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FE WEEK

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England's largest apprenticeship provider hit with grade 3 Ofsted

BILLY CAMDEN
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FROM FRONT | EXCLUSIVE

England's largest apprenticeship provider is set to be slammed by Ofsted for failing to deliver high-quality teaching and enough off-the-job training, *FE Week* can reveal.

Lifetime Training will be downgraded from 'good' to 'requires improvement' in a critical report due to be published today (July 1) by the education watchdog.

The firm has recruited more apprentices and secured more levy funding than any other provider in the country for several years, delivering to big-name employers including the NHS, KFC, McDonald's, Wetherspoons, B&Q and David Lloyd, as well as the civil service.

But Lifetime's overall achievement rates have been falling steadily: in 2015/16 the provider recorded an overall apprenticeship achievement of 67.6 per cent, which declined to 55.3 per cent in the latest available provider-level achievement rate tables for 2018/19.

Lifetime's most popular apprenticeship in 2018/19 was hospitality team member, delivered to 2,230 apprentices, and recorded a 34 per cent achievement rate.

FE Week understands that Ofsted sent around 30 inspectors to Lifetime Training in May for its first full inspection since 2012 and found a range of quality concerns, resulting in an overall grade 3.

The biggest issue was proving that at least 20 per cent off-the-job training was being delivered to apprentices mostly in the hospitality and care sectors.

FE Week understands that Lifetime Training requested and secured an extra day's inspection after complaining that Ofsted's sample of apprentices was not large enough to reflect the size of the company – a defence that was unsuccessfully used by Learndirect during its failed High Court battle with the inspectorate that attempted to overturn a grade 4 report in 2017.

Ofsted agreed to increase its sample size for Lifetime Training but stood by the grade 3.

A spokesperson for Lifetime Training told *FE Week* that Ofsted's grade and the evidence used during the inspection was not appealed.

The report is due to be published in the same week that skills minister Alex Burghart and Ofsted chief inspector Amanda Spielman raised concerns about the quality of apprenticeship training and poor achievement rates, which Spielman said are damaging the prestige and brand of apprenticeships.

Carl Cornish, Lifetime's new chief operating officer, blamed the off-the-job issue on the pandemic.

"Due to the challenges brought by the pandemic, many of our employer partners have experienced increased staff turnover rates and high sickness and absence – particularly in the hospitality and care sectors," he told *FE Week*.

"This has contributed to an unexpected number of apprentices not getting their entitlement to high-quality off-the-job training during working hours, which was one of the key areas identified by Ofsted."

He claimed that despite the overall grading, "many positives" were identified through the inspection. A "highlight" was the "relationship between our learners and coaches and the impact our apprenticeship programmes have, with many apprentices making a positive contribution to their workplace through the skills they have developed, which our employer partners highly value".

Lifetime Training has made several leadership changes in recent months.

Geoff Russell, who used to head up the Skills Funding Agency, became the firm's new chair in April. Since then, Lifetime's long-serving chief executive Alex Khan, chief financial officer Peter Mitchell, and chief commercial officer Sean Cosgrove have left.

Jon Graham is now Lifetime's chief executive after joining from JTL Training.

Lifetime Training was put up for sale in 2019 by its private equity parent Silverfleet Capital. But the auction was put on ice during the pandemic.

The provider has sat at the top of the apprenticeship provider table when it comes to starts for a number of years. But recruitment has fallen significantly.

The provider recorded 20,170 starts in 2017/18, which grew to 23,020 a year later, before falling by more than a third to 14,980 in 2019/20. In 2020/21 Lifetime had 12,910 starts and figures for the first two quarters of 2021/22 show 6,990 starts. The falling starts numbers led to large-scale redundancies in 2020.

Lifetime has also topped the list of providers who receive the most funding from apprenticeship levy-paying employers. It was paid £51.5 million in 2018/19, £50.6 million in 2019/20, and £43.3 million in 2020/21.

Cornish said Lifetime was "disappointed" with the Ofsted outcome, but insisted the provider has "already started working on a detailed improvement plan against the recommendations and progress against this plan will be our key focus".

"The majority of the actions required to deliver these improvements are already in flight or at launch stage," he added. "We have already taken steps to address the feedback and are confident we will see a rapid and significant improvement in the areas identified during this inspection."


Geoff Russell


Jon Graham

News

AELP **NATIONAL CONFERENCE**

Providers sceptical at Burghart's 67% achievement rate ambition

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The skills minister has set a "stretching ambition" to reach a 67 per cent achievement rate on apprenticeship standards by 2025 – a 15 percentage point increase on the current rate.

But training providers fear the target will be unachievable and have criticised Alex Burghart for failing to offer adequate support to accomplish his goal.

The minister announced the target at this week's Association of Employment and Learning Providers national conference, in the face of falling achievement rates across the apprenticeships sector.

He also sent a letter that outlined the "support" on offer. It said, for example, that providers will continue to be offered access to a workforce development programme run by the Education and Training Foundation, while the Department for Education will ensure apprentices "get the best possible advice" about their programme through new digital service accounts.

Existing resources for employers will also be built upon, including the DfE's "employer quality roadmap" which provides guidance on what employers need to be doing at each stage of the apprenticeship.

In addition, officials will review whether there is further data it can publish to "equip employers and providers with the information they need to improve achievements".

Burghart said he is keen to hear from providers about whether there are "other things we can do to support you".

AELP chief executive Jane Hickie, who believes the 67 per cent ambition will not be achievable, said the minister's letter offers "little tangible support in addressing issues that are holding back apprenticeship completion – the primary one being the thousands of apprentices who are past their planned end dates and are at risk of dropping out as they cannot pass their functional skills assessments".


Alex Burghart

"If the minister is serious at driving up outcomes, it is areas like this that need further intervention," she added.

New-style apprenticeship standards only achieved 51.8 per cent achievement rate in 2020/21, a slight improvement on the achievement rate of 45.2 per cent in 2019/20.

Meanwhile, old-style frameworks, which are being phased out, hit a 68.1 per cent achievement rate in 2019/20 and 68.9 per cent achievement rate in 2020/21.

Only one of the 11 subject sector areas – science and mathematics – had an overall achievement rate of above 67 per cent on standards in 2020/21.

Hickie said there is a "danger" that with the 67 per cent target, the government is trying to compare frameworks to standards "when they are not like for like".

"AELP feels the target will unfortunately be unachievable until the DfE irons out unhelpful nuances in the current qualification achievement rate methodology – updating and reflecting the new climate that we're all working in," she added.

FE Week asked the DfE why Burghart specifically chose 67 per cent as the target, but a spokesperson would only say: "When setting this stretching ambition based on the available data we wanted to ensure that as many apprentices as possible are supported to achieve."

A poll of 88 delegates at AELP's conference showed that 61 per cent did not think the minister's ambition was achievable by 2025.

Feedback tool for apprentice drop-outs set to launch in autumn

A new feedback tool is to launch in the autumn to better understand why half of apprentices drop out.

Skills minister Alex Burghart announced this week that the feature was in the works. He said it will be delivered by the Department for Education and that government officials will collate the feedback.

A DfE spokesperson said the data generated will be an "important source of information to inform future improvements" to apprenticeships.

In time the department wants the tool to evolve "so we can better predict those at risk of withdrawal, allowing us to target direct support as needed".

Government data shows that 47 per cent of apprentices on standards dropped out.

The drop-out rate for frameworks was 17 percentage points lower than standards in 2020/21.

By comparison, latest DfE data shows the drop-out rate for A-levels in 2019 was less than one in ten (8.7 per cent).

A DfE apprentice survey published in May found that personal or domestic factors such as a better job offer, mental health issues or caring responsibilities were among the key reasons for apprentices dropping out in 2019/20.

And when it comes to apprenticeship-related factors for withdrawals, the most common reasons were that apprentices felt they did not have enough time for training, poor quality training and badly run programmes.

News

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AELP NATIONAL CONFERENCE

'Positive discussions' underway for AELP to return as ETF co-owners

BILLY CAMDEN
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Discussions are under way for the Association of Employment and Learning Providers to return as co-owners of the Education and Training Foundation – four years after all ties were cut.

AELP dramatically walked away from the ETF in 2018 after claiming the foundation was ignoring independent training providers and was "no longer an organisation run by the FE sector for the sector".

> "This is a critical time for the FE sector and our workforces"

Two AELP trustees resigned from the ETF's board, leaving the Association of Colleges and adult community education body HOLEX as the foundation's remaining part-owners.

David Hughes, the AoC's chief executive, revealed at this week's AELP national conference that he is now working with the AELP to return as an ETF member to increase collaboration in the sector.

He said the ETF has "lost sight of their true purpose" in recent years and that it is time to have a "fundamental review" of the foundation's role and purpose.

AELP chief executive Jane Hickie confirmed that "productive discussions" about their return to ETF co-ownership are taking place.

She told *FE Week* this is a "critical time for the FE sector and our workforces" in the face of the cost-of-living crisis and inflation pressures, so "we need a collaborative approach to tackle the challenges with an ETF that represents the interests of the sector as a whole".

Interim ETF chief executive Jenny Jarvis, who replaced David Russell when he stood down in April, said the ETF has been having "really fruitful conversations" with AELP.

She told *FE Week* the ETF wants AELP to be a member again because "we recognise how important it is to have the representation across the sector, in terms of all those different views".

Established in October 2013 by former skills minister John Hayes, the ETF was mostly funded by the Department for Education and designed as a "sector-owned" support body, helping train the people who work in technical and vocational education.

Hughes, who was chair of the steering group that set up the ETF, told this week's conference he was "really clear all the way along" that the foundation needed to be a "small organisation procured from the market", including colleges, private providers and adult education providers.

But instead "I think they've started to think well, actually, we need to survive as an institution", which resulted in the ETF venturing into delivery.

"I think that was a mistake, and I said so at the time," Hughes said, "so I'm really keen that we have a fundamental review of purpose and role, and that we work out what the relationship is between ETF and my organisation, and AELP, and HOLEX, and ITPs and colleges".

In response, Jarvis said: "I think we've always had a clear core purpose and it's always been linked to our charitable aims and objectives and articles, which is about post-14 and workforce development. That's what we're always here for and that it what we will be doing."

She added that the ETF has received around 4,000 responses as part of a "big listening exercise" to "make sure we're meeting needs in this changing environment".


Jenny Jarvis


Jane Hickie

AELP **NATIONAL CONFERENCE**

Ofsted: FE staffing crisis threatening quality of training

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The FE staffing crisis is drawing leaders' attention away from ensuring that quality education is delivered, Ofsted's chief inspector has warned.

Amanda Spielman told the conference this is a "significant concern" of hers, especially when it comes to specialist teachers and trainers in subjects like English and maths.

Both colleges and independent training providers recently told *FE Week* how soaring inflation and the cost-of-living crisis is forcing their staff to leave the profession in favour of better-paid jobs.

FE providers are also making parts of their workforce redundant in an effort to balance the books as funding rates continue at a level that does not reflect the true cost of delivery.

Spielman told AELP's annual conference: "Of significant concern are the staffing difficulties that many of you are having, especially in relation to recruiting and retaining specialist teachers and trainers, including in subjects like English and maths. We are also seeing fewer learners achieving revised functional skills qualifications.

"These and other matters are absorbing leaders' time and drawing their attention and focus away from thinking longer term about the learner experience."

She also used her speech to take aim at apprenticeship achievement and retention rates (see page 6), warning that they could "diminish the prestige and brand" of apprenticeships.

"Some achievement rates are very low, on one apprenticeship standard as low as 16 per cent," Spielman said.

"We often find that the apprentices who finish the course and take their end-point assessment do very well. But too often, too many leave before the end of their training.

"But why is this? It could be down to money, because in the current labour market, you may not need an apprenticeship to earn more. But it could be because of pressures at work that mean apprentices do not get enough learning opportunities. Or it could be because of poor quality provision."

She continued: "Now, more than ever

Amanda Spielman

the answer to the why question is so important. Are apprentices going into better-paid roles in entirely different sectors? Are they getting new roles, thanks to their learning, for better pay, but ending their apprenticeships early? These may be great outcomes for apprentices, but what about the wider picture?

"There is a real danger that poor retention rates, low achievement rates and a lack of information to demonstrate the value of training programmes will undermine the value of apprenticeships and diminish the prestige of the brand."

CBI: 'Let's unlock levy money that isn't being used too productively'

The apprenticeship levy should only be reformed for sectors where it is being under-utilised, according to the Confederation of British Industry. Chief policy director Matthew Fell from the CBI told conference that the employer representative body had "got a little bit of traction" from the Treasury, after chancellor Rishi Sunak said the levy would be examined alongside other elements of the tax system in his spring statement.

"We said to the Treasury that we think there's a way of getting better bang for the buck out of this," Fell said.

"Keep it as it is today for firms that it's working brilliantly for, but then let's unlock that money that isn't being used as productively in some other firms and some other sectors for the skills that they need."

Fell said it was "not a slam dunk" it would happen but believed there is interest in introducing flexibility to certain sectors.

The CBI would like to see the levy element ringfenced but able to be used for more flexible training, he explained.

"Some people might say, actually, I really like that to be spent on apprenticeships just as I'm using today, because it's working fantastically," he said. "Others would say, actually, you know what, I can only really utilise 30, 40, 50 per cent of that on an apprenticeship route, but I have some other really burning issue skills needs over here."

Fell said firms "should be stepping up and spending a lot more on training" but it was a difficult ask when the existing levy was under-utilised.

In addition, he told the conference that apprenticeships were best for getting people into work for the first time, but bitesize training was more suitable for existing workers needing training.

He said: "If you're already in the world of work, there are elements of it that I don't need to relearn – how do I properly behave and treat myself, handle myself in the world of work?

"But what I'd absolutely need is then some of the skill elements of the apprenticeship to learn a new craft.

"If I'm in automotive, for example, and I spent the last decade or more learning how to build combustion engines and that's what I do, how do I flip that across to electric vehicles?"

He added: "Taking the best bits of the apprenticeship levy and making it available to existing workers in a digestible format, as well as those people into the world of work – if we can crack both of those things we think we can be on to something."


Matt Fell

AELP **NATIONAL CONFERENCE**

AoC: Consultants will be the big winners from college reclassification

Consultants and auditors are set to cash in on any reclassification of colleges as public sector institutions in the future, the Association of Colleges boss has warned.

David Hughes told conference that the financial side will be among the biggest change in the sector if Office for National Statistics proposals to reclassify colleges as public instead of private organisations goes through.

"The biggest implication is around the college accounts that become public accounts. So DfE will have all the college accounts on its balance sheet," he said.

"Anyone who's got shares in an auditing or accountancy firm, you're going to make loads of money because there's just going to be loads of business for consultants working out how to make this work."

He refused to be drawn on whether he supported any change in classification, but said there may be a risk of more interference.

Elsewhere, Hughes said VAT could be affected, while capital borrowing procedures may also change as they will be carried out through local government, rather than commercial means.

He added: "We're pushing really hard, as you would expect, to get the National Insurance one per cent pay for colleges, because it was paid for all public sector. So if colleges become public sector in September, we'll say, 'Well, where's the one per cent bit of extra money?'"

Hughes also spoke about the AoC's latest 2.5 per cent pay offer to the University and College Union, which the UCU rejected last week. He admitted fewer colleges than usual may be in a position to accept the offer.

"Colleges don't have to adhere to the pay award we recommend – it is a recommendation," he said. "Usually about two-thirds of colleges either made the recommendation or exceed it. I think that's probably going to be slightly less this year, but I think more than half will."

Hughes said pay in the sector isn't good

David Hughes

enough, with the combination of bills like gas and electricity rising, inflation hitting nine per cent and only "modest" increases in funding creating a "perfect storm".

He added: "I think it's going to be really tough. But what we all have to do as employers is just make our institutions or organisations more attractive to the people that are out there with more choice. So, holiday pay, CPD training, progression opportunities, flexible working – all of those things become much, much more important."

IfATE: 'We're not in a position to give everyone a funding band lift overnight'

The outcome of the apprenticeships funding rate review will not be published until February 2023 at the earliest, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education has said.

And there will be no immediate changes to existing funding bands for apprenticeship standards upon conclusion of the review.

IfATE chief executive Jennifer Coupland was pressed for an update on the review during this week's AELP conference. She explained that a pilot of the new funding model, which has been designed to better reflect the "true cost of delivery", is ongoing.

Coupland said she understood the sector's concerns about skyrocketing inflation resulting in higher costs for apprenticeship delivery, but warned that the institute is "not in a position to give everyone a funding band lift overnight".

She did not say when the IfATE would publish the final outcome of the review, but a spokesperson for the institute told *FE Week* it won't be until the 12-month pilot, which started in January 2022, is complete.

The review will take into account the Department for Education's eligible costs review, which is due for publication "shortly", according to a document published in May alongside the draft apprenticeship funding rules for 2022/23.

There will not be an immediate change to existing funding bands following the conclusion of the pilot, the spokesperson said, although any revisions will subsequently be managed through the new model.

Apprenticeship standards and their funding bands are reviewed periodically by IfATE, but may be reviewed in other circumstances, such as lower than expected starts.

The institute's revision process also allows trailblazers to request reviews of funding bands after the apprenticeship has been approved for delivery for at least 12 months.

IfATE said it takes around eight weeks to fully consider a funding band recommendation. If the institute approves, it is then subject to sign off from the education secretary. However. there is no expected timeframe for this.

Jennifer Coupland

Coupland also used her speech to plug IfATE's plans to create a "fully integrated skills system" over the next five years.

She said there were over 14,000 different technical qualifications available last year, so it is "no wonder employers find it nigh on impossible to fathom which qualifications are any good".

"Employers have been saying consistently and for so many years that the system is too complicated, they don't understand it and it's difficult for them to engage with,", she added. "Educationalists sometimes try half-heartedly to justify it, but most of the time they just tune it out."

Coupland continued: "But what if we actually started really listening to it – I mean really listening – and then acting on it?

"We plan to create a high-quality, streamlined system that employers can value and use easily."

AELP NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Collaboration between AELP, AoC and HOLEX is hugely important

JANE HICKIE

Chief executive, Association of Employment and Learning Providers

The resilience of FE will be tested in the year ahead. Here are five key takeaways from our recent national conference, writes Jane Hickie

AELP's first in-person national conference in three years took place this week. Among the packed agenda, we learned a lot from the two-day event. Here's five key takeaways from me:

1 There are huge challenges facing us in the year ahead

There are big challenges ahead. A common theme from providers was the impact rising costs are having on their ability to continue delivering high-quality training provision, linked with issues around recruiting and retaining good staff.

Level 2 and below qualification reform is also a major worry. These are important stepping stones, and we must be careful not to remove opportunities in the name of simplification.

And we heard support for our position from Jennifer Coupland of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.

2 Our resilience will be tested at times – but we will persevere

These challenges will test our resilience. This includes meeting the skills minister's new ambition for an overall 67 per cent achievement rate on apprenticeship standards by 2025 – this ambitious target will need proper funding and support from government.

It was great to have the minister with us, and I hope he heard our concerns loud and clear.

While the new achievement rate target is certainly very ambitious, I fear it won't be achievable until the Department for Education irons out unhelpful nuances in the current qualification achievement rates methodology and finds a better way to measure success.

Nevertheless, I've really appreciated the minister's engagement with AELP recently – particularly his commitment to helping more SMEs to engage with apprenticeships. However, we clearly still have more lobbying to do around functional skills and tackling inflation before we see further movement. Rome wasn't built in a day – we will persist!

3 We will need more collaboration in the sector

Meeting these challenges means we need to collaborate more effectively – the whole FE sector must push in the same direction on the big issues.

David Hughes, of the Association of Colleges (AoC), focused on this by pointing out there are many areas in which we share common challenges and aims – so why wouldn't we work together?

Strengthening the relationship between AoC, adult education provider body HOLEX and AELP will be good for the whole sector.

Speaking of collaboration, on Tuesday, we launched our joint report with ERSA on employability and skills provision. 'Hiding The Join' – rather fittingly – calls for more collaboration between government departments to ensure better alignment across employability and skills.

4 AELP plays a crucial role in the sector

National conference was an opportunity to reflect on the importance of AELP's work for our members.

At a time when providers need support and a national voice more than ever, that sense of community is crucial. Membership is growing steadily and skills have never been higher on the government's agenda.

Despite the challenges, we've also had some great wins over the past 12 months, including positive changes to the off-the-job training requirements, a re-set on the cap of ten starts for non-levy-paying employers, imminent changes to the law so that prisoners can undertake an apprenticeship, and additional skills funding in the multi-year spending review.

> "The whole FE sector must push in the same direction on the big issues"

5 A modern economy needs ITPs

The role of independent training providers in delivering the skills our country needs continues to grow. As we come out of the Covid-19 pandemic, and our relationship with the European Union changes, there is even more demand for high-quality home-grown skills.

ITPs – given their ability to adapt and innovate – should play a prime role in making levelling up a success and shifting to a low-carbon economy.

That's why ensuring there's a level playing field between all types of providers has never been more vital.

News

Investigation: how colleges coped with the £61.4m AEB clawback

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FROM FRONT | EXCLUSIVE

Redundancies, slashing professional development budgets and merging classes are among lengths colleges have gone to in mitigating the impact of controversial clawbacks to adult education funding, an *FE Week* investigation has found.

Analysis of government data showed that £61.4 million had been clawed back by the Education and Skills Funding Agency from 103 institutions, where less than 90 per cent of their AEB allocation was spent in 2020/21.

The threshold proved divisive when it was announced in March last year, after being set at 68 per cent the year before as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns limiting in-person teaching. Colleges had argued that the pandemic had continued to impact teaching and finances during 2020/21 – particularly in areas which experienced local lockdowns as well as nationwide restrictions.

The ESFA had initially refused a business case process for colleges to explain why they should be given leniency for missing the 90 per cent target, but u-turned on that in July last year.

Despite more than 80 per cent of those that submitted a business case being given some sort of reprieve (even if it wasn't for the full amount they wished to retain), colleges have still suffered as a result.

Following the recent publication of the ESFA's AEB clawback data, most institutions have remained tight-lipped about the impact this has had, but an *FE Week* investigation has uncovered some of the struggles.

Derby College Group, which was among six colleges where more than £2 million was clawed back, confirmed it had been forced to make redundancies (24 voluntary and 22 compulsory) while 24 workers were redeployed within the organisation.

In its annual accounts for the year ending July 2021, the college said: "As a result of an announcement by the ESFA to only reduce the tolerance on the AEB funding stream to 90 per cent, significantly higher than the previous year, where there was a lesser impact on adult education for DCG, DCG undertook a major restricting [restructuring] exercise in the latter part of 2020/21 in order to compensate for the anticipated clawback of AEB funding."

West Nottinghamshire College had just over £2.5 million clawed back, but said its favourable cash position from an in-year surplus meant ESFA advice indicated a business case wouldn't be successful.

It made adjustments to its finances mid-year, which meant no staff reductions were needed, but it still had

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

TOP 10 AEB COLLEGE CLAWBACKS IN 2020/21

College name	Amount of AEB clawed back
Birmingham Metropolitan College	£3,891,000
Ruskin College	£3,557,000
DCG	£2,959,000
EKC Group	£2,913,000
South Thames College Group	£2,831,000
West Nottinghamshire College	£2,541,000
Richmond and Hillcroft Adult Community College	£1,950,000
Harlow College	£1,942,000
Chichester College Group	£1,855,000
RNN Group	£1,568,000

Source: College accounts 2020-21 data, ESFA

CORRECTION: The original table contained a clawback of £1,928,000 against West Herts College. The college has clarified that the ESFA's information is incorrect and their actual clawback was £919,000. FE Week has amended the table to reflect this.

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to make some changes.

The college confirmed it had limited recruitment of new staff, as well as use of its capital budget. Budgets for areas such as staff training and development were also reduced.

"Although it was reasonable that colleges were incentivised to deliver more AEB activity, the revised targets were too high and achieving them was always going to be immensely challenging, given the Covid-19 pandemic, with various lockdowns affecting the ability to deliver face-to-face provision," a college spokesperson said.

"Mansfield and Ashfield had among the highest rates of Covid infections during the second wave in early 2021, which impacted upon us disproportionately. Furthermore, the college continued to incur staffing costs and did not access support through the government's furlough scheme, which we feel should be recognised."

RNN Group, which runs Rotherham, North Notts and Dearne Valley colleges, said it was unable to comment on the measures it had taken, but in board meeting minutes from October said it was "reviewing class sizes, and decisions may be taken to merge some to make them more efficient", explaining that the AEB underachievement had been "significant".

A spokesperson said: "The group recognises the need to apply appropriate performance management to public funding based upon evidenced impact and remains committed to ensuring value for money and high levels of quality in public funding.

"It is felt, however, that the significant impact of Covid-19 upon educational providers strongly focussed upon meeting the needs of both local communities and employers could have been given greater recognition."

RNN secured the second highest amount in its business case, at just over £1.5 million, behind only Leicester College, which was allowed to keep £2.1 million.

Leicester had been a vocal opponent of the clawback back in March 2021, with its students' union launching a petition with more than 5,000 signatures against the policy, albeit before the business case process had been allowed.

In a blog post on its website prior to the business case announcement, principal Verity Hancock said the college faced having to hand back around £4 million, warning of "serious consequences" for cashflow, capital programmes and future plans.

In the final figures Leicester had £701,000 to return. The college did not wish to comment further.

Chichester College also declined to comment, but in its report and financial statement for the year ending July 2021 it said that additional in-year enrolments in 2021/22 may be needed to offset the clawback.

Ruskin College had the second highest amount clawed back – £3.5 million, behind only Birmingham Metropolitan College's £3.8 million – and cited ESFA clawbacks and Covid-19's impact on student recruitment in its year-end financial report last July. A spokesperson from the University of West London, which acquired the college in August last year, said a strategic plan had helped move the college on to a break-even position this financial year.

Of the 103 institutions where some level of funding was returned, 19 had more than £1 million clawed back, which included two above £3 million and four between £1 million and £2 million.

Justifying its switch to the 90 per cent threshold back in March 2021, the ESFA said it acknowledged the situation was difficult for providers but 90 per cent was "a fair representation of grant-funded providers' average delivery".

It also cited the remote learning arrangements colleges were forced to develop at the start of the pandemic as an "effective contingency" to continue delivering learning.

In January, the Department for Education revealed that 78 providers had submitted a business case, 58 of which were from general further education colleges. Of those, 48 were successful.

Its criteria was for providers to demonstrate that "local circumstances made it impossible for the provider to deliver at or close to the 90 per cent level" or that "applying the full amount of AEB clawback would cause significant financial difficulties for the provider".

News

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DfE monitors staff after edict to return to the office

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EXCLUSIVE

The Department for Education is now monitoring WiFi use to track attendance after ordering staff to return to in-person working at least four days a week.

Officials who do not physically attend an office for 30 days or more will be reported to their managers.

FE Week revealed in May how civil servants had been forced to work in corridors and canteens because the department has almost twice as many workers as desks.

The DfE confirmed this week it is tracking logins to its virtual private network (VPN) and local area network (LAN).

Headline data on attendance is shared with the Cabinet Office, where the mandate to return to the office originated. Individual data is passed to senior civil servants so they can have discussions with those not coming in.

Helen Kenny, a national officer at the FDA union, which represents senior civil servants, said it was "very disappointing" the DfE "continues to waste time and energy tracking when staff are in the office, rather than accepting that the world of work has fundamentally changed".

"FDA members have proven themselves to be just as, if not more, productive when working remotely, and government departments should move with the times. Work is what you do, not where you do it."

Nadhim Zahawi, the education secretary, ordered staff to return to the office at least four days a week earlier this year. It followed a government-wide edict from efficiency minister Jacob Rees-Mogg, who visited departments and left notes for absent officials.

But the push backfired because the DfE, which encouraged flexible and hybrid working before the pandemic, has far more staff than desks.

Staff outnumber desks by almost two-to-one across the department's 12 offices, figures seen by *FE Week* show. In Leeds, there are just 24 desks for 110 staff. Bristol has 95 desks for 299 people.

There was further criticism at the end of May when staff at the department's overcrowded Sheffield office, which has nearly double the number of staff than desks, struggled to evacuate after a "suspect package" was discovered.

The order to leave resulted in queues in the stairwell and congestion on upper floors.

A DfE spokesperson said its approach "fits with the amount of desk space we have, gives us full and vibrant offices but also retains flexibility to work in different ways when needed.

"This is good for our business and staff - and good for the children and learners we serve every day."

NEET 16: out of work and training 16-year-olds at highest level in nearly a decade

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The number of 16-year-olds not in education, employment or training is at its highest level since 2012, new data shows.

Department for Education figures released on Thursday showed the overall NEET figure for 16-18s is down, thanks largely to a big fall in 18-year-olds considered to be NEET.

But the numbers for 16- and 17-year-olds not in education, employment or training is more of a concern.

FE Week has picked out the key findings from the latest stats.

16-year-old NEETs highest since 2012

The number of NEETs aged 16 in 2021 is 4.9 per cent, according to the DfE's Thursday release.

That's the highest it has been for nearly a decade – back in 2012 the 16-year-old level was 5.8 per cent.

In addition, the figure for NEETs aged 17 has also risen – 5.2 per cent last year compared to 4.6 per cent in 2020. The last time it was that high was in 2016, at 5.6 per cent.

Laura-Jane Rawlings, chief executive of Youth Employment UK, said it was "concerning" and saw a number of factors at play.

"The growing anxiety for those in education on what their future will hold and the inconsistency in support around key transition points could mean this is a growing trend," she said.

"With a growing mental health emergency for our young people and a lack of support to make big decisions, inaction can feel like the safest option to young people."

Rawlings said the Covid-19 pandemic and fluctuations in the economy and labour market meant teenagers have had to make decisions on their future during a period of uncertainty.

She added: "There is growing frustration from organisations struggling to recruit and a record number of vacancies – all the while young people remain convinced that there are no opportunities local to them. This shows that there is worrying disconnect between young people and opportunity, something Youth Employment UK works hard to address through our #CreateYourFuture campaign."

Sam Avanzo Windett, deputy director at the Learning and Work Institute and co-chair of the Youth Employment Group, said: "The latest DfE measures show a record low rate of 18-year-old NEETs, which is cause for celebration.

"However, we're concerned by the continuing rise in economic inactivity among young people. In a labour market with record levels of job vacancies, there are a growing number of young people who are not engaged in the labour market and risk being locked out of these opportunities."

Findings are soon to be published on the characteristics of NEET youngsters, which will highlight health issues and disparities, the institute said.

Record low for 18-year-old NEETs

18-year-olds appear to be helping to bring down the number of overall 16-to-18 NEETs, as the DfE data shows a record low of 9.3 per cent of 18-year-olds who are NEET.

This marks the first time that number has been below ten per cent, and contributed to the overall NEET rate for 16-to-18s being 6.4 per cent. That is its lowest since 2017, when 6.4 per cent was also recorded.

A DfE spokesperson said: "It is great to see that despite the impact of Covid, the proportion of 16-18-year-olds not in education, employment or training remains one of the lowest on record, with those aged 18 the lowest on record.

"Our ambitious education recovery programme is supporting pupils to catch up on lost learning through tuition, world-class teaching and extending time in schools and colleges.

"Alongside this, we're continuing to work with employers to offer more apprenticeship opportunities, rolling out new T Level qualifications, and have launched a campaign 'Get the Jump' to promote the full range of exciting opportunities available to young people."

Boys still favour apprenticeships

According to the data, more males than females are still opting for the apprenticeship route.

Figures for apprenticeships and work-based learning last year was 3.5 per cent for females in comparison to the 5.9 per cent recorded for males.

It appears females still favour the full-time education pathway, as the 77.2 per cent figure for females in full-time education remains well above the 70.1 per cent figure for males.

News

Keith Smith to leave DfE to become college boss

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A high-profile skills civil servant is set to leave the Department for Education to become the chief executive of a college.

Keith Smith will take the reins at HCUC, the merged college group for Harrow College and Uxbridge College, in November.

He will replace Darrell DeSouza who is retiring from the role after over 20 years at Uxbridge College and HCUC.

Smith began working in the then Skills Funding Agency in 2012 as director of funding and programmes before becoming director of apprenticeships in the Education and Skills Funding Agency in 2018, leading on the levy and funding reforms.

He moved to the DfE as director of post-16 strategy and analysis in 2020 and led on the skills for jobs white paper.

"It is a real privilege to be given the opportunity to lead HCUC," Smith said. "I am really excited to work alongside such an amazing team and represent the outstanding work done at both Harrow College and Uxbridge College. We have an exciting future ahead."

His move comes amid government plans to reduce the civil service headcount by 91,000 by 2025.

HCUC said Smith's experience and background will "provide a new perspective for the role" at the college.

Nick Davies, HCUC chair, said: "I know all of HCUC's staff and stakeholders will join me and the entire governing body in congratulating Mr Smith on his appointment, and we look forward to Keith taking up this new role later in the year."

HCUC teaches almost 10,000 students, including programmes for young people, adults and apprentices.

The college was judged as 'good' by Ofsted in a report published last month.

Smith will join as Richmond upon Thames


Keith Smith

College merges with HCUC in the autumn. Richmond is currently engaged in a bitter dispute with University and College Union staff members, who are preparing to strike for three consecutive weeks at the beginning of the 2022/23 academic year.

New EQA process launches for degree apprenticeships

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A new "method" for external quality assurance of integrated higher and degree-level apprenticeships has been launched.

Thirty-eight standards, mostly delivered by universities, will be subject to the scrutiny delivered by the Designated Quality Body in England (DQB) on behalf of the Office for Students (OfS).

Site visits using the new EQA method will begin next month.

It is part of the second phase of the reforms to how EQA works for apprenticeship end-point assessment.

The first phase involved transitioning apprenticeships below integrated higher and degree-level to Ofqual for EQA from a mix of professional bodies, employers and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. This process is still ongoing.

A new handbook outlining DQB's new method has been published this week. It includes sections on readiness checks and approvals, as well as how the EQA monitoring process will work.

The handbook says DQB will undertake risk-based monitoring of each apprenticeship, confirming that the delivery of the EPA is "valid and compliant, delivering consistent and comparable results that are recognised by employers as delivering the right outcomes".

DQB will also "confirm evidence and information that will be required from the EPAO, giving them the chance to comment on and agree reported information", and "identify actions and recommendations to inform the EPAO's action planning process".

Rob Stroud, director of the DQB, said his organisation's independent experts will check that providers and EPAOs are "delivering high-quality outcomes for apprentices, employers and all those involved in their delivery".

Rob Nitsch, delivery director of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, said the announcement is an "important step forward for higher and degree-level apprenticeships".

"It is vital that all assessment is consistent and of high quality, meeting the high expectations we have for all apprenticeships," he said.

"It must match up to the rigour associated with higher-level learning but also fully respect that this is an apprenticeship, so the focus must be on ensuring the apprentices are properly challenged to prove they can do the job they've trained for. I am confident that the new method will achieve this."

London college staff to strike at start of 2022/23 over fire and rehire plans

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Staff at Richmond upon Thames College have announced another round of strikes over "fire and rehire" plans – this time for 14 consecutive days that clash with the first teaching week of the next academic year.

University and College Union members said they will down tools over a three-week period in August and September in response to management plans to "sack every teacher at the college and force them to reapply for their jobs on worse terms and conditions if they want to stay".

The announcement comes in the same week that staff take a further day of strike action aimed at disrupting an open day taking place at the college.

Around 70 staff took five consecutive days of strike action in May, which prompted local MP Munira Wilson to call on the college to withdraw the fire and rehire threat.

Richmond upon Thames College (RuTC) previously condemned the UCU's action, which clashed with the busy exam period for students.

The college has urged the union to reconsider its latest strike action, which a spokesperson described as an "unacceptable tactic".

The dispute has arisen over the college's proposal to reduce the current 64 days per year of annual leave, including bank holidays and efficiency days, to what the college calls "a level in line with other FE colleges".

UCU has claimed staff would lose ten days of holiday – but the college said it is proposing a "net loss" of eight days of annual leave with full financial compensation.

"This is not a cost-cutting exercise but one which in fact will compensate staff fully for the reduction in annual leave and thereby increase their salary during a time of cost-of-living rises," a spokesperson for the college said.

But UCU said holiday entitlement is one of the few perks in RuTC, which allegedly pays qualified teachers "as little as £26,000". The union claimed that teachers with over 13 years' experience only earn around £37,000 – lower than at "most colleges in the surrounding area, and teachers at local schools can earn up to £51,000".

UCU regional official Adam Lincoln said: "Staff now fighting to save their jobs have dedicated themselves to supporting their students, and the fact that management are trying to slash ten days from their holiday entitlement is a mark of shame for the entire college, and one which will rightly shock current and prospective students as well as the wider community in the area.

"The announcement of further strike action shows staff are going absolutely nowhere, and it is in the interests of college management to immediately remove the threat to people's jobs, ditch these plans and treat staff properly."

The summer strikes, which will hit enrolment, induction and the first week of teaching in 2022/23, will run from August 22 to September 9.

An RuTC spokesperson said: "These dates are clearly and cynically targeted at disrupting the enrolment process and start of teaching for new students joining the college in 2022/23, as well as prolonging the disruption to the learning experience for continuing students who have been impacted by the strike action carried out to date.

"We are aware that the ongoing dispute with UCU might reasonably give rise to concerns for prospective students and their parents/carers, as well as those already with us and continuing into 2022/23.

"Please be reassured that the college remains committed to providing all of our students with the best possible learning experience and opportunities to achieve, and we have already put in place strong and effective contingency plans to ensure that any disruption from further industrial action is minimised and our students' learning experience is fully protected."

The spokesperson added that management at RuTC "will not be intimidated by tactics that seek to coerce by means of threat of further disruption to our students' learning and assessment experience".

PEARSON BTEC AND MOBIE HELP LEARNERS MEET THE SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGE IN CONSTRUCTION

MOBIE and Pearson BTEC have partnered to create four exciting units for the BTEC Level 3 Nationals in Construction and the Built Environment. These units explore efficient modern methods of construction and place emphasis on quality, performance, energy efficiency, sustainability and future digital technologies.

The importance of teaching sustainability in construction

Meeting the challenges of climate change and decarbonisation is critical. Our buildings account for 40% of CO_2 emissions, therefore it is imperative that we invest in zero carbon homes and update the country's 27 million homes to be efficient and ecological. The government agrees, with its Build Back Better campaign stating that the UK will have 'the most efficient, technologically advanced and sustainable construction sector in the world'. The government have also committed to reducing all greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050.

This promise not only calls for modernisation of materials and energy efficiencies but also greater understanding and take up of Modern Methods of Construction (MMC). If these aims are to be achieved, we must start with educating and training young people who will lead and manage the future of the construction industry. Through collaborative and innovative education and training we can bring young people's ambitions and the country's needs to the forefront.

Breaking stereotypes and reaching new kinds of learners

Construction and the Built Environment has not always been perceived as the most auspicious and inspiring career industry for school leavers as there is limited awareness towards the varied and exciting jobs available, as well as longstanding stereotypes about construction workers and lack of diversity.

This is totally at odds with meeting the future needs and opportunities within the sector. We must inform and attract new types of learners to construction and show that the industry now has a place for those interested in all aspects of modern technology, IT and digital skills and solutions. To ensure this, our centres, courses and tutors must equip learners with the resources needed to understand and practise digital technologies like Building Information Modelling, VR and AI.

Collaboration between MOBIE and Pearson BTEC

MOBIE, Ministry of Building Innovation and Education, was established by architect and TV presenter, George Clarke in 2017. With its education partners, MOBIE aims to inspire and educate young people to revolutionise the way they think about homes and how they want to live now and in the future.

MOBIE have worked with Pearson BTEC and industry partners to provide optional units for the BTEC Level 3 Nationals in Construction and the Built Environment, creating four units specifically for the housing sector. These units focus on innovative and future-proofed housing design, the use of renewable energy in housing, offsite and onsite alternative construction methods, and sustainability in the housing industry.

MOBIE and Pearson BTEC have further updated specifications, with changes taking effect from September 2022, which include the critical retrofit agenda, digital design technology and knowledge of the latest innovative materials and methods such as smart roofing materials, smart glass, SIPS panels, awareness of advancements in relevant manufacturing technologies such as robotics and 3D printing and the increasing integration of manufacturing with design and build in the sector. Pearson BTEC will also be offering a new Level 4 Higher National Certificate in Modern Methods of Construction, approved by IFATE and available for delivery in 2023.

To find out more about how you can prepare your learners for the future of construction, visit **mobie.org.uk** and **quals.pearson.com/BTECMOBIE**

Pearson MOBIE Ministry of Building Innovation and Education

Gerry Ruffles and Jessica Rayif-Pearson (MOBIE ambassador, ex-BTEC Construction learner and current Engineering Apprentice with MACE Group) at Harlow College

By Gerry Ruffles, Head of Education for MOBIE with responsibility for MOBIE's range of courses, training programmes and design challenges. Gerry has been with MOBIE since its inception after twenty-five years in Construction and Built Environment Further and Higher Education following several years in industry and as a partner in a Design and Build company.

Tell applicants your drop-out and employment rates, universities ordered

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Universities and higher education providers are being told by ministers to advertise subject drop-out and employment rates to stop students ending up "stuck on dead-end" courses.

Government said the plans aim to give students "genuine choice" about where to study and will "clearly identify courses with high drop-out rates and poor graduate outcomes".

However, it will only be voluntary, non-statutory guidance. If take-up is "insufficient", ministers may consider whether to make it mandatory.

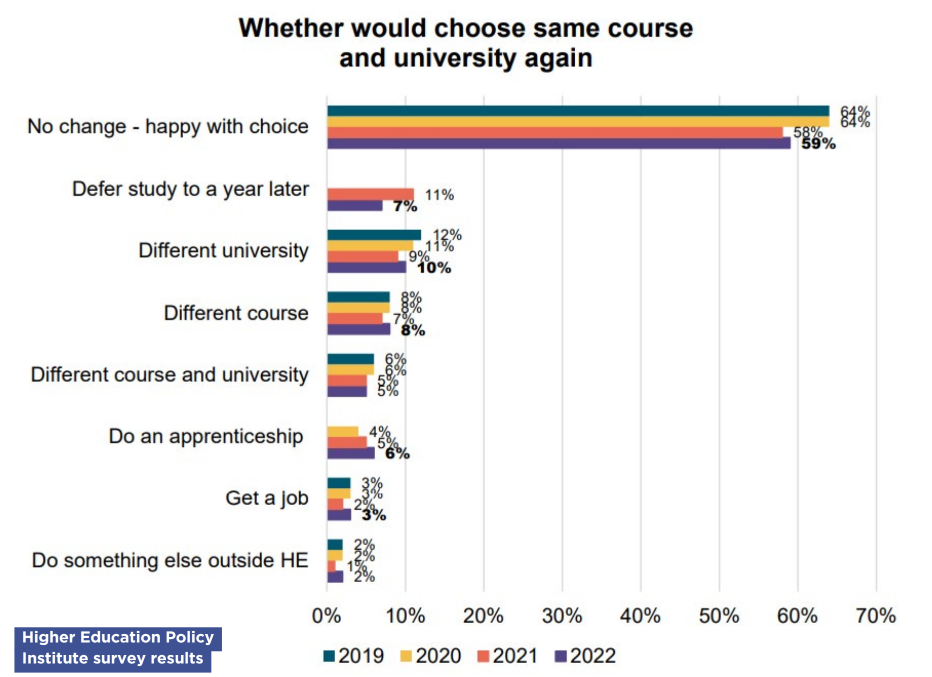
All providers on the Office for Students register will be asked to comply. However, only full-time, first degree courses are in scope. It does not apply to foundation degrees, post-graduate degrees or degree level apprenticeship standards.

Critics say it risks "stigmatising" universities trying to help those who "aren't academic superstars".

A study by the Higher Education Policy Institute found that 59 per cent of students said they'd make the same choice of university and course again. This was 64 per cent in 2019, pre-pandemic.

Michelle Donelan, higher education minister, said the guidance will "ensure that just as every advert for a loan or credit card must include basic information like the APR, every university advert should include comparable data on drop-out rates and the progression rate of students into graduate jobs or further study".

"Making such a significant investment in your time, money and future is not made any easier by bold university advertising, which often promises students a high-quality experience even when the statistics suggest they will be stuck on a dead-end course."



Higher Education Policy Institute survey results

Geoff Barton, general secretary of school leaders' union ASCL, said the matter is more complex than "dead-end courses" and that the move risks "stigmatising universities and courses which are actually trying to do the right thing for those who aren't academic superstars".

"Clearly, they have to make sure that they are putting the appropriate support in place for these young people to help reduce drop-out rates and ensure good outcomes. But this is a much harder job than it is with very confident and able young people."

Bill Watkin, chief executive at the Sixth Form Colleges Association, said HE's value "extends beyond its role in contributing to the employment market and future careers".

The guidance says that while the data is already publicly available, it generally "requires some inside knowledge and a certain amount of persistence" to access it.

So the government wants universities to position the data "prominently" on all "institutional and subject-specific advertising".

They suggest the font size should be the same as the main body of text, but it could be smaller than the headline.

It should apply to all new advertising, including on web pages, social media, TV and radio and influencers.

Nick Hillman, HEPI director, said "the decision will leave many vice-chancellors wondering whether their institutions are as autonomous as they thought they were".

Study X at the University of Y

[Insert Subject Group name] Completion Rate: 85% Professional Employment or Further Study Rate: 75%

The University of Y

Completion Rate: 78% Professional Employment or Further Study Rate: 81%

Example outcomes advertisement provided by DfE

Focus: Decarbonising college estates

'We had 144 holes in the ground – it looked like the Somme'

JESS STAUFENBERG
@STAUFENBERGJ

Decarbonising a college estate is a huge, multi-million-pound project. Jess Staufenberg talks to three leaders about risking it all for huge cuts to bills and carbon footprints

Even before the current crisis in spiralling energy bills, colleges were sounding warning shots about the costs facing them this year. Cast your mind back to 2021, when a number of energy suppliers went bust amid rising gas prices and when a survey by the Association of Colleges showed colleges faced a rise of £20 million in energy bills this year.

Since then, the war in Ukraine has brought an unwelcome ethical as well as economic element into the equation. *FE Week* has previously reported how colleges face a "moral dilemma" over exiting contracts with Russian suppliers such as Gazprom – torn between not wanting to fund an invasion and having to negotiate new, pricier energy contracts.

At the same time, carbon zero targets march ever closer. Our climate strategy deep-dive in November revealed many FE providers are playing catch-up as local authorities have announced climate emergencies and the government set its 2050 net zero carbon target.

Then in April the Department for Education published its 'green strategy' for education, including a requirement for all capital projects to consider carbon reduction measures, and reminding the sector that the UK aims to reduce emissions from public sector buildings by 75 per cent by 2037 compared to a 2017 baseline.

So decarbonising the college estate looks more urgent than ever – but with squeezed budgets, it's also harder for colleges to undertake the massive restructuring projects to wean themselves off environmentally harmful, and morally compromised, gas and coal.

So how can it be done?

The 'why'

FE Week has spoken at length to three colleges with large campuses that undertook multi-million-pound projects around their energy sources.

Luke Rake, chief executive at Kingston Maurward College in Dorset, says it felt like a "pretty poor show" for a land-based college to have a heating system based on oil and liquid petroleum gas. Overall, the college was releasing about 1,000 tons of carbon a year.


Luke Rake

"All of our courses involve the environment, plants and animals. But the reality was we

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Focus: Decarbonising college estates

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were not doing a great thing for the carbon footprint."

External targets also made an impression, he continues: the National Farmers' Union set a carbon zero target for 2040, Dorset Council set 2030 and campaign group Extinction Rebellion set 2025. Rake, himself an environmentalist, chose 2025.


Iain Baldwin

Meanwhile Derby College Group was also motivated by practical considerations. According to Iain Baldwin, director of estates, the Broomfield Hall campus was heavily dependent on coal-fired boilers which needed lorryloads of coal to be delivered on the site and shovelled into the ovens. "It was heavily reliant on manual input to operate it," says Baldwin, and it meant lorries were constantly visiting the site.


Gary Horne

Finance and resilience were other key drivers. "It was a substantial cost – we used to have a delivery every ten days throughout the year," he says. "I also didn't want a whole site with one heating system, because if one thing goes down, it all goes down.

One of the reasons for introducing the new provision was spread betting."

Finally, reducing the carbon footprint at the Colchester Institute in north Essex was "close to the heart of the principal," Alison Andreas, according to her deputy chief executive. Gary Horne explains the college declared a climate emergency in October last year and set a target to slash its carbon emissions 50 per cent by 2030.

Students were also suffering from the poor insulation and heating systems throughout the college, Horne adds. "There were single glazed metal windows, and many of them either wouldn't close or were welded shut."

The heating was expensive yet learners often had to wear coats indoors in winter.

Another main motivator was financial. As finance director, Horne has got a horribly tight situation on his books as energy prices rise. The college's energy bill is forecast to rise from half a million pounds to £1.3 million next year, and he needs all the help he can get in finding efficiencies.

Raising funds

Each college is clear they could never


Preparing the boring holes at Kingston Maurward College


New solar panels at Derby College group

have carried out the huge capital project work without government funding. They all applied to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme, which was launched by the government in 2020 and has had three funding rounds so far.

Kingston Maurward College secured just over £2 million from the fund, with £300,000 extra put in by Dorset Council, to instal ground-source heat pumps. Work began last January and completed in March.

Colchester Institute got £3.7 million, and put in £1.3 million itself by selling some land. The funds allowed the college to replace its gas-fired boilers with air-source heat pumps as well as replace single glazed windows and instal insulation panels. Work began in August 2021 and, due to Covid delays, only completed in March this year.

Meanwhile, Derby College Group secured £3.6 million from the fund, to replace its coal-fired boilers with six air-source heat pumps and three water-source heat pumps, as well as to install 101 solar panels, LED lighting and insulation. Work also began in August last year, with the new technology switched on in January this year.

For the uninitiated, an air-source heat pump is like reverse air conditioning. It absorbs heat from the air outside a building, which is used to heat either the air or water inside the building. Because it

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Focus: Decarbonising college estates

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runs on electricity, it can be connected to a renewable energy source and so provides a low-carbon alternative to fossil-fuelled heating.

A ground-source heat pump transfers natural heat from the ground, again using renewable electricity to compress fluid, run it deep into the earth, raise it to a higher temperature and return it to the building.

Getting ready

"You need to go into this stuff with your eyes open and a good plan because the timeline is tight, and you need to have all your ducks in order," says Rake, for whom this was his first major build as a principal.

In his case, permissions were the first hurdle. The main building at Kingston Maurward College is a grade I listed mansion and other buildings are grade II*, so planning permission was needed from national charity Historic England as well as the local conservation officer at Dorset Council. Thankfully, they both agreed.

Rake and his team also had to work out the most financially efficient way of getting the work done, eventually settling on eight contracts with five different contractors as the "best for the public purse".

At Derby College Group, the 200 acres of parkland means there's a lot of wildlife on site, Baldwin says, and so the team had to run bat surveys to establish the migratory paths of bat colonies and ensure they were safe.

The pump for bringing up the hot water from underground at Kingston Maurward College

The new air source heat pumps at Derby College group

Meanwhile Colchester Institute took a 'fabric first' approach and re-insulated its main building before tackling the energy supply. Another requirement of the fund was to employ at least 50 local construction staff – the college managed to find 71 staff locally, hitting a key performance indicator and allowing work to go ahead.

The final but crucial piece of preparation is to "win the hearts and minds" of staff and students, adds Horne. This will help with everyone understanding any inconveniences further down the line.

Works on site

At Colchester Institute, the main challenge was teaching in a building where all the windows and insulation were being ripped out and replaced, continues Horne.

"We had to move classes into other blocks, and we took out two storeys at a time in a five-floor building," he explains. It also helps to have "an understanding contractor who will down tools" around the exam period, he adds.

Covid also slowed the work down. The project was originally meant to be completed by November 2021 but computer chips coming from the continent for the new system were delayed by nearly eight weeks, pushing the completion date to March this year.

Insulating the building and replacing the windows at Colchester Institute

At Kingston Maurward College, the main challenge was the mud. The site needed 144 boreholes to be drilled, which were 130 metres deep to where the earth's temperature is warmer and liquid heats to 63 degrees Celsius. When Storm Eunice arrived in February this year, the college grounds "looked like the Somme," says Rake drily.

"I'm not overstating how much of a challenge the mud was. There was a lot of mess, mud trampled into everything."

The college was under particular pressure to keep the site presentable as it doubles up as a wedding venue, so to ensure minimal loss of income the works were scheduled for winter, when bookings are scarce, explains Rake.

Meanwhile, the campus at Derby College Group has many learners with additional needs, who needed extra support to ensure they were not at risk from all the building works happening on site, explains Baldwin.

"We had to be very mindful of learners who may be deaf and may not hear the lorry coming," he says.

Results and the future

By replacing four gas-fired boilers with air-source heat pumps run on electricity from wind farms off the coast of Essex, Colchester Institute has cut down on 290 tonnes of carbon per year. That's an 18 per cent reduction of the college's annual carbon footprint overall, amounting to about

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Focus: Decarbonising college estates

CONTINUED

£50,000 in savings a year.

So to become carbon net zero, the college wants to do the same work "four times over", at a cost of approximately £5 million each time, explains Horne. It shows the huge sums of money involved in effective decarbonisation.

"Our long-term aim is to be off grid if we can," he adds. This would enable the college to be completely independent of fluctuating national grid prices and the fossil fuel market, and the senior leadership team are already looking at solar panels in pursuit of that goal.

Another key benefit was educational: eight construction apprentices were employed by the contractors on site and enrolled with the college as part of the project.

Next, at Kingston Maurward College, more than 200 tonnes of carbon have been cut per year, or around 25 per cent of its carbon footprint. It amounts to around £25,000 in savings in the short term, with chief executive Luke Rake anticipating greater savings in the longer term.

The college has also seen an uptick in recruitment to its construction courses, possibly as a result of the reputational pull of the large-scale environmental project, he says.

Meanwhile at Derby College Group, a staggering 659 tonnes of carbon have been cut, resulting in £14,000 of savings a year. The project has also "improved site safety because we don't have lorries delivering coal, and the environment is better as we took down a ten-metre high chimney stack," explains Baldwin.

Improvements

All the colleges praised the expert support provided by Salix, the non-departmental public body which awards the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme funding (it's funded by the Department for Education and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy).

But the criteria for winning the funding can be tough, and may change for each new funding cycle, they add.

"It's first come, first served, so you've got to get in early," explains Horne. "It means you need to do all the legwork upfront and you're developing plans at risk."

Meanwhile the externally imposed timeframes for completing the works are tight and "do put you under pressure," says Rake (whose team had from January to end of March 2022 to get everything done).

These individual case studies are inspiring – but the mission now must be to convert such projects into a whole-sector transformation.

Yet we're still a long way off. According to Salix, 63 colleges applied for decarbonisation funding from Salix in 2020/21, but only seven were successful, with £10.2 million handed out.

Meanwhile in 2021/22, 27 applied and 16 were successful, with £12.1 million handed out. The next funding round opens for applications in September 2022.

So as ever, the government is making FE providers fight one another for a pot of money many times smaller than the amount needed to allow them to do what's necessary.

As a reminder, £13.5 billion was spent in one year on Covid testing, showing what money can be made available.

The climate emergency is surely even more serious than Covid. Rather than making colleges write more bids, perhaps government should allocate sufficient decarbonisation funding to every college estate, so that the sector has a real hope of meeting the 2037 deadline.

Better insulating replacement windows fitted at Derby College group

The new air source heat pumps at Derby College group

THE IMPORTANCE OF JOINED-UP DATA

How integrated data can help colleges drive improvement

advanced

Having access to accurate, up-to-date and connected data is critical for successful colleges and education providers. Too many are still being held back by non-intuitive and restrictive systems that are not capable of delivering the information needed in a timely or practical fashion. There are a number of ways that shifting to a joined-up approach can transform processes and results.

Course data

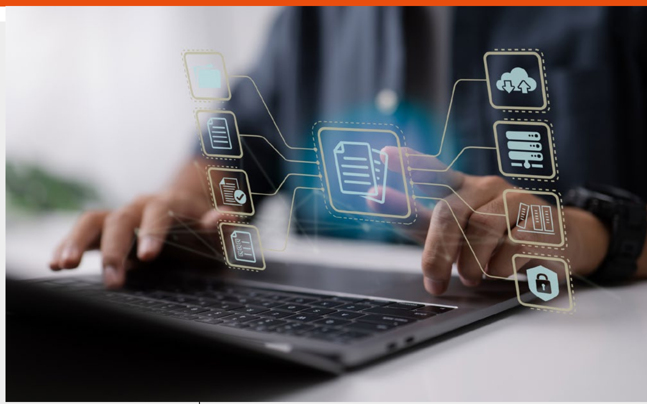
Having access to data about course delivery and learner successes is key for teaching staff, helping them to understand what is and is not working for their students and enhance the way they shape their sessions to deliver the best learner outcomes. Connected data empowers teachers to develop their lesson content and delivery where improved outcomes can flourish.

Course data is also valuable for college managers, giving them real time oversight of information such as attendance, that can help them shape future courses and provision. Strategies can be developed using accurate information that may be far more revealing than previous anecdotal evidence and reflective of actual rather than perceived changes in trends.

Individual learning journey

Ultimately, the day-to-day function of education delivery needs to be student-focused, with the experience of each individual learner a critical element in broader trends and outcomes. High quality data about individual learning journeys helps educators identify areas where a student may need more support or require a different approach in order to achieve their own particular goals.

Using accurate data is an essential tool for sharing information with students, as it represents honest and unbiased information. Teachers can use this to motivate, encourage and support better outcomes. When students can see that their learning experience is being recorded and evidenced in this way it can help with engagement, encouraging them to stick with their studies and achieve their goals. Supporting learner retention is not just important for the students. It's a vital objective for providers to maintain income streams that correlate to learner numbers and course completion data.



Management data

Using powerful data management solutions means the right information can be pulled together quickly and easily to create insightful reports to be shared with key stakeholders. They allow for more meaningful reporting that can focus on multiple datasets and help to drive organisation-wide improvements.

This is invaluable for Ofsted inspections and securing funding streams. Being able to produce meaningful and appropriate evidence, virtually to order, can drastically reduce the stress on staff during these high-pressure processes. Immediate access to information is critical for providers seeking to monitor their own KPIs and trends, helping with strategic decision-making.

Achieve optimum results at every stage

At the end of the day, data is just information and it is only as useful as the processes put into place to access and measure it. Data becomes a hugely powerful tool for success when it is used correctly. Education providers amass large quantities of information and it is essential it is used to inform better decision-making and inspire new ways of doing things. Implementing a powerful suite of integrated solutions is the way to achieve optimum results. Systems that 'talk' to each other can also each contribute to a more detailed and in-depth collection of information that can help transform efficiencies within an organisation.

Connected solutions, with connected data, can be the difference maker for colleges. Which is why Advanced are committed to offering the most comprehensive and integrated suite of digital solutions in the education space. Innovative software products that support you on every step of the journey. If you aspire to be an outstanding provider, we can help – with connected solutions covering MIS, ILR, LMS, ePortfolio, learner monitoring, functional skills, GCSE and much more.

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Specifically, the new VP will

- Provide leadership and direction to Central Bedfordshire College ensuring that the college achieves its strategic objectives. Creating an ethos and culture, which maximises the Colleges potential as a major provider of education and learning to the communities, which it serves.
- Together with other SMT members, the new VP will provide effective and inspiring leadership to the college as a whole.
- Lead on the whole college strategy for employer engagement, in relation to apprenticeships, T Level industrial placements, work experience and curriculum development
- Ensure proper and effective operation of financial, planning and management controls.
- This is an ideal opportunity for an experienced senior leader, who has led and managed curriculum in further education.

An understanding of the statutory requirements related to running specialist provision in a college will be a distinct advantage, especially if have a SENDCO qualification or experience of managing SEND provision.

You will have experience of leading and managing a team, with a positive track record of successful outcomes.

You will know how to implement the requirements of the Department for Education and Ofsted.

Please contact Lita Bird, Head of Human Resources, who will arrange for you to speak to the Principal.

Contact **lbird@centralbeds.ac.uk**
or telephone **01582 349635**

CLICK HERE TO FIND OUT MORE.

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*2022/23 pay award to follow

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THE STAFF ROOM

Dispatches from the frontline of FE

This is what I've learnt as a staff member with ADHD

Staff can use the term 'ADHD' flippantly, but a thorough understanding and compassion for the diagnosis is needed, writes Richard Moody

RICHARD MOODY

Employability and life skills tutor, Calderdale College

At 26 years old I was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. It was a long journey to get there.

Growing up, I knew I wasn't necessarily 'normal'. That feeling followed me through my late teens and into adulthood, as I dropped out of university and stumbled into my career in FE.

In 2020 I was in the second year of my CertEd, specialising in SEND. Then the pandemic hit and like everyone, I was suddenly working from home, left to my own devices.

It was impossible. I sat at my computer for hours on end and tried so hard, and nothing happened. I couldn't work, and I felt lazy and guilty about it. It wasn't that I was getting distracted by other things, I just couldn't make my hands move.

This wasn't a new sensation, but the reality of that feeling every day for weeks at a time forced me to look for answers again. Fast forward to October 2021 and I had one – an ADHD diagnosis.

Nothing changed overnight, but it felt good to have something of an answer. There were still a lot of questions. When I told my manager, she asked: "What reasonable adjustments can we put in place to help you?". Honestly, I had no idea. I was used to my normal.

I needed something to change, though, because like a lot of new teachers, I was finding my first year tough, and I was struggling with feeling isolated.

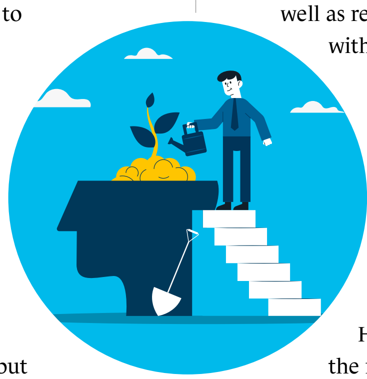
It didn't help to hear people (sometimes colleagues) speaking about ADHD flippantly or in an uninformed way. My condition would be minimised into a stereotype (lazy or hyper) or even used as an adjective ("He's so ADHD!"). I can't really blame them because I used to have the same misconceptions.

ADHD isn't what I thought it was. My image was of hyperactive children bouncing off the walls – naughty, disruptive behaviour.

> "I sat at my computer for hours and couldn't work"

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder. Hyperactivity and inattentiveness are part of a bigger picture that includes executive dysfunction, emotional dysregulation and impaired social skills. Things that, in their own ways, affect me more than I would have liked to admit before my diagnosis.

It was taking medication that helped me to understand my differences. Medicated, I am at the normal of the people around me, but for me that feels superpowered. It isn't perfect, but I can do things when I want to. I can focus on one thing at a time.



I understand now, and am learning more and more, that feeling normal is more important than people anticipate. With neurodiversity as a term to apply to myself, I had an identity and community. It wasn't that I never fitted in, it was that I was judging myself against people who were simply not like me.

When I started to talk to people with the same condition as me, I finally got the validation that it was OK to be me.

We still have a way to go.

Across all levels of staff in FE, training is imperative. It should be designed to remove stereotypes and stigma and should be led by medical experts or by people with those conditions.

Organisations should make reasonable adjustments tailored to their staff. For me, that means making sure I have structured routines with clear and distinct deadlines, with advance warnings about any changes as well as regular meetings with my manager.

These things help me to manage at work, but for others, those adjustments could be completely different.

However, I think the most important thing for anybody with ADHD is compassion. I don't expect a free pass on making mistakes, but know that when I am late, or I am reacting badly to a change, these things aren't always in my control, and I am trying my best.

I am fortunate enough now that I am beginning to understand myself and feel more confident to ask for what I need. With the right training and understanding, organisations should know what I might need and ask me first.

The most important lesson I learnt, however, is that I am not alone.

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?
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Thousands of students could be left without a qualification to study

DAVID HUGHES
Chief executive, Association of Colleges

Unless ministers take a slower, more iterative approach to T Levels, our analysis suggests many learners could be left without a course at all, writes David Hughes

The English qualification system is a complex beast, so reforming it is tricky.

There is a lot to consider and a lot at stake: the credibility and currency of thousands of qualifications run by hundreds of awarding organisations, the engagement of the teachers and education providers who deliver them and the trust and understanding of employers and HE providers.

And most importantly, the hopes and ambitions of the students who will take and use these qualifications is at stake.

There is also the challenge of maintaining integrity across time so that, for instance, 'old' qualifications are not debased because of new ones.

It's a fragile balance which needs sensitive handling, clear communications and strong stakeholder management with a diverse range of people and institutions who 'use' qualifications – students, parents, employers, universities, colleges, schools, teachers, advisers etc.

In England, we are in the middle of several simultaneous reform programmes. One strand is the new T Levels and higher technical qualifications, based on a premise that we support at AoC: that England needs a coherent and respected set of technical qualifications that help to meet the aspirations of students and the needs of industry.

With the first cohort of T Level students soon to receive their results, it's a good time to take stock of where we are and think about how the reform roadmap might need to be adjusted.

Ministers are understandably keen to see results quickly and yet we know that getting these reforms right will take many years.

The current consultation on the first 160 existing qualifications for which funding will be removed because of 'overlap' with T Levels has heightened our concerns about the pace of reform. Our analysis suggests it could result in many thousands of students without a qualification to study.

Some current level 3 students will find T Levels very demanding, so colleges are rightly setting entry requirements to ensure students will be successful.

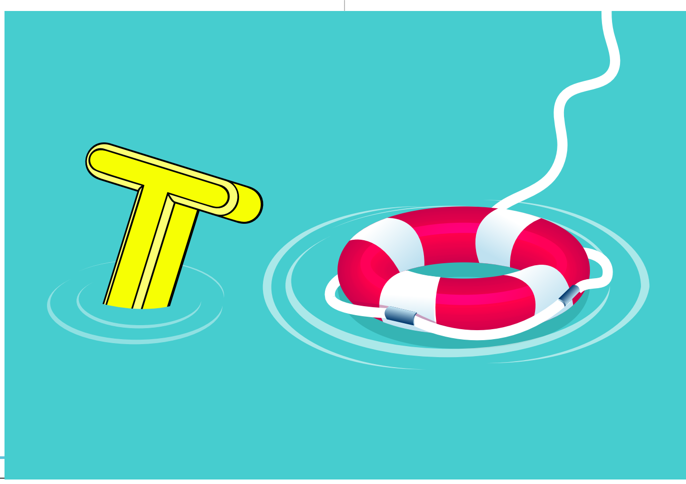
Some colleges and areas of the country might struggle to deliver all of the T Levels, particularly with the challenge of finding work placements in some sectors.

That's why we believe the decision to cease funding for any qualifications that are deemed to overlap with the new T Levels is risky.

> "Colleges are rightly setting entry requirements for T Levels"

There are 52,920 college enrolments on the 160 qualifications in 2021/22. Of these, 44,796 are aged 16-18 and nearly all have the defunded qualification as their main aim. We do not believe that all these students would have been able to move straight on to a T Level.

And for adults, alternative qualifications might simply be unviable because of small numbers.



If our concern comes true, it will disproportionately affect students facing the greatest disadvantage, with more young people ending up not in education, employment or training (NEET). That's why we are asking for a full impact assessment to be carried out urgently.

Today, we are publishing our analysis to support the wider debate about how we ensure that every young person has access to the motivating, stretching and relevant education they deserve.

We would like to see a more considered, iterative approach, with time for the T Levels to become established and to prove their worth. That way, the 160 pre-existing qualifications would simply wither on the vine and defunding would be simple.

We believe T Levels have the potential to be a long-term success, if introduced in the right way, but the pace at which qualifications might cease to be funded looks high risk. We want to see more young people achieve level 3 by age 19, but our fear is that these reforms might instead result in fewer. That should worry us all.

We want T Levels to be respected, widely understood and supported by employers with exciting placements, but the approach being taken risks too much in its haste to reach that point.

Opinion

Could better investment in skills derail future train strikes?

KIRSTIE DONNELLY
Chief executive, City & Guilds

Training and upskilling opportunities are an important way to improve job satisfaction and retention in essential jobs, writes Kirstie Donnelly

Last week's rail strikes highlighted many critical issues facing workers in our transport sector, with trade union RMT calling for better pay, better working conditions and the guarantee of no forced redundancy.

But they aren't the only ones suffering. As the rail strikes come to an end (for now), there are murmurs of other sectors starting their own picket lines, with workers and unions across healthcare, education and other public services also threatening strike action this summer.

It's no coincidence that these industries are the very ones that were deemed essential during the pandemic, providing the critical services and infrastructure that communities and people rely on, day in, day out.

Making up half of the workforce, these essential jobs are the lifeblood of Britain's economy.

And over the coming years, we're only going to see the number of roles in these critical sectors increase, with more than three million essential job openings expected in the next five years, including 340,000 brand new jobs.

But, it's not just the workers who are discontented. Employers are already reporting that they are struggling to fill vacancies, leaving us with a labour market crisis that is set to worsen in the years ahead without intervention

> "The government needs to take action to place higher value on these essential roles"

It's about more than just the money. Our research published earlier this year looked into the vital role these industries play. We found that despite the ten key worker sectors being critical to keeping our lights on, only 25 per cent of the UK population would consider working in one.

The research demonstrates the undeniable fact that low salaries, unattractive or inflexible working conditions and a general lack of respect for these critical jobs is having a catastrophic impact on the ability of employers to fill these roles.

Across the board, good pay, a respected status and sociable hours are cited as the top three reasons why people find certain essential jobs attractive.

As well as these, other important factors included having the relevant skills, experience or qualifications and good opportunities for career progression – demonstrating once again that training and upskilling opportunities are crucial for encouraging more people to apply for these roles.

So, while there is work to be done in reviewing and increasing pay for some of these industries, that's just one piece of the puzzle.

In the face of further potential strike action, and a growing labour crisis that continues to impact these vital industries and wider society, we need to collectively take a long, hard look at how we can make these jobs more attractive.

Find out what employees want

Employers should consider polling their workers on what they really want, and prioritise offering benefits, such as flexible working or increased learning and development opportunities, if they don't already do so.

Offer upskilling opportunities

There is a need to focus on training and upskilling throughout people's careers to ensure that the current workforce maintains their skillsets. Also important is a strong offering to younger people (i.e. traineeships and level 2 and 3 apprenticeships) to ensure a solid talent pipeline of people coming into industries

Boost pride and pay in essential jobs

The government needs to take action to place higher value on these essential roles and drive a public behaviour change through working with employers to ensure fair wages across both public and private sector roles and by supporting positive campaigning to reinforce the pride in essential jobs.

If we're to solve the crippling skills and recruitment gaps these sectors are facing once and for all, employers, industries, educators, government and the general public must all give these hard-to-fill roles the respect they deserve and reposition them as the foundation for our whole economy.

Opinion

Local authorities are taking wildly different approaches to rolling out Multiply

IAN ROSS

Managing director, Whitehead-Ross Education training provider

Hard-to-reach learners won't be helped by the programme if councils engage the same old providers, writes Ian Ross

It has become apparent from contacting numerous local councils that many are taking wildly different approaches to rolling out the Multiply programme.

As a quick reminder, the programme, part of the UK shared prosperity fund, is gearing up to support adults in improving their numeracy skills. Currently, half of the working-age population have entry-level everyday maths skills.

Multiply will help to boost confidence and assist individuals with career progression while supporting the government's levelling-up mission to ensure that by 2030, the number of people successfully completing high-quality skills training will have increased.

> "Some councils have written their plans behind closed doors"

Local authorities across England are finalising their investment plans, outlining how their proposed provision will meet the Multiply investment prospectus. Around £270 million is being allocated directly to 91 mayoral combined authorities and local councils.

Local councils are also finalising their delivery plans and how they are going to respond to rolling out Multiply. But after contacting just 14 local authorities, it's clear there are inconsistent approaches.

Allocating funds directly to 91 bodies, namely mayoral combined authorities and local councils, comes with many hurdles. This presents a challenge to ensuring the funding helps those that Multiply is designed to support.

Although there are advantages to devolution and giving local bodies the autonomy to lead Multiply in their areas, some local councils are already struggling in drafting their investment plans. I have seen some councils send out their entire investment plan templates inviting external stakeholders to write it for them.

Other councils are running consultation events and co-producing their proposals with local stakeholders. But some have just written their investment plans internally behind closed doors.

I have also observed how advanced some councils are in drafting their plans, while others are only just starting to think about what interventions they might offer.

The risk is that those councils without the internal expertise or passion risk squandering an opportunity for their residents to access high-quality numeracy provision.

Then there are major discrepancies in how Multiply will be delivered in year one, which runs from April 2022 to March 2023.

Given that Multiply investment plans will not be approved by the Department for Education before August 2022, mayoral combined authorities and local councils will only have seven months to spend their year one allocations from September 2022.

Although this timescale is tight for commissioning delivery partners, some bodies have decided to just hand the money out to FE colleges or their existing adult community learning providers in year one. Meanwhile other councils are running short competitive grant application processes during July.

While I appreciate there may be capacity issues within local councils, handing money out to existing providers is unlikely to have the desired impact of finding hard-to-reach learners.

FE colleges and council adult community learning providers already have adult education budget funding to deliver maths qualifications and non-accredited numeracy provision. I question why they are not already reaching these target group of learners with their existing AEB funding?

So it is crucial those drafting their investment plans look beyond FE colleges and existing adult community learning providers.

There are many local providers, already working with hard-to-reach learners, who can bring innovation and add value to Multiply.

It is all well local councils reassuring the sector that new providers can get involved in year two but, as proved by West Sussex County Council and Brighton and Hove City Council, it is possible to roll out a short competitive grant process in year one if the drive and determination are there.

Let's make sure Multiply has the impact it deserves, and we do not to waste a once-in-a-generation opportunity to drive up adult numeracy.

Bulletin

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Movers & Shakers

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

Rachel Ellis-Jones

Principal, Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education

Start date: June 2022

Previous Job: Deputy Principal, Bishop Burton College

Interesting fact: Rachel had lots of interesting jobs as a student, including working for the National Union Of Mineworkers, a famous ballerina, driving a forklift truck and frying fish and chips.

Danny Metters

Principal, East Riding College & Scarborough TEC, part of TEC Partnership

Start date: June 2022

Previous Job: Vice Principal - Riseholme College, part of Bishop Burton College

Interesting fact: Danny lives on a small-holding and has over 50 animals; including alpaca, horses, turkeys, peacocks, dogs and cats, most of which are rescues.

Tom Bewick

Visiting Professor of Skills and Workforce Policy, Staffordshire University

Start date: July 2022

Concurrent Job: Chief Executive, Federation of Awarding Bodies

Interesting fact: In his 20s, Tom was a tech house DJ called Van Alen, living in Ibiza and Cape Town.

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