

CELEBRATING

500

EDITIONS OF DEDICATED FE JOURNALISM

FEWEEK

FEWEEK.CO.UK | @FEWEEK

FRIDAY JUNE 13, 2025

EDITION



Thank you to our readers,
subscribers and supporters

Editorial

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



Welcome to the 500th edition of FE Week

Since our first edition landed on doorsteps in September 2011, further education has changed dramatically. Governments have come and gone. Policies have been launched, scrapped, relaunched and rebranded.

But through it all FE Week has been there week in, week out, to report, investigate, challenge and inform.

From the earliest stories on 12-week apprenticeships, the rise and fall of training giants, holding 11 ministers to account and uncovering the realities behind the rhetoric, our mission has always been the same: to serve the further education and skills sector with independent, impartial and fearless journalism.

FE deserves great trade press, not just a conveyor belt of press releases. One that understands the sector and the communities it serves and isn't afraid to speak truth to power.

We are proud to have reported on so many of the defining moments in post-16 education and training over the past 14 years. But our job was never to merely chronicle events. Our investigations have changed policy, injected public scrutiny

where there was none before and, at times I'm sure, made decision makers think twice before signing off on something daft.

We do it because we know what FE done well does for students, and what mismanagement, chaos and confusion does to the providers delivering those opportunities.

FE is famous in Whitehall for its policy churn. There was no such thing as the apprenticeship levy when we started, 16-18 numbers were going down and the sector was split across two government departments.

Funding cuts and financial challenges prevailed during FE Week's formative years, requiring tough messages for the sector over spending and accountability.

Devolution has seen a proliferation of funding rules, procurements and policies that were all managed centrally when we published our first edition. When our classrooms vary from prisons to workshops to lecture theatres to hair salons and church halls, we work extra hard to make sure no stone is left unturned.

We strive to give voice to those too

often excluded from decision-making; students, apprentices, teachers, assessors and professional services staff, and to amplify the expertise of the sector's many champions. But we recognise, as many of you do, that FE leadership reflected in our pages often fails to reflect the diverse communities it serves.

Trust in journalism matters more than ever. From the largest global news organisations to the local and trade press, dwindling newsroom resources in the face of non-expert, polarised commentary and AI-generated hot takes is a risk for all of us. That's why your support matters so much.

So, as we mark our 500th edition, we want to thank our readers, particularly those of you who have been with us from the start. Thanks for your tips, your quotes, your scrutiny and your support.

The job is far from done. If the past 500 editions have taught us anything, it's that FE never stands still. And nor will we.

Shane Chown
Editor

TEAM FE WEEK THROUGH THE YEARS



Editors Nick Linford Chris Henwood Shane Chown	JL Dutaut Jess Staufenberg Jessica Hill	Reporters Rebecca Cooney Holly Welham Jude Burke Rebecca Jones Alix Robertson Sam King Pippa Allen-Kinross Yasemin Craggs Mersinoglu Tallulah Taylor	Senior Designer Simon Kay	Photographer Ellis O'Brien
Deputy Editors Nick Reinis-Keightley Paul Offord Billy Camden	Senior Reporters Nick Summers Eleanor Radford Freddie Whittaker Jessica Fino Fraser Whieldon Will Nott Jason Noble Josh Stein Anviksha Patel Josh Mellor		Designers Daniel Duke Rob Galt Russell Hardman Matthew Willson	Advertising Bridget Stockdale Clare Halliday Anthony Hudson
Features and Commissioning Editors Janet Murray Hélène Mulholland Cath Bansal		Head Designer Nicky Phillips	Sub Editors Tom Mendelsohn Jill Craven Nic Andrews David Firth	Finance and Operations Director Victoria Boyle
				Publisher Shane Mann

FEWEEK

FEWEEK.CO.UK | @FEWEEK

FRIDAY JUNE 13, 2025 | EDITION 500

INTERVIEW

'Not all
disadvantage is
about money'

Alun Francis, college
principal and social
mobility commissioner

Pages 20-23

UK withdraws entries
from WorldSkills
after DfE grant cut

Page 11



How to become
a technical
excellence college

Page 13



OPINION

Help us Get the
Nation Learning

Page 32



Spending review cash splash leaves FE treading water

- £1.2bn extra skills spending by 2028
- 65k more 16-19s 'just about' covered
- Treasury slammed for sidelining adult education



News and analysis

Pages 9-10

Reaction

Pages 29-31

MARPLES V DFE HIGH COURT SHOWDOWN TO BEGIN NEXT WEEK

EXCLUSIVE

Page 5

FEWEEK

MEET THE TEAM



Shane Chowen
EDITOR

@shanechowen
shane.chowen@feweek.co.uk



Shane Mann
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

@shanermann
shane.mann@educationscape.com



Billy Camden
DEPUTY EDITOR

@billycamden
billy.camden@feweek.co.uk



Jessica Hill
COMMISSIONING AND INVESTIGATIONS EDITOR

@jessjahill
jessica.hill@feweek.co.uk



Anviksha Patel
SENIOR REPORTER

@annieiseating
anviksha.patel@feweek.co.uk



Josh Mellor
SENIOR REPORTER

@JMellorFEWeek
josh.mellor@feweek.co.uk



Simon Kay
SENIOR DESIGNER

simon.kay@educationscape.com



EducationScape

Managing Director: Scott Forbes | **Head Designer:** Nicky Phillips |
Relationship Manager: Clare Halliday | **Sales Administrator:** Tyler Palmer |
Events Manager: Frances Ogefere Dell | **Operations and Finance Director:**
Victoria Boyle | **Senior Administrator and HR Assistant:** Evie Hayes | **Finance**
Assistant and PA to CEO: Zoe Tuffin | **Office Administrator:** Zoë Belcher

Got a story? Get in touch.

Contact news@feweek.co.uk
or call 020 81234 778

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

education week jobs

FEATURED JOBS

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

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



SOUTH THAMES COLLEGES GROUP
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS
COMPETITIVE SALARY PLUS BENEFITS



Click here for more information



DARLINGTON COLLEGE
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL RESOURCES
£70,000



Click here for more information



BRIDGWATER & TAUNTON COLLEGE
COURSE LEADER FOR ARBORICULTURE
£35,713 - £43,301 PER ANNUM



Click here for more information



BRIDGWATER & TAUNTON COLLEGE
DEPUTY HEAD OF DEPARTMENT SPORT, PROTECTIVE SERVICES & HOSPITALITY
£44,885 - £49,208 PER ANNUM



Click here for more information

Contents

'Inadequate' rating during Ramadan sparks complaint

Page 18



Anger at 'reckless' delay of Ofsted report card plan

Page 6



Getting 'Back to the Floor' means staying relevant for students

Page 28



Colleges, your students ignore you on social media. Here's why

Page 34

CORRECTION

Our article "Teacher sacked in trans student name row can appeal" (FE Week 499), reported that former principal Carole Kitching said a teacher was sacked "because of the way he manifested his anti-trans views". We would like to clarify that Ms Kitching did not use the term "anti-trans".

SUBSCRIBE

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

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

ADVERTISE WITH US

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

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

DISCLAIMER

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

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

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

Please address any complaints to the editor.

Most read online this week:



- 1 [Teacher sacked in trans-student name row can appeal](#)
- 2 [College planning to axe 100 staff faces strike](#)
- 3 [Spending review 2025: What the chancellor announced for FE and skills](#)
- 4 [Level 7 apprenticeship funding to be axed from January 2026](#)
- 5 [Most adult apprentices continue English and maths after exemption](#)

[CLICK LINKS TO READ STORIES](#)

FOLLOW US

- [WEBSITE FEWEEK.CO.UK](https://feweek.co.uk)
- [X \(TWITTER\) @FEWEEK](https://twitter.com/FEWEEK)
- [FACEBOOK FEWEEK](https://facebook.com/feweek)
- [LINKEDIN FE-WEEK](https://linkedin.com/company/feweek)
- [BLUESKY @FEWEEK.BSKY.SOCIAL](https://bluesky.com/FEWEEK.BSKY.SOCIAL)



EducationScape Ltd
Office 1.3, 1st Floor
1EdCity, EdCity Walk
London, W12 7TF
T: 020 8123 4778
E: news@feweek.co.uk

FE WEEK IS PROUD TO BE A MEMBER OF





Delivering the promise
Owning the future

Headline Sponsor



Monday 23 & Tuesday 24 June 2025 | Novotel London West, London

AT A PIVOTAL MOMENT **FOR THE SECTOR**

Hear from the voices shaping the future of skills and employability



Baroness Jacqui Smith
Minister for Skills



Phil Smith CBE
Chair, Skills England



Sir Martyn Oliver
HM Chief Inspector,
Ofsted



Sir Ian Bauckham CBE
Chief Regulator, Ofqual



Kate Ridley-Pepper
Director of the Work-Based
Skills Directorate, DfE

THEMED ZONES

Focused discussions, workshops, and content for teams working across every part of the sector.

GROWTH

Onefile

FUNDING



POLICY

TEACHING & LEARNING

NCFE

INNOVATION

YOUR ZONES

TECHNOLOGY



EMPLOYER

GEN Z



PARTNERSHIP & COLLABORATION



plus a keynote from
Dame Kelly Holmes MBE!



DELEGATE PLACES
ARE **GOING FAST**
BOOK NOW



Media Partner

FE WEEK

#aelpNC25

News

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

CONTACT US NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Skills chiefs in court for Marples v DfE battle

BILLY CAMDEN

BILLY.CAMDEN@FEWEEK.CO.UK

EXCLUSIVE

The long-awaited showdown between former apprenticeships tycoon Peter Marples and the Department for Education is set to begin in the High Court next week – with a heavyweight cast of witnesses confirmed.

FE Week can reveal the 12 individuals due to give evidence in the high-profile trial include former bosses of the DfE's then-Skills Funding Agency who have since become college leaders.

Peter Marples himself, co-founder of the now-defunct apprenticeship giant 3aaa, along with his nephew and ex-commercial director Lee Marples, will be among those taking the stand.

The pair and two other members of the family filed a £37 million claim two years ago. They argue "misfeasance in public office", alleging the government scuppered the planned sale of their business to Trilantic Capital Partners (TLP) in 2016. 3aaa later collapsed in 2018. With interest added, a win could score the Marples' over £60 million.

Also due to appear at the trial for the claimants is FE consultant Tony Allen, who was a senior manager at the Skills Funding Agency and account director from the "large contracts unit" responsible for 3aaa.

Andrew Palmer, a 3aaa employee who later ran England's former largest training provider Learndirect until its skills funding contracts were terminated following an 'inadequate' Ofsted judgment in 2017, will give evidence, as will business and skills consultant Robert Kilpatrick.

Both Palmer's and Kilpatrick's testimonies will be in connection with a change in control at their respective former training providers – an issue that is at the centre of Marples' claim.

Karim Khan, who was the corporate finance advisor responsible for the proposed transaction with TLP in 2016, will also give evidence for Marples, as will independent consultant Patrick Tucker, who will appear

in respect to a government investigation in 2018 that led to 3aaa's contract termination and referral to the police. Tucker worked with Marples at former training company Carter & Carter in the 2000s.

From the government side, the witness list features key figures from the then-Skills Funding Agency, including former chief executive Peter Lauener, ex top skills civil servants Keith Smith and Kirsty Evans, as well as investigators David Smales and Keith Hunter – all believed to have been involved in oversight and intervention decisions for 3aaa.

Lauener went on to chair college group NCG until 2023, and still chairs the Student Loans Company and Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) – both of which are non-departmental public bodies of the DfE. Smith is now CEO of Harrow, Richmond & Uxbridge Colleges (HRUC) and Evans is an executive principal at CITB.

Smales and Hunter still work in the DfE.

The case centres on the Marples family's allegation that the DfE acted maliciously and irrationally when it said the SFA was "not able to agree to this change in ownership" amid the planned sale to TLP, adding that there would be a "risk that a change of control will prejudice delivery of our contracts both now and in the future".

But the DfE has robustly denied any

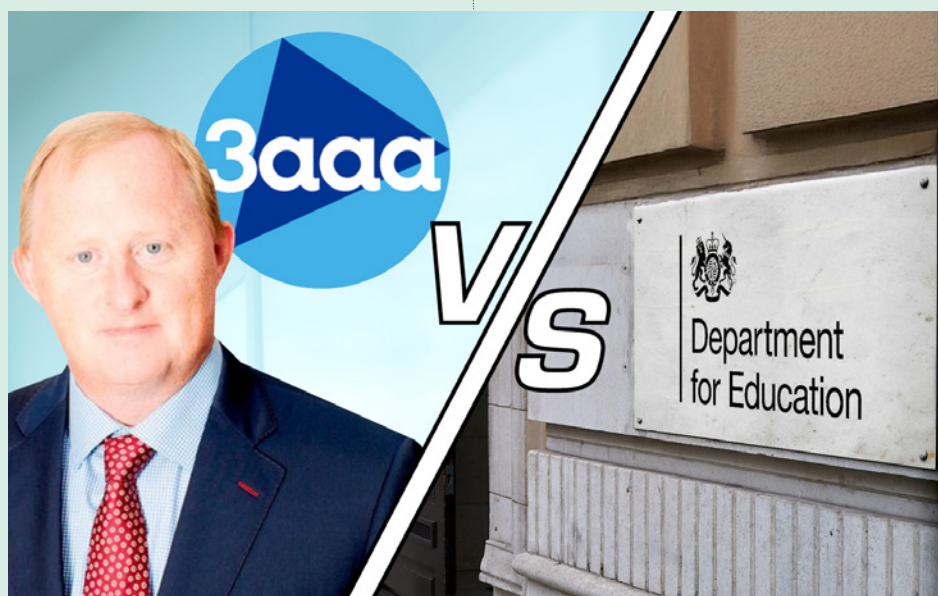
wrongdoing. In its defence, the department described the lawsuit as "fundamentally flawed", maintaining that the decision was "based principally on a concern that the business plan put forward by the prospective purchaser (TLP) was based on unrealistic expectations as to future growth that were incompatible with impending changes in the funding environment, such that the pursuit by a new buyer of that level of growth would undermine the stability of the company and jeopardise the stable provision of services".

Peter Marples has dismissed these claims as "specious" and said he intends to expose a pattern of "targeted malice" and "hostile" behaviour at the heart of the SFA's handling of the case.

Marples has changed his KC during the course of the case, first filed in December 2022, with Adam Solomon now his lead barrister. The DfE will be defended by James Segan KC.

The trial, expected to last several weeks, will scrutinise high-level correspondence, whistleblower reports and audit findings from 3aaa's final years – with the outcome likely to have a wider impact on the FE and skills sector.

FE Week will provide coverage from court as the trial unfolds.



News

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

CONTACT US NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Anger at 'reckless' delay of Ofsted report card plan

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS
NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Union leaders have blasted a "reckless" move by Ofsted to delay revealing its report card plan until September, leaving schools, colleges and training providers facing a "nonsensical" timeline for the roll-out of new inspections.

Ofsted had planned to publish its response to the consultation to reform inspections in the summer, before introducing the new inspections in November.

But the watchdog said on Wednesday it would not be ready to publish its response until "early September".

Ofsted had mulled delaying inspections but has confirmed it will stick to its plan to roll out report card inspections in November, leaving education settings just weeks to prepare.

'Leaders need comprehensive understanding'

Education secretary Bridget Phillipson told Ofsted chief Sir Martyn Oliver in a letter that the delay was "disappointing".

She warned Oliver he must also "give education providers a comprehensive understanding of the new arrangements

before they are introduced", and ensure "in-depth" training of the Ofsted workforce.

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the National Association of Headteachers, said the delay would place "immense" pressure on education providers and that the announcement was "symptomatic of an organisation and a process in disarray".

"This decision is bordering on reckless and could do real damage to the health and wellbeing of staff," he added.

Pepe D'lasio, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said: "The introduction of a nonsensical inspection framework is now compounded by a nonsensical timetable.

"The idea that schools and colleges can prepare for a complete change in the inspection system on this scale in two months is, frankly, ridiculous."

In its consultation document, Ofsted said its original timeline would ensure "a notice period equivalent to one term between the publication of our post-consultation response and inspection materials and the start of education inspections".

This would allow the inspectorate to "ensure that providers and inspectors feel well prepared for the new inspections".

Delays 'disappointing', says Phillipson

Oliver informed Phillipson of the delay in a letter. He said Ofsted "fully intend to make improvements" to its proposed inspection framework, but they "need a little more time to complete our analysis of the responses we have received".

The online consultation questionnaire received over 6,500 responses from parents, education professionals and representative bodies.

He described the delay as "regrettable" but said he believes it will "result in a better and more effective inspection regime".

After publishing its response in September, Ofsted said it will begin "a comprehensive training programme for inspectors and an extensive programme of engagement and preparation for those we inspect. This will allow us to introduce the revised framework in November as planned."

But Phillipson was displeased, adding it was "important that Ofsted delivers to the expected timescales, to build confidence in the inspectorate and avoid additional challenges for headteachers and leaders".

She noted Oliver's "absolute commitment" to introduce the revised framework in November as planned.

Ex-chief inspector Gilbert is board's new chair

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS
NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Former chief inspector Dame Christine Gilbert has been appointed as the next chair of Ofsted.

Gilbert, who served as chief inspector of Ofsted between 2006 and 2011, last year led the independent review which found the watchdog's response to the death of headteacher Ruth Perry was "defensive and complacent".

Her appointment will begin on September 1 and will be for a period of three years. She will be paid £55,000 a year for two days a week in the role.

Gilbert said: "It's a privilege to accept this appointment as chair of Ofsted. I'm very much looking forward to supporting Sir Martyn Oliver and Ofsted in their determination to raise standards, increase opportunities and improve lives."

Gilbert called for Ofsted board to be 'strengthened'

Gilbert made a string of recommendations for Ofsted in her independent review. The watchdog is currently carrying out a widespread overhaul of the way it carries out inspections.

She found the Ofsted board "had little or no involvement in determining the strategy for dealing with the crisis and communicating to the media and stakeholders".

The board's role "appears curiously limited, apparently leaving some of Ofsted's most critical activities outside of its control", she said.

"This degree of autonomy and entitlement for HMCI does not make for effective governance."

Gilbert urged Ofsted to review its governance framework to "strengthen the role of the board with the aim of establishing

constructive challenge to support Ofsted in its learning and reform".

The chair role was previously held by Dame Christine Ryan, who left at the end of March after four years.

Star Academies chief executive Sir Hamid Patel has served as interim Ofsted chair.

Gilbert previously spent 18 years working in schools as a teacher and headteacher. She also served as director of education at Harrow Council and at Tower Hamlets Council, where she "led the dramatic turnaround in performance and quality of local schools" and rose to the role of chief executive.

She is chair of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and has been a visiting professor at UCL Institute of Education for more than a decade.

Gilbert was made a dame in the Queen's Birthday Honours in 2022.

NEW Level 3 Transport and Logistics EPA:

Supply Chain Practitioner (FMCG)

Prepare your apprentices for versatile and in-demand roles, at the heart of any business.

An effective supply chain is key to the success of any business. This is particularly important in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sectors.

Whether it's forecasting consumer demand, monitoring production schedules, processing orders, or working closely with hauliers and distributions centres, the knowledge and skills apprentices will acquire will prepare them for rewarding future roles.

Award-winning support

We'll include all the support you'll need to successfully deliver this EPA including:

- **EPA Resource Pack** – support for apprentices preparing for assessment
- **Industry-relevant assessments** – reflecting the skills, knowledge and behaviours employers look for
- **Flexible assessment dates** – providing access to more dates to suit individual requirements.

Outstanding results

In 2024 Pearson Transport and Logistics Apprentices achieved:

- **100% first time pass rate** (100% distinction grade)

[Find out more](#)



FE WEEK is 500!

To celebrate we are offering a **20% discount** off recruitment advertising within our next edition



FE Week hits edition 500! To celebrate, Education Week Jobs has a special offer just for you. Book an advert in our next edition of FE Week and receive a 20% discount. All adverts comes with full design and a premium listing on Education Week Jobs.

To find out more please contact the recruitment team by [clicking here](#).

News

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

CONTACT US NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Spending review's £1.2bn 'won't meet student spike'

BILLY CAMDEN

BILLY.CAMDEN@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Skills funding will be boosted by an extra £1.2 billion a year by 2028 – but experts fear it is too little to cope with a spike in student numbers.

Chancellor Rachel Reeves delivered Labour's spending review on Wednesday and told Parliament there would be additional investment to support "over a million young people into training and apprenticeships".

She told MPs it "cannot be right that too often" the ambitions and potential of young people are "stifled" when those who want training find courses that are "oversubscribed and are turned away at the door". This was likely a reference to college leader concerns that there are too many 16 to 19-year-olds coming through the system to meet demand later this decade.

Reeves added: "We've seen growing businesses eager to recruit, to look elsewhere. Potential wasted and enterprise frustrated.

"So today I am providing record investment for training and upskilling – £1.2 billion a year by the end of the spending review to support over a million young people into training and apprenticeships so that their potential, their drive and their ambition is frustrated no longer."

Spending review documents failed to provide a detailed breakdown of the £1.2 billion, but said it includes "funding to support over 1.3 million 16 to 19-year-olds to access high-quality training, supporting 65,000 additional learners per year by 2028-29".

It will also involve £625 million between 2025-26 and 2028-29 to train up to 60,000 skilled construction workers, as announced at the spring statement.

There was no mention of adult education funding, but the government did say it will set out further detail "on its plans in a strategy for post-16 education and skills later in the year".

Reforms to the SEND system will be set out in a schools white paper in the autumn.

Further education providers in England include 220 colleges and 1,300 independent training providers which currently receive



over £12 billion from the government each year to support around 1.9 million learners.

While predicted school pupil numbers are forecast to fall over the next four years, the number of 16 to 19-year-olds is set to rise by 118,000.

David Hughes, chief executive of the Association of Colleges (see page 30), warned the extra funding for more 16 to 19 places "may not" be enough.

He said: "It is positive that the Treasury has recognised the growing numbers of young people we estimate will be in post-16 education over the next few years with an increase to the 16 to 19 budget.

"However, the 65,000 extra 16 to 19 places will only just keep up with population growth, so the budget may not be sufficient if the improving participation we have seen in recent years continues."

Imran Tahir, senior research economist at the Institute for Fiscal Studies (see page 10), believes an extra £290 million is needed just to maintain existing per-student funding levels in real terms.

He said: "One area that is almost certain to absorb a substantial share of the funding is demographic growth. Since 2018, the 16 to 18 population in England has risen by 13 per cent – an increase of around 230,000 young people – with a further 5 per cent increase expected by 2028. If participation rates remain steady, that translates into around 65,000 additional students in the system.

"Just to maintain existing per-student funding levels in real terms would require an additional £290 million in 2028-29 – roughly 70 per cent of the £400 million increase

that year. Any ambition to improve funding per learner, rather than simply preserve the status quo, would require a larger share of the settlement."

DfE efficiencies

The DfE's overall budget, including capital, will increase by an average 0.8 per cent a year in real terms by the end of the spending review period, from £100.9 billion in 2025-26 to £109.2 billion in 2028-29.

Ofsted will get a £20 million funding boost for staff inspections under its new report card plans.

But elsewhere in the spending review documents the Treasury stated that the Department for Education had committed to delivering at least 5 per cent savings and efficiencies.

This includes savings identified through the first zero-based review in 18 years, such as defunding level 7 apprenticeships for those aged 22 and over.

Documents state the DfE will work with the FE sector to "improve the value for money of government spend", by providing FE Commissioner support to colleges and "other relevant providers, seeking opportunities for economies of scale arising from more 16 to 19-year-olds moving into post-16 education and training, simplifying processes and reducing data collection burdens, providing greater certainty of capital funding to enable colleges with estate planning, and exploring commercial efficiencies".

The DfE also has worked with the Office for Value for Money to "identify £248 million of technical efficiencies". These will be a combination of "non-frontline efficiencies" and "corporate initiatives".

Documents state the DfE will become "smaller and more agile over the spending review period through a strategic workforce plan to improve its capability and operations".

They add: "This will include moving to more flexible resourcing, greater use of AI and digital tools, conversion of managed services in its digital, data and technology function to permanent civil servants, and reviewing all non-staff expenditure to identify areas for efficiencies".

Analysis

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



IMRAN
TAHIR

Research economist,
Institute for Fiscal Studies

What does the Spending Review mean for FE?

The chancellor has pledged an extra £1.2 billion annually for FE by 2028-29 – the biggest rise in years. But amid demographic pressures and staff pay gaps, Imran Tahir asks whether this be enough to reverse a decade of cuts

The chancellor Rachel Reeves has delivered her much-anticipated spending review – arguably one of the defining moments of this Parliament so far. It sets the overall limits for day-to-day departmental spending through to 2028-29, and in doing so, begins to shape what’s possible for public services in the years ahead.

For DfE, she set out a £7.4 billion cash-terms increase in day-to-day spending between 2025-26 and 2028-29. In real terms, that equates to a 1.3 per cent rise in DfE’s total resource budget by 2029. Much of this uplift is expected to be frontloaded, with new funding likely to be released early in the review period.

What does it mean for overall FE funding?

Within the broader settlement, the government has announced an additional £1.2 billion per year in day-to-day funding for FE by 2028-29, in cash terms. After accounting for inflation, that will see the overall budget rise by

just over £400 million (in today’s prices) between 2025-26 and 2028-29, a 3 per cent total real-terms increase over this period. That leaves FE – unusually – with a substantially faster growth rate than the education department as a whole.

The Treasury has not published a detailed breakdown, but this figure appears to cover the main areas of the FE and skills system: 16–19 education, apprenticeships, and adult skills. Together, these areas currently account for around £13.5 billion of public spending each year.

The chart below shows how total skills spending across these areas has changed since the early 2000s.

After a period of sustained growth through the 2000s, the FE and skills system saw sharp real-terms cuts through much of the 2010s. There has been some

recovery since 2020, thanks to additional funding allocated by the previous government. But even after these recent increases, total spending remains well below the levels seen in the early 2010s.

The uplift announced yesterday continues the slow but recently steady increase in FE and skills funding. Based on the spending review plans, spending in 2028-29 will be at its highest level since 2014–15, although still well short of its peak in 2010.

How will this additional money be spent?

The spending review offered few details on how the extra funding for FE will be used. Aside from references to accommodating 65,000 more 16-19 year olds and training up to 60,000 skilled construction workers, specifics were in short supply. Further direction is expected in the upcoming post-16 education and skills strategy.

One area that is almost certain to absorb a substantial share of the funding is demographic growth. Since 2018, the 16-18 population in England has risen by 13 per cent – an increase of around 230,000 young people – with a further 5 per cent increase expected by 2028. If participation rates remain steady, that translates into around 65,000

additional students in the system.

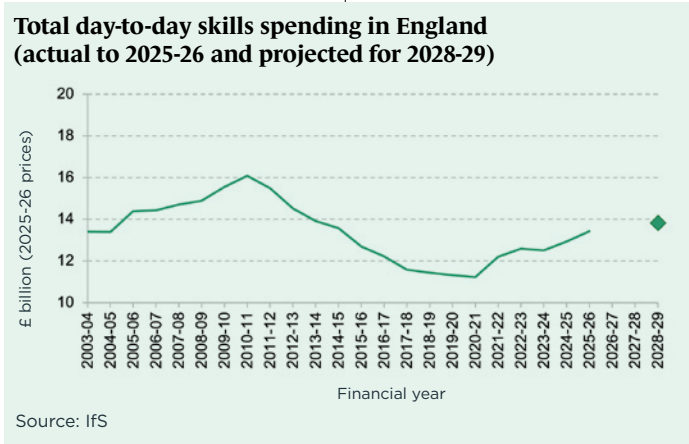
Just to maintain existing per-student funding levels in real terms would require an additional £290 million by 2028-29 – roughly 70 per cent of the overall increase announced. Any ambition to improve funding per learner, rather than simply preserve the status quo, would require a larger share of the settlement.

Staffing pressures are also likely to draw on the budget. The government has committed to recruiting more teachers into FE, but making that a reality will mean addressing long-standing issues with pay. College teachers now earn around £7,000 less than school teachers on average, and FE pay has fallen significantly in real terms since 2010. If recruitment and retention are to improve, a portion of the new investment will almost certainly need to go towards closing that gap.

What happens next?

At this stage, we still don’t know how the additional funding will be allocated across programmes and priorities. That will be one of the most important questions to watch in the months ahead. Much will depend on the direction set by the post-16 strategy and DfE’s decisions about how best to balance competing pressures.

Still, this is a substantial settlement in the context of the wider education budget. It goes well beyond offering real-terms protection to per-pupil college funding, and should make a meaningful difference to overall spending in the FE and skills system. If used well, it could start to relieve some of the pressures that have built up over more than a decade – particularly around funding levels and staffing.



News

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

CONTACT US NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

WorldSkills UK among DfE's belt-tightening contestants

JOSH MELLOR
JOSH.MELLOR@FEWEEK.CO.UK

EXCLUSIVE

WorldSkills UK will compete in fewer competitions at next year's summit in Shanghai after falling victim to the Department for Education's "drive for efficiency".

The organisation was among charities and quangos to suffer a DfE funding haircut – confirmed two months after the start of the new financial year following a Freedom of Information request from *FE Week*.

Worldskills UK will receive £5.7 million for 2025-26 from the DfE, a 15 per cent fall on this year's £6.7 million grant.

Elsewhere, the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) will suffer a 20 per cent reduction from £17.5 million to £13.9 million.

The Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) drops from £34 million to £30.5 million after the DfE withdrew funding for the Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge (ASK) programme.

The department shaved £500,000 of funding available to providers of the National Careers Service contract, which will now hand out £51.3 million.

Meanwhile, the Teaching Regulation Agency, which will start regulating around 200,000 FE college teachers in 2026, will suffer a 3 per cent cut, falling from £15.1 million to £14.7 million.

Rumours of funding reductions emerged earlier this year but neither the DfE nor the quangos would comment.

WorldSkills' dark cloud

WorldSkills UK told *FE Week* it had taken the "difficult decision" to reduce the number of competitions it competes in at WorldSkills Shanghai next year.

Contests it has ditched include logistics and freight forwarding, software testing, and cloud computing.

The UK skills competition body will also cancel its international skills summit, pause its equity, diversity and inclusion heroes awards, reduce its "international insights work" and scale back its careers resources.

However, a spokesperson confirmed it still planned to enter the bricklaying competition next year, seven years after

the UK last competed.

Worldskills UK's £5.7 million grant for 2025-26 compares to funding of £7.2 million it received in 2022-23.

Ben Blackledge, CEO of WorldSkills UK, said: "We take pride in our ability to innovate, adapt, and deliver measurable value for money.

"With the continued support of the DfE and our partners we will be participating at EuroSkills with the team we announced earlier this year.

"We remain committed to driving efficiencies and promoting skills excellence across the UK, equipping young people with world-class skills and supporting employers with the talent they need to thrive."

He added that while the changes were "regrettable", the body will continue to run a "comprehensive portfolio" of local and international competition programmes.

ETF uncertainty

Exactly how the £3.6 million cut to the Education and Training Foundation's budget will impact its work is yet to be confirmed.

When approached for comment, a spokesperson said more time was needed to validate the DfE's figures.

They added: "We are proud of our ongoing work with DfE and with other partners to deliver high-quality professional development for teachers, trainers, leaders and governors across the sector.

"Across our contract work, we are maintaining a focused offer and retaining our high-profile programmes while supporting DfE's drive for efficiency, ensuring the sector continues to benefit from opportunities for career development".

ETF is a charity set up in 2013 as an "expert body" for professional development and standards in FE.

It provides training on topics and skills such as artificial intelligence, English for speakers of other languages, apprenticeship workforce development and leadership and governance.

According to its 2023-24 financial year accounts, most of its £20 million income came from government contracts, with a smaller £2.3 million sum coming from membership and accreditation.

The ETF's DfE grant was £21 million in 2021-22.

CEC... don't ASK

The careers quango has lost its Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge (ASK) programme, worth £1.27 million this year, and a primary school pilot.

As part of the negotiations with the government, which resulted in a £30.5 million settlement, CEC agreed to two "new government priorities": driving improvement in careers education through the Gatsby benchmarks and implementing Labour's national work experience guarantee.

FE Week understands CEC will continue to run its 44 careers hubs which connect schools and colleges with nearby businesses, share best practice in careers and offer targeted resources.

John Yarham, CEO of the Careers & Enterprise Company, welcomed the funding confirmation which "brings certainty and confidence" for schools, colleges and local partners.

He said: "Our focus will remain steadfast on helping young people from all backgrounds, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to ensure they receive the support needed to take their next best step."



News

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

CONTACT US NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Turing Scheme survives but with 29% budget cut

ANVIKSHA PATEL

ANVIKSHA.PATEL@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Next year's Turing Scheme budget has been slashed by almost a third.

The Department for Education this week confirmed it had made £78 million available for the international placement scheme during the 2025-26 academic year, a 29 per cent reduction from £110 million last year.

The DfE has also limited the maximum funding pot available per FE provider application to £205,000 and has almost halved daily living costs for students going abroad.

The reduction follows fears that Turing would be scrapped altogether. Reports emerged in March that the DfE had offered up the Turing Scheme to the Treasury as part of its cost-cutting proposal.

The 2025-26 academic year is a one-year extension for Turing, with the prior

EU-funded Erasmus+ programme possibly making a comeback in the future.

Skills minister Jacqui Smith said last month that the government was negotiating to "work towards" rejoining Erasmus+.

In the meantime, the DfE has changed how it allocates Turing funding.

Guidance published on Wednesday shows FE providers will be limited to apply for a maximum of £205,000 and consortiums can apply for up to £600,000, but no more than £205,000 will be given to each provider.

The DfE said it would "rank" providers' applications by their assessment score, based on the relative proportion of placements that will go to students and apprentices from disadvantaged backgrounds.

"We assess that this will be the fairest way of allocating funding

and will make it easier for providers to deliver all the placements they apply for," the guidance said.

Next year's scheme will also have a reduced living cost for groups going aboard.

Students and staff travelling to higher-cost destinations will be funded for £55 per day for the first two weeks, and £40 per day after 14 days. Last year's funding awarded £109 and £76 per day respectively.

Those going to lower-cost countries will only receive a £50 daily allowance for the first two weeks, down from £87, and £35 per day after 14 days, a cut from £61.

Further education providers have placed over 37,000 students onto the Turing scheme since its launch and 22,483 of them were from disadvantaged backgrounds.



Jacqui Smith

Devolve skills powers 'to the max', say MPs

BILLY CAMDEN

BILLY.CAMDEN@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Power over post-16 technical education should be devolved to the "maximum possible extent" to mayors and leaders of new strategic authorities, MPs have said.

The business and trade committee's conclusion followed an inquiry into the government's industrial strategy, which is set to highlight key sectors of priority to drive growth. It will be the first industrial strategy for eight years.

Ministers were set to present it this week alongside the multi-year spending review, but reports suggest the strategy's release has been delayed to the end of the month.

The committee's inquiry heard "substantial" skills shortages across the economy are "acting as a barrier to growth and are deterring investment in the UK".

Expert evidence suggested there is a "strong case to further devolve responsibility for skills to local leaders".

Around 60 per cent of the government's adult education budget has been devolved

to mayoral combined authorities since 2019. The government has already proposed further devolution of adult skills funding to more areas in its English devolution white paper.

Mayors have repeatedly called for control of more skills pots, including apprenticeships and 16 to 19 education.

While the white paper did not commit to devolution of different types of skills funding, skills minister Jacqui Smith told the business and trade committee there was "potential for further devolution" as she admitted to "tensions" with mayors over skills funding powers.

Sector experts have warned however that releasing further budget lines to mayors would lead to more "bureaucracy" and "inequalities".

The committee concluded that skills shortages are "holding back growth and deterring investment across large parts of the economy, including within the UK's growth-driving sectors", adding that the skills system is "too fragmented and inflexible".

Local leaders are "best placed to know the needs of local employers and work

with training providers to adapt provision accordingly", the committee claimed.

It called on the government's plans in the devolution white paper to "go further", specifically that "responsibility for technical education and training post-16 should be devolved to the maximum possible extent to mayoral combined authorities and newly created strategic authorities, once they have demonstrated capability to manage local systems".

The committee also urged the government to transfer skills funding and policy at a national level to the Department for Business and Trade to "attune" it more to the needs of employers and align with the upcoming industrial strategy.

And the minister for skills role should be a joint ministerial job across the Department for Business and Trade and Department for Education to ensure better coordination between the "disconnected" departments.

Responsibility for FE and skills was under the remit of the former Department for Business Innovation and Skills until then prime minister Theresa May moved them to the DfE in 2016.

News

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

CONTACT US NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Cementing status as a construction technical excellence college

SHANE CHOWEN
SHANE.CHOWEN@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Further education colleges with a track record of high-quality construction training have just three weeks to apply to become a technical excellence college.

Applications to obtain “technical excellence college status” and gain access to a share of £100 million in funding for construction training opened on Thursday.

There will be 10 construction technical excellence colleges, known as CTECs, one in each of the nine English regions, plus a bonus one in one region.

In addition to accessing £80 million in capital and £20 million in revenue funding over the next four years, the CTECs will be expected to partner with neighbouring colleges and training providers to improve access and quality of construction training in their areas.

Prime minister Sir Keir Starmer first announced he would introduce technical excellence colleges in his final party conference speech as leader of the opposition in October 2023. On entering government, £100 million was set aside in the spring statement specifically to establish the first 10 technical education colleges specialising in construction skills “crucial to delivering the government’s plans to build 1.5 million homes and progress vital infrastructure projects”.

The funding is part of the £1.2 billion in headline skills investment re-announced by the chancellor in Wednesday’s spending review.

But becoming a CTEC does not guarantee capital funding, and revenue cash will come with “specific terms and conditions” according to guidance.

Construction credentials

Eligibility criteria to become a CTEC, also published on Thursday, states that general FE colleges must hold a ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ Ofsted overall effectiveness grade, or have a



Keir Starmer and Angela Rayner

‘significant progress’ monitoring report if they are graded ‘requires improvement’.

Financial health must also be rated ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ for the 2023-24 financial year and the college must not be subject to a notice to improve, current or recent investigations or have any ‘significant concerns’ raised in recent audits.

Colleges will also need to prove their construction credentials.

Minimum volume thresholds are in place based on data from academic year 2023-24. Colleges will need to have trained “an above average proportion” of construction learners at any level, which the Department for Education said is 5.8 per cent or above their overall cohort, or at least 525 construction learners that year.

They will need an above-average achievement rate, 84 per cent or above, for their construction courses or have had at least 440 achieving learners in academic year 2023-24.

To be in with a chance of becoming a CTEC, colleges will also have to show they have contributed their construction expertise through one or more skills initiatives.

Those listed include delivering construction training through an Institute of Technology, being a construction lead on a local skills improvement plan (LSIP), being a WorldSkills

UK Centre of Excellence, or putting forward learners in WorldSkills UK or CITB skills construction-related skills competitions.

London colleges can also tick this box if they hold the mayor’s quality mark for green or construction skills, or are involved in the mayor’s green skills academies.

Five objectives

If a college meets the criteria, they will then have to evidence how they meet five objectives: increase construction provision to meet local and national employer needs, deliver high-quality teaching, leverage employer investment, collaborate with other providers, and show that learners progress to construction jobs or higher-level training.

Applications should also include “endorsements” from construction employers, employer representative bodies and other education and training organisations.

Decisions to award the CTEC status will be made by the education secretary, in consultation with local mayors.

Once awarded, CTECs will be held to account against the five objectives. Failure to meet those objectives could result in the status and funding being stripped and the CTEC being readvertised.

Applications close on July 4.

Enhanced reviews

The power of AI
within Aptem



- ✓ Cut the admin time of the review process in half.
- ✓ Deliver consistent, high quality review documentation.

Watch
the video



MAYOR OF LONDON



Mayor of London Adult Learning Awards 2025 – celebrating the power of adult learning across the capital

Nominations for the Mayor of London Adult Learning Awards will open next week.

This annual ceremony showcases the most inspirational stories of adult learning happening in London, the fantastic opportunities on offer and the difference they make to Londoners' lives.

The Mayor is committed to ensuring all Londoners have the skills they need to benefit from the city's growth, and that all businesses can access the talent they need to thrive.

Now in its fourth year, the awards recognise the remarkable stories of adult learners, many of whom have overcome barriers to succeed in learning, find good work, or contribute to their communities. They also celebrate the training providers, employers, and community organisations that support people with their first steps into learning to make these journeys possible.

Nominations will open on the 18 June for approximately six weeks from June until July so now is a great opportunity to start thinking about who you might like to nominate. Whether that's a learner who's transformed their life through education, a provider delivering exceptional support, or an employer developing their workforce through adult learning.

Award categories will celebrate the role adult learning plays in developing industry-relevant skills and supporting key growth sectors, contributing to the London Growth Plan's aim of creating 150,000 new good jobs. Past awards have recognised inspirational learners, exceptional tutors, outstanding providers, and forward-thinking employers.

This autumn, the winners will be celebrated at a high-profile ceremony at City Hall which will bring real Londoner stories to the forefront and the transformational impact of adult learning on their lives.

Nominations open on 18 June and close 25 July

To learn more and be among the first to hear when nominations open, visit: www.london.gov.uk/london-adult-learning-awards

NOMINATIONS OPEN SOON FOR THE FOLLOWING AWARD CATEGORIES:

- Mayor of London Inspirational Adult Learner of the Year Award
- Mayor of London Learning for Good Work Award
- Mayor of London Learning for Personal Progression Award
- Mayor of London Distinguished Provider of Adult Education Award
- Mayor of London Inclusive Provider of Adult Education Award
- Mayor of London Champion Employer for Skills and Progression Award
- Mayor of London Apprenticeship Employer of the Year Award
- Mayor of London Inspirational Tutor in Adult Education Award
- Mayor of London Outreach and Engagement of Adults into Learning Award
- Mayor of London Inspirational Professional in Adult Education Award

Sponsored by

Media partner



FEWEEK

News

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

CONTACT US NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

How to use AI in colleges – DfE reveals all

JACK DYSON
NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Colleges could use AI to monitor attendance patterns, generate tender documents and provide ideas for lessons, new government toolkits suggest.

The support material, published this week and drawn up by the Chiltern Learning Trust and Chartered College of Teaching, also says colleges should plan for “wider use” of AI – including to analyse budgets and plan CPD.

The government said the toolkits were part of a new “innovation drive” which includes investment to “accelerate development” of AI marking and feedback tools.

Ministers also launched a new nine-month pilot, asking 100 providers, including in FE, to volunteer to become edtech “testbeds” for AI software to find scalable solutions to cut teacher workload. Expressions of interest for the pilot are open until August.

The Department for Education will hand out a further £1 million on top of the existing £1 million pumped into AI firms to fund the development of classroom tools.

Officials have previously produced guidance on “safety expectations” for the use of generative AI – artificial intelligence that creates content – in education, along with policy papers and research on the subject.

Here’s what you need to know on the new toolkits guidance:

1 Marking feedback and ideas for lessons

For teaching and learning, the documents state generative AI may be able to support ideas for lesson content and structure, formative assessments, analysis of marking data and creating “text in a specific style, length or reading age”.

The guidance also suggested AI could be used for quiz generation from specific content, to offer feedback on errors, or produce infographics to “support understanding”.

2 Draw up an AI ‘vision’

The guidance stressed “it’s essential” that colleges “are clear with staff around what tools are safe to use and how they can use them”. The tools included on any list should

“have been assessed” and colleges should have “control over” them.

It recommended college leaders lead by example by using AI tools responsibly themselves and set boundaries so users can safely play around with tools.

When exploring AI use, the guidance encourages colleges to invest in staff training and to collaborate with industry as well as creating an AI culture within the college community.

3 Reducing administrative burden

The toolkits say technology could support the reduction of time spent on admin, such as email and letter writing, data analysis and long-term planning.

It also mentioned policy writing, timetabling, trip planning, staff CPD and analysing attendance patterns.

4 Plan for ‘wider use’, like budget planning and tenders

Leaders have been told to plan for AI’s “wider use” and involve staff and learners to “improve efficiency and effectiveness across operations”.

The writers of the report said some “finance teams [are] using safe and approved” tools to analyse budgets and support planning. Business managers are also using it to generate “tender documents based on a survey of requirements”.

5 Adapt materials for SEND learners

According to the DfE, the technology could offer “valuable tools” for SEND learners, such as getting AI to describe images for the visually impaired.

But it added specialists and education, health and care plans (EHCPs) should be consulted to “help identify specific needs and consider carefully whether an AI tool is the most appropriate solution on a case-by-case basis”.

6 Critical thinking lessons

As the technology becomes more prevalent, “integrating AI literacy and critical thinking into existing lessons and activities should be considered”.

Guidance included the recommendation that AI ethics and digital citizenship could be incorporated into PSHE or computing curriculums.

Approaches to homework may also have to be considered, focusing on “tasks that can’t be easily completed by AI”.

7 Transparency and human oversight ‘essential’

The report warned about two issues “inherent” in AI systems: hallucinations and bias, and recommended to always have a human in the loop to double-check content.

It added it was “essential” that no decision that could adversely impact a student’s outcomes is “based purely [on] AI without human review and oversight”.

8 Beware AI risks: IP, safeguarding and privacy

There were also broader warnings that using AI must comply with Britain’s GDPR rules and copyright breaches could happen if the systems are “trained on unlicensed material and the outputs are then used in educational settings or published more widely”.

Any AI use must also meet keeping children and young people safe in education guidance. The report advised colleges to update child protection policies, including online safety and behaviour policies, to reflect the “rapidly changing risks”.

9 Educate on deep-fakes

The guidance also warned of challenges like the “increasing accessibility of AI image generation tools”.

Colleges have been told to conduct regular staff training “on identifying and responding to online risks, including AI-generated sexual extortion”. These sessions should be recurring “to address emerging threats” and staff should be taught how to respond when nudes and sexualised deep-fakes have been shared.



City is ‘testbed’ to trial personalised jobseeker service

ANVIKSHA PATEL
ANVIKSHA.PATEL@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Wakefield will be the first place in England to run a pilot scheme to “personalise” a jobs and careers service for jobseekers.

A new “pathfinder”, which will work with employers to provide a “pathway into good jobs”, has been designed by leaders from West Yorkshire Combined Authority and Wakefield Council.

West Yorkshire mayor Tracy Brabin said the city was a “testbed” for new ideas including a coaching academy for Department for Work and Pensions staff that will be rolled out across the country this year as part of the government’s Get Britain Working plan.

DWP secretary Liz Kendall announced last year the National Careers Service would be merged with jobcentres to tackle economic inactivity.

Close to one million young people are classed as not in education, employment or training (NEET). Estimated figures fell nationally

by 7,000 in the last quarter to 923,000.

Government data shows that over 3,000 16 to 17-year-olds were classed as NEET in 2024 in the six constituent councils that make up WYCA. Wakefield recorded 371 NEETs and a 3.5 per cent NEET rate, the third highest rate in the region behind Leeds and Calderdale.

Labour’s autumn budget announced £55 million would be spent to develop and test the new service in 2025/26.

It is not clear how much funding has been allocated to the Wakefield pilot.

WYCA last week greenlit a £37 million plan to “guarantee a healthy working life” by linking up NHS services with employment support providers such as jobcentres and councils.

DWP employment minister Alison McGovern will face MPs later this week to give oral evidence about the merger.

The new services to be piloted will include a coaching academy to train up DWP staff to provide better support, and changes to DWP appointment services to give jobseekers a “more personalised” experience.

Wakefield will also test a series of careers events to link up jobseekers with employers. Officials said more events in the coming months involving the local manufacturing and technology sectors will be open to the public, not just jobseeker claimants.

Brabin said: “People stand a better chance of landing a good job when they are treated with dignity and respect at a trusted local Jobcentre.

“Working with the government, we’re investing almost £40 million to help guarantee a healthy working life to everyone in our region, and as the testbed for the new national jobs and careers service, Wakefield will lead the way on transforming our welfare system to get Britain working.”

McGovern added: “Our one-size-fits-all, tick-box approach to jobs support is outdated and does not serve those looking to better their lives through work.

“We are building a proper public employment service in partnership with local leaders that truly meets community challenges and unlocks opportunity.”

‘Exceptional’ quality at sixth form retains top rating

ANVIKSHA PATEL
ANVIKSHA.PATEL@FEWEEK.CO.UK

INSPECTION SECTION

A sixth form college in Cambridge has been awarded a third consecutive Ofsted grade one for its “exceptional” quality.

Hills Road Sixth Form College got top marks from inspectors after they found high exam achievement rates and “outstanding” support for high-needs learners.

The sixth form had 2,902 students on a combination of A-level subjects alongside the extended project qualification (EPQ) during its April 1 to 4 inspection.

The college was first awarded an overall ‘outstanding’ judgment in 2007 and then again in 2022. The result comes in time for the college’s 50th anniversary.

Ofsted’s latest report said students enjoy their studies “greatly” and take pride in the challenging and “stimulating” lessons.

Inspectors found attendance was high, even to the extra voluntary lessons to prepare

learners for maths exams.

“Students attend well, arrive promptly to lessons and are eager to learn. They routinely go beyond what is expected of them,” the report added.

As a result, a “very high proportion” of students achieve A* to B grades in A-level exams and nearly all progress to further or higher education or employment.

Principal Jo Trump said: “This report is a lovely recognition of all the fabulous staff and students who make up the Hills Road community.

“We are lucky to benefit from the dedication and care of our staff and the energy and enthusiasm of our students. We are proud of the outcome, and prouder still of our community that makes it all possible every day.”

Curriculums are of “exceptional quality”, Ofsted said.

Inspectors said that making students study the EPQ allows them to “showcase both their creative and academic potential” which prepares them well for university.

Meanwhile, teachers were highly praised for thoroughly checking learners’ understanding and reinforcing foundational knowledge before moving onto more complex topics.

For the sixth form’s 21 SEND students, Ofsted was impressed by teachers’ “outstanding” support, using inclusive teaching techniques in class, well-thought-out seating plans and specialist staff where needed.

Inspectors also applauded the range of wellbeing services students have access to, such as drop-in sessions, a therapy dog and internal and external counselling sessions.

The watchdog also found the sixth form college made a “reasonable” contribution to meeting skills needs.

The report said leavers and governors have a good understanding of local skills needs and have put in place “strategic targets” to improve their contribution.

Governors were found to hold leaders to account “exceptionally” well and support them in the development of college policies such as safeguarding practices and staff wellbeing initiatives.

News

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

CONTACT US NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

INSPECTION SECTION

'Inadequate' rating during Ramadan sparks complaint

ANVIKSHA PATEL
ANVIKSHA.PATEL@FEWEEK.CO.UK

EXCLUSIVE

A London-based apprenticeship provider has raised questions of "deep-seated" biases at Ofsted after being judged 'inadequate' following an inspection during Ramadan.

The London Academy for Applied Technology (LAAT), based in Tower Hamlets, has lodged a complaint claiming the grading of its first ever full inspection was "fundamentally flawed, inaccurate, and unfair".

The watchdog's report, published this week, judged the provider as 'inadequate' in three out of five areas. Inspectors claimed apprentices were waiting months to be registered for their final assessments, including English and maths, were studying at the wrong levels, and leaders were "too slow" to make improvements.

Bosses at LAAT escalated the row to the Independent Complaints Adjudication Service for Ofsted, which reviews alleged failures to follow complaints procedures, inspector conduct and concerns of the inspection process.

Raghav Malhotra, LAAT's operations director, accused Ofsted of "failing to accommodate" staff and learners' religious commitments as the inspection was conducted during Ramadan in March, impacting staff's ability to "fully engage" with the inspection.

He said 90 per cent of the provider's provision serves ethnic minority apprentices.

Malhotra told *FE Week*: "It is increasingly difficult not to wonder if there is some form of bias at play here. How else can you explain the allocation of four white inspectors to a diverse provider like LAAT?"

His provider's "treatment" by Ofsted makes him question if "racial dynamics played any part in how our inspection was handled", he said.

Malhotra added: "Ofsted talks about inclusivity, but the way in which our case has been handled suggests there are deep-seated biases in play, particularly when it comes to providers like us – who serve largely ethnic minority communities and offer opportunities for growth in diverse sectors."



Ofsted told *FE Week* it completely refuted any claim of discrimination, adding that the watchdog does not comment on individual inspections.

Malhotra said LAAT "immediately" submitted a formal complaint when it received Ofsted's draft report in late April "in the hope of having the issues fairly addressed".

"We provided evidence and clear arguments demonstrating the errors in the draft report, yet the outcome letter we received on June 3 was even more negative and dismissive than the original report," he added.

Private providers judged 'inadequate' by Ofsted are usually sanctioned by the Department for Education, which can include contract termination. Malhotra said the DfE had not yet contacted LAAT.

'Why us?'

LAAT began delivering apprenticeships three years ago and was fully inspected for the first time from March 25 to 27. Ofsted's report stated that the majority of the provider's 119 apprentices were studying level 2 commis chef and level 2 production chef and the minority were on early years and adult care apprenticeships.

Malhotra said there were "severe" factual errors in the report, including the calculation of 119 apprentices.

"In reality, we had 59 active apprentices, with the rest already in gateway and end point assessment (EPA) stages," he claimed.

Ofsted's report noted that "many apprentices" need to gain English and maths qualifications as they have not studied in England before, adding that most do achieve but "not always" in the time expected.

Inspectors praised trainers for helping apprentices "fill the gaps in their knowledge of these subjects and teach English and mathematics effectively", but also said trainers "do not correct errors in apprentices' written English", adding that the "quality of written work for many apprentices is not of an appropriate standard".

Ofsted's report also claimed that LAAT apprentices were not on "appropriate" apprenticeships for their level of prior expertise and trainers did not consider what apprentices already knew.

Although a new apprenticeship director and quality manager were recently appointed, the report found leaders were "too slow" to act and did not have "effective" oversight on the quality of training.

Malhotra said Ofsted put forward four recommendations for improvement that were already identified and being "actively worked on" by LAAT, but that none of them justify a grade of 'inadequate'.

Malhotra added that LAAT paused new apprenticeship starts in November to "focus" on the quality of provision for current learners.

"This is an example of us being proactive and committed to quality, yet it seems this was not adequately considered in Ofsted's final grading," he said.

Malhotra added he was puzzled why inspectors did not reference the "strong" performance indicators LAAT achieved in the Apprenticeship Accountability Framework, which he claimed was "green in all areas except for the achievement rate".

He also claimed "astounding" contradictions in the report, which revealed most apprentices regard their teachers highly and said their training was "helpful". Inspectors also praised trainers for giving "useful" advice for managing sleep and work whilst fasting during Ramadan.

"Yet, despite this, Ofsted rates us as 'inadequate'. This makes no sense and is fundamentally contradictory," he said.

"The question we are forced to ask is why us? Are we being targeted because we raised our voice against Ofsted's unfair and inaccurate assessment? Or is it because we are a minority-led provider with 90 per cent of our provision serving ethnic minority apprentices?"

SUBSCRIPTION

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ANY TIME ANY PLACE.

EducationScape Training & Events are offering expert-led, flexible professional development for schools, colleges, and training providers.

More than training—it's a whole professional development ecosystem.



FIND OUT MORE



educationscape.com/training



Unlimited users



Scalable for any organisation



High-impact. Global reach



Discounts on bespoke training



**Access to an on-demand
webinar catalogue**



**Delivered by world-class
facilitators**



Interview

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
CONTACT US NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UKALUN
FRANCISChair, Social Mobility
Commission‘Not all disadvantage
is about money, it’s
about behaviour’JESSICA HILL
JESSICA.HILL@FEWEEK.CO.UK**Deprived areas need vision – not victimhood – to level up, and Alun Francis is delivering it with a ‘Multiversity’ built in Britain’s most famous seaside town**

Alun Francis is practising what he preaches as chair of the government’s Social Mobility Commission at the Blackpool college he runs.

In a town where deep structural economic challenges lie behind the neon lights and candy-floss charm, he is poised to realise his longstanding vision for the UK’s first

‘Multiversity’.

This unique £65 million project will expand access to degree-level learning through flexible courses, tailored to Lancashire’s skills needs. It will, Francis believes, help to finally shift the dial on social mobility – “the signature problem of our times” – in a town that tops the charts for having the lowest male life expectancy and the second-lowest employment rate in the country.

Having spent his entire career trying to solve the challenge of ‘levelling up’ from all angles of the public sector – local authority (Manchester and Oldham), combined authority (Greater Manchester), FE (13 years leading Oldham College) and nationally through the

commission, his passion sometimes spills over into exasperation at the forces holding it back.

Birbalsingh and controversy

Mindful of his responsibility to uphold Blackpool and The Fylde College’s (B&FC) reputation, Francis has until now been less outspoken than his commission predecessor, Michaela Community School head Katharine Birbalsingh, who achieved infamy as “Britain’s strictest headmistress”.

In 2023, she handed the reins to her “brilliant” deputy Francis, blaming her “propensity to voice opinions... considered controversial” for her decision to step down.

Interview

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

CONTACT US NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Although Francis prioritises “building bridges” more than Birbalsingh (she recently called Bridget Phillipson a “patronising cultural Marxist”), he shares many of her views, including her disdain for the national narrative of ‘victimhood’.

The Cabinet Office-sponsored commission he leads, which was formed in 2016 to assess and promote the UK’s progress on social mobility, now faces an uncertain future amid the latest quango-cutting drive.

Perhaps he feels the time is ripe to be more vocal.

He explains he gets “frustrated in education when everything’s about disadvantage”. Disadvantage, he says, is “so badly defined” that much of the time people “never actually work with the most disadvantaged – very often it’s about the polite poor, who will do well anyway”.

He accuses some prominent educationists of caricaturing working-class kids in a negative way without considering the children from those backgrounds who display “model behaviour” and “amazing attendance”.

“The flip side is an equally insulting argument that middle-class kids are bland and achieve only because of their parents’ privilege. They’re all caricatures. We want a world where every individual has the potential to achieve.”

He also lashes out at graduates who “dominate the policy world” and view non-graduates as “victims” they “don’t understand”.

A month into his role at Blackpool in 2023, Francis sent a team of staff to Birbalsingh’s school to learn from her approach. They



New DWP building in Blackpool

returned energised with ideas to raise the bar on student expectations.

B&FC proceeded to ban mobile phones in classrooms (unless permitted for learning) and prohibited vaping on campus grounds. Staff in designated blue jackets conduct regular patrol duties to enforce such rules. Although “one or two staff” are not fans of these patrols, they are “non-negotiable” for Francis.

Blackpool renaissance

Since taking the helm at B&FC, he has been too busy juggling the role with his day a week at the commission to do much sightseeing. But he knows Blackpool well. When his seven children were younger he would rush his asthmatic second youngest son from the family’s Manchester home to Blackpool beach when he was having an attack, as “the air’s just better here”.

Many of this area’s residents are welfare claimants who moved from nearby Liverpool and Manchester for its cheaper housing.

Francis sees the area’s decline as symbolic of a “very British” problem. Like many left-behind towns, Blackpool has been neglected by our finance and commerce-dominated, London-based economy and a

“welfare system that allows people to move here without taking any care for the outcome”.

“You end up with ghettos where everybody’s seriously poor, which has knock-on effects. Getting neighbourhoods right is key to getting schools right, which is key to skills,” he says.

These rundown houses are about to be torn down to make way for Multiversity Blackpool, with residents relocated to better-quality homes while the college works with the council to improve their skills.

“We’ll constitute their lessons into one day if we can”

The Multiversity’s flexible routes into and through higher education, incorporating digital and AI, health and life sciences, and business and engineering, will serve Lancashire’s wider economy, including its large manufacturing base and the new National Cyber Force base in Samlesbury.

Francis believes that by “broadening opportunities” for those in and out of work to improve their skills across different life stages, the Multiversity approach “really epitomises



Blackpool and the Clyde college vape ban sign

Interview

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

CONTACT US NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

where FE should go”.

The Department for Work and Pensions is moving its new office into the area too as part of wider regeneration plans to diversify Blackpool's economy away from day trippers and stag dos to more “high-end shopping and better-quality attractions, but without losing the town's soul”.

Multiversity represents a gamble for B&FC, which is borrowing £16 million from the council to fund the project and paying it back through rent on the completed building.

Given that universities elsewhere are scaling back amid deteriorating finances, is this not an odd time to be expanding HE?

Francis denies that Multiversity represents competition to Lancashire's universities. It will instead provide “what only colleges can deliver – highly intensive support for students and a real understanding of their needs. We'll constitute their lessons into one day if we can, so they can work four days a week.”

Multiversity is a term coined by Andy Haldane, who in 2018 (three years before becoming the government's levelling-up tsar) suggested that multiversities could “operate like career roundabouts, with turnoffs into both work and study”.

Like Haldane, Francis is a fervent critic of the country's “one size fits all” system of “narrowly defined academic success”. He believes that a decade of social mobility programmes “focused on getting poor children into elite universities, then into London jobs at magic circle law firms” has now “run out of road”, having “neglected”

adults and not led to any wider community benefits.

Welfare woes

Francis saves his harshest criticism for our welfare system.

He backs controversial government proposals to overhaul Personal Independence Payments (PIP) for those with a health condition or disability, which he describes as a “very spurious system” of people “sometimes acquiring, sometimes seeking labels” to boost their benefits.

“Not all disadvantage is about money, it's about behaviour”

“You can't blame people for doing that, if that's how the system works.”

He knows of some mainstream schools where most pupils are now seen as having a special educational need, and puts some of this down to parents seeking “external explanations for bad behaviour”.

Meanwhile, families with four or more children and a household income of over £80,000 a year are a “neglected part of the social mobility story” as they live in “relative poverty” but “never figure in social mobility stats”.

But “pouring money” into more welfare support would not “get to the root of the other things sitting behind disadvantage – a lack of

skills and the need for family support”.

Francis says: “Not all disadvantage is about money. It's about behaviour and being looked after properly.”

He also considers it “bonkers” that the DWP can categorise young NEETs (not in education, employment or training) as unable to work on mental health grounds, and then expect not to see them for a year.

“They certainly don't need writing off at the worst possible time in life to be doing nothing,” he adds.

Francis is familiar with our welfare system from his own upbringing in a similar poverty-stricken seaside town, Colwyn Bay in north Wales. His “downwardly mobile” parents never worked again after he turned 10. His dad, a former church minister, “kind of lost his faith” and his brother's alcoholism worsened after he was signed off on disability benefits, thereby providing him with regular money for booze at a time when his family was trying to encourage him to give it up.

“There are genuine issues around what the welfare system does to human beings which you wouldn't do to your own family,” he says.

But in talking about his background, he worries that people will think it's this that qualified him for the commission chair role, which is not the case.

Diversity drama

In fact, his social mobility credentials partly stem from his work on aspiration-raising regeneration programmes. They include a £77 million project in east Manchester which was found 10 years later to have cut crime by 40 per cent and unemployment by 25 per cent.

Six years after Oldham's race riots, Francis worked for the council there on tackling community segregation by closing seven schools and opening five new ones in “neutral” community areas.

A subsequent DfE report found that blending these divided communities “increased trust” between them but did not boost school performance or “liking” between social groups.

Francis is therefore deeply sceptical of the prevailing narrative among some big-name



Andy Haldane, CEO of the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) and the government's former levelling up tsar, with Alun Francis at a recent RSA event

Interview

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

CONTACT US NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

consultancy firms that ethnic or gender diversity increases success.

Oldham College later sponsored one of the new schools, Waterhead Academy, and in a “joke that became serious”, Francis took up a friend’s suggestion that he should run the college, despite his lack of FE experience.

A mentor arranged for him to “learn the ropes” by visiting Sir Peter Birkett at Barnfield College in Luton, which at the time sponsored two schools achieving impressive academic results. But Francis was left unimpressed during his “very strange” trip to Luton.

After being driven to the college in a limo and offered a trip to the races, Francis asked Sir Peter how it was that his schools were performing so well. Francis says he credited the “energy boosting” bananas that pupils were given after lunch.

Sir Peter was knighted in 2012 for services to FE and the academy movement, but was later embroiled in two government investigations over grade massaging and ghost learners.

These found a “lack of oversight” by governors into improper use of college funds for Sir Peter’s pay-off, foreshadowing a similar turn of events more recently at Weston College for which Francis at the time voiced his “anger and disappointment”. He would like to see the FE sector being “braver” at calling out such bad behaviour.

“It’s still very easy for people to create the impression that somehow they’re wonderful... ministers aren’t helpful because they always want their heroes, so people cozy up to them. Then it all gets a bit uncritical”.

Gaming the system

Francis is aware that some of his views clash with the FE mainstream.

He disagrees with the “increasing view” that the “curriculum needs to be thrown up in the air to start again” and was in a “minority of one” for thinking the government should have scrapped BTECs last year. By keeping both BTECs and T Levels, he is concerned that “everyone’s just going to do the easy one and the hard one will never happen”.

He claims the current curriculum and

attainment system is vastly better than the one in place when he started out in FE, when few exams took place. Back then, he says, many teachers “didn’t really know how to teach” as “we didn’t talk about pedagogy”.

Meanwhile, Oldham’s academies were focused on “institutional performance” rather than “improving learning”. He accuses the then-prevalent Greater Manchester Challenge system of school improvement (which was based on the celebrated London Challenge) of teaching people “how to cheat” by sharing techniques to jump grades, rather than teaching “theories of learning”.

In 2016, Francis pulled the college out of academy sponsorship altogether.

‘Crackpot theories’

Francis sits on Ofsted’s inclusion reference group but takes an opposing line to many of its members. He believes the watchdog’s current focus on inclusion will mean schools and colleges having to “bend over backwards to accommodate everybody”.

“The inclusion I’m worried about is the poor kid that comes in wanting to work hard, but the rest of the class are messing about and won’t let them. How is that inclusive?”

“Half the education system is turning into a therapy centre”

Francis claims there is “embarrassed silence” when he poses this question to Ofsted.

He believes there are “a lot of crackpot theories going around the inclusion world at the moment”, one being around “trauma-informed practice”, which has become widespread in FE colleges. Francis believes that not all bad behaviour is down to trauma, and “if you let [young people] behave in daft ways, they’ll do that more”.

During a 1990s community project in south Manchester in which local youths were “running



riot”, he recalls how at a concerned community hall meeting of “woolly jumper wearing” locals, the youths’ ringleader “opened the skylight and urinated” over everyone.

“They all thought it was trauma. Honestly, traumatised kids don’t do stuff like that.”

Francis is concerned that so-called behaviour management ‘experts’ are cashing in on young people’s perceived mental health problems. His inbox is “full of people writing to me with all kinds of snake oil”.

He puts the theory that “we all have different learning styles” into the snake oil bracket, instead advocating that “our brains all work pretty similarly... which is great for teachers, because they don’t need 99 different techniques”.

Francis is also concerned about a sense of “learned helplessness” among young people, particularly those who fail their English and maths GCSEs and falsely believe they are “rubbish” at them.

And school leaders who complain about having to “do the washing and buy people food” should “shut up”. “Everybody’s always done that. Be discreet when you need to do it.”

He asserts that “half the education system is turning into a therapy centre”, which is not its role. Francis believes that sometimes, college governors “like to climb into the safeguarding issues because they find it interesting”. But he adds: “we’re not a therapy unit, we’re an educational centre”.

“People come to college to learn – that’s the best therapy we can give them,” he concludes.

DEPUTY HEAD OF DEPARTMENT SPORT, PROTECTIVE SERVICES & HOSPITALITY

Full time

Permanent

£44,885 - £49,208 per annum (*Plus 28.7% Employer pension Contribution)

Click here
to find
out more

The person appointed to the Deputy Head of Department will have an integral role in designing and delivering outstanding provision across Education programmes for Young People, Higher Education and Adult Learning, through excellent leadership of curriculum teams and coordinating the operational delivery of provision. Working collaboratively with the Head of Department and other members of the College Management Team, you will be a key figurehead in managing and supporting the continued success of the department.

At the heart of the role is to support BTC in delivering its vision: achieving the four overarching strategic aims that have been developed in response to the current context of local, regional and national priorities. In addition, the role will influence our response to the climate emergency, digital transformation, and our continued work to strengthen equality, diversity, and inclusion for all.

You will play a critical role in overseeing the operational day to day running of the department, whilst supporting the Head of Department in achieving departmental KPIs, appropriate financial contribution and implementing a robust curriculum plan that allows for growth, meeting the needs of our students and local, regional & national skills priorities.

This is an exciting time for the college and our high-performing departments, and we are seeking a proactive, dynamic and experienced practitioner to create a new College Management Team and continue to relentlessly pursue the highest standards and outcomes for our students. We are passionate about teaching, learning and assessment and as such, critical to this post, the post-holder will need to be an excellent classroom practitioner, with the ability to develop and lead teaching & learning initiatives and pedagogical practice.

Critical to the values of BTC, the Deputy Head position requires effective communication and people management skills. The ability to motivate, talent develop and unlock the potential of individuals and teams is critical. Being a strong team-player who is positively solution focused, with the ability to work collaboratively with leaders and managers across different areas is essential.

BTC offer a range of fantastic employee benefits including:

- Generous pension scheme
- Competitive holiday entitlement
- Dedicated CPD days
- 2 wellbeing days
- 2-week Christmas closure
- Opportunities for hybrid working
- On-site discounted gym
- Free parking
- BTC Extra discount package, this includes top retailers, supermarkets, holidays, entertainment packages and much more!

BTC is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion and welcomes applicants from all backgrounds and communities. We are also a disability confident employer and we'll do all we can to help with your application. Please let us know if you need to request reasonable adjustments. We encourage everyone to apply who wishes to and we believe that everyone should have an equal opportunity

Bridgwater & Taunton College are proposing to merge with Strode College in August 2025 to form a stronger College Group to continue to serve its learners, employers, and the wider Somerset Community.

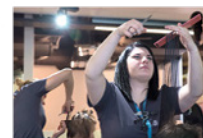
Applicants who apply for a role at Bridgwater & Taunton College and who start their employment after 31 July 2025 will be contracted under the newly merged organisation to be known as UCS College Group (University Centre Somerset College Group)

Closing Date: 22 June

BRINGING OUT YOUR BEST www.btc.ac.uk    



**BRIDGWATER
& TAUNTON
COLLEGE**



Executive Director for Business Development and Partnerships

South Thames Colleges Group

Competitive Salary, plus benefits including up to 50 Days leave + Bank Holidays

Permanent, Full Time

Here at South Thames Colleges Group, we are recruiting an Executive Director to lead on the development and growth of the Group's provision through partnership, marketing and innovation.

We are looking for an individual with a track record of proven leadership in the FE sector, backed by strong evidence of partnership development, great strategic insight and creating innovation in the Group's work with partners, students, employers and other stakeholders.

The role will be part of the Senior Leadership Team and the post holder will have responsibility across the Group to lead Business Development activities, Business Partnerships, the successful recruitment of all students, marketing and promotional activities, including the Group's website and the active engagement of the Group with tenders, awards, bids and project opportunities.

The successful candidate will be expected to work closely with the wider Group Leadership Team to draw on practice from a broad context and share developments consistently with other team members. We expect a passionate commitment to student and stakeholder engagement, a strong understanding of the financial implications of College activity and the vision and ability to deliver equal opportunities in an inclusive learning context.

You will demonstrate a committed understanding of the values and mission of South Thames Colleges Group and be able to work in a demanding and complex role as part of a wider leadership team and you will have a demonstrable track record of success, excellent communication skills and possess the leadership qualities necessary to secure sustainable and deep-rooted development of our Colleges.

The recruitment process will consist of the following stages:

- 29 June 2025 - Recruitment closes
- w/b 30 June 2025 - Longlisting complete; all candidates notified of decision
- w/b 7 July 2025:
- Day 1 - Longlisted candidates attend an assessment day; shortlisting at end of day and candidates informed of outcomes
- Day 2 - Shortlisted candidates interviewed; appointment made

South Thames Colleges Group very much encourages applications from candidates whose backgrounds are as diverse as the learners who attend the Group's Colleges.

When clicking on 'Apply', you will be taken to the STCG Recruitment platform where you can download some supporting documents including a welcome from the Chair of Governors, the job description and person specification, South Thames Colleges Group's inspection report from May 2024, South Thames Colleges Group's financial statements from 2023-24 and the Group's strategic plan.

For an informal conversation about the role, please contact the Group Principal/Chief Executive, Peter Mayhew-Smith, peter.mayhew-smith@stcg.ac.uk

The benefits package includes generous annual leave of 37 days plus up to 8 additional days over Christmas/New Year as well as an additional 5 days Wellbeing leave to enhance employees' physical and mental health. This leave is all in addition to Bank Holiday entitlement. There is an excellent pension scheme that receives a significant financial contribution from the employer (Teachers Pensions or Local Government Pension Scheme), subsidised sports facilities and professional development and training plus a salary sacrifice cycle to work scheme.

South Thames Colleges Group is an equal opportunities employer and is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and vulnerable adults.

The South Thames Colleges Group is made up of Carshalton College, Kingston College, Merton College and South Thames College, which merged on 1 August 2017. South Thames Colleges Group is one of London's largest providers of post-16 education and training and is an ongoing and significant contributor to its local communities. We aim to put students' success at the heart of everything we do.


[Click here to apply](#)

Assistant Principal Resources

Salary - £70,000

Assistant Principal Resources is a new and important strategic leadership position and will contribute to the design and implementation of college strategy. The postholder will be a member of the Executive Team of the college involved in the strategic oversight of functions to meet current strategic objectives and help shape and deliver future strategies. The role will be responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and reporting on the impact of services across the college, making strategic recommendations for change and taking a lead on their implementation.

Functions the postholder will be responsible for are the management and strategic direction of: IT Infrastructure and Digital Strategy, Management Information Systems (MIS), Estates and Facilities Strategy, Environmental and Sustainability Strategy and progress towards Net Zero, Health & Safety, Risk Management and Board Assurance, Procurement, contracts and delivery of Value for Money and Data Protection Officer role.

If you would like further information, please contact Carolyn Kipling (CFO) for a conversation on **01325 503179**

Closing Date – 20 June 12 noon

COURSE LEADER - ARBORICULTURE

Cannington Campus

£35,713 - £43,301 per annum (*Plus 26.8% Employer pension Contribution)

Permanent

[Click here to find out more](#)

Bridgwater & Taunton College seeks an outstanding individual to join our highly successful Agriculture & Environmental Sciences team, as the Course Leader for Arboriculture.

You will be motivated and enthusiastic about the area and a strong team player who strives to deliver the best possible outcomes for our learners. You will have strong industry experience and be passionate about creating the very best opportunities for our students. You will be expected to lead a successful team of staff to continue to contribute to the College's expectations of quality across all aspects of the role.

BTC offer a range of fantastic employee benefits including:

- Generous pension scheme
- Competitive holiday entitlement
- Dedicated CPD days
- 2 wellbeing days
- 2-week Christmas closure
- Opportunities for hybrid working
- On-site discounted gym

- Free parking
- BTC Extra discount package, this includes top retailers, supermarkets, holidays, entertainment packages and much more!

BTC is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion and welcomes applicants from all backgrounds and communities. We are also a disability confident employer and we'll do all we can to help with your application. Please let us know if you need to request reasonable adjustments. We encourage everyone to apply who wishes to and we believe that everyone should have an equal opportunity.

Bridgwater & Taunton College are proposing to merge with Strobe College in August 2025 to form a stronger College Group to continue to serve its learners, employers, and the wider Somerset Community.

Applicants who apply for a role at Bridgwater & Taunton College and start their employment after 31 July 2025 will be contracted under the newly merged organisation to be known as UCS College Group (University Centre Somerset College Group)

Closing Date: 22 June

BRINGING OUT YOUR BEST www.btc.ac.uk [f](#) [x](#) [i](#) [n](#)



**BRIDGWATER
& TAUNTON
COLLEGE**



education week jobs

Find your dream job today by visiting Education Week Jobs

- * Sign up to receive job alerts
- * Upload your CV
- * Save jobs

Brought to you by

FEWEEK

Find your dream job 



Are you ready for the next step in your career?

DIRECTOR OF INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM

Salary; £65,498 per annum + benefits

You will be instrumental in shaping and driving the Group's strategy for inclusive curriculum provision, encompassing High Needs, SEND, Project-Based, and 14-16 pathways. Your leadership will ensure that every student, regardless of their background or learning needs, has the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential.

A key responsibility of the role will be to design and deliver a nature-based project-based curriculum for students with complex socio-emotional needs, fostering collaboration, embracing challenge, and developing character, resilience, and empathy. You will lead a culture of high expectations, building successful relationships based on high-quality inclusive teaching and learning that supports students' emotional regulation for learning through a therapeutic lens.

Closing date: Monday 16 June 2025 at 12:00 Noon

[Click here to find out more about the RNN Group, and how to apply.](#)



LEWISHAM COLLEGE



Assistant Principal
Lewisham College

Salary: **£73,275**
Closing date: **16 June 2025**

Lewisham College, part of NCG, is seeking a motivated individual to join our dynamic senior leadership team. This is a great opportunity to join a developing college that is committed to delivering outstanding education and an exceptional experience for our students.

We are seeking a passionate and experienced educational leader to be part of the team to lead the next phase of our development in essential and technical education, apprenticeships, and employer responsive curriculum. You will be responsible for driving excellence across our vocational provision, ensuring high standards of teaching, strong industry engagement, and real-world progression for every learner.

This post offers the opportunity to develop high-level leadership skills and the ability to work cross-group on key projects and priorities aligned to the role and responsibilities. This role is open to applications from ambitious middle manager leaders looking for their next step or applications from more experienced leaders who would like to broaden their experience.

If you wish to have an initial conversation, please email luke.martin@lewisham.ac.uk.

[Click here to apply](#)

THE STAFF ROOM

Dispatches from the frontline of FE



ALICE DUARTE

Deputy head of electrical engineering, Chelmsford College



Getting 'Back to the Floor' means staying relevant for students

Days spent with industry and the wider community help staff re-energise and witness how their areas of specialism are evolving, says Alice Duarte

Chelmsford College's 'Back to the Floor' day last month was an incredibly valuable event for our whole community.

Every member of staff – both teaching and support – left college and spent the day either back in industry or volunteering in the community. It was a chance to refresh and remind ourselves of why we do what we do.

For me, it meant getting my steel-toe boots back on and heading out with an electrician who led me as an apprentice. He now runs his own company, Scott Thompson Electrical, and it felt full circle to be back on the tools with him.

I started out in college myself, first studying beauty therapy before realising it wasn't for me. I switched to

electrical and never looked back. I loved the hands-on challenge and problem solving it brought every day.

I spent several years working in the trade before an accident meant I could no longer use tools safely. So I moved into teaching, determined not to let my hard-earned skills go to waste.

That experience also deepened my understanding of health and safety, and I now try to instil that same respect and caution into my students

every day.

Industry doesn't stand still. New techniques, tools and technologies are constantly emerging. If you don't keep up, you fall behind. And if we fall behind as lecturers, our students suffer. They would no longer be getting taught what's really going in industry – and may be getting a version that's years out of date.

That is why industry days like ours are vital. "If you don't use it, you lose it" might sound like a cliché, but it's absolutely true in construction, specifically electrical, as systems change, tools are developed and renewable energy systems evolve.

Our students deserve the most up-to-date, relevant training we can give them. And to do that, we have to keep our own knowledge fresh.

I encouraged my team to take the day seriously and make the most of it. One also spent the day with an electrician and another visited another FE college. Both came back with ideas and best practices we could adapt ourselves. We are also planning return visits – demonstrating genuine collaboration, which again

benefits students.

Some staff volunteered at Billericay Town FC to assist with maintenance. This was a great reminder that our college is not just in its own bubble – we are rooted in our communities and have a responsibility – and opportunity – to give back.

"If we fall behind as lecturers, students suffer"

The day, which took place at the end of term so learners finished on a Thursday rather than the Friday, was part of a full week of events, with learners holding a youth social action day the day before.

This was the third time this event has taken place and it's a firm part of the college's calendar now.

FE colleges like ours are anchor institutions. We train the local workforce, offer second chances, support small businesses and keep communities connected. Days like "Back to the Floor" show what that looks like in action – staff learning from the world outside, while also giving back and generating social value.

I'd love to see more colleges doing something similar. Construction, electrical – and indeed most vocational sectors – move fast. The more we can get out and stay close to industry, the better. And the more we show our local community that we are very much part of it, the stronger those relationships – and the outcomes for our learners – will be.



Chelmsford College social action day

Opinion

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

SPENDING REVIEW REACTION



BEN ROWLAND

CEO, Association of Employment and Learning Providers

Why is the chancellor avoiding the easiest win for growth?

It's cheap, quick, and universally supported. Yet the chancellor barely mentioned skills in her spending review. In a time of tight budgets, this isn't just puzzling—it's self-sabotage, writes Ben Rowland

The International Monetary Fund. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Make UK. Combined authorities. Backbench MPs. Every single one says that that skills improvement is a top priority if we want growth and prosperity.

On Wednesday, the chancellor presented her three-year departmental spending settlement to drive the government's agenda.

What did skills get? One sentence in a 35-minute speech – and even that referenced previously announced funding!

At this point the government's reluctance to embrace the low-risk, high-benefit, easy choice that is skills investment is starting to look, well, a bit weird. Politicians often want to be seen as 'making tough choices' – but when that is at the expense of making a really easy choice, that's not rational.

The government should embrace three truths, if they are to get the growth they want by releasing more funding for skills:

First, skills is its best lever for

growth, assessed against four key criteria:

Cost: additional spend of less than a billion more would be transformative; compare that to the numbers announced yesterday for other measures that will cost tens of billions.

Impact reliability: skills spend gives an almost guaranteed return, whether that is someone not becoming NEET, someone earning more or a company filling a long empty vacancy – or just people gaining confidence. By contrast lots of Wednesday's big announcements have been (rightly) characterised by the press as "gamble".

Speed: Sizewell C is the right thing to do, but it will take decades to see the benefits; by contrast, benefits from skills spending come in months and years, not in parliaments and decades.

Gearing: spending on skills catalyses and enables tons of other benefits – 1.5 million homes needs skills; northern transport transformation needs skills; new nuclear power stations....you get the picture.

The criteria that skills falls short against are, unfortunately, the ones that politicians love: the bigger the number the better, and the more industrial/military the photo op.

room: you cannot just heat the corner of the room you want to sit in, you have to heat the whole room. Similarly, you cannot just get better skills in one corner of the economy – you have to improve skills across all of it. And all the precision comes at a cost. For example, is all the fuff required to channel the £600 million announced for construction precisely going to deliver a better outcome than a simple increase to apprenticeship and

"The criteria that skills falls short against are, unfortunately, the ones that politicians love"

The second truth that the government should embrace is that skills investment is what everyone wants. With nearly one million young people NEET and 3 million inactive adults and businesses desperate for better home-grown skills, everyone is united around the need for more skills investment. Who is against skills investment? That is not a rhetorical question. Who? Perhaps politicians, whose everyday existence is predicated on conflict, don't quite know what to do when there is no conflict.

The third and final truth is about the 'how' they should spend on skills.

Trying to be too targeted does not work. It is like heating a

bootcamp funding bands in the construction sector? It definitely won't be quicker.

The prize is huge and it is within government's grasp; every government department wants more skills investment. Every business. Every family. Every council and every mayor. It is dead cheap – hundreds of millions, not tens of billions. It starts to deliver returns within 3-6 months if done through existing mechanisms. The provider and assessment base is raring and ready to go, to convert those extra funds into extra precious outcomes. Skills investment will transform lives and earnings prospects for hard pressed families and individuals, creating a political dividend; it will unleash 'animal spirits' across firms and investors, economically gearing and compounding that initial extra spend. Productivity, growth and the tax base goes up. Borrowing costs go down.

In this, the 500th edition of *FE Week* (congratulations to everyone!), this is as close to a no-brainer as one will ever see in public policy.



SPENDING REVIEW REACTION



DAVID HUGHES

CEO, Association of Colleges

No cuts but no cure: FE’s funding dilemma post spending review

The chancellor avoided cuts and boosted 16-18 funding – a rare relief for colleges. But adult skills, apprenticeships, and staff pay remain overlooked, writes David Hughes

The chancellor this week set out the hard ‘Labour choices’ she was making which will frame the government’s actions for the next four years in the spending review. In doing so, there was some good news for colleges coupled with areas where more information is required for the FE sector. A mixed picture like this is not unusual at fiscal events, but what feels new is the absence of any funding cuts or negatives which the sector has unfortunately been subject to many times over the last 15 years.

On the very positive side, we heard about significant investment in young people, with an increase of £1.2 billion to the 16-18 budget by 2028-29, funding 65,000 more students. And it would seem there are inflation increases in the funding rate. It is pretty close to what we asked for in our submission earlier this year, and builds on the above

inflation funding rate increase for 2025-26. We have not had that sort of position in the recent past and it will offer a good deal of stability to many colleges with large cohorts of young people.

“The adult budget is a pale imitation of what it was when Labour was last in power”

With 16-18 budgets making up a little over half the income of the college sector, that announcement is very welcome. The ‘but’ comes

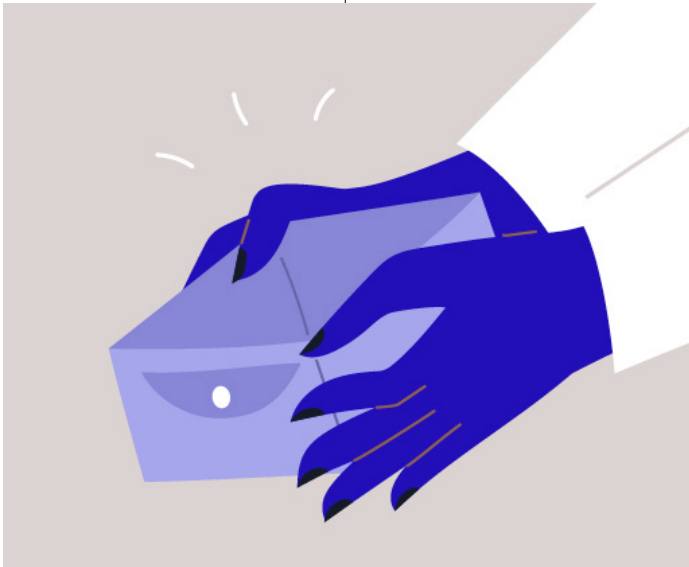
now though because we did not see similarly positive announcements on adult funding or apprenticeships to match. We did not hear much either on capital funding, or investment in priority sectors to match the £625m announced for construction in March. Nor how skills support for unemployed young people and adults will be delivered. On all of those we will probably have to wait for publication of the industrial strategy, the infrastructure plan and the post-16 education and skills white Paper. Ministers will want to have their own opportunities to announce funding alongside those strategies and plans. College leaders will be

relieved that there are no more obvious cuts to adult spending after those already announced for next year, and with the adult budget still

a pale imitation of what it was when Labour was last in power. For colleges with larger adult funding, there is once again nothing to ease the challenge of increasing costs and a wider fear that there is simply not enough support for learning that does not directly and immediately deliver against the government’s priorities. We will do more work on this over the summer, to set out the positive impact adult education delivers and why it should be a higher priority for government. And how taking a slightly longer term view can show the return on investment in human, community and economic terms.

There will also be some disappointment that the biggest challenge facing colleges - of low pay for their staff - will not be helped by these announcements. College pay lags a long way behind schools and industry, hampering colleges from being able to deliver on the government’s missions. Even the increased investment in 16-18 funding will only plug those gaps, rather than closing them.

So it is a mixed picture, with more announcements to come, one big positive boost to investment and no big funding cuts. Given what colleges have had to endure in the last 15 years, that feels like a win. And with increasing understanding across Whitehall that investment in skills through colleges is central to achieving economic growth and breaking down barriers to opportunity as well as delivering across the government’s missions, I am feeling optimistic and hopeful about the next few years.



Opinion

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

SPENDING REVIEW REACTION

SUE
PEMBERPolicy director,
Hoxley

Spending review marks yet another failure for adult skills

Despite cross-government recognition of adult skills being vital for growth, Rachel Reeves has not delivered the investment needed to improve our fragmented and exclusionary system, says Sue Pember

The lead-up to this spending review started with hope. For once, it seemed we had won the argument. It was fantastic to see that the importance of adult reskilling was recognised across government.

Strategies like the industry strategy, the Department for Work and Pension's connect to work, migration plan and initiatives from departments responsible for health and defence, all highlighted skills as key to their goals.

However, this recognition hasn't translated into investment from the Department for Education or in the spending review itself.

Despite a modest 2.3 per cent real-terms increase in departmental budgets and £1.3 billion pledged for young people and apprenticeships, this still leaves the DfE short.

Children's services are the clear winners, and while few would argue against investing in children, adult skills have once again been left behind.

This is not just short-sighted, it is reckless. At a time when skills are vital for economic recovery,

growth, and national resilience, neglecting adult learners means ignoring those who will help deliver national renewal.

The DfE still has no adult skills strategy. How could chancellor Rachel Reeves agree on new investment without one?

Although the funding to DWP for employment support is welcomed, the spending review settlement is likely to continue weakening a fragile adult skills system. The UK faces pressing shortages in sectors such as construction, health, digital, and green energy, yet instead of preparing the workforce, current policy choices risk long-term damage.

Once the adult education infrastructure is dismantled and staff made redundant, it's slow, costly and often impossible to rebuild.

Instead of fixing failing schemes or learning from what works, the DfE continues to back underperforming legacy programmes. Short-term politics are being prioritised over long-term reform. This leaves behind 30 per cent of adults with low qualifications, nine million people lacking basic literacy and numeracy, and many who are economically inactive but ready to re-engage if only they had the support.

The result is a fragmented, exclusionary system. It benefits



those already doing well and neglects those in greatest need. Adults with low skills are offered piecemeal, bolt-on training that provides little chance for real progression, while young people access structured pathways to meaningful qualifications. A two-tier system is emerging – one that risks widening inequality.

Case for investment

To return adult learning participation to 2010 levels, at least £5 billion additional investment is needed. This still wouldn't close the full gap identified by Skills England.

Instead, funding is being channelled into costly legacy technical programmes that do not meet the outcomes they promised. These are often rigid, costly and poor at helping adults progress into sustained employment.

What works is flexible, local, community-based learning that meets adults where they are both geographically and in terms of their life circumstances.

This kind of provision is accessible, responsive and rooted in trust. It helps people who have been excluded from the education system, those with low prior attainment, caring responsibilities, insecure work or health challenges to re-engage, build confidence and gain the skills needed to progress. It supports social inclusion, wellbeing and economic participation.

Yet despite strong evidence of its impact, resources are instead

being diverted to more rigid, centralised schemes that often fail to reach those most in need. This risks widening the gap between the education system and the communities it should serve.

Reframing adult education

This spending review misses the bigger picture. Instead of positioning adult skills as a driver of growth and opportunity, it reduces skills to short-term programmes scattered across different government departments which fail to build long-term capability, stronger communities or individual self-reliance.

We must reframe adult education as a long-term investment in people – the people who will build homes, deliver green jobs, and reduce NHS backlogs.

Sweden, Singapore and China are all increasing their investment in adult learning because they know it drives both national progress and individual hope.

The statement promises further details of government plans in a strategy for post-16 education and skills later this year.

Let's hope this is a bold adult skills strategy with clear roles for employers, the state and individuals. This isn't a luxury, it is an economic necessity.

If the UK wants to build 1.5 million homes, decarbonise the economy and reduce waiting lists, it must start with the adults who will do the work.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

CONTACT US NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK



EMILY JONES

Deputy director, Learning and Work Institute

Get the Nation Learning could change our culture and society

Our lifelong learning campaign is a rallying call to build the thriving country we want to live in, says Emily Jones

Lifelong learning increases people's likelihood of being in employment, boosts their earnings and reduces the amount of time spent on out-of-work benefits. So says our latest research, commissioned by Phoenix Insights.

Ministers targeting an 80 per cent employment rate and savings in the welfare system should take note. When adults learn, our society and economy thrive.

NHS mental health services are buckling, but we know learning can be transformational for people's wellbeing.

Last year's riots after the Southport murders lifted the lid on deep divisions in some communities across England, but we know learning promotes social cohesion and increases levels of interaction between people from different backgrounds.

Sectors with growth-driving potential need more skilled workers to kickstart a decade of economic renewal. But rates of retraining are falling short of what's required.

Despite the evidence outlining

its benefits, investment in lifelong learning has been in decline for over a decade. Government investment in adult skills fell by £1 billion in real terms between 2010 and 2024, resulting in seven million fewer qualifications awarded than if attainment had remained constant.

These cuts predominantly affected people in the poorest areas with the lowest qualifications who had the most to gain.

Employer investment also contracted sharply over the same period, with UK firms spending half the EU average on workplace training. The effects of declining employer spend have also been felt unequally, replicating and reinforcing inequalities in public skills investment and vice versa.

This situation cannot continue, particularly as

lifelong learning is becoming ever more vital. As technology alters our economy and careers get longer, people will increasingly need to update their skills.

The same is true for life outside of work, with people needing the know-how to access essential public services and remain active and engaged in their communities.

Increasing investment and participation in lifelong learning promises great rewards: growth, productivity, good work, resilient communities, and fuller and richer lives. But if levels of learning continue to languish the future will look different – with job dislocation, economic scarring, deepening inequalities and social exclusion all a major risk.

Business, Enginuity, Libraries Connected, Centre for Better Ageing and The 5% Club.

By joining the movement, you too can add your voice to the case for change and lead by example in getting the nation learning.

Everyone has a role to play. National and regional governments can put the funding and policy in place. Employers can invest more in skills and training and give their staff the flexibility they need. Community organisations have a role in delivering learning opportunities, but also in removing barriers local people and their service users face.

By acting together, we can move towards a culture, society and economy where everyone can learn throughout life.

“Growth sectors need skilled workers to kickstart a revival”

This is why L&W has launched the Get the Nation Learning campaign to make and win the case for lifelong learning. Just two weeks after launch, we're delighted to have the support of dozens of organisations, including Make UK, Channel 4, the National Housing Federation, Association of Colleges, AELP, HOLEX, Be the

This campaign builds on the legacy of the Festival of Learning, which L&W ran for over 30 years. And the tradition of our annual Adult Learning Awards will continue with the Get the Nation Learning Awards.

These awards will be the biggest celebration of lifelong learning in England. They will shine a light on people and organisations empowering adults to engage in learning, as well as individual learners who can inspire others. Get your nominations in before July 25.

If you have any questions about the campaign, and how you can get involved, please contact me and my team.

It's time to turn the tide. It's time to get the nation learning.



Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

CONTACT US NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK



KERRY BOFFEY

CEO and founder, Fellowship of Inspection Nominees

Do inspectors have skill to spot 'exemplary' in specialist fields?

FIN backs Ofsted's reforms but unresolved risks include inconsistent grading and the challenge of defining 'exemplary' practice, says Kerry Boffey

Over the past 18 months, the Ofsted inspectorate has demonstrated a commitment to redefine its approach, fostering greater trust across the sector.

We members of the Fellowship of Inspection Nominees (FIN) appreciate its evolving transparency and improvements.

In its response to the watchdog's latest consultation, FIN welcomes written confirmation of a five-day notice period for inspections for all providers. This was among our recommendations during the Big Listen.

To better understand sector sentiment, FIN, alongside the University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC), conducted a survey on Ofsted's proposals. It revealed strong support for the introduction of report cards, albeit with notable concerns. Under the current proposals, providers worry about their own ability to self-assess and how inspectors will differentiate between secure and strong grades. And now in his letter to the secretary of state this week, the chief inspector has acknowledged the need for

greater clarity in the toolkits, particularly in how Ofsted defines the grades and the boundaries between them.

We must ensure the new exemplary grade is both meaningful and attainable. Providers and inspectors alike must have a shared understanding of what exemplary practice entails to promote excellence effectively.

A key concern remains the ability of sector non-specialist inspectors lacking confidence to identify and award 'exemplary' within specialised fields. There's a risk that important contributions could be overlooked.

As one of the most debated topics in FIN's consultation roundtables, members really hope the intention is to highlight best practice to celebrate the huge impact FE has on learning and skills and for government recognition.

FIN advocates for high quality and will actively encourage members to showcase strong examples during inspections rather than leaving identification solely to inspectors. In turn, inspection teams must be fully equipped and tasked with proactively seeking out best practice in every organisation they assess.

Given that report cards will be the only written output from inspections, FIN members

are seeking assurances that accompanying narratives will adequately justify assigned grades. Ofsted reports should be valuable not only for providers but also for employers and prospective employees, offering clear insights into the quality of the training.

While FIN is broadly comfortable with the five-point grading scale, members have questioned its selective application. For example, grading is limited for safeguarding, raising concerns that Ofsted's approach could rely too heavily on learners' perceptions of a provider's responsiveness rather than evidence-based assessments.

The integrity of the grading process must be preserved to ensure judgments remain objective and substantiated.

There is also support for independent training providers, HE and employer providers to be graded as exemplary on their ability to meet local skills needs, a long-standing strength of the wider sector that deserves recognition.

FE providers cater to a diverse range of learners, making it essential for inspectors to assess broader outcomes beyond qualifications. Personal development, workplace impact and career progression, including promotions, should all form part of the evaluation process. Measuring progress from a learner's starting point and recognising distance travelled as a critical achievement will be key.

While the inclusion agenda is widely accepted, one FIN member posed an interesting question: "Isn't this what we do every day?" Nonetheless, the majority of survey respondents agreed that inclusion should form part of the new framework, provided Ofsted establishes a clear definition and consistent



guidelines to ensure fairness across all types of providers.

The careers guidance aspect of the toolkit is well written. FIN believes employer providers and indeed all providers should be celebrated and recognised for fostering internal promotions contributing to sustained employment and improving attrition rates.

The new operating guide must also explicitly reference functional skills. Inspectors will continue to assess how providers are delivering improvements in maths and English, but it's important Ofsted recognises that this may not be funded, particularly in light of the removal of exit requirements for apprentices aged 19 and over.

Lastly, the FIN survey uncovered overwhelming support for embedding external challenge within provider governance structures – a move that will strengthen accountability and sector-wide improvement.

Overall, FIN members see the proposed reforms as positive steps. However, Ofsted has for some time widened its scope, way beyond what providers are actually funded to deliver. There is an underlying concern that the inspectorate leans too heavily toward younger learners, potentially sidelining the needs of those already in employment and seeking career progression.

Opinion

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

FE and HE marketer

Colleges, your students ignore you on social media. Here's why

Stop being corporate and give students something they want to show off – from a sporting achievement to a staircase to nowhere, says Adrian Quester

Most colleges make the same mistake on social media – they talk at students, not with them.

It's a classic case of institutions misunderstanding their audience. Your social team spends time crafting polished updates, sharing official news and broadcasting messages that they think are important.

But here's the uncomfortable truth. Most students don't care. Not because they dislike your institution. Not because they're disengaged. But because, in their world, interacting with official accounts just isn't cool.

They're not going to share your latest campus update with their mates. They're not rushing to comment on a post about your latest news story. They don't care that your local mayor came to look at a classroom. And they're definitely not leaving enthusiastic comments under a corporate sounding caption. Maybe their parents will. But students? Unlikely.

So if they're not engaging, then what's the point? Should colleges just give up on social media? No, but they need to get smarter about how they use it.

Instead of pushing out more

corporate content, create content students actually want to engage with.

The list is long, but the three main reasons why students are ignoring your social media content are straight forward.

It feels too corporate

Most institutional social media accounts sound like a press release. Formal, polished, professional, which is everything students actively avoid in their own feeds.

“Institutions winning on social media aren't trying to be cool”

If your posts read like they've been written for a committee, rather than by a human, students will scroll straight past.

Bear in mind this is also the reason your news stories will be some of the lowest ranked

pages on your website.

It doesn't speak to them

Think about the content students actually engage with. It's personal, relatable, often funny, and always relevant to their lives. If your posts focus solely on institutional priorities, rather than student interests, you're talking into the void. Those posts with case studies selling your courses? Forget it.

There's no reason to share it

Social media is about self-expression. People share content that makes them look good, makes their friends laugh, or sparks a conversation. A campus press release doesn't tick any of those boxes. Believe it or not, students want to look cool in front of their peer group.

So how do you cut through? Instead of pushing out more corporate content, create content they actually want to engage with:

Make students the stars

If a student's face, voice or story is in a post, they're far more likely to engage with it and share it. But here's the important part; it has to be authentic. No overly scripted testimonials or case studies, no awkwardly staged photos. Think student takeovers, day-in-the-life videos, and user-generated content that feels natural, not forced.

Lean into humour

What's the best performing college content? It's rarely the official news updates. It's the memes, the tongue in cheek videos, and the self-aware posts that are relatable. The posts that feel like they've been written by someone who actually understands student life, not by a marketing department trying to sound “down with the kids”.

Tap into student pride

Students might not share your official announcements, but they will share something that makes them feel proud. Give them something they *want* to show off. Whether it's a sports victory, a student achievement, a quirky campus feature (the strange staircase that goes nowhere, the best study spot, the most epic takeaway item on the menu), or simply a reminder that they're part of something special.

And here's one bonus tip to get your team to implement right away. Be useful.

What are students actually asking about? Careers, student finance, where to find the best cheap eats near campus? Answer those questions. That beloved local chicken shop all the students go to? Feature it. That niche but essential piece of student advice? Post it.

The institutions winning on social media aren't trying to be cool, they're being useful, entertaining and authentic. Because here's the thing: most students won't engage with an institutional account. But they will engage with content that speaks to them, not at them.

So, take a moment and look at your last post. Would *you* engage with it if you were a student? If not, it's time to rethink your strategy.



Opinion

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

CEO, Nisai Learning

They're not 'hard to reach' but the system is closed to them

Students who risk becoming NEET often need time, flexibility or a second chance – so providers must remove the barriers that block them, says Dhruv Patel

There's no shortage of ambition among the young adults I meet. But too often, it's not ability that holds them back – it's a system that decides they're not worth the investment.

At Nisai Learning, we work with young people who've been out of school for months, sometimes years. They're not "unmotivated" or "hard to reach", they're recovering from trauma, anxiety, or long-term health conditions; young adults trying to rebuild their lives and secure the level 2 qualifications they need to progress.

But the path to reintegration is riddled with barriers.

Let's be clear: this isn't about ability. It's about access. The post-16 system is set up for those who fit the standard trajectory. Demand for college places is spiralling, funding is rigid, and accountability pressures leave little incentive to take a risk on a learner who might take longer to succeed.

Our system rewards speed and outcomes, not distance travelled. That discourages providers from working with

learners who need time, flexibility or a second chance.

Meanwhile, accountability measures prevent leaders from letting former or external pupils enter as exam candidates – so even if a learner is ready to 'sit', there's no way back in.

them a real route back. So, what would it take to build that system?

First, it means flexibility.

Traditional classrooms are simply not viable for every learner, at least not right away. Blended learning, phased reintegration and small-group, online provision offer a bridge back into education.

We see this every day at Nisai: learners with severe anxiety who begin with a few hours a week online and gradually rebuild their confidence and capability.

This flexibility is equally vital in adult learning. For decades, we've run the widely acclaimed and valued Nisai's Professional Development Institute,

secure, scalable way to assess learners who can't attend an exam hall.

And we must make it easier for schools and colleges to accept external candidates. Right now, we have pupils with university offers but no exam centre willing to take them. They've completed the course, but without the assessment they lose their place. That is indefensible.

Third, it means rethinking what we value.

Instead of asking, "Did they pass five GCSEs in a year?", we should ask: "Did they re-engage? Did they gain confidence? Did they progress from where they started?" Because the irony is, these learners have enormous potential. In 2024, 95 per cent of our UK students had an identified special educational need or disability. Yet they achieved a 99 per cent GCSE pass rate, with 78 per cent gaining grade 4 or above, way outperforming national averages.

One third of our learners reintegrate into mainstream education and 91 per cent progress to apprenticeships, further study or work. This is a second chance working exactly as it should.

But these results are in spite of the system, not because of it. We need second chances to be a built-in – not bolted on. That starts with properly funding flexible provision, embedding remote assessment, and holding providers to account for re-engagement, not just results.

Every learner deserves a route back in. And for many, blended learning is the only way that journey begins.

"Our system rewards speed and outcomes, not distance travelled"

These aren't learners without potential. But we've built a system that treats them as if their chance has passed. It's no surprise that the proportion of 18-year-olds not in education, employment or training is now at its highest since 2009.

That's why we launched our *Every Learner* campaign, to ensure this group is no longer overlooked. Every learner deserves a system that meets them where they are and gives

supporting adult learners to gain functional skills. It helps those not yet ready for college or employment build confidence, structure and independence.

Second, it means access to qualifications.

Remote invigilation, trialled successfully during the pandemic and already standard for international candidates, must be expanded. It offers a



Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

CONTACT US NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK



DAVID NASH

Director of Strategy & Policy,
Engineering Construction
Industry Training Board (ECITB)

Oil and gas workers have the skills to power green energy

Great British Energy is here but its success, and that of the UK in hitting clean energy targets, depend on the redeployment of existing energy staff, writes David Nash

The UK achieved an important milestone last month in the race to become a clean energy superpower by 2030. The bill to create Great British Energy – the new publicly backed energy company – received royal assent.

The organisation will be backed by £8.3 billion over this parliament to leverage additional private sector investment and expertise to deploy clean energy technologies and create high-quality jobs across the UK.

Amid this promise of clean energy creating tens of thousands of new green jobs, a key consideration is how we transition workers from carbon intensive to clean industries.

This is not only a moral requirement, as we cannot afford to leave these workers and communities behind, but also an economic necessity.

We will struggle to fill these new roles solely with those entering the workforce for the first time. We need to draw on the existing workforce, including those employed in oil and gas, steel and other energy-intensive industries.

This is talked about as a

challenge for the future, but the transition is happening now.

Scotland's Grangemouth refinery, which marked its 100-year anniversary last year, will cease manufacturing operations this summer following a decision to close the plant.

More than 400 workers will lose their jobs and need support to reskill and transition into other roles.

“90% hold skills with medium to high transferability”

The Scottish and UK governments have put in place £225 million of funding alongside a training guarantee for all staff.

The ECITB is supporting some of these workers through a new cross-skilling programme we are piloting, which will provide existing oil and gas technicians with the technical training needed to work on wind projects.

Looking at the wider picture there are several challenges to navigate, such as how to sequence the transition so workers have roles to move into at the right time.

The ECITB's Labour Forecasting Tool shows peak demand for workers in engineering



construction has shifted from 2028 to 2030, a sign many projects are being delayed or deferred.

The UK government has a key role to play in providing policy certainty to help unlock the final investment decisions that will see shovels in the ground.

How we highlight available opportunities is another issue.

Our 2024 career motivations study highlighted that supporting the energy transition was not a strong enough reason on its own to attract new entrants or motivate the career choices of those already in industry. Of more importance, especially to young people, were attractive salaries, career progression and working in a welcoming and inclusive environment.

Furthermore, 41 per cent of workers in oil and gas are over 50, our latest Workforce Census found. Anecdotally, we hear that many are no longer prepared to travel for work, favouring instead to settle down closer to home – which could be a problem if there aren't sufficient opportunities locally.

Another issue is whether skills will be transferable.

Robert Gordon University research suggests that over 90 per cent of the oil and gas workforce

hold skills with medium to high transferability with the offshore renewables sector.

Our Connected Competence scheme is providing a mechanism whereby workers can demonstrate their transferable competence and could play a key role in a future skills passport.

In all of this, collaboration is key.

The UK government will be launching its industrial strategy later this year. This is an opportunity to set out a clear workforce plan for clean energy, including how to deploy existing workers.

Now is the time to pull together. Industry, government – in Westminster, Edinburgh, Cardiff and the regions – trade unions, education providers and public bodies such as GB Energy and the ECITB must work together to ensure clean energy opportunities are available for all.

We must act now. As Grangemouth demonstrates, the transition is already underway.

We owe it to the communities that have powered our energy system for the past 100 years or more to ensure they are among the first to benefit from the future clean energy opportunities.

Bulletin

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

Movers & Shakers

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



Oluseun Sowole

Trustee, Prison Education Trust

Start date: May 2025

Concurrent Job: Team Leader, St Giles Trust

Interesting fact: Oluseun enjoys endurance challenges, including Tough Mudder events and the 75 Hard mental toughness challenge



Lucy Strand

Assistant Director - VTQ and Skills Delivery, WJEC / CBAC

Start date: June 2025

Previous Job: Head of Assessment Delivery, VTCT

Interesting fact: Outside of work, Lucy enjoys cooking and spending time with friends, and hosts a 'Strandfest' festival in her garden each summer



Natalie Gee

Director of Workforce Policy and Services, Association of Colleges

Start date: June 2025

Previous Job: Head of Recruitment and Consultancy, Association of Colleges

Interesting fact: Natalie has worked her way up the ranks at the AoC since starting as a recruitment administrator in 2010. A self-described "slow runner" and avid traveller, she completed her first marathon in Manchester this year

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

WEBINAR



18 June 2025
at 13:00 till 14:30



This session is
FREE TO ATTEND

Beyond compliance: building safer institutions together

Register today

Delivered by

SaferSpace

UVAC
UNIVERSITY VOCATIONAL AWARDS COUNCIL



safer.space.io



EducationScope
INVESTIGATE · INFORM · INSPIRE

