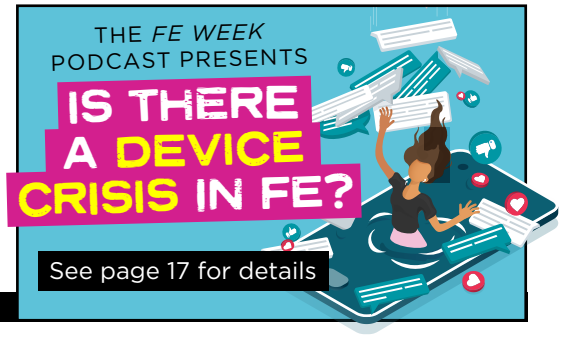
In-depth, investigative journalism, determined to get past the bluster and explain the facts for the FE & skills sector

FE WEEK

FEWEEK.CO.UK | @FEWEEK FRIDAY, APRIL 22, 2022 | EDITION 386



THE STAFFROOM

T Levels need urgent changes to be successful qualifications

Page 25





Lia Nici: From college lecturer to Boris Johnson's 'eyes and ears' in Westminster

Pages 19-21

DFE PUBLISHES CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY

Page 7



HOW TO TURN CONSTRUCTION TRAINING GREEN

Page 27



APPRENTICE RECRUITMENT CAP STRIKES AGAIN

- **DfE's cap on small businesses from April 2021 remains at 10**
- **Starts halted just as businesses recover from pandemic**

EXCLUSIVE

Pages 5-6

NCFE

Technical Education 16-19

Supporting providers in building their study programmes

Find out more

FE WEEK

MEET THE TEAM



Shane Chowen
EDITOR
@SHANECHOWEN
SHANE.CHOWEN@FEWEEK.CO.UK



Shane Mann
MANAGING DIRECTOR
@SHANERMANN
SHANE@LSECT.COM



Billy Camden
DEPUTY EDITOR
@BILLYCAMDEN
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK



Jess Staufenberg
COMMISSIONING EDITOR
@STAUFENBERGJ
JESS.STAUFENBERG@FEWEEK.CO.UK



Will Nott
SENIOR REPORTER
@WILL_NOTT1
WILLIAM.NOTT@FEWEEK.CO.UK



Simon Kay
SENIOR DESIGNER
SIMON@FEWEEK.CO.UK

THE LSECT TEAM

HEAD DESIGNER
Nicky Phillips

OPERATIONS AND FINANCE MANAGER
Victoria Boyle

SALES MANAGER
Bridget Stockdale

SALES EXECUTIVE
Tony Hudson

EVENT MANAGER
Frances Ogefere Dell

SENIOR ADMINISTRATOR
Evie Hayes

OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR – APPRENTICE
Zoe Tuffin

SUBSCRIBE

Stay in the know with an *FE Week* subscription, from as little as £1 per week. *FE Week* is the essential read for the FE & skills sector.

Visit feweek.co.uk/subscribe or email subscriptions@feweek.co.uk

Got a story?
Get in touch.
Contact news@feweek.co.uk or call 020 81234 778
FE WEEK

EDU WEEK JOBS

FEATURED JOBS

THIS WEEK'S TOP AVAILABLE JOBS IN THE FE SECTOR. TO FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION PLEASE TURN TO THE CENTRE OF *FE WEEK* OR VISIT THE WEB ADDRESS LISTED

TO ADVERTISE YOUR VACANCY WITH EDUCATION WEEK JOBS AND *FE WEEK* PLEASE CALL 020 81234 778 OR EMAIL ADVERTISING@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Derwent Training
TRAINING FOR YOU

DERWENT TRAINING
MULTIPLE OPPORTUNITIES
SALARY DEPENDENT ON ROLE
https://httpslink.com/vafl

Yeovil College

YEOVIL COLLEGE
VICE PRINCIPAL
QUALITY OF EDUCATION
£76,950 PER ANNUM
https://httpslink.com/cz5e

Abingdon & Witney College

ABINGDON + WITNEY COLLEGE
VICE PRINCIPAL CURRICULUM & QUALITY
£74,719 PER ANNUM
https://httpslink.com/3cjy

WAES WESTMINSTER ADULT EDUCATION SERVICE

WESTMINSTER ADULT EDUCATION SERVICE
MULTIPLE OPPORTUNITIES
SALARY DEPENDENT ON ROLE
https://httpslink.com/tfqs

fesussex
The consortium of Sussex colleges

CHICHESTER COLLEGE GROUP
CEO AT FE SUSSEX LTD
£85,000 (PRO RATA 0.8 APPOINTMENT)
https://httpslink.com/p6qp

Please inform the FE Week editor of any errors or issues of concern regarding this publication.

FE WEEK

EDITION 386



Contents

Outlooks variable: what the eight LSIP 'trailblazers' have stated in their newly published plans



Page 15



DfE to spend over £100m on a digital platform to launch Multiply maths scheme

Page 11



Education and Training Foundation boss stands down

Page 14



Scrapping smaller level 2 qualifications would be a national disaster

Page 26

FOLLOW US

WEBSITE FEWEEK.CO.UK

TWITTER @FEWEEK

FACEBOOK FEWEEK

LINKEDIN FE-WEEK

PODCAST
FEWEEK.CO.UK/PODCAST

SUBSCRIBE

Stay in the know with an *FE Week* subscription, from as little as £1 per week. *FE Week* is the essential read for the FE & skills sector.

Visit feweek.co.uk/subscribe or email subscriptions@feweek.co.uk

ADVERTISE WITH US

If you are interested in placing a product or job advert in a future edition please click on the 'advertise' link at the top of the page on feweek.co.uk or contact:

E: advertising@feweek.co.uk
T: 020 81234 778

DISCLAIMER

FE Week is owned and published by Lsect Ltd. The views expressed within the publication are those of the authors named, and are not necessarily those of FE Week, Lsect Ltd or any of its employees. While we try to ensure that the information we provide is correct, mistakes do occur and we cannot guarantee the accuracy of our material.

The design of the digital newspaper and of the website is copyright of Lsect Ltd and material from the publication should not be reproduced without prior permission. If you wish to reproduce an article from either the digital paper or the website, both the article's author and FE Week must be referenced (to not do so would be an infringement on copyright).

Lsect Ltd is not responsible for the content of any external internet sites linked to.

Please address any complaints to the editor.

Learning & Skills Events,
Consultancy and Training Ltd
c/o Mindspace,
9 Appold Street,
London EC2A 2AP
T: 020 8123 4778
E: news@feweek.co.uk

FE WEEK IS PROUD TO BE A MEMBER OF

besa
BRITISH EDUCATIONAL SUPPLIERS ASSOCIATION

AELP | 2022 conferences

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Skills for the future workforce

Headline Sponsor

the skills network

NEW SPEAKERS ANNOUNCED!

Monday 27 & Tuesday 28 June | Novotel London West | Hammersmith

BOOK NOW

AELP National Conference 2022 comes at a crucial time, when skills have never been so high on the government's agenda. As a result, we are delighted to announce that Alex Burghart MP, Minister for Skills, will be delivering a keynote speech at this year's National Conference.

The minister's speech will cover his priorities around skills and work-based learning, his view on the role of independent training providers in FE, and how he would like to work with the sector to deliver the government's skills ambitions.



Alex Burghart MP
Minister for Skills

The fantastic keynote line-up so far includes:

- **Amanda Spielman**
  Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, Ofsted
- **Jennifer Coupland**
  Chief Executive, Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE)
- **David Hughes**
  Chief Executive, Association of Colleges
- **Jules Pipe CBE**
  Deputy Mayor of London for Planning, Regeneration and Skills
- **Tracy Brabin**
  West Yorkshire Mayor
- **Kirsty Evans**
  Post 16 Regions and FE Provider Oversight Director, Department for Education
- **Jo Saxton**
  Chief Regulator, Ofqual
- **Anthony Impey MBE**
  Chair of the Apprenticeship Ambassador Network
- **Toby Perkins MP**
  Shadow Skills Minister



Exhibition & Sponsorship opportunities

The conference features an extensive exhibition area providing delegates with the opportunity to network and speak to key stakeholders operating in the sector.

This year we have two booth sizes available, with prices starting from **£3,950 + VAT**. For more information and view your floor plan, visit our website or contact the team via nationalconference@aelp.org.uk

For a full breakdown of further delegate fees including the discounted Associate Member rate, please visit www.aelpnationalconference.org.uk

Don't forget, full AELP members receive one **COMPLIMENTARY DELEGATE TICKET** for both days of the conference! Scan the QR code and book your place today!

Non-levy SMEs frustrated as DfE refuses to raise cap on appren starts

BILLY CAMDEN
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

FROM FRONT EXCLUSIVE

Small and medium-sized employers are turning apprentices away again due to a cap on starts that the government is so far refusing to reset or increase.

Non-levy-paying businesses have been capped on the number of apprentices they can start through the digital apprenticeship service since January 2020 – starting with a limit of three before increasing to ten that summer – to ensure the overall apprenticeships budget is not overspent.

The cap was reset to zero in April 2021 as SMEs fully transitioned on to the service and amid concern that employers were reaching the limit.

Apprenticeship providers and employers were hoping and expecting the cap to be reset again at the start of this month, or at least be increased, as reports emerged of a number reaching the limit.



"This is worst time to switch the tap off"

But there has been no communication to the sector from the Department for Education on the issue. A DfE spokesperson told *FE Week* this week that officials are keeping the level of the cap "under review to ensure it is sufficient to allow SMEs to use apprenticeships to grow their business".

Sector leaders say the stance flies in the face of the government's ambition to increase the number of apprentices in SMEs, especially after starts took a plummet nationally during the pandemic.

'This is the worst time to switch off the tap'

Gareth John, director at accountancy apprenticeship provider First Intuition, told *FE Week* he has ten SMEs who have reached the cap so far and are now being prevented from taking on any more apprentices despite plans to do so.

John said those being impacted are the "large" SMEs who have wage bills just shy of £3 million and therefore do not pay the levy but are "some of the most important employers, particularly in regional economies" as they are able to recruit large numbers of apprentices.

He said this is the "worst time to switch the tap off" as employers look to rebuild their staff levels following the Covid-19 pandemic. He added that apprenticeships are essential for teaching the "essential broader skills" that young people require after having their development hampered by the pandemic.

John added that his "big frustration" is that SMEs could wind the clock back five years where they do not do apprenticeships because of the barriers in their way.

One SME being stifled by the cap is Kirk Newsholme Chartered Accountants, based in Leeds. The firm's training coordinator, Amy Carter, said the company has hired 13 new trainees in recent weeks with plans to put them on apprenticeships on the assumption that the cap would be reset this month.

But Kirk Newsholme, which already has

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

News

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

CONTINUED

five of its ten apprenticeship spaces filled, has now been left in a position where it will have to choose some of the 13 new recruits to take the apprenticeship, while the remainder will instead be put through a commercial course.

On top of this, the company has a trainee on a basic level apprenticeship who is about to progress on to a higher level but in doing so will be classed as a new start. Another apprentice resigned five months into their programme, but they will still continue to take up one of the ten spaces under DfE rules.

Carter said the system "feels backhanded when the government is trying to grow the number of SMEs in apprenticeships but when employers try to step up, it all of a sudden comes to a halt".

She added that the new recruits who will have to be put through commercial courses instead will miss out on the "extra skills and benefits" an apprenticeship offers and cost her business even more. Carter said the cost of each apprenticeship usually ranges between £3,000 and £4,000 but the commercial training route typically costs around £14,000.

John listed a number of other employers, who did not wish to be named, that his provider works with and have hit the cap: "One of our employers in Bury St Edmunds said they wanted to sign up another five apprentices before the end of this year, another in Stevenage said four, one in Sheffield said 12, one in Norwich said they had recruitment plans for 20 more apprentices, and another in Royston said ten."

The DfE said its analysis of non-levy demand shows that a reservation level of ten was sufficient for 99 per cent of non-levy paying employers during 2020/21.

But John pointed out the DfE is most likely not comparing like for like, as in that year SMEs could also tap into procured non-levy contracts held by training providers. These contracts ended for new starts in April 2021 and all new SME apprenticeships must now be put through the digital apprenticeship service where all employers now manage and spend their apprenticeship funding.

John also questioned why the DfE wouldn't agree to lift the cap if only one per cent of SMEs were affected.

Levy transfers are 'no magic bullet'

One option the DfE offers to SMEs that have reached the cap is the ability to gain further funding for apprenticeships through the receipt of levy transfers from larger employers, which don't count towards the reservations limit.

But providers and employers who spoke to FE Week bemoaned the lengthy and bureaucratic nature of this process.

"The DfE seems to think levy transfers are some kind of magic bullet that will solve everything," John said. "We had one employer who went through the whole rigmarole of that levy-pooling service and when they got to the end of it, they were offered a fraction of the funding. It was useless."

Jane Hickie, chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, added: "Many SMEs find the transfer process too slow when they have new demand. Furthermore, there is no guarantee of funding through the levy transfer system, which makes planning growth difficult and is why the cap was increased in the first place."

Gordon Franks Training is one provider that has been able to secure levy transfer funding to help five of its employers who have reached the cap to take on more apprentices. But managing director Sue Fielding said the process is proving "problematic" because red tape is delaying the releasing of funds.

"Our employers are very, very frustrated. We have to go through loops to get the levy transfer, but what if I didn't have it? They would turn apprentices away," she said.

"This also only papers over the cracks as we have more employers nearing the ten cap and more funding will be required."

> "How does the government square this with the aim to increase SME participation in apprenticeships?"

A DfE spokesperson said: "SMEs play a key role helping to create apprenticeship opportunities, particularly for younger people and those in disadvantaged areas."

But Hickie hit back: "There are employers ready to take on more apprentices and providers that are happy to deliver high-quality training, yet inaction on the cap of ten is blocking them from doing so. How does the government square this with the aim to increase SME participation in apprenticeships? We urge officials to take action and either reset or lift the cap as soon as possible."



Jane Hickie

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

Climate change: New FE teachers must incorporate sustainability in their courses

WILL NOTT
WILLIAM.NOTT@FEWEEK.CO.UK



All new further education teachers will be required to build sustainability into their teaching next year as part of the government's climate change strategy.

The Department for Education's final policy document on the strategy was published on Thursday, following a draft that was released in November and launched at the COP26 conference in Glasgow.

The new "requirement" for FE teachers will come into effect in 2023. Existing college staff will, however, not be required to include sustainability into their teaching.

While the sector has responded positively to the government's commitment tackling climate change, the key policy proposed for FE doesn't go as far as college leaders had hoped.

The Association of Colleges sent a letter signed by 150 principals to education secretary Nadhim Zahawi in October calling for all courses for 16-to-18-year-olds to change to include compulsory modules on climate change. The AoC was unable to comment on the DfE's new strategy at the time of going to press.

Launching the Department for Education's climate change strategy on Thursday, Zahawi said: "We are delivering a better, safer, greener world for future generations, and education is one of our key weapons in the fight against climate change."

The policy paper says that by 2023 the government will develop an occupational standard for further education teaching that explicitly requires all new teachers to integrate sustainability into their teaching.

Teachers will be expected to do this through modelling sustainable practices and promoting sustainable development principles in relation to their subject specialism.

While it was not clear from the strategy whether new FE teachers will be required to teach sustainability to all students, including adults and 16-to-18-year-olds, the DfE told *FE Week*: "The requirement applies to all new teachers, regardless of courses/level."

Bill Watkin, chief executive of the Sixth Form Colleges Association, welcomed the plans, saying that sixth-form colleges have a "long-standing commitment" to the sustainability agenda.

"Teachers in sixth-form colleges are already mindful of the importance of tackling issues of sustainability in the classroom, and the most likely impact of this latest requirement is that it will help to embed, and perhaps even expand, existing good practice," he said.

Other key policy updates around sustainability were announced in the paper.

Policy makers said that by 2023 all bids for capital funding for further education and higher education will need to consider environmental impact, carbon reduction and adaptation measures, and align with the government's targets and objectives.

Ministers also pledged to introduce a new natural history GCSE by 2025. The new qualification will give young people a "further opportunity to engage with and develop a deeper knowledge and understanding of the natural world".

The government also said that every education setting will have nominated a "sustainability lead" by 2025. These leads will receive carbon literacy training and will be responsible for putting in place climate action plans.

The DfE said that "at least four schools and one college will have been built via the GenZero platform that the department demonstrated at COP26" – this will also happen by 2025.

The DfE told *FE Week* that the GenZero platform is a kit of parts for delivering the "widest range of educational buildings to the highest standards in the most economic method".

"As part of the development we are piloting five GenZero schools and colleges selected from the department's building programmes," the DfE told *FE Week*.

"Each will be selected on their suitability for incorporating the GenZero principles and will then undergo a rigorous monitoring and evaluation process to collect evidence on performance to technical and sustainability standards."

So far Forge Hill, a new free school in West Sussex, and Ashington College, Northumberland, have been selected to take part and are undergoing feasibility studies.

The government has previously spoken about how colleges will be "key" to hitting their target of supporting 440,000 net zero jobs by 2030.

The paper outlines how its existing programme of skills reforms, including trials of levels 4 to 6 short courses, the strategic development fund for colleges and local skills improvement plans each have a role to play in the sector's contribution towards green skills.

Zahawi warns of 'systemic antisemitism' in NUS and threatens to cut ties with union

BILLY CAMDEN
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

There is "systemic antisemitism" in the National Union of Students and the government may cut all ties with the organisation, the education secretary has told MPs.

Nadhim Zahawi was asked for his thoughts on the union during an education select committee hearing on Wednesday after several antisemitic allegations led to the launch of an independent investigation.

He told MPs: "I am deeply concerned about the NUS. It feels to me there is systemic antisemitism."

Zahawi said he is "worried" the union is going through the "same sad predicament" as seen in the Labour Party under former leader Jeremy Corbyn where, Zahawi claimed, "you have antisemitism rife and leaders within it either participating or turning a blind eye to it".

He added that the NUS, which represents students in both further and higher education institutions including apprentices, "needs to rebuild and regain the trust of Jewish students" as it has "collapsed".

> "The NUS needs to rebuild and regain the trust of Jewish students"

The intervention comes after Jewish students expressed concerns at the election of the NUS's president-elect Shaima Dallali, after it emerged she had made an antisemitic post on social media ten years ago.

Dallali wrote in 2012: "Khaybar Khaybar O Jews ... Muhammad's army will return



Nadhim Zahawi

#Gaza" – a reference to a massacre of Jews in 628. She has since apologised for the post, calling it "unacceptable".

And last month, current NUS president Larissa Kennedy allegedly told Jewish students they could segregate themselves at a conference concert in Liverpool to avoid hearing "anti-Israel" rapper Lowkey.

Kennedy allegedly put forward the "self-segregation" plan at a meeting with the Union of Jewish Students (UJS), whose members were worried about Lowkey's appearance at the concert, according to the UJS president.

Joint HE and FE minister Michelle Donelan tweeted last week that she was considering a "range of possible measures" in response to the allegations, including reporting the NUS to the Charity Commission and "full suspension from all engagement with government".

Zahawi told MPs during Wednesday's committee hearing that "no option is off the table, including our relationship with the NUS".

In response, a spokesperson for the NUS said: "There can be no place for antisemitism within the student movement. We are listening to the concerns being raised and we're very concerned about the pain and hurt being expressed.

"We will take any and all actions that are needed to remedy any wrongdoing and rebuild trust with Jewish students as well as our members, partners and stakeholders."

Later in the education committee session, chair Robert Halfon said that LBC radio has also revealed a recording where students attending an NUS workshop run by the Federation of Student Islamic Societies were told not to report any individual in cases where they had concerns they had been watching extremist material to Prevent.

Zahawi responded: "This is deeply concerning. I would like to look at the detail of this. That is very serious."

The NUS declined to comment on this allegation at the time of going to press as the union was waiting for a copy of the recording.

How the education select committee looks now

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The parliamentary education committee has welcomed five new members in the past year after several MPs stood down or took front-bench jobs.

The current committee looks very different to the one formed in early 2020 following the last general election.

The political make-up of select committees is determined by representation in the Commons, with parties putting forward MPs. Membership can change frequently.

For example, Christian Wakeford recently left the committee after defecting from the Conservative to the Labour party. Tory MP and former teacher Jonathan Gullis stood down after becoming a parliamentary private secretary (PPS), as did David Johnson, who is PPS to education secretary Nadhim Zahawi.

The Conservatives have seven MPs on the committee, while Labour has four. Chair Robert Halfon, with original Conservative members Dr Caroline Johnson and Tom Hunt, remains, as do Labour MPs Apsana Begum, Kim Johnson and Ian Mearns.

MEET THE NEW MEMBERS...

ANNA FIRTH, CONSERVATIVE JOINED MARCH 2022



A former councillor in Sevenoaks, Kent, Firth was elected as the MP for Southend West in a by-election in February this year following the murder of Sir David Amess.

She was the co-founder of the Invicta Academy, an online learning platform set up to provide lessons during Covid lockdowns. Invicta last year was forced to stop listing MPs, including the former education secretary Gavin Williamson and committee chair Halfon, as "sponsors".

Companies House records show Firth resigned as a director of Invicta in February.

CAROLINE ANSELL, CONSERVATIVE JOINED MARCH 2022



First elected as the MP for Eastbourne, East Sussex, in 2015, Ansell lost her seat in 2017 and then regained it at the 2019 general election.

She is a former French teacher and referred in her maiden speech to her "passion" for education.

She also served as a councillor on Eastbourne Borough Council.

ANGELA RICHARDSON, CONSERVATIVE JOINED MARCH 2022



Richardson was elected as the MP for Guildford in Surrey in 2019, replacing the former skills minister Anne Milton who ran as an independent after resigning the Tory whip in protest over Brexit.

Before becoming an MP, Richardson worked in investment banking and in the City. She has been a school governor and chair of a parent-teacher association.

MIRIAM CATES, CONSERVATIVE JOINED OCTOBER 2021



Elected in 2019 for the South Yorkshire seat of Penistone and Stocksbridge, Cates was once a science teacher in Sheffield.

She went on to own a technology business with her husband, and has talked about the importance of "digital skills".

KATE OSBORNE, LABOUR JOINED JULY 2021



Osborne has been the MP for Jarrow in Tyne and Wear since 2019.

She worked for Royal Mail for 25 years, and was a trade union representative.

She was also a councillor in Preston until her election to Parliament.

Pearson
BTEC



Unique benefits for BTEC Business students

Pearson BTEC has agreements with the CMI, CIM, CII and ACCA.

Each provides a progression pathway to students who want to focus on a specified area in the industry while making huge strides in their career progression.

Explore the benefits
btec.co.uk/businesspartners

ACCA CIM CIPD CMI

C0013 | © Shutterstock-fizkes

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

DfE to spend over £100m on a digital platform to launch Multiply maths scheme

BILLY CAMDEN
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The government is preparing to create a digital platform worth over £100 million to aid its Multiply maths scheme for adults.

A recently published prior information notice (PIN) states that the tool will not only signpost to the new free courses being created in local areas, but also assess skill levels and provide online tutoring.

Suppliers, who will be sought to bid for the work in July, are told that the platform needs to track participation, progress and achievement and report the data back to ministers.

Multiply, part of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, is worth £559 million in total over the next three financial years to the end of 2024/25.

The Department for Education unveiled the local area allocations for the scheme last week: £270 million is being dished out in England while another £160 million will be spread across Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Local areas have now been tasked with developing bespoke numeracy courses with training providers and employers to adults who do not already have a GCSE grade 4 or higher in maths free.

A DfE spokesperson told *FE Week* the remaining £129 million includes the department's budget for a new digital online platform set to be launched "later in 2022", as well as "a programme of work to evidence what works in addressing adult numeracy", which will include randomised control trials.

Stefan Drew, a consultant who has sourced numerous websites and platforms for colleges, questioned the "ridiculous" cost.

He told *FE Week*: "A standard FE website, carefully designed and costed, is under £100,000. So how can this digital platform be a thousand times more expensive? Even if it were to deal with a million students, the development cost would be the same, it would only need larger servers to host it. Servers are literally as 'cheap as chips' these days, so over £100 million is ridiculous.

"It's been suggested that the costs might include staffing over several years. In which case, why not say so? Why say it's for a digital platform? Such imprecise explanations help no one."

Drew added: "One thing is sure, the Multiply maths scheme for adults is certainly multiplying the cost of education manyfold. It makes me query how such extravagance can be justified when budgets are so tight for colleges."

Documents published alongside the PIN for an upcoming tender to build the platform state that this will be the national "front door" for Multiply, giving people the "ability to learn at their own place (including at work, or at home) and pace".

Through the platform, the DfE wants to see people sign up for "personalised free online tutorials" to help them "build their confidence and take the stepping stones towards a maths qualification".

The tender will have several components: a digital learning platform, platform content, and an online tuition offer.

The DfE said: "Across all three, we would like the platform to provide a diagnostic tool to assess skills levels (e.g. identify strengths and weaknesses) to help guide learners through the learner offer; and recognise a learner's progress."

Outputs for the digital learning platform include the ability for users to have an account that stores their participation, progress and achievements; offer some recognition of progression throughout the learner journey (e.g. certification) via the diagnostic and assessment tools; and a mechanism to route users to local Multiply interventions.

Outputs for content include a digital diagnostic tool to assess current skills levels; an assessment tool to benchmark user progression, against the initial diagnostic; online content and learning materials (e.g. practice exercises), which could be contextualised to real life (e.g. household finances) and particular industries (e.g. construction, business).



And outputs for the online tuition function include provision of Multiply remote tutoring for the lifespan of the programme, including recruitment and training of suitable tutors; an online booking system and support services such as a telephone line and webchat; a diary management system for the coaches and tutors; and a mechanism to assess a learner's eligibility (e.g. UK based) to participate in the tutoring or coaching offer.

The DfE said further details will be "available in due course".

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

Advertorial

BRITISH ARMY SEEKS ITPS TO SUPPORT THEIR APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMME – CONTRACTING LAUNCH



The British Army is holding an event for independent training providers (ITPs) to raise awareness of how their apprenticeship programme is delivered and what support services the Army needs from ITPs. The event will also cover how they can tender for these support contracts.

The 'Industry Brief for Training Providers' will be held at the British Army headquarters in Andover on Tuesday 10th May between 10.30am and 12.30pm. Attendees will learn about potential opportunities, timelines and how best to engage in the contracting process and be able to hear from representatives from army personnel policy, army education branch and army commercial.

As an employer provider, the Army delivers the majority of training in knowledge, skills and behaviours, as part of Army standard military courses. However, there are some aspects of a civilian apprenticeship standard which do not naturally fit within Army training.

The Army is looking for training providers who are able to assist them to support Army apprentices through their learning journey. These services include supporting induction and carrying out initial assessment and enrolment onto the apprenticeship; functional skills delivery (when required); managing data entry and individual learner records throughout the apprenticeship; carrying out regular progress reviews; preparation for end-point assessment (EPA) working with the Army nominated end-point assessment organisations (EPAOs) and support through the apprenticeship gateway. The training provider staff need to have the capability to work directly with Army units across a range of UK Army bases offering both face to face and remote support options.



Most of the Army's apprenticeships commence as the soldier starts their initial trade training course, ensuring the apprenticeship is closely related to a soldier's role. Offering an apprenticeship means that as well as becoming a better soldier, the soldier can be sure their apprenticeship will be valued both while serving and in the civilian employment sector.

The Army is keen to engage with a range of forward-thinking training providers as this model allows it to access the latest developments in apprenticeship delivery, working jointly to ensure a high completion rate that is well above the national average.

The Army was number one in the most recent Top 100 Apprenticeship Employers ranking and 90 per cent of new soldiers are enrolled onto an apprenticeship with more than 14,000 on programmes at any one time.

"Being listed top of the Top 100 was a really significant achievement for the Army. For those inside the organisation it provided reinforcement and validation of the outstanding training offer made to every soldier. Externally it demonstrated the breadth of the Army employment offer as well as its value to the individual whether their career aspirations remained within or outside the Army," said Col Matt Ketterer, DACOS education branch.

There are currently over 37 programmes in a variety of trades from engineering and construction to hospitality and animal care.

Training providers on the register of apprenticeship training providers (RoATP) that have the skills, capacity and capability to support this national programme and wish to attend the briefing event, should send their full name, organisation (max two names per organisation) and contact details to the Army apprenticeship team at ArmyIDev-Apprenticeship-Mailbox@mod.gov.uk by 3rd May 2022. You can also learn more about upcoming opportunities to work on the Army's apprenticeship program as ITPs and EPAOs on the Defence Sourcing Portal (DSP) (mod.uk) where you can register for alerts.

ARMY

News

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

EASTER HOLIDAYS *FE WEEK* NEWS ROUNDUP

SHANE CHOWEN
SHANE.CHOWEN@FEWEEK.CO.UK

A sector body resignation, a ministerial speech and some news on level 3 qualifications that made BTEC campaigners very happy – here is a roundup of some of the sector news you may have missed over the Easter holidays

College staff warn of strike action if pay doesn't increase by ten per cent

The University and College Union called for a ten per cent pay rise for college staff and warned that their members are ready for strike action, reported Will Nott.

In a letter to the Association of Colleges sent on behalf of UCU and other unions representing FE staff, the ten per cent pay increase also called for all colleges to become Foundation Living Wage accredited employers and for "significant movement" towards agreements on workload.

The UCU noted that staff pay has fallen by 35 per cent in real terms since 2009 and that an indicative ballot of its members showed that 91 per cent were in favour of strike action.

Negotiations with the Association of Colleges are expected to formally commence in May, but the AoC chief executive David Hughes said the union's demands are "clearly not affordable".

"Colleges are experiencing the perfect storm of inflation, energy prices, national insurance and national living wage increases as well as recruitment and retention difficulties in a very tight labour market. We will be thinking carefully and discussing together how best to respond. There is no simple solution with government restoring funding to where it should be" Hughes told *FE Week*.

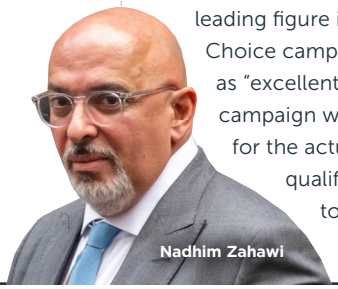
'Significantly' less than half of AGQs will get the chop, government concedes

The government confirmed that it expects to cut funding for only "a small proportion" of applied general qualifications, like BTECs, that sit alongside A-levels and T Levels, reported Will Nott.

The secretary of state for education, Nadhim Zahawi, said that "significantly less than half" of the total level 3 BTEC and applied general qualifications would have their funding removed.

Zahawi's remarks came in a letter to members of the House of Lords on the day they held their final debate on the skills and post-16 education bill. Lords had the opportunity to push an amendment from Lord David Blunkett that would have prevented funding removal for level 3 qualifications for three years. The amendment was dropped, with Blunkett telling *FE Week* that Zahawi's letter, and a corresponding ministerial statement in the Lords chamber, was "genuine progress."

James Kewin, deputy CEO at the Sixth Form Colleges Association and a leading figure in the Protect Student Choice campaign, described this as "excellent news" but said the campaign will be watching out for the actual list of defunded qualifications, which is yet to be published.


Nadhim Zahawi

'Unit for future skills' to launch this month – Burghart

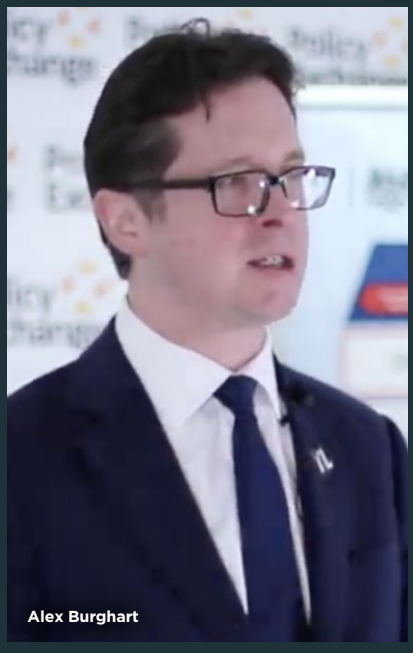
In a keynote speech for the think tank Policy Exchange, the skills minister Alex Burghart announced that a new unit for future skills would launch this month, reported Shane Chowen.

The unit was first mentioned in the government's levelling-up white paper which was published in February. It said that the unit would be cross-government, would be publicly accessible and will produce information on local skills demand, future skills needs of businesses and the pathways between training and good jobs.

In his speech for Policy Exchange, Burghart said, "Over time, we want to show what courses and interventions lead to what jobs. I want prospective students to know what happened to people like them, who chose a particular course at a particular institution. What were they doing a year, two years, five years later?"

Data from the unit will start to be produced "this month" the minister said. But he was keen to stress that it would be a very early version and that it will grow over time.

"Before anyone gets too excited, it's just the beginning. It won't give you all the answers you're looking for," Burghart said.


Alex Burghart

News

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

EASTER HOLIDAYS *FE WEEK* NEWS ROUNDUP

Education and Training Foundation boss stands down

David Russell left his role as chief executive of the Education and Training Foundation, reported Shane Chowen.

The announcement of Russell's sudden departure after eight years at the helm of ETF came with news that his deputy, Jenny Jarvis, had been promoted to interim CEO of the organisation with immediate effect.

ETF said that Russell's "decision to move on has been carefully planned and co-ordinated with the board, with a smooth transition in place for his replacement".

> "I am grateful to have played a part in helping teachers and leaders in our amazing sector"

He began his new role as executive-in-residence at the Oxford Saïd Business School earlier this month.

The Foundation's roster of training and development programmes for leaders and teachers grew under Russell's leadership,



David Russell

including its Taking Teaching Further programme and training for T Level delivery staff. According to ETF, over 180 principals and chief executives have taken part in its subsidised strategic leadership programme, delivered with Saïd Business School.

The news came just over a week after ETF announced that the DfE was cutting its grant funding by just over £3 million.

In a statement on the day of his departure as ETF CEO, Russell said: "It has been an amazing privilege to lead the ETF. The FE system is at its best when it works together for the benefit of all learners. I am grateful to have played a small part in helping teachers and leaders in our amazing sector be all they can be and flourish in their professional journeys."

The ETF board will recruit a permanent chief executive later this year.

DfE seeks brokers for SME T Level placements

The Department for Education announced that it is looking for organisations to help broker T Level industry placements in small and medium-sized employers, Billy Camden reported.

Up to £350 will be paid per placement to the winning contractors covering four sectors: construction and the built environment; engineering and manufacturing; digital; and business operations.

The contracts will run from 2022/23 to possibly 2024/25 and are worth £2.2 million in total. This comes amid concerns that not enough businesses will be convinced to host T Level students for mandatory industry placements as the new qualification scales up.

In tender documents, the department says it recognises that SMEs do not have the same infrastructure as larger employers and so there is "a need for an extra layer of support to broker placements as part of a T Level programme".

The DfE hopes that contractors will help broker up to 1,794 placements in construction and the built environment, 664 in business operations, 1,423 in engineering and manufacturing and 2,098 in digital.



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

Local skills improvement plans: what the eight trailblazer reports look like

SHANE CHOWEN
SHANE.CHOWEN@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Spanning over 500 pages in total, the "trailblazer" local skills improvement plans – a key plank of the government's "employers-first" skills reforms – have been published. Shane Chowen takes a look to see if they live up to the hype

The pros and cons of an "employers-first" skills policy have filled column inches in *FE Week* since its first publication over ten years ago. Ministers are currently attracted to the narrative because, as a starting point, it means you can, at least in theory, then talk about tangible economic outcomes like jobs, business growth, incomes and productivity.

In today's policy landscape, the latest manifestation of "employer leadership" in the skills system comes in the form of local skills improvement plans (LSIPs).

LSIPs were first mentioned in the House of Commons by the former education secretary Gavin Williamson on the day that the skills white paper, Jobs for Growth, was published, back in January 2021.

"The white paper is going to put employers firmly at the centre of our local skills systems," he said. "It will introduce German-style local skills improvement plans, which will be led by business organisations such as local chambers of commerce. Those plans will identify the skills that an area needs and spell out what needs to change to make training more responsive to employers' needs."

The white paper itself went further. There will be new accountability structures placed around some further education providers to make sure they're doing what employers say they want: "To lay on provision that meets the skills needs of the local area, providers need to have a clear articulation of those needs. Many providers do this well independently... but some do not."

And then a consultation on reforms to FE accountability, which closed six months ago and appears to have stalled, laid out proposals to align multi-year funding



Gavin Williamson

agreements to LSIPs, publish how well a provider is delivering against the priorities of the LSIP on a new performance dashboard and an expectation that a college will "reflect" on how it is doing what its LSIP says is needed locally through new accountability agreements.

All of this took place as eight chambers of commerce were chosen to produce trailblazer LSIPs and new primary legislation for LSIPs made its way through parliament.

The eight chambers each got a share of £4 million provided by the Department for Education to develop their trailblazer LSIPs, which were published last week:

- **Business West Chamber of Commerce – West of England**
- **Cumbria Chamber of Commerce – Cumbria**
- **Doncaster Chamber of Commerce – South Yorkshire**
- **East Midlands Chamber of Commerce – Leicester and Leicestershire**
- **Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce – Kent and Medway**
- **North East England Chamber of Commerce – Tees Valley**
- **North & Western Lancashire Chamber of Commerce – Lancashire**
- **Sussex Chamber of Commerce – Sussex**

What were the trailblazers asked to do?

It's worth remembering that a form of local leadership over skills is not new. Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) were set up as employer-led bodies to oversee economic development in their areas, including, albeit to a limited degree, skills infrastructure.

We also currently have skills advisory panels (SAPs), linked to LEPs and Mayoral Combined Authorities, which each receive an annual grant from the DfE to analyse labour market data and produce a local skills report. Panels that are in LSIP trailblazer areas were still given their £75,000 grants this year, but had to support the development of the LSIP, rather than publish their own report.

Ministers never really properly explained what it was about the LEP/SAP set-up that still makes LSIPs necessary. In fact, LEPs were specifically excluded from being recognised as employer-representative bodies for the LSIP trailblazers. Yet, they felt it necessary to cough up £4 million for LSIP trailblazers on top of the £2.7 million already provided to the advisory panels.

The risk here was duplication and even more confusion for employers and providers.

The trailblazers, though, are not the finished product. The brief was as much about testing approaches and processes for making the plans as it was about the plans themselves.

When chambers of commerce were asked to bid to become an LSIP trailblazer, they were specifically told that they shouldn't try to dictate what individual providers should deliver, nor should they set out what could happen if funding was any different.

Despite the latter instruction, but somewhat pleasingly, funding comes up time and time again in the trailblazer LSIPs. They want continued funding for their LSIPs of course, but there are calls from South Yorkshire for fully funded ESOL and repeat level 2s through the adult education budget; Kent and Sussex want to propose funded locally designed

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

News

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

CONTINUED

non-accredited short courses; and Tees Valley asks for the ability to develop apprenticeship standards for jobs that don't yet exist.

What has been produced?

The published trailblazer LSIP documents each follow a similar structure; a bit of context about their area, lists of ways that employers have been consulted and commentary on what it is about their local systems that they think needs to change.

Where there are recommendations, there are some common themes which, if you work in or around FE and skills, aren't particularly new or surprising.

Employers find the skills system too complex, qualifications lag behind advancements in industry, formal courses are too big and time-consuming, tutors aren't up-to-date, and SMEs feel systematically excluded.

In turn, recommendations such as more bespoke and modular courses, better careers advice services, apprenticeship levy flexibilities and "one-stop-shop" websites aren't all that ground-breaking.

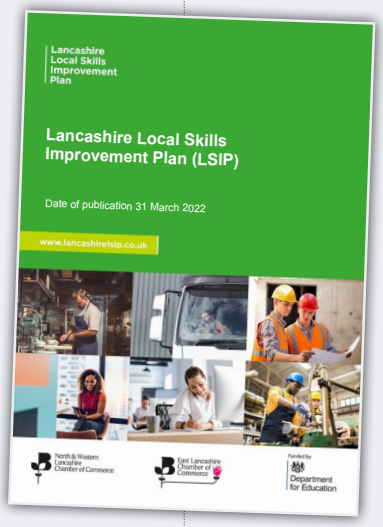
Lancashire's LSIP comes in at 134 pages compared to Leicestershire's at 27, yet Leicestershire's more convincingly satisfied the brief because it produced a sustainable model for business-provider relationships using brand new tools and methods. In its "roadmap for change" it maps out a simple structure for the sort of system leadership DfE should be looking for, with clear lines of accountability at priority sector level informing a strategic oversight board.

Another interesting thing to look at is the approach chambers took to deciding what sectors to focus their LSIPs on.

Most made the decision to take a lead from an existing evidence-base, usually the skills advisory panel, with some prioritisation. West of England chose three sectors (social care, aerospace and advanced manufacturing) to focus their LSIP on, whereas Lancashire chose 11.

Tees Valley dedicated its entire LSIP to its low-carbon and net-zero industry. This is a very different approach to other areas which selected existing established industries in their local economy. The Tees Valley LSIP states: "Studying the skills requirements of the sector at this early stage will provide insights from industry. This will help shape future provision and avoid the problems faced by other industries, such as skills gaps and a drain of talent from the area."

They are critical of a skills system which, they argue, fails to prepare for future industries. Taking aim at apprenticeships specifically, they say employers can't form occupational or apprenticeship standards until job roles exist which, they say, doesn't work for employers in low carbon: "When the predicted jobs finally do come on stream, there is no skills base to fill them because the qualifications haven't been developed."



South Yorkshire decided not to name specific sectors at all and instead reported on common issues across its whole labour market; this included the most-detailed look at how the skills system can make the workforce more inclusive. Alongside this, Sussex, Tees Valley and West England observed how access to affordable childcare was a barrier to training.

Not all of these approaches will strictly meet the brief that the DfE laid down; but officials should be supportive of areas having varying outlooks if the whole point of trailblazers really is to see how employers do things differently once they're given some scope for leadership.

How DfE responds to the recommendations made by employer groups will also be interesting.

Chambers called for some level of modularisation built into the whole skills system because engagement with full qualifications was seen by employers as too costly in terms of time and money.

This was probably the most common recommendation across all LSIPs.

An easy thing for DfE to do in response would be to point to the lifelong loan entitlement, due in 2025. This would miss the mark for employers who, based on most of the LSIPs, say that smaller courses are needed at all levels.

So the LSIP exercise gives us a useful test to see how far DfE will go to really reform the system around employers or, as many suspect, continue to pay lip service.

The LSIPs create a similar challenge for employers.

Another universal theme across the LSIPs is that the exercise itself has "galvanised" employers with a willingness to engage in all sorts of ways – from taking part in regular skills conversations (as in Sussex) to providing more work experience (South Yorkshire) and doing more with providers in curriculum design (Cumbria).

All very welcome – but there is less to say about how to make it happen. The West of England LSIP's main recommendations are less about whole-system reform and more concerned with capacity within a well-performing system to do things better: "Within the current system, the quality of engagement between industry and skills providers contains many pockets of excellent and innovative practice, but is not systematically meeting either business needs for skills, or skills providers' needs for clear information and engagement to develop well-functioning and sustainable training provision based on business workforce planning."

The verdict

The crucial next step is how DfE chooses to respond to the LSIP trailblazers that it has been presented with. There is some good evidence of new strategic structures and sustainable approaches to the use of data that it could deem to be higher risk, but are at least offering something tangibly different and collaborative.

Some feared that LSIPs would be developed in isolation and that ITPs in particular would be excluded. But there are several examples from the trailblazers where a strong and well-networked ITP base is seen as a strategic asset alongside colleges, schools and universities.

While there are some genuinely creative and refreshing proposals and commitments from the chambers, they will be conscious, and perhaps suspicious about, the DfE's willingness to give up so much power and control.

Editorial

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

It's time for DfE to prove or ditch its 'employers first' mantra



SHANE CHOWEN
SHANE.CHOWEN@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The recently published trailblazer local skills improvement plans and ongoing let-downs on apprenticeships are the latest in a growing list of examples proving the government's "employers first" narrative on skills policy is just lip service.

How frustrating it must be to try and make the skills system work for you if you run a small business in this country.

You're told constantly that businesses like yours are the "backbone of the economy", and whether its apprenticeships for new starters or training for your staff – the skills system is there for you.

You've got emails from your local colleges and training providers offering their services to you. You may well have had a survey from the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education or your local chamber of commerce asking for your views on the system.

All that sounds interesting because you want to be a responsible employer – doing your bit for the next generation and making sure your staff are at the top of their game.

But it's too hard. There's too much to do. Too many people involved. Too much red tape. Maybe you'll look at those emails again when things quieten down?

Covid, Brexit, supply shortages, energy costs – it should be easier than ever for an SME to access training and support from the skills system.

Yet calls for reforms that could open the system up for them just seem to fall on deaf ears.

The skills minister Alex Burghart stood on stage at the *FE Week* Annual Apprenticeships Conference and said he wanted to "reassure" employers and providers that the department will be "starting in-depth discussions to identify where improvements in the [apprenticeships] system can be made".

This week we hear directly from employers and providers that the cap on starts for SMEs is holding them back from recruiting, and in some cases is even turning them to more costly commercial training.

Levy-paying employers' repeated calls for a proper review of the apprenticeships levy have been ignored. Employers' requests for extending the apprenticeship cash incentive were ignored.

The LSIP trailblazers' plans published this week are stacked with ideas – from employers themselves – that seek to make local skills systems that work better for them.

It's hard not to be sceptical that DfE will ignore those ideas too.

A lot of those proposals will require ministers to either be much more courageous in letting go of power from the centre, or force ministers to have a much more honest conversation with employers.

THE FE WEEK PODCAST PRESENTS
EPISODE 3
IS THERE A DEVICE CRISIS IN FE?
Provided by The FE WEEK Podcast

Is device use seriously negatively affecting student learning?
How can devices be used well?
And what is the situation with device poverty?

Tune in to the third podcast in our brand new series, with investigative journalist Jess Staufenberg. Join Jess as she chats to classroom lecturers and students on the frontline as they spill the beans and shine a light on the big FE issues that affect them

FOR STAFF BY STAFF

AVAILABLE APRIL 25
feweek.co.uk/podcast

Subscribe now to The FE Week Podcast on your favourite podcast app.



Technical Education 16-19

Supporting providers in building their study programmes

Find out more →

Profile

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



INTRODUCING

LIA NICI

Prime minister's parliamentary private secretary

'Staff feel under pressure to hide that they're a Conservative'

JESS STAUFENBERG
@STAUFENBERGJ

FROM FRONT

Lia Nici is the first ever FE teacher to be the prime minister's 'eyes and ears' in Westminster – his parliamentary private secretary. She tells Jess Staufenberg why complaining about the system is not the answer

Lia Nici is waving at me from the other end of Portcullis House. There's a relaxed Thursday afternoon feel as I head over – politician bingo locates Jeremy Hunt in the lunch queue, Daisy Cooper of the Lib Dems crossing the floor, Jeremy Corbyn with young people at a table. Welcome to the home of UK MPs in Westminster.

Nici herself is far from home – she is four-and-a-half hours away from her constituency, which clings to the coast of north-east Lincolnshire. I've come because Nici is a number of intriguing "firsts". She is a "red wall MP" – Great Grimsby voted her in as its first Conservative MP in 70 years in 2019. And she surely must be the first FE teacher to be a parliamentary private secretary to a prime minister.

But she is not, she tells me, in a vanishing minority as a Tory FE teacher. "As soon as I came out as a Conservative, it was interesting at work," she grins. "People would come up in the corridor, and say quietly, 'I vote Conservative too!'"

Right on cue, Nici waves to a colleague on the next table who Nici says is a former headteacher. So it was a positive experience? I ask.

"Sadly I've got colleagues, some of them union representatives, who were great colleagues but as soon as they knew I was a Conservative, they refused to speak to me," she says. "It's really sad that in an educational institution, people feel so under pressure they can't be open that they are a Conservative."

Of course, there are some awkward facts to mention. Under her party, funding per student aged 16 to 18 fell by 14 per cent in real terms for further education and sixth-form colleges

Profile

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



Nici alongside Alex Burghart during a visit to the Grimsby Institute hospitality department



A young Nici wearing one of her Dad's aprons helping out in their Italian restaurant

between 2010 and 2019. Spending on adult education fell by 49 per cent.

Meanwhile, apprenticeship starts for learners aged 19 and under have nearly halved since the levy was introduced.

For many, the Conservatives' cuts to the FE sector have been unforgiveable. What makes Nici a Conservative?

She takes me to her childhood. Her mum was a born-and-bred Grimsby girl who was in the police force until she married Nici's dad, an Italian, and together they ran a restaurant.

"Both my parents came from poor backgrounds, but they worked hard to better themselves," says Nici, who grew up in the flat above the restaurant. "That ethic was always there. If your skills are good enough, there is always someone who will pay you."

Nici remembers a family friend offering advice for her first job in a florist. "She said: 'Don't forget, when you're working, someone is paying you to work for them. There's always a job to do to help that business.' That's what makes me a Conservative. Through your own endeavours, and with supportive others, there's always some way you can develop."

"Some colleagues stopped talking to me"

Overcoming the odds has a close-to-home meaning for Nici. "I've had a few challenges in my life, and I always say, nothing is insurmountable or not solvable. Apart from death," she tells me. "When you're dead, you can't do anything. While you're alive, you've always got an ability to improve a situation."

When she was just 12, Nici's father took his own life.

As a single parent, her mum took on multiple jobs, and went on to become a social worker. "Throughout my whole life, the key influence has been my mum."

Nici greatly enjoyed sixth form, focusing on art as her favourite subject, but a debilitating bout of glandular fever contributed towards "terrible results" in her A-levels, and she took an art foundation course at Grimsby College, now Grimsby Institute.

Rather than go to university, she had her eye on entering the television industry straightaway, partly inspired by her father. "My dad was a photographer. He would convert the bedroom into a dark room, and he taught me about shot composition."

So she did a higher national diploma in writing and design and got some work at the National Film and Television School. She later moved to Newcastle as a runner for the BBC's children's series Byker Grove with Ant and Dec (then PJ and Duncan), working her way up to assistant director.

After the BBC, Nici set up her own TV production company, working on corporate films. It was a male-dominated world, she tells me. "A woman coming in with the camera on her shoulder was unusual." She laughs as she remembers asking men to remove images of topless women from the shot: "'Would you mind taking that calendar down while I film, please?".

But the reality of "standing in the pouring rain" as a camera operator began to bite, and she applied to be a college lecturer at her alma mater, Grimsby College. She would stay in FE for 22 years, teaching video production and other media qualifications from entry level through to HE, until it became, she says, "one of the most highly regarded media departments in the country".

Is being an FE teacher good preparation for being an MP?

"It is absolutely perfect. I think education is one of the toughest areas to work in. In this job, you need a lot of resilience too." As in teaching, Nici now works a six-day, sometimes seven-day, week.

But Grimsby felt like a forgotten town, she says. Her local Labour MP, the late Austin Mitchell (in post from 1977 until 2015), was "wonderful" – a working-class Brexiteer who should "really have been a Tory", she says. But it was frustrating that Mitchell was usually stuck in opposition.

So she became a parish councillor for her village, then a ward councillor. Soon the



Teaching at Grimsby Institutes

Profile

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

Conservatives gave her Hull North, an unwinnable seat, to try for parliament.

Being heckled in a Labour stronghold was "terrifying", she says, as was putting campaigning costs "on my credit card". But she loved the debates, and in 2018 took voluntary redundancy from Grimsby Institute.

However, making her views known in Great Grimsby had a more unnerving consequence. A local man began harassing her.

"It started with little comments, like 'you're a Tory'. Then he'd block us into our lane and wouldn't let us out with the cars. It really ramped up when I was selected to stand."

Nici won her seat in 2019, with a majority of about 7,000 votes, but it was only in October last year that her 49-year-old harasser was fined. She tells me she worries about the "black and white" world of opinion today.

To be fair to Nici, she appears to listen closely and answer my questions frankly, without contortionist political double-speak. But she can come across as fairly black and white herself. A general loyalty to Boris Johnson as a red wall MP is perhaps to be expected, yet she raises no word of criticism about lockdown parties in Downing Street (and during our conversation, the new chief whip Chris Heaton-Harris comes along to say hello). Rather, she has called him the "best" prime minister.

She recalls first meeting Johnson at 5am in Grimsby fish market, "with everyone getting on their trilby hats and white overalls". Now she is his PPS and her job is to feed back issues among MPs to Number 10.

I should say we are speaking before Johnson was handed his fine in mid-April for breaking lockdown rules in 2020 (making him the first ever prime minster to be found to have broken the law).

"He has apologised," she begins. "But my concern is, if people were so angry at the time, why didn't someone report it then, rather than to the press 18 months later?" Although this is a valid question, I'm not sure it's of greater concern than the prime minister's top team breaking the rules they had set for the nation.

She adds, by way of an excuse: "Westminster and Number 10 is a very strange location, in that it's both work and the prime minister happens to live there."


Nici with constituents in Great Grimsby

"Funding isn't everything"

Nici also wholeheartedly backs the move to T Levels – bluntly telling shadow skills minister Toby Perkins in December that "BTEC is just a brand name of the Pearson group". Nici explains to me she felt some MPs were forgetting that other brands, such as City & Guilds and Cambridge Nationals, are also in the same space as BTECs, and felt "they were being lobbied by Pearson… I was being a bit naughty," she acknowledges.

Nor does she mince her words on FE funding.

"FE never has enough money," she says. But "funding isn't everything. When the New Labour government came in in 1997, and flooded money into FE, in my opinion it was wasted. It didn't get spent on students, it was spent on brand new computers for people, better working environments and members of staff. It didn't get to students." It's a bold claim.

"The bottom line is that having a passionate lecturer in the work environment is the most important thing," she says, adding that in that respect, "it didn't make a difference whether a lecturer was on £23,000 or £33,000".

But we know salaries impact on whether passionate lecturers stick around.

It all comes back to Nici's self-starter mantra. "People say to me, 'Oh it's the system', but I say, 'We are the system.' It's about having that positive mindset to say, 'Yes, we've got challenges, but we've also got opportunities'." She says: "FE colleges are corporations, and it's down to corporations to make choices."

So Nici's rise to Johnson's side does not appear to mean the sector has a staunch champion for funding in Number 10 (despite being appointed an 'FE ambassador' by Gavin Williamson). She does speak enthusiastically about the importance of greater diversity in apprenticeships, as chair of the government's Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network, which brings together employers.

Instead she seems most passionately committed to upskilling her constituents in Grimsby, and has warned the levelling-up agenda must deliver "physical change" for them – or she will likely lose her seat.

It's been a fascinating conversation. Perhaps if Nici does lose her seat in 2024, she could return to the sector she left as a principal, bringing her all-positive mindset to the extremely tight circumstances leaders operate under. Of course, she should never be made to feel like an outcast on her return.


Nici with Boris Johnson

CALL 02081234778 OR EMAIL ADVERTISING@FEWEEK.CO.UK TO SEE HOW WE CAN HELP YOU ADVERTISE YOUR VACANCIES

A rare opportunity to join an independent training provider based in Malton, North Yorkshire.

Curriculum Leader in Leadership £32,000-£34,500
Mechanical Engineering Trainer £24,700-£30,000
Electrical Engineering Trainer £24,700-£30,000
Permanent, Full-time



Derwent Training
TRAINING FOR YOU

Derwent Training Association, currently graded Good by Ofsted, is experiencing a period of growth and diversification. We offer apprenticeships in both Engineering and Leadership & Management. With an extensive client base, apprenticeship numbers are growing, and we require more staff to meet employer demand.

We are in a strong position financially and offer market leading benefits including:

- 27 days annual leave, with an additional day for your birthday
- 9-day fortnight meaning staff get a long weekend twice a month
- Support to undertake CPD, including initial teacher training and Training, Assessment, Quality Assurance qualifications as appropriate
- Flexible working opportunities
- Access to a fleet car

These roles are the result of growth within the business and a fantastic opportunity to help us to shape 21st Century vocational education, equipping the next generation in the workforce with sought after skills.

As our **Curriculum Leader in Leadership**, you will have a career defining opportunity to build an outstanding apprenticeship programme within a region that requires individuals to develop leadership skills to increase productivity and bounce back from the impact of the pandemic and Brexit. This role also requires a degree of networking to expand the client base. The ideal candidate will bring experience of curriculum development and teaching on Leadership and Management Apprenticeships.

Our new **Engineering Trainers (Electrical or Mechanical)** will teach on Engineering Apprenticeships with achievement rates that significantly surpass the national average. Experience of teaching desirable.

Applications by CV and covering letter to **Claire.gavaghan@derwenttraining.co.uk** by 06 May 2022

All appointments will be subject to satisfactory references and an enhanced DBS. We are an equal opportunity employer, and welcome applications from veterans.

Yeovil College

VICE PRINCIPAL QUALITY OF EDUCATION

£76,950

Yeovil College is an inclusive tertiary college serving communities in South Somerset and North and West Dorset. It has enjoyed outstanding achievement rates in recent years and is the highest performing college in Somerset for 16-18 achievement, with an annual turnover of over £18m.

The management and wider college team have absolute uncompromising ambition for leaners to maximise their potential, with a clear vision towards outstanding.

The Vice Principal will be engaging, creative, entrepreneurial and visionary; someone who will inspire our brilliant learners, lead our committed team and work with our ambitious governing body. Expectations and standards are exceptionally high.

We offer a competitive remuneration package in a great place to work in a beautiful part of the country. To support the right applicant, we are offering a re-location package.

To arrange an informal conversation with Mark Bolton, Principal & CEO, please email **mandy.morton@yeovil.ac.uk**

Closing date: Sunday 8 May 2022

Please click here for more information

CALL 02081234778 OR EMAIL ADVERTISING@FEWEEK.CO.UK TO SEE HOW WE CAN HELP YOU ADVERTISE YOUR VACANCIES



Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality

£74,719 per annum

Following the appointment of the current post holder to Principal of another college, applications are sought for the post of Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality, a senior team role reporting directly to the Principal. The post holder will:

- Lead on all aspects of curriculum and quality across the College, with particular focus on leading Study Programme delivery
- Lead on the development of a college culture that embraces innovation in teaching and learning, and always adopts a "student first" approach
- Lead the College-wide quality strategy, including acting as Ofsted nominee
- Lead on teaching and learning, ensuring that our approach delivers the very highest of outcomes for all our students, exceeding their expectations and preparing them effectively for their next steps

This is a very exciting opportunity for someone who is passionate about making a difference to the College and its community. If you are student-focussed, passionate about making a difference through education, commercially astute and excited about being part of an ambitious team, then this is the opportunity for you!

Click here for more information

fesussex
The consortium of Sussex colleges

Are you driven by success and looking to share your vision?

If so, we are looking to recruit a **Chief Executive Officer** at FE Sussex.



FE Sussex is the highly successful consortium of post-16 colleges in Sussex, comprising FE groups, sixth form and specialist colleges. FE Sussex supports members through a diverse range of activities including project bidding, sponsored research, quality improvement and curriculum development.

Knowledge and experience of the FE sector, attracting external funding, government policy, inspection, quality assurance and the workings of colleges is essential.

You will be eligible for benefits including:

- Salary: pro rata of £85,000 per annum (£85,000 x 0.8 = £68,000 or a self-employed daily rate)
- 0.8FTE with opportunity for flexible hours
- Home working option
- NEST/LGPS/TP dependent upon existing pension scheme

Closing date: **2 May 2022.**

We envisage a start date of around the autumn term 2022 or sooner.

Please click here for more information.

WESTMINSTER ADULT EDUCATION SERVICE

TUTORS

At Westminster Adult Education Service, we provide life-changing learning opportunities for our learners through our qualification courses, apprenticeship programmes and extensive community-based provision. We work to adapt to the changing needs of our communities – resulting in a dynamic atmosphere where ambition, diversity and creativity are celebrated. We are on our journey to outstanding and want staff who share our vision of attaining excellence to join our passionate and highly skilled teaching team.

To start in September 2022, we are looking for Tutors in a range of subjects, teaching a variety of hours that include evenings and Saturdays. You will teach from one of our 3 Centres or online

We offer a permanent variable hours contract paying £28.57 per hour.

A range of benefits are available as well as opportunities for Continuous Personal Development.

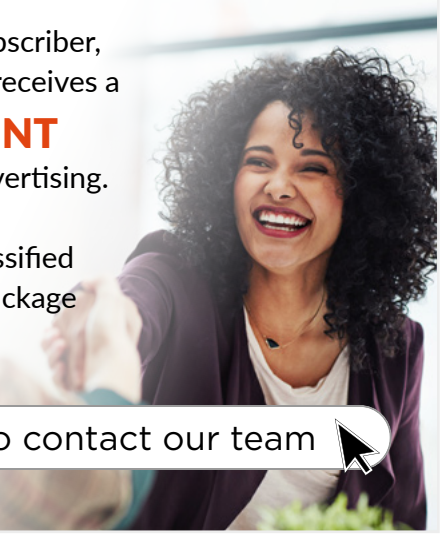
Job Descriptions, further details about the service and how to apply can be found on Vacancies at WAES

EDU WEEK JOBS
In association with SCHOOLS WEEK FE WEEK

DID YOU KNOW?

As an FE Week subscriber, your organisation receives a **20% DISCOUNT** on recruitment advertising.

Online listings, classified advertising, and package options available.



Click here to contact our team

Skills & Education Group

Transforming lives through education for over 110 years.

Celebrate good times, come on!



Join us at our further education and skills conference on 26 May 2022

After two years away, the Skills and Education Group's further education and skills conference makes an eagerly anticipated return in 2022.

Our conference is a conference with a difference. While most education conferences tend to be aimed at those in leadership and governance roles, our event is dedicated to growing the potential of practitioners and middle managers – the everyday heroes of further education.

Headline sponsor

the skills network

Interested in finding out more?

Visit skillsandeducationgroup.co.uk or scan the QR code.

Celebrating 110 years of impact

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



THE STAFF ROOM

Dispatches from the frontline of FE

Here are the three urgent ways T Levels still need reforming

Everything from too-strict entry requirements to the exams timetable are stopping T Levels from working on the ground, writes Vernon Shaw

T Levels need urgent reform if they are to become the option of choice for the majority 16-19-year-olds who want to progress into skilled employment or higher technical education.

At the moment, T Levels pose providers like mine significant delivery challenges around the size of the qualification, assessment requirements and industry placements.

Here are the three key reforms I would like to see for my students:

1 Reduce and standardise the size of the qualification

T Levels are different sizes and many are too large. The two-year programme must be standardised at no more than 1,300 guided learning hours for the technical qualification, including employability, enrichment and pastoral hours.

Instead, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education gave too much freedom to employer panels to set guided learning hours for their technical qualifications, resulting in large variations in size.

So for example, the education and childcare assisting teaching T Level amounts to 844 total guided learning hours. But the engineering and manufacturing design and development T Level amounts to 1,360.

This means T Level learners are required to commit more hours to study than their peers on certain study programmes.

That also impacts students who need part-time employment to finance themselves, or who have caring responsibilities – in other words, socially disadvantaged students.

There is also an inequality in how the UCAS tariff affects T Levels. Regardless of size, they attract the same UCAS points. This inequality also exists between T Levels and alternative level 3 qualifications and A-levels.

Providers also face real challenges when timetabling the current guided learning hours into the academic year and accommodating a 315-hour industry placement.

This often results in part of the placement taking place during holiday periods, further disadvantaging some learners.

2 Modularise technical qualification core assessment

Providers need more flexibility to develop T Level delivery plans that work for students and employers.

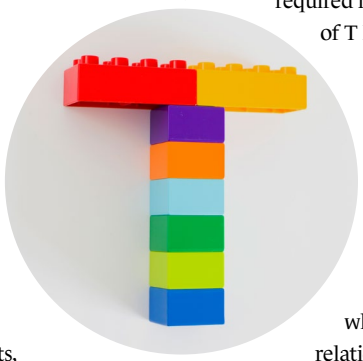
Many providers deliver the core learning in year 1 followed by the occupational specialism learning in year 2.

In term three of year 1, students sit both examinations, typically 2.5 hours each, and complete the employer set project.

But this is too soon for many students who would previously have been enrolled on an applied general, such as a BTEC level 3 extended diploma.

Staff can only continue to be successful at developing students over two years if the qualification enables this.

Separating the exams and the employer-set project into three modules alongside additional assessment windows would allow providers to stagger assessments, improving the sequencing of learning.



Meanwhile, providers have set entry requirements for T Levels that are closely aligned to those for A-levels and significantly higher than level 3 applied generals.

This is typically five GCSEs at grades 9-4 including English and maths, with additional requirements around science and maths grades for STEM T Levels. This limits access to T Levels for 16-year-olds and progressing level 2 students.

Ofqual chief Jo Saxton also recently suggested that there should be a T Level the size of two A-levels so students could do a T Level with something else.

Modularising them would facilitate this and also open up the qualification for adult learners.

3 Alternative industry placement model

Providers are unable to generate the volume of industry placements required for the full rollout of T Levels.

The industry placement has to remain at the heart of all T Levels, but there needs to be a viable interim model while employer relationship and capacity building takes place.

Flexibilities with placements, such as the fact that remote working can be allowed, need to go further if T Levels are to become a major post-16 option for technical education.

Reducing the placement to a minimum of 4 weeks would result in more placement opportunities and would still be long enough to develop essential sector employability skills.

An integrated work-based project contextualised around the employer and sector could supplement a reduced industry placement, providing an autonomous learning experience similar to the Extended Project Qualification.

T Levels are now at a critical juncture. They require urgent changes to prevent them becoming niche qualifications and a barrier to social mobility.



VERNON SHAW
Curriculum director for construction and technologies, Bury College

Got views from the frontline? Write to commissioning editor Jess Staufenberg on jess.staufenberg@lsect.com or on Twitter @StaufenbergJ

Get in touch!

Opinion

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

Scrapping smaller level 2 qualifications would be a national disaster



ADRIAN GROVE
Business development director, Qube Learning

Many of the small qualifications the government wants to scrap are the best stepping stones for vulnerable individuals, warns Adrian Grove

The announcement last month of a consultation on technical and academic qualifications at level 2 and below has sent shockwaves across the further education sector.

Claims that the current offering is "too crowded", with multiple courses covering the same or similar subjects, is extremely short sighted.

Whoever has drawn these conclusions has failed to recognise the range of abilities and experiences of those candidates typically accessing level 2 education.

Put simply, scrapping level 2 qualifications would be a disaster on a national scale.

These qualifications represent the first rung of the career ladder for many people. Why would you take that first step away?

Do those in Whitehall only consider achievement at GCSE level to be the first step?

What about those students for whom GCSEs don't work?

Should these candidates not access education and opportunity in another way?

Should they really remain unqualified and unemployed instead?

It seems baffling that we must even ask these questions in 2022, when accessibility should be top of the agenda.

Level 2 qualifications allow many individuals a chance to develop their skills from an accessible starting point. This is the place from which these candidates can develop the necessary basic skills and knowledge to gain employment.

The Department for Education proposes a cut of nearly 3,700 level 2 qualifications from the current 8,000 available. Such large-scale reforms will deny entry-level opportunities to learn, train and enter the workforce to thousands of people, of all ages.

It is said that the cuts will remove "the smallest qualifications, where they are unlikely to be able to provide a student with the knowledge, skills and behaviours contained in a relevant employer-led standard, or to provide them with broad content relevant to an occupational route".

> "It seems baffling we must even ask these questions"

However, the smallest qualifications hold the greatest power as stepping stones for those who may have struggled with formal education in the past.

Whether it was difficulty concentrating or participating in a traditional classroom



environment, additional learning needs, difficult personal life, mental health conditions or for any other reason, many individuals find themselves in need of education from the 'beginning'.

It is these 'small' qualifications that may be the key to unlocking job opportunities for those who are too anxious to handle job interviews or phone calls, or who struggle with maths or literacy skills.

This means that the 'bigger' qualifications that the government wants to keep are too much of a step up for these candidates.

So a workable alternative for these individuals should be provided. Meanwhile, the restriction of accessible education opportunities in such circumstances may be considered, in my opinion, discriminatory.

It also follows that these level 2 qualifications have a positive impact on lifting people out of poverty. For those who want to work but who cannot access the level 3 courses, provision must be made for training.

It is in the government's interest to encourage and support people into work, and this is the first step for many into a sustainable career – and later, level 3 training when appropriate. Level 2 provision is therefore crucial in reducing pressure on the benefits system.

The impact on the UK workforce if these first rungs of the career ladder are removed will certainly be felt, particular as many entry-level jobs are struggling to recruit post-Brexit and post-pandemic.

Not only this, but the gap between the qualified and unqualified workforce will leave a severe impression on social mobility and a knock-on effect of increasing the national adult skills gap over time.

The deadline for responses is next week. It is clear to me that this is about as far from the prime minister's levelling-up pledge as we can get.

Opinion

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

Construction industry SMEs have little incentive to invest in green skills



ANDREA LACZIK
Head of Research,
The Edge Foundation



KAT EMMS
Education and policy senior researcher, The Edge Foundation

Not much is in place to encourage smaller construction businesses to change how they operate, write Andrea Laczik and Kat Emms

This week, the Department for Education published its sustainability and climate change strategy. It includes pledges such as all FE staff integrating sustainability into their teaching, and new capital projects being evaluated on whether they are net zero.

But here, we want to focus on a big industry partner for FE.

When it comes to the hugely pressing issue of climate change, the construction sector has a particularly important role to play. By some estimates, construction contributes up to 11 per cent of global carbon emissions. On Earth Day, that's an especially sobering thought.

So, to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050 will require immediate action within the industry on a scale never seen before.

In our Greening Construction report out last month, we explored what green skills are required and the challenges the construction industry faces. In partnership with the University of Oxford, The Centre for Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance (SKOPE) and the Environmental Change Institute (ECI), we combined a literature review, document analysis and stakeholder input.

Too much focus on STEM over soft skills

In mainstream narratives, net zero is often framed in terms of developing science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) skills.

But Edge's report outlines that communication, leadership and general business and administrative skills, as well as professional integrity and sustainable dispositions, are also vital to the green revolution.

In the construction industry, which already lacks regulation, this will mean a huge overhaul of the skills and training system.

This cannot happen without significant sector input.

Fortunately, organisations such as the Federation of Master Builders (FMB) – the UK's trade body for small and medium enterprises and micro-building companies – are keen to do their part.



Lack of incentives

Greening construction poses a huge challenge to the sector, but it's also a market opportunity worth between £3.5 and £6.5 billion a year or more.

Unfortunately, there's currently little incentive for SMEs and micro businesses – which make up 99 per cent of the construction industry – to invest in green skills.

This is because their current skills are already in high demand. This reduces any incentive to invest in training and resources, which is challenging for smaller businesses to achieve.

There's also a more systemic issue at play. At the report's launch, Brian Berry, FMB chief executive, explained: "When governments introduce policies, such as the Green Home Grants scheme, and then shuts them down, small businesses lose confidence in investing.

"There's currently no long-term government plan to working with the building industry to upskill and deliver a carbon-zero built environment."

But the climate will not wait. Things must change now.

Diversity and employment

The construction sector's current training landscape is patchy and confusing at best.

To circumvent this problem, many companies recruit from those they know, resulting in a shortage of workers and a lack of diversity in the sector.

Bricklayers, carpenters and other tradespeople are all in short supply – vacancies in the industry are currently at an estimated 42 per cent.

Furthermore, women constitute only around 11 per cent of construction sector employees, while ethnic minority workers constitute only seven per cent.

Brexit and the pandemic have exacerbated these problems. But developing green skills presents an opportunity to tackle skills shortages and make the industry a more attractive option for a broader workforce.

Solutions for a zero-carbon built environment

As Edge's report emphasises, and as Berry agrees, the government needs a longer-term strategy for greening construction. Berry said: "The government has already created various initiatives, flexible apprenticeships, bootcamps and T Levels.

"But many small companies don't know how to access these. If we're to deliver a zero-carbon built environment, industry, government and the education sector must collaborate and pull these into a long-term strategy for skills."

Despite the myriad challenges, there's one positive foundation to build on. And that's the increasing desire of further education learners to combat climate change.

With close collaboration between government, industry and training providers, it's eminently possible to transform the construction industry into a vehicle for a more sustainable future.

Bulletin

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

Movers & Shakers

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



Jenny Jarvis

Interim chief executive officer, Education and Training Foundation

Start date: April 2022

Previous Job: Deputy CEO, Education and Training Foundation

Interesting fact: As part of her commitment to lifelong learning, Jenny attended the Gordon Cook Conversations, as well as being a Windsor leadership fellow.



Jonathan Porter

Technical Advisor for Engineering, City and Guilds

Start date: March 2022

Previous Job: Curriculum operations manager (Engineering), Chesterfield College

Interesting fact: Before starting his engineering careers, Jonathan had applied to be a refuge collector. He didn't get the job but from there was lucky to be involved in a career in education to help change so many lives.

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

Are you ready to move?

Check out the top roles in Further Education and Skills at **educationweekjobs.co.uk**

EDU WEEK JOBS