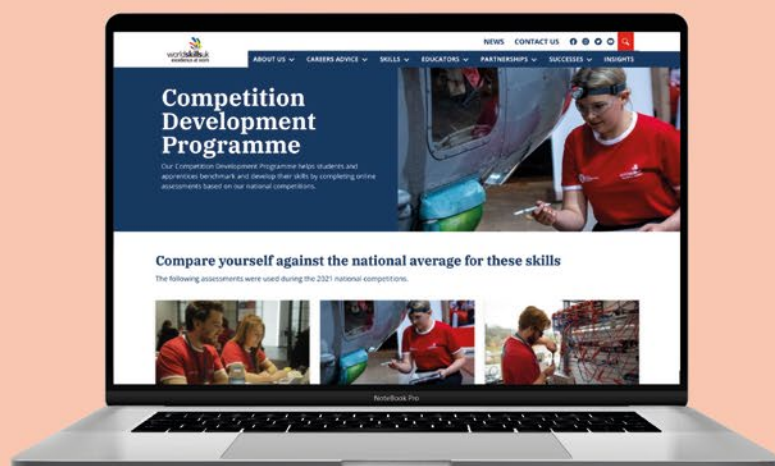


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Opinion

Apprenticeships in green skills sectors require joined-up thinking



JENNIFER COUPLAND

Chief executive, Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education

Apprenticeships can only meet our green skills needs if we follow the lead of employers, and link up across government departments, writes Jennifer Coupland

Apprenticeships and technical education are vital to train people for two million green jobs targeted by government by 2030. This is a great opportunity for business to take advantage of the innovation and talent we have available in this country to help tackle climate change and set us on the road to net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Making sure current training offers are future-proofed will help, but we will also have to improve our understanding of how the economy will change and what new skills will be needed.

Predicting future skills needs is notoriously difficult – but the Institute is in a great position to lead the way.

We need deep conversations on whether the existing skills offers are right and what needs to change. We can weave insights and market intelligence from the thousands of employers we work with into occupational standards that shape apprenticeships, T Levels, and higher technical qualifications.

“There’s no room whatsoever for complacency”

Our employer-led green apprenticeships advisory panel (GAAP), which launched last year, is working at pace and is already producing impressive results.



Its role is to identify how existing apprenticeships serve new green jobs, or could be made greener, and where new apprenticeships could be created to address emerging skills gaps.

Its immediate impact can be seen through the expanded sustainability business specialist apprenticeship to help a business in any part of the economy become more sustainable.

The role used to focus only on agriculture, but we’ve broadened it for all areas of the economy following panel members’ guidance.

Further important work is being done to develop a low carbon heating technician apprenticeship that will support the rollout of heat pumps across England.

No new petrol and diesel cars will be allowed after 2030, so it’s really important to improve training for

technicians to build and maintain electric vehicles.

National Express, which is moving to an electric and hydrogen fleet from 2030, is a good example of an employer informing our work. They’re helping make the existing bus and coach engineering technician apprenticeship, which recognises emerging technologies, more sustainable.

Other GAAP priorities include apprenticeships to support more sustainable food production, animal welfare, carbon zero construction, maintenance of wind turbines, and green finance, which enables businesses to invest in projects that support better environmental outcomes, following recommendations by the Chartered Banker Institute.

This needs to be promoted and supported across government. I know

from my career with multiple departments how important it is that thinking is joined-up.

That’s why we are working closely with the Department for Education’s Unit For Future Skills. We also fed into the cross-government green jobs taskforce and will, for example, fully support its call to get more smaller employers involved with training young talent at a local level.

“There’s huge demand from young people to learn these green skills”

We’re united in the shared belief that apprenticeships and technical education will only meet the nation’s green skills needs by following the lead of large and small employers, who I know from countless conversations view sustainability as a priority.

We also know that there’s huge demand from young people to learn these green skills, with half of 18-to-34-year-olds expressing a desire for a career that helps protect the environment.

The GAAP, which is extending its remit across technical education, has made a good start but there’s no room whatsoever for complacency.

Rest assured the Institute, government, employers, and the whole FE sector will do everything in our power to ensure skills training plays its full part in putting the economy on a greener footing and helping to save the environment.

Opinion

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Apprenticeships should be a core part of the levelling-up agenda



DAVID PHILLIPS

Managing director,
City & Guilds

The government needs to take action over the decline in apprenticeship starts if the country is to 'level up', writes David Phillips

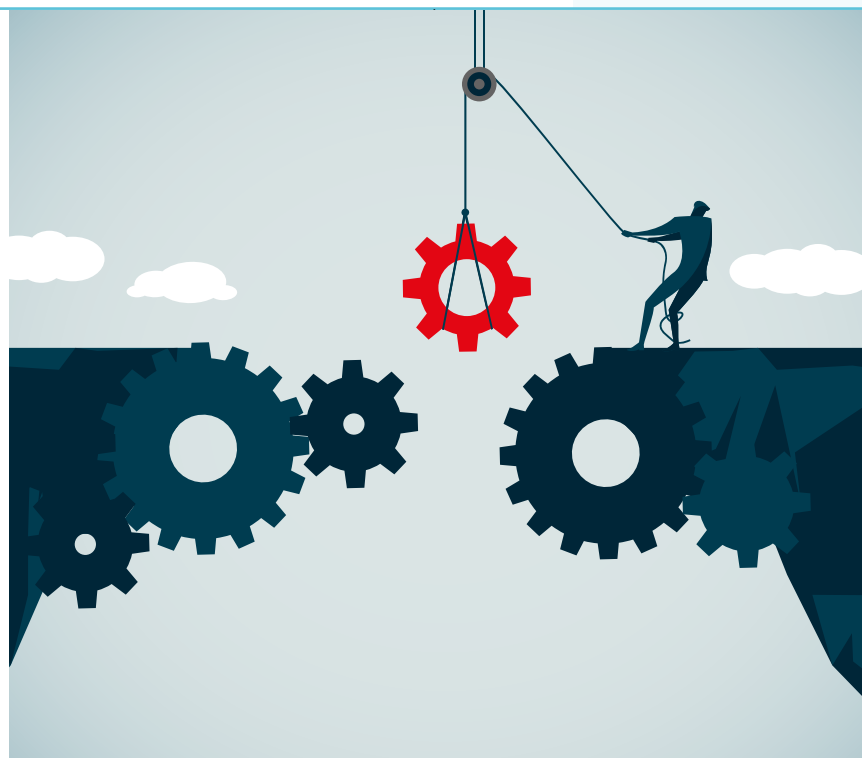
The government has outlined ambitious and laudable plans for their levelling-up agenda, with the release of their recent white paper. This promises to address geographic inequality across the country by investing in education and skills, some public services (such as the NHS, police and immigration), investing in towns, high streets and culture as well as a series of ambitious civil projects.

“The words “apprentice” and “apprenticeship” don’t appear at all in the levelling-up white paper”

Big-ticket items of investment include £26 billion of public capital investment for the green industrial revolution, £4.8 billion into improving towns across the UK via the levelling-up fund; £5.7 billion allocated for improving transport links outside London and a commitment has been made to spend £5 billion on bringing gigabit-capable broadband to 85 per cent of the UK by 2025.

It is encouraging to see that the government has recognised the vital role that skills development will have to play in achieving the wider levelling-up agenda.

The white paper announced a £3.8 billion investment in skills in 2024/25, a lifetime skills guarantee in England,



bootcamps and a new UK-wide numeracy programme.

However, it will be critical that these investments reach people across all parts of the UK and that the money is spent in key areas if they are to be effective.

The words ‘apprentice’ and ‘apprenticeship’ don’t appear at all in the levelling-up white paper. But apprenticeships must be made a priority to allow as many people as possible to access the opportunities that are likely to be available. And if they are more widely adopted, apprenticeships can help employers of all sizes to capitalise on the opportunities that the levelling-up agenda presents, by allowing them access to the skilled workers they need.

Using construction as an example, according to the Construction Industry Training Board, the construction sector is expected to need 217,000 new workers by 2025. Meanwhile, our Great Jobs report found that just 17 per cent

of people not currently working in the construction sector said that they would consider a role in the industry.

“There has been a 36 per cent decline in starts among disadvantaged young people since the levy”

Similarly, while only 23 per cent said they would consider a job in transport and logistics, the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport found that 54 per cent of logistics firms expect to experience skills shortages by 2024. If these skills shortages are not addressed then the UK will struggle to meet the goals of the levelling-up agenda.

A central aim of the levelling-up

agenda is increasing pay, employment and productivity in every part of the UK. In the past five years, since the introduction of the apprenticeship levy, there has been a 36 per cent decline in the number of apprenticeship starts among young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

SMEs have been particularly impacted by the reforms to the apprenticeship-funding system, with many smaller firms struggling to meet the financial commitments required.

This is of particular concern, given that SMEs have historically been more likely to offer level 2 apprenticeships which offer opportunities to people without academic qualifications, thus promoting social mobility among disadvantaged groups.

While the 2019 reforms to the apprenticeship levy system did take steps to provide additional support for SMEs offering apprenticeships, the government should consider whether additional actions should be taken as part of the levelling-up agenda.

And with the increasing cost of attending university, apprenticeships have the potential to provide an alternative route to many young people, as well as older workers looking to change careers.

The levelling-up programme offers a valuable opportunity to support economic development across the UK and to bring opportunities to regions and communities that have historically struggled with high unemployment and a lack of investment.

If these opportunities are to be realised in a way that will promote long-term, sustainable growth and improvements in prosperity across the UK, then apprenticeships will constitute a vital part of achieving these goals, providing a long-term solution to the skills shortage and promoting social mobility.

City & Guilds are the headline partner of the Annual Apprenticeship Conference 2022

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Opinion

Students are keen on apprenticeships, but still need earlier guidance



CLARE MARCHANT
Chief executive,
UCAS

Among current undergraduate applicants, almost half expressed an interest in apprenticeships, writes Clare Marchant

As part of FE Week’s focus on apprenticeships, we’ve delved into our latest UCAS survey data to get an up-to-date picture of how the undergraduate students and apprentices of the future feel about their next steps – setting them up for life.

When we recently asked current year 12 and equivalent students how important they felt a degree was to their career plans, 72 per cent said “very”. However, within these respondents, 33 per cent said that they would rather do a degree apprenticeship than a traditional degree – and a further 14 per cent said that they don’t have a preference.

Degree apprenticeships are clearly becoming more valued by young people, even by those who feel a degree is very important for their career. Among all respondents, the interest in degree apprenticeships is now at 36 per cent.

As this cohort gets closer to making decisions, we expect the appeal of apprenticeships to grow even further. Among current undergraduate applicants, almost half expressed an interest in apprenticeships when they set up their UCAS account.

However, there is a gulf between interest and supply of opportunities – just 3,600 apprentice starts in England were undertaken by apprentices aged 19 or under.

One of the most surprising results from our survey respondents was that students from more advantaged backgrounds (POLAR quintile 4 and 5) are most likely to still be unsure about their career plans. It may be that they feel confident in keeping their options open for now.

By contrast, those from slightly more disadvantaged backgrounds (Q2 and Q3) know what they want to be and have a clear plan – these individuals are focused on the task at hand.

“We expect the appeal of apprenticeships to grow even further”

Unsurprisingly though, those who have not received any careers advice (not even chats with friends/family) are most likely to be unsure about their career, or to have a firm plan.

Students who have had careers advice

from outside of school are most likely to have a clear plan, highlighting the importance of building networks beyond the school gates.

The most common form of careers advice comes from family and friends (with around two-thirds having received guidance). Additionally, the most popular form of future career advice is to have a one-to-one with employers.

Worryingly, 12 per cent say they are yet to receive any guidance. Excellent careers advice is absolutely essential for young people as they make big decisions. We know [ucas.com](#) and our supporting social media channels are online sources for guidance, so we are investing in them to reach students early because GCSE choices can have huge implications years later. Around one-fifth of students couldn’t

study a degree subject that interested them because they didn’t have the right subjects to progress.

The overriding message is that relevant and meaningful careers advice for students is essential, including advice coming earlier than perhaps many would assume. From before first choices are made about GCSE options, right through to graduation and employment, feeling confident about next steps comes from being able to make well-informed decisions, using relevant and accessible data.

Last week, we hosted several online events as part of National Careers Week, helping students with their decisions and giving them the opportunity to find out what employers are looking for.

“There is a gulf between interest and supply of opportunities”

That’s in addition to our in-person discovery exhibitions and all our existing online content, including the new careers quiz we introduced in the autumn. This clearly shows the link between the courses that previous students have studied and what jobs they went on to do, providing personalised and timely guidance to individuals.

Our aim is to bring true parity across undergraduate courses, apprenticeships and technical training by independently presenting these choices side-by-side. Hopefully, more young people will choose the right course of study for them.



BTEC | 20 AWARDS 22

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Profile



JESS STAUFENBERG
@STAUFENBERGJ

Sally Dicketts, who steps down as chief executive of Activate Learning this month, talks to Jess Staufenberg about getting staff development right – and where she found her two life-changing coaches

I clearly remember first meeting Sally Dicketts. It was last year at the Association of Colleges' conference, where, as president since 2020, she was overseeing one of the first big face-to-face events in many months. She had on a brilliant red dress, and as I ushered her towards a tiny room for The FE Week Podcast, she noticed great spots of what looked like black bike oil along the hem. "What is that?" she admonished them for a moment. Then she brushed the matter aside, sat down in front of the mic, and gave a fascinating interview. No nonsense, no fuss, straight to the point.

Dicketts' aura of authority – you can completely see why she was voted AoC's president – must come from 18 years of being the chief executive of Activate Learning, an Ofsted grade 2 college group with seven colleges across Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Surrey. Dicketts is stepping

down at the end of this month, but in her first interview with this paper back in 2014, she said she thought she might have been passed over for roles earlier in her career because of a lack of "gravitas", being naturally very "chatty" and without an Oxbridge education. Nowadays, she exudes authority, without throwing it about.

It's clear Dicketts has put tremendous effort into developing herself, and her staff in turn, during the past couple of decades – from a girl in Cardiff with dyslexia whose potential was often overlooked, to becoming principal at Milton Keynes College by 1996 and then chief executive at Activate Learning in 2003. Coaching has been instrumental, she says. She found two long-term coaches – Paula and Nick – herself. Paula she met over a decade ago on a training course run by LSIS, the forerunner to the ESFA.

"They were piloting this very innovative programme and both Shelagh Legrave [now the FE Commissioner] and I were on it. It was unusual because you were there for a day and a night, and one of the tasks was you literally had to talk for 30 minutes about what you were trying to achieve in your organisation," recalls Dicketts.

"They gave you a coach, and mine was Paula, and she just picked apart all my barriers, very delicately and very impactfully. And I just

'I give lots of learning opportunities, but I expect you to meet me halfway'

thought, 'You're brilliant'."

Since then, Paula has coached and supported Dicketts with operations and organisational matters. Meanwhile, her other coach, Nick, has helped her focus on strategy and culture. She found him on a training course at St George's House in the grounds of Windsor Castle. "He was the facilitator, and he was phenomenal. At the end I asked if he would coach me."

It must have made an extraordinary difference to have two professional people, external to the college context, to freely bounce ideas and problems with. Dicketts' determination to keep improving herself seems the opposite of complacent, overconfident leadership.

It's such a priority that she made sure all her senior leaders also got an external coach, paid for by the college group. She additionally appointed a director of coaching



who trains middle management staff to coach one another, and in 2020, following the global Black Lives Matter protests, "dual coaching" was introduced.

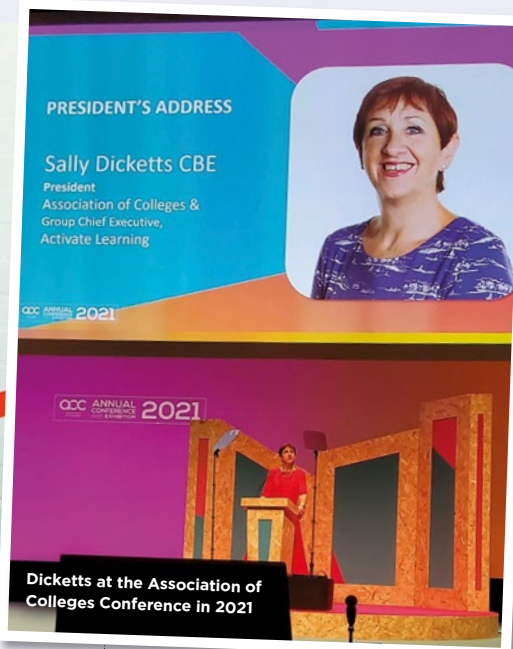
"I worked with our ethnic minority staff to look at what was happening in our

Profile

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Dicketts, Angela Richardson MP and local business leader Kathy Slack officially open a training centre at Guildford College



Dicketts at the Association of Colleges Conference in 2021

institutions and was horrified at some of the behaviours and a lack of sense of belonging," she notes. "So those staff who are aspirational are mentored by a senior manager – but the senior manager is also mentored by the member of staff, on what it's like being in an ethnic minority in our institutions."

It seems to be working: there has been a 40 per cent increase in staff with black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds applying for and getting faculty manager roles, compared to before the coaching initiative was introduced.

But for Dicketts, her leadership has been about demonstrating that while staff will always be developed, the individual is expected to put in hard work for themselves too. On this, she wanted to set an example.

"For me, if you are a learning organisation, the most senior person should be the best learner," she explains. "I'm always learning, and I'm still reading." Right now Dicketts is reading *Atlas of the Heart* by Brené Brown, a former US social worker turned researcher who discusses vulnerability and shame, or a lack of sense of self-worth, and leadership. Dicketts has wanted to boost her staff's sense of self-worth but has also expected them to take opportunities. It's the same for students, whom she regularly reminds that "cleverness is like a muscle – it increases the more you use it".

"Some people might say, 'Sally Dicketts didn't give me what I wanted' – I've given you learning opportunities, but I won't take you there, you need to meet me halfway," she says frankly. "For instance, do I want staff to do all the heavy lifting for students? Absolutely not. And that's the same in how I lead." Dicketts has

hoped to lead by example, always developing herself and taking opportunities, and giving staff opportunities for development for them to take too.

One of the greatest challenges of leadership has been what to do when someone is not developing themselves as expected, she continues. "That's difficult, when you're going into an organisation and you're meeting students who aren't getting the great deal you thought they were, and for many of them, this is their last opportunity, and they will suffer. We talk about our learning philosophy, and there's a buzz around that. But if there's a teacher who doesn't understand that, and we've not enabled that enough, that's hard."

"For me, if you are a learning organisation, the most senior person should be the best learner"

Dicketts is admirably frank about her own mistakes as a leader in some of those situations. "Normally the place where you might get it wrong is around people, where instead of challenging them to develop themselves further, you've actually made them feel worse about themselves, and that's not great. Then it's about trying to resolve that."

This is why the best and most important continuous professional development for leaders focuses not on the 'what' of leadership, but on the 'how', she says. "CPD

for leaders has improved, but it can tend to be on the 'what', so that leaders must know about balance sheets, cash flows, marketing, which I wouldn't disagree with, but actually it's, 'what are the biggest barriers to the individual succeeding?' And that's behaviours. It's about looking at your behaviour as a leader."

On this, Dicketts has all the self-insight of someone who has been coached effectively for at least a decade. "So for example, I can do things badly, I can be distracted, I can probably have a grumpy day. If that's pointed out to me, I will apologise. You have to do a lot of work to see your strengths and weaknesses."

It's perhaps unsurprising then, that neuroscience is one of the five "drivers" for the 2021 to 2025 strategic plan that Dicketts is leaving Activate Learning with when she steps down. Understanding the science behind teaching and learning must be a key pillar in the group's decisions. The other four are: globalisation (the need to have strong global relationships, as particularly exemplified through Covid, Brexit and the Russian invasion of Ukraine); technology (its importance but also the impact of device use); sustainability (of the organisation and the planet); and wellbeing (particularly since the stress caused by the pandemic).

Dicketts also leaves Activate Learning the legacy of a new structure, through its academy trust (which opened in 2013 and now has four UTCs and two secondary schools) and a reworked college staffing structure – both moves designed to break

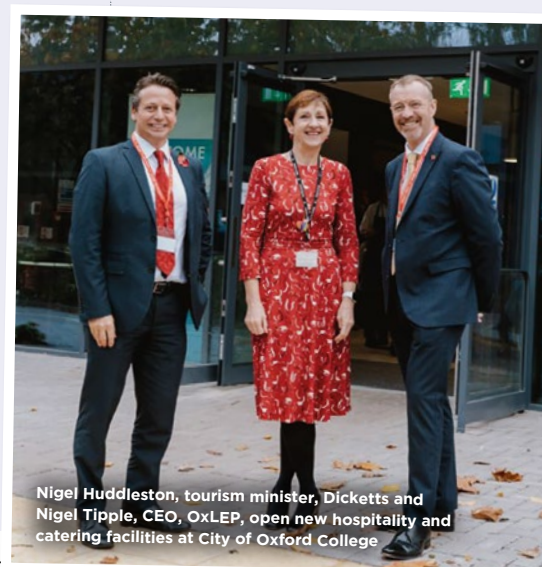
down barriers between institutions and to create opportunities for development. It's particularly her move around her senior leadership structure that pricks up my ears.

"We have a very unusual leadership structure, in that we don't have college principals," says Dicketts. In 2015, she replaced the principals of each college with cross-college faculty and executive directors instead, because she was finding that "principals were loyal to their college, not to Activate Learning".

The faculty directors are responsible for six programme areas across all colleges: technology, lifestyle, creative industries, land-based, life skills; and then A-levels, professional, business and other studies as the final programme area.

There are also three director roles: a director of pathways, who looks outwards to where learners are headed; a design director, to design the programmes; and a delivery director. "All three have to work very closely together." The move has largely worked, says Dicketts, although design directors needed time and training to grasp the role, and she thinks the delivery director role needs tweaking. It's work for the person who will replace her: Gary Headland, joining after seven years as chief executive at Lincoln College Group.

As a leader, Dicketts has clearly been fascinated by how people develop and learn, driving through new roles, new challenges and free coaches during her tenure as an authoritative, motivated person. Now, she's headed for a well-earned break, not planning on becoming an interim college principal, and remaining in post as AoC president. All in all, as she bows out, she's happy. "The team universally embrace learning, feedback and coaching. There's a real learning culture."



Nigel Huddleston, tourism minister, Dicketts and Nigel Tipple, CEO, OxLEP, open new hospitality and catering facilities at City of Oxford College

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Advertorial

WHY EDUCATORS NEED TO PRIORITISE QUALITY IN EDUCATION

Following two years of workplace changes and as technological development continues, educators around the world are increasingly recognising the need to update their teaching and training practices to provide the highest quality provision for all.

High quality training resources create higher levels of accessibility, offering inclusive learning opportunities for more. As a leading UK based online training provider, we at The Skills Network are committed to this cause, developing high quality and accessible training resources to close national labour shortages.

Following updates to the Ofsted framework we have developed our leading industry technology, providing diagnostic and pre-assessment resources, allowing educators to predict learner success rates prior to starting a course and offer a individualised training experience.

This alongside expertly developed user experiences (UX), reviewing and refining every element of the digital user's journey through a process deeper than how it looks. The Skills Network ensures the development of a seamless and efficient online experience, providing a quality of learning far greater than simply the aesthetic, made accessible through digital means.

Unlocking quality content - how have digital developments helped?

Digital developments in the world of learning and upskilling have opened the doors to education for many more people, and while digital exclusion is an obstacle that must be overcome, learning through digital offers more flexibility to access upskilling resources and content for personal development and career enhancement.

The likes of shift workers or busy parents

Committed to Quality



Making Learning & Skills Accessible
theskillsnetwork.com



who struggled to find the time to upskill before the online and remote training world developed, now have access to self-development opportunities and this is something that should be celebrated.

Each individual has the right to learn and better their skillset, but not everyone has the same lifestyle. Ensuring we're flexible in our approach to training supports the need for inclusive skills development. Through flexibility in businesses training allows for the most engaging and successful staff development, creating skilled and efficient workforces.

What are we doing to increase accessibility?

Here at The Skills Network, when we design bespoke course content, we work in partnership with employers to embed their terminology, ethos, and values into their online learning

programmes, allowing us to deliver a bespoke learning experience perfectly fulfilling the needs of the employer through a flexible customer first method.

The ability to learn online is a great step towards ensuring everyone has access to new skills and career development opportunities, outside of the traditional education system and we believe that the education sector need to develop traditional approaches to teaching and training, and the quality of a learning experience must be prioritised in this.

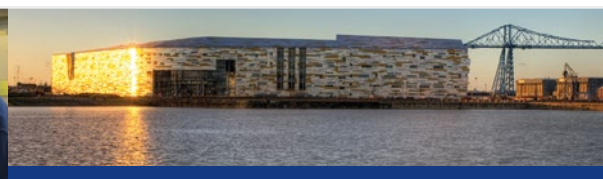
How do we ensure quality is delivered?

We, at The Skills Network are committed to quality, having developed an understanding of the learner and their needs through continuous market insight, we have now developed a depth of learner insight never before seen.

Our new report The Generational Divide highlights our commitment, showcasing the variances in generational learning preferences and offering insight into the needs of all learners regardless of age. The report sheds light on a gap in educational content, highlighting the dated methods of development in the modern learning landscape.

For those working in education, the variance in learning preference and the growing demand for digital learning resources calls for tighter control over the quality of online content. As the digital health agenda grows as does the responsibility of educators in ensuring their students receive high quality and safe online experiences, regardless of platform and device.

To get in touch please contact sales@theskillsnetwork.com



Deputy Principal / CEO

Up to a six-figure salary could be on offer to the right candidate

Middlesbrough College is the largest further education provider in Teesside. It provides predominantly further education but also selected higher education provisions to over 13,000 students. Middlesbrough College also employs over 1,000 staff out of their £100m state of the art campus.

Whilst retaining and developing its traditional offering it has also recently been selected as the Tees Valley hub of the North East's Institute of Technology – A new concept providing higher technical training through collaboration between further and higher education and employers. The funding secured through the Institute of Technology has been invested in extending the College's STEM Centre, the latest expansion of the Middlesbrough College group, bringing a

range of academic, technical, and vocational training opportunities to learners across the region.

Job Purpose:

To develop, lead and manage a high quality curriculum offer that meets local and emerging economic needs, and provides our students with excellent teaching and learning alongside programmes which develop their character, resilience and behaviours to prepare them for their next steps. To deputise for the Principal / CEO as and when required.

For more information or a confidential discussion please contact Anthony Antoniou on 07714 743343 and to apply send your CV to anthony@imperialrecruitmentgroup.com

Do you have experience leading and managing a large and complex curriculum department, faculty or small college?

Do you have a passion for pedagogy and an up to date knowledge of evidence based practice?



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Vocational Learning Manager

An exciting opportunity has arisen in the ELATT Vocational Learning department, managing the Vocational Learning and Sixth Form teams. You will need to be a strategically-minded manager, focused on seeing the bigger picture but with a keen eye for operational detail. You will believe passionately in our vision to create opportunities for our students at all stages in their progress, combined with an even stronger belief in the skill and determination of your team to achieve that.

Salary: £37,000 - £40,000
Deadline: Monday 28 March 2022, 10 a.m.

Vocational Team Lead Administrator

Our vocational team lead administrator will have one of the most important roles in the department: ensuring that our tutors and support workers are organised, up to date and well supported. Through this your work will have a positive impact on learner achievement and staff satisfaction.

Salary: £25,000 - £28,000
Deadline: Monday 28 March 2022, 10 a.m.

Careers Advisor

As our careers advisor, you will play a vital role supporting our students into sustainable jobs and careers. Apply now and join our learning community today!

Salary: £24,000
Deadline: Monday 28 March 2022, 10 a.m.



Exam Writers and Reviewers – ESOL (International)

Home-based with some occasional in person training
Contracted Services
Competitive fees

Summary of the role

We are currently recruiting for Exam Item Writers and Exam Reviewers for ESOL (International).

Writers will need to be able to produce assessment items and question papers as detailed on the commissioning agreement, in accordance with ESOL and CEFR criteria and Open College Network West Midlands' qualification specifications and associated guidance.

Reviewers will need to be able to mark scripts as detailed on the commissioning agreement, in line with ESOL and CEFR criteria and Open College Network West Midlands' qualification specifications and associated guidance.

Summary of skills and experience

- You will need to have at least 3 years' experience in writing/ reviewing/ materials and development, preferably for high-stakes ESOL

examinations.

- Have a recognised TESOL certification at Certificate/ Diploma level or equivalent with Cambridge CELTA or DELTA.
- Have at least 5 years' experience of teaching adults ESOL.
- Have a knowledge and understanding of CEFR
- Have excellent attention to detail and proof-reading skills
- Be competent in the use of Word, SharePoint, excel and other data sharing platforms.
- If you have experience within these areas we would love to hear from you.

How to apply

For further information and how to apply for this role please contact Sarah Bailey, Compliance Manager on s.bailey@opencollnet.org.uk



Vice Principal and Dean of Higher Education

£68,667 - £70,707 (pro-rata if part-time)

Following the retirement of our longstanding and very successful Dean, an outstanding opportunity now exists for an exceptional academic leader to take up the role of Dean of Higher Education at University Centre Sparsholt (UCS).

UCS is a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) Gold rated provider of Specialist Higher Education. UCS is a central part of the wider Sparsholt College Group.

UCS aspires to appoint a new Dean to lead the higher education portfolio through the next exciting stage of its evolution. This role will be based at our beautiful Hampshire campus. As Dean, you will lead the development and implementation of UCS's strategic academic management. You will report to the Deputy Principal, and have significant interaction with Academic Boards of Study, College Committees and our Higher Education Strategy Group and contribute to the overall success and effectiveness of the organisation as a member of the wider management team.

The new Dean will bring a record of accomplishment in scholarship and academic oversight. You will bring extensive academic leadership experience in the higher education sector and experience in developing and implementing best practice teaching methodologies and curriculum development. You will also be comfortable building relationships with key internal and external industry partners.

The appointment can be made on a full-time or substantial part-time basis of 4 days per week. Please set out in your application your desired working arrangement.

Benefits include: relocation support, access to the Teachers' Pension Scheme, free car-parking, occupational sick pay, ability to access a range of CPD events and activities and On Site Accommodation (short term or long-term provision considered subject to terms and conditions)

An informal telephone conversation can be arranged by appointment with Suzanne Grant, Deputy Principal. In the first instance please email her PA at fiona.montrose@sparsholtcollegigroup.ac.uk to make arrangements.

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



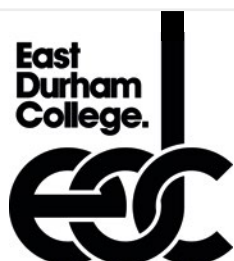
Closing Date: 28 March 2022

Application packs are available from:

01962 797309 | <https://www.sparsholt.ac.uk/college/jobs> | HR@sparsholt.ac.uk

UNIVERSITY CENTRE
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COLLEGE GROUP



Management Information Systems Report Writer

Location:
Willerby Grove Campus
(hybrid working available)

Salary:
Up to £35,000

Closing Date:
25th March 2022

There's never been a better time to join the fantastic team here at East Durham College, with recent investment in our already outstanding teaching facilities, and further investment still to come the College has a great deal on offer for both staff and students.

We have an exciting opportunity for a **Management Information Systems Report Writer** based at in Peterlee on a permanent, full-time basis. The role will be to provide technical support for the colleges information systems and intranet, developing reports for internal and external audiences, performing updates, and deputising for the Director of Data Management.

More information about the College can be found on our website. East Durham College is committed to safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, and therefore this role requires an Enhanced DBS check

To apply, please visit <https://httpslink.com/zsas>



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TRAINING PROVIDER NETWORK
WORK-BASED LEARNING

Greater Birmingham and Solihull Training Providers Network is looking for a Network Development Manager.

This is new full-time two-year fixed term post with a salary of £28k.

As a collection of Independent Learning Providers, we see the potential of having someone develop and manage the plans and possibilities of the Network for the benefit of all its members.

The role will include:

- Identifying and applying for funding and for programmes members can work together on collectively.
- Representing the Network at meetings and events with our

key partners.

- Keeping members updated with the latest news and managing our meetings and events.
- Helping to grow the Network.

For a full job description contact current Network Chair Noel Dunne
noel@creativealliance.org.uk

Closing Date **5.00pm 31st March**. Interviews will be held on-line on **Friday April 8th**.

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DEVELOPING ESSENTIAL DIGITAL SKILLS TO BRIDGE THE SKILLS GAP



It's been well reported that the UK is experiencing record-high employment levels, a sign of the health of the country's labour market. After the disruption in 2020, the UK has seen employer demand not only recover but reach levels seen before the pandemic. All regions in the country have experienced double-digit growth in job postings over the past two years.

But this strength hides a vulnerability – a mismatch between workers skills and those needed by employers. The OECD has found 40% of workers in the UK are in a profession that they are not qualified for.

Skills are a vital component of productivity. This mismatch has serious implications for the UK economy. It affects productivity, limits the competitiveness of UK businesses, and acts as a lag on individuals' pay progression and job satisfaction.

What are skills for work?

What do we mean when we talk about skills for work? These skills are personal qualities that make a person employable. Sometimes they are referred to as "soft skills" or transferable skills as they are different from the technical skills and work experience in a job role or industry. They can be applied to any area of work or life. They are arguably more important than ever due to the rapidly changing job market.

Evidence suggests that the UK's demand for skills – particularly technology and interpersonal/people skills will increase over the next decade, while the supply of these skills will be constrained. The in-depth analysis shows that 80% of the 2030 workforce are already in the workforce today. Reskilling the existing workforce will be a significant challenge between now and 2030.

Building a workforce for the future



Business leaders understand that reskilling is good for both businesses and society. This is key to a successful future workforce, identifying those workers who are being displaced from their roles, focusing on committees to manage this displacement, funding reskilling and upskilling – either out of company budgets or through government funding.

Lifelong learning is a critical aspect of building a workforce for the future, such as evolving the Apprenticeship Levy into a flexible Skills and Training Levy to unlock business investment in accredited training.

Lifelong learning ensures each employee has routes to continue expanding their skill set and can grow as technology improves and new industries emerge.

The CBI has called on the Government to act on several measures to prioritise learning and development. This includes

the Apprenticeship Levy being turned into a Skills and Training Levy, which will support higher levels of investment in training.

Opportunities for businesses

Those companies who are forward-looking recognise that the future will be digital. Planning for a digital workforce needs to be a top priority. Upskilling staff with essential digital skills has enormous benefits for businesses. Staff with these skills use them to improve their job performance, advance their careers and take on new responsibilities. This allows companies to address the talent gaps through existing talent pools, not just by recruiting new people.

Having improved digital capability helps individuals improve their personal resilience – from health and wellbeing to future employability. For example, the 2020 Lloyds Consumer Digital Index found

that people with high digital engagement report significant lifestyle and wellbeing benefits. 87% say it helps them connect better with friends and family, and 44% say it helps them manage physical and mental wellbeing.

The 2019 DCMS report No Longer Optional: Employer demand for Digital Skills describes digital skills as "essential entry requirements for two-thirds of UK occupations".

The good news is improving digital skills is also rising the priority list for employees. Recent research from Microsoft reports 59% of employees say developing their digital skills will be necessary to their employability. This suggests that helping people improve their digital capability could be part of the employer value proposition (EVP).

Find out how NOCN Group are supporting digital skills at: <https://www.nocn.org.uk/products/qualifications/digital-skills/>



THE STAFF ROOM

Dispatches from the frontline of FE

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Socio-political education should be embedded in the FE curriculum

Without a counter-narrative from educators, students can believe inaccurate versions of the world, writes Maxine Looby

One of the most valuable lessons I've learnt as a teacher is never to assume what I think my students know.

With the internet at their disposal, students have the world at their fingertips, and at the very least we would assume they have a basic understanding of significant world events. It's a very easy assumption to make.

I was teaching my students about the Holocaust when it soon became clear that out of about 15 students, only two had heard about this horrendous, globally significant event. My students speak English as a second language, and come from all over the world.

They were very moved and shocked. Sadly, as with the Holocaust, significant numbers of my students have had to flee war and persecution. But outside of my ESOL class, I think you'd also find this across the board, with many students.

“It shouldn't be up to an individual teacher to be interested enough”

There needs to be a real commitment to teach students about socio-political and historical events and contexts. Students often don't have a clear understanding of what's happening in the wider world, or their local history.

One takeaway for me from these lessons is the genuine interest and gratitude students show when given the opportunity to learn.



MAXINE LOOBY

ESOL lecturer

I also taught a class recently about the local history of Oldham, in our programme of study in ESOL called Skills for Life. Learning about past history and how this links to the local economy and current unemployment rates should be integral to learning.

Oldham was once the world's manufacturing centre for spinning cotton. Being able to physically reference some of the cotton mills from the classroom window brings that history alive, and it also directly pays respect to the Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities who came to Oldham and worked long hours in those same mills to help to build the economy.

It's especially important that all students from Oldham understand the history and

context, because it's a very multicultural town but division and racist attitudes still exist. Local history gives all of our students a sense of pride and purpose.

One student from South America came up to me after the lesson and said, “Thank you.” When I asked her why, she said, “I would never know this, and I appreciate all the work Asian people did when they came to this country to help me have a better life now.”

For International Women's Day, I focused on two extraordinary but little-known women. Amy Garvey was a feminist from the Caribbean, and one of only two women to chair the Pan African Congress, in 1945. She was also an author, educator, theatre producer, restaurant and club owner and executive

of the Black Star Line ship. She edited the first newspaper for African Caribbean communities in the UK and campaigned tirelessly for equality for girls and women.

“Local history also gives all our students a sense of pride and purpose”

Jayaben Desai was a factory worker who led a two-year strike in the 1970s against the way Asian women were being treated unfairly in the workplace, including being paid less than their white counterparts and having to request to use the toilet. At one point, 20,000 demonstrators joined in her protest. No one in any of my classes had heard of her. One my male students said, “Wow, that's a strong woman!”

This kind of learning challenges sexist attitudes, and it's also important for my women students. Some of them have faced very difficult or similar struggles coming to this country.

The real problem is that socio-political education is not embedded in the FE curriculum, or in the school curriculum. There's no requirement to teach students a rounded understanding of the world, or why things are like they are now.

It shouldn't be up to an individual teacher to be interested enough or understand the importance to bother to teach it. Without a counter-narrative from educators, they can believe versions that are inaccurate and which fuel tensions between communities.

Otherwise, too many of our students are only hearing one side of the story about their local area or wider global events.



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Opinion

Parents of older learners will be very sceptical about the SEND review



RACHEL AMOS

Co-founder, Support SEND Kids



JANVI PATEL

Co-founder, Support SEND Kids

The fight for resources becomes harder the older students become – making the SEND review especially critical for this group, write Rachel Amos and Janvi Patel

With a long trail of delays behind it, the government’s SEND review is billed to finally arrive this year, evaluating the support system for those students with special educational needs and disabilities.

There is already considerable concern amongst parents that not only are they not being consulted about the SEND review but that all the messages coming from government ministers suggest the focus is on changing the system (again) and not making the system we already have work better.

“His father says his life ‘fell off a cliff’”

From a legislative point of view, the system is good – the Children and Families Act 2014 pulled education, health and care together and enables a holistic approach. Unfortunately, it is in the implementation of the act, the divergence of application from one local authority to another and the fight that parents have to access help that lets this down.

Parents of older children and young adults with SEND will be the most sceptical of the SEND review outcomes. Education and health care plan (EHCP) provision is supposed to run until children are 25 years old, but in truth,

that is very hard to achieve. Most EHCPs are delivered at the top of primary school, with a decline in provision as learners move out of formal education.

I talked to Nick, who has a rare genetic condition, for this article. He was born in 1984, and Great Ormond Street Hospital refused to give him a life expectancy span – the only other recorded person with the condition had only lived to age 15. Nick is now 37.

He cannot speak, as he has a tracheostomy, so Nick had a statement in school and was supported. But when he left aged 17 – unable to complete A-levels – his father says his life “fell off a cliff”. He has never had a paid job and got very little support. He is very good at spelling, and is very active in online chat groups about his condition, but at 37 his health is poor. The family feel strongly that if he had been better prepared for leaving school, he could have been able to contribute much more, and might even have had a job.

Stories like these are a waste of opportunity and capability, and a waste of the stated support Nick was given, which vanished overnight. Not only did his educational funding disappear, a new struggle began and this is the reality for many parents of older SEND students.

The personal independence payment (PIP) was brought in in 2013 by the then chancellor George Osborne to replace disability living allowance (DLA) as part of the austerity cuts. PIP is assessed very differently from DLA, and even if a child has had DLA throughout education there should be no

assumption that they will get PIP post 18. It is also a lower amount, despite the costs for the SEND young adult increasing as they get older.

“Stories like these are a waste of opportunity and capability”

At a point of extreme change and flux, SEND children and their parents may embark on the toughest legal fights of that journey, on a diminished income. Only eight per cent of parents of disabled children are in work.

Another obvious flaw in the system is for learners who have a late

diagnosis – this is particularly likely if they are neurodiverse or have a hidden disability.

One of the parents that Support SEND Kids interviewed last year spent £50,000 to achieve support for her daughter who was diagnosed with autism at age 17. That is well beyond the means of most parents and these sorts of costs are financially crippling. Who knows how good her outcomes might have been if she had been diagnosed earlier?

The recent SEND Money Survey carried out by Let Us Learn Too and the Disabled Children’s Partnership reported that UK families have spent a combined £14.6 billion fighting authorities, a tragic waste of money and time, given that appeals have a 95 per cent success rate. And in many cases, “success” may come too late for some of the older learners.

Families with learners who are over 16 stand to lose a lot if the SEND review fails. We mustn’t let any more lives fall off a cliff.



Opinion

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Can we reduce learner drop-out without increasing trainer workload?



BRAD TOMBLING

Customer success director,
Bud Systems

Training managers end up struggling with caseloads due to the volume of reporting required, writes Brad Tombling

The training provider sector is critical to delivering the full skills complement needed to run tomorrow's private and public sector businesses.

The future of the training industry is optimistic. But there are some operational and policy-induced hurdles to jump first.

Learner withdrawal rates pose one of the most significant challenges to a training provider. According to the Department for Education, 40 per cent of apprentices in England who start an apprenticeship drop out early.

So training managers are constantly striving to strike a fine balance between the quality of training and increasing the quantity of its learners.

"A blanket approach is sure to increase withdrawal rates"

The government has heralded skills and training as the way to help the country "build back better" after the pandemic – so we need to get this right.

The question is: where should training providers be focusing their attention?

Lengthy and bureaucratic reporting

Growth is rarely a byproduct of doing more with the same level of resource.

In the training industry, it's clear that increasing the volume of learners without increasing the resource can impact that intricate balancing act of quality and

quantity.

In effect, it leads to training managers struggling under the weight of an increasing caseload due to the volume of reporting required.

This reporting is not only for the learner and employer, but also to meet ESFA and Ofsted requirements.

But anything that forfeits time spent observing and guiding the learner and improving outcomes is detrimental to both the learner and the training manager.

This means there is a need to modernise business operations.

Demotivating factors

Trainers are no longer just trainers, they are more akin to coaches guiding learners in developing the skills, knowledge and behaviours to succeed.

Knowing how each learner is progressing at any given moment and, importantly, how engaged they are in the curriculum are metrics that trainers and managers rely on.

A lack of motivation and engagement can result in the learner taking longer to complete their training. Or in the worst-case scenario, they may become so

unmotivated they withdraw.

It's a trainer's job to keep them on track and engaged while balancing the weight of necessary reporting requirements.

Avoiding the urge to treat every learner the same

Every learner is different. Some will welcome challenges and others will prefer to comfortably meet the minimum standards.

"Streamline workflows by tracking learners in real-time"

Last summer the ESFA did a U-turn on the learning support needs assessment after initially proposing to ban it. The guidance was reviewed to support those with a specific learning difficulty or disability.

But arguably, the principles of a learning assessment and a personalised approach

should also apply to all learners at the outset and throughout.

After all, a blanket approach is sure to increase withdrawal rates.

So how can trainers achieve this?

Here are some tips for managing trainer workloads, while boosting learner engagement:

1. Build a rapport with learners and measure engagement regularly, anticipating any possibility of drop-out.
2. If engagement levels drop, adapt quickly to understand why and take positive intervention, which might include altering the curriculum content or by reviewing at their next progress meeting.
3. Streamline and smooth workflows by tracking the learner in real time to meet compliance requirements.
4. Build interactive activities into the curriculum to track knowledge and behaviour and use this data to inform future training delivery.



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Opinion

As the boss of an independent apprenticeship provider, my hands are tied



IAIN ELLIOTT
Chief executive, Humberside Engineering Training Association (HETA)

FE colleges have access to capital and bailout funding, but independent providers are largely ignored, writes Iain Elliott

At HETA and GTA England we don't do politics, just training. But we do welcome MPs of all political persuasions to visit, because it helps us inform the skills and training debate and raise awareness of what we do.

If we can help to shape government policy that's great. It's important that people get out of Westminster and listen to learners and employers.

The latest politician to call in was Toby Perkins, shadow minister for skills and education. He toured our headquarters in Hull and chatted to learners and apprentices working on fabrication and welding, mechanical and electrical engineering.

He wanted to know about their journey from school to traineeships and apprenticeships, and about how we help them get jobs. He spoke to employers about how to use their leftover apprenticeship levy. He asked a lot of questions and listened intently.

Mr Perkins was impressed with learner attitudes, modern facilities that showcase attractive career opportunities and the strength of our relationships with employers dating back to 1967. This was when HETA was launched as an independent learning provider (ITP) in a rundown property near Hull's fish docks.

We've moved twice since then, most recently in 2018 to a site that we transformed with a £4 million investment helped by grant funding from the now defunct Humber LEP and support from Hull City Council.

Using reserves and borrowings, we've committed even more than that to a newbuild at Stallingborough, near Grimsby. We are aiming to open it in August 2023 to replace the nearby

facilities which we've leased for over 15 years.

"Give the ITP network fair and focused access to strategic funding"

We've also got a centre at Scunthorpe that is less than ten years old, and everything we do is consistent with the principles we adopted 55 years ago, working as members of the Group Training Association – GTA England – to deliver exactly the sort of training that businesses want. We are employer-led and we always will be.

But there has to be a level playing field. While FE colleges have had access

to capital and bailout funding, the ITP and GTA network is largely ignored.

Our new centre is a key element of a £42 million regional investment programme that is regenerating 189 hectares of land to create attractive new locations for business and industry.

We know from our work with GTA England and with hundreds of employers that the demand for the facility is there and will increase.

During 2021 we received more than 800 applications for 210 learner places. Numbers this year are similar but we haven't been able to access any capital funding from the government for the project, and we feel as though we are fighting with one hand tied behind our back.

In short: give the ITP and GTA network fair and focused access to strategic funding and we'll deliver the government targets for skills growth.

We also spoke to Mr Perkins about the enormous amount of effort we put into visiting schools and inviting students into our training centres, but there's a view among our team and among employers that parents and their children don't know enough about their post-16 options.

We would like to get to the situation where, at 16, we have more discerning customers.

Katie, an apprentice who is employed by a major local business and learning mechanical and electrical engineering, told Mr Perkins she worked in admin and knew nothing about STEM until she went to Rwanda with her Girlguiding group and experienced building houses.

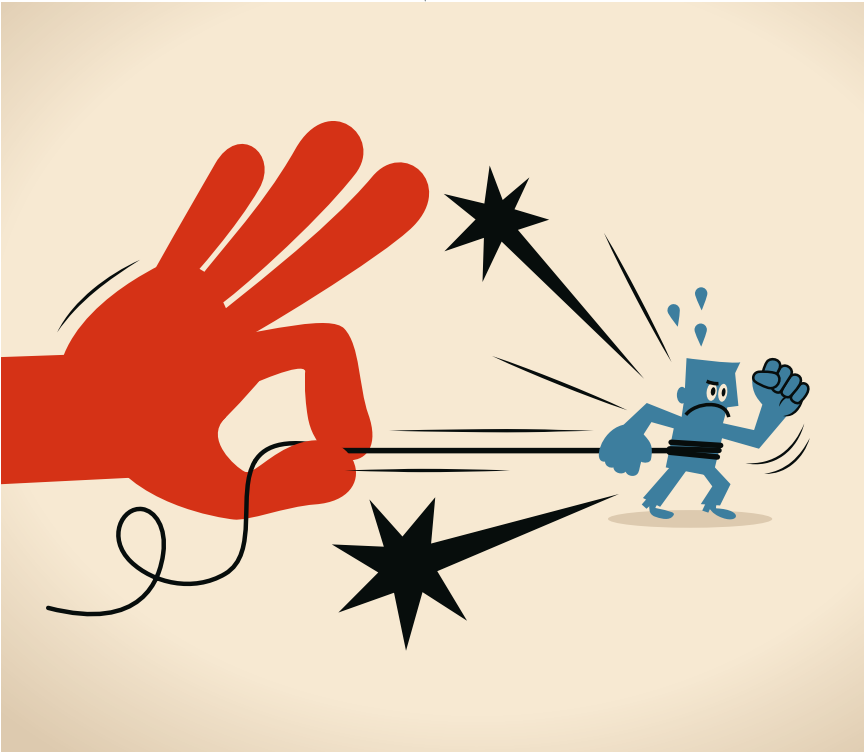
"We're working to get the message across to the real decision-makers – young people and their families"

It's great that she found her vocation, but she's now 27 and it really shouldn't have taken that long.

We're working to get the message across to the real decision-makers – the young people and their families – that apprenticeships are a fantastic post-16 opportunity.

And our message to the government is that there's never been a more important time to invest in training.

By the way – there's an open invitation for all policy makers and influencers to come to Humberside!



Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Apprenticeship reform starts with the school calendar



JO FOSTER

Director, Institute for Research in Schools

The apprenticeship cycle needs to move in line with university applications, writes Jo Foster

To kick-start apprenticeships in this country we need to be bold. Today, there is a stigma around apprenticeships where they are seen as “less than” a university degree. The perceived wisdom is that a student who wants to progress in life goes to university – for many it is seen as the only option.

In 2020, a Department for Education study found that 48 per cent of parents polled “worried” about the future earning potential of their children if they went down the apprenticeship route.

Furthermore, 35 per cent of parents still associated apprenticeships with manual jobs, and 45 per cent did not know you could earn a degree via an apprenticeship.

This is not only a huge shame for young people of all abilities and their life chances; if the country is to become a science superpower, we need an army of technicians and lab scientists to accomplish that – and apprenticeships are key to making that happen.

“On the continent, university and apprenticeships are regarded on an even footing”

On the continent, university and apprenticeships are regarded on an even footing. In the UK, teachers and senior leaders (including those inspecting schools) need to be supported to understand the huge opportunity and breadth available in apprenticeships.

Apprenticeships are suitable for all types of young people and are absolutely not



second best. This is a particular issue for science, as many students who are suitable for science apprenticeships are highly likely to be applying for a university course.

To match-make apprenticeships between students and businesses more effectively, reform needs to start with the school calendar. The apprenticeship cycle needs to move in line with university applications, or in advance of them. Apprenticeships should be made available in June and July, students interviewed in autumn, to start the following September.

The current cycle makes no sense – we need to give young people certainty over apprenticeship places before the university application process.

These students will almost certainly accept their university place so as not to take the risk of holding out for an apprenticeship place.

Here's how it would work well. In year 11, students should be encouraged to make clear what subjects and routes

they're exploring to give an indication to schools and colleges of what might be needed to meet their demand.

This could be shared with a regional apprenticeship lead (roles like this currently exist in many areas) or the education business partnership hub to ensure local knowledge about business and industry requirements is fully incorporated.

At the start of year 12, students thinking of an apprenticeship should be able to apply online, specifying what they are interested in and where.

Regional hubs can use this information to approach small and medium-sized enterprises in the local area and match them up with relevant students.

The apprenticeships available could be offered to students, with an application process in areas of high demand, in the summer before students start year 13.

Interviews could take place in August and September and places confirmed

at the end of September, before university places are offered.

This approach would need full government backing, most likely through the DfE, but there are huge advantages to investing in this, not least as it would result in spending the apprenticeship levy in a far more effective way.

“What stops students signing up to an apprenticeship is an overly opaque system”

Nationally, this would make apprenticeships more widely available, particularly in science, to students of all abilities and backgrounds, and there would be far fewer young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Locally, this would ensure apprenticeships in local areas match local business need, it would get more SMEs involved in the programme, and it would be particularly impactful in areas of deprivation where families may be unwilling to incur debt from university.

It's widely known that careers in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) increase social mobility – so it's a double whammy in the case of science apprenticeships.

This would also be of financial benefit to SMEs, giving them support to increase capacity and bounce back from the disruption caused by coronavirus.

Often, what stops students from signing up to an apprenticeship is a system that is overly opaque and bureaucratic.

Apprenticeships must reform to engage young adults by becoming easier to apply for and more relevant locally.

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Bulletin



Revealed: colleges’ moral dilemma over Russian energy contracts

Not really such a difficult dilemma, here are the options:

Option 1: Cheaper fossil fuel-based energy supplier, catastrophically environmentally damaging, but funds a warmer.

Option 2: Less cheap fossil fuel-based energy supplier, catastrophically environmentally damaging, but does not fund a warmer.

Option 3: More expensive renewable energy supplier, environmentally neutral or positive, but funds a warmer.

Option 4: More expensive renewable energy supplier, environmentally neutral or positive, but does not fund a warmer.

TTP, website

Focus feature: the realities of research in FE

And, of course, there are many of us who are so committed to identifying the root-cause issues behind the adverse symptoms we all see, that we haven’t waited for formal funding to become available. The report, The FE & Skills System (<https://ccqi.org.uk/research/the-fe-skills-system-a-study-by-the-policy-consortium>), written by Policy Consortium and The Centre for Creative Quality Improvement, identifies 21

important recommendations for the architects of the FE system. But as Jo rightly points out, without ‘formal money’ formal dissemination becomes a challenge.

Tony Davis, website

As vice-chair of the Research College Group steering committee, it is great to see us included in this article. The shame is that we are fighting to bring something to the sector that HMG provided for in schools. We have only gained a small amount of funding for our work, but hope that the quality of the report we have prepared as part of an FEDPG project makes the department realise we exist. With £200K per college, we could make a really big difference – we are doing pretty well with £0!!

Mike Saunders, website

Careers guidance still prioritises university routes over apprenticeships, new research finds

“They found that 39 per cent of pupils in state secondary schools said that they were not confident in their next steps in education and training compared to 29 per cent of pupils in private schools.”

The less affluent have fewer

REPLY OF THE WEEK

The lifelong loan entitlement doesn’t fit around the situations of learners

You only need to look at the USA to see what a loans-funded education system does to social mobility metrics and the ever-widening gap between rich and poor.

If govt expects only 25 per cent of current loan recipients will ever pay off their loan in full, that says a lot about how effective it is in terms of raising earnings and the inflating bubble of unpaid loans that the public will eventually have to pay.

However, it is a handy tool for the Treasury. They can get the expenditure off the balance sheet and flog off the good part of the loan book when they need some beneficial economic news (irrespective of who is in power).

So, back to USA. As of 2021 the US student loan debt was \$1.58 trillion (that is 12 zeros). Or \$4,800 for every single one of the 329 million people living in the States.

In the UK, with loans having been introduced in the early 1990s, the first ten years of debt got to about £10 billion, the next ten years it was up to about £40 billion, then in the last ten years stood at £160 billion in March 2021.

In the world of finance, that type of growth trajectory makes people salivate. In the real world it makes people cry.

Anna, website



realistic life choices and face more competition, which erodes confidence. This particular gap is more reflective of wealth inequality in society.

It would be interesting to see some stats on differences in progression to apprenticeships and degrees from state versus private schools. Personally, I think that the government predicting that only 25 per cent of student loan recipients will pay back their loan in full

should be ringing alarm bells, and that careers advice should be coupled with education on the financial implications of deciding their next steps...

Avoiding the disproportionate drag effect that debt has on the majority will do more for social equality and mobility than pumping up false confidence with ‘aspiration’.

Obvs, website

Bulletin

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Judith Feline

Trustee, Prisoners' Education Trust

Start date: April 2022

Previous Job: Governor, HMP Maidstone

Interesting fact: When Judith was working in Bedfordshire she secured a £2.4 million Millennium Lottery Grant to create the Forest Centre - a country park visitor and conference centre



Dan Baxter

Business Manager, Education Practice, Peridot Partners

Start date: April 2022

Previous Job: College Engagement Manager, National Citizen Service Trust

Interesting fact: Dan has won the trophy on Pointless but, sadly, didn't win the jackpot because of a lack of Taylor Swift knowledge



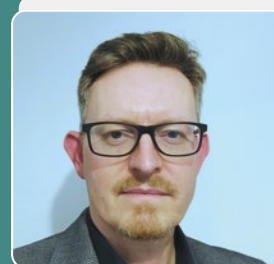
Jamie Rowley

Director of Apprenticeships and Employer Solutions, City College Plymouth

Start date: February 2022

Previous Job: Head of Academy for Construction and the Built Environment, City College Plymouth

Interesting fact: Whilst at a motel in Dover, Jamie was invited to dine with June Whitfield who was there with her family



Martin Buck

Head of Assessment and Product Development, Skills and Education Group

Start date: March 2022

Previous Job: Head of Digital Improvement, NCC Education

Interesting fact: Martin enjoys cycling and has completed many of the UK's iconic long-distance challenges, including the famous Land's End to John O'Groats, Lon Las Cymru and Scotland's North Coast 500

Movers & Shakers

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

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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