

FEWEEK



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FE WEEK

MEET THE TEAM



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Pearson
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Most universities reject first cohort of T Level students

BILLY CAMDEN
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EXCLUSIVE

FROM FRONT

Less than half of all UK universities have confirmed T Levels are suitable for entry on to at least one course this year – with most Russell Group members turning their backs on the new technical qualifications.

An FE Week investigation has also found many universities still yet to decide whether to accept T Levels despite there being less than two weeks before the UCAS deadline for 2022 admissions.

The first T Level students – who study either digital, construction or education and childcare – began their two-year course in September 2020 and will be deciding their next steps now.

While T Levels were designed so that students can enter work straight after completing their course, ministers have repeatedly made clear that the courses are still a viable entry route into university.

One parent of a T Level student who spoke to FE Week slammed the “disconnect” between the government and universities after spending months scrambling to find higher education institutions that might accept her son, with no clear way of identifying them.

The Department for Education said universities are independent of government and it is for them to set entry requirements, but urged them to offer prospective students “transparent information about their entry requirements” as soon as possible.

DfE finally publishes list of unis that will accept T Levels

On December 17 – the last day of term for most colleges – the DfE published a



list of higher education institutions that had confirmed T Levels were suitable for at least one of their courses.

Eighty were listed, of which 66 were traditional universities. There are 140 universities in the UK, meaning just 47 per cent currently accept students who have studied T Levels.

The new technical qualifications are equivalent to three A-levels and have UCAS tariff points allocated to them.

Ten of the 24 universities in the elite Russell Group are so far not accepting T Levels.

The University of Oxford told FE Week that T Levels alone “are unlikely to satisfy the requirements for entry, as they are technical qualifications, while all degree courses at Oxford are highly academic”. Cambridge University said the three initial T Level subjects “would not be a natural fit” with any of their degrees.

Some universities, such as Imperial College London, said they will wait until

T Levels are rolled out further before determining whether students studying them are academically able to cope with their courses.

Others, including the likes of Leicester and Loughborough, told FE Week they have still not decided whether to consider T Levels as entry criteria.

Nick Hillman, director of the Higher Education Policy Institute think tank, said universities legally have autonomy over who they admit but pressed that it is vital that there is clarity about how they treat applicants. “Where universities are already clear that T Levels are unlikely to provide effective preparation for a specific course, they should make this really clear,” he said. “Otherwise, disadvantaged students in particular are likely to continue lagging behind middle-class students when it comes to entering highly selective

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News

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CONTINUED

institutions.”

Universities UK, which represents the country’s 140 universities, said it expects to see T Level acceptance increase within the sector as the number of subject areas expands “to give learners the opportunities and flexibility they deserve”.

The DfE’s list doesn’t include details of which courses T Levels are accepted as entry criteria. Instead, it encourages students to “look at UCAS and at their preferred higher education provider’s website for more information on entry requirements”.

‘I’ve been really struggling to get a clear answer’

Annie Dorrington’s son Niall is in his second year of digital, design production and development T Level and she began helping him search for university opportunities at the start of the 2021 autumn term.

She said it was a confusing and frustrating time as most universities failed to advertise whether or not they accepted T Levels as entry criteria, while others had still not made up their mind.

Most shocking to Dorrington was that some universities said they would only

accept her son if he also had an A-level in maths, despite the T Level effectively being a nine-to-five course.

She criticised the government for not publishing a list of universities that would accept T Levels sooner, explaining that it was released after the timeframe for university open days. “It seems to me that the DfE thought it was enough to give T Levels UCAS points and leave it at that,” she told FE Week.

“I work at a university and know my way around the admissions process but even I’ve been really struggling to get a clear answer in most cases.”

Dorrington, who described the T Level course as “fantastic”, said she knew from the get-go that there would be some universities who would not be interested in students with T Levels but did not expect the process to be so difficult: “I was expecting there to be a list of universities accepting T Levels much earlier. The college didn’t have that, nor did the government.”

Around 1,300 students studied the first three T Levels in 2020 and a further 5,450 signed up in 2021, with a total of ten subjects now on offer at over 100 colleges and schools.

A DfE spokesperson said the government expects the number of universities offering T Levels “to grow in the coming weeks”.

THE 80 UNIS THAT WILL ACCEPT T LEVELS SO FAR

- Abertay University
- Anglia Ruskin University
- Askham Bryan College
- Aston University
- Bangor University
- Barnsley College
- Bath Spa University
- Birmingham City University
- Blackpool and The Fylde College
- Canterbury Christ Church University
- Cardiff Metropolitan University
- Cardiff University
- Chester University
- Coventry University
- East Surrey College
- Edge Hill University
- Edinburgh Napier University
- Falmouth University
- Greenwich University
- Hartpury University
- Keele University
- Kingston University
- Lancaster University
- Leeds Beckett University
- Leeds Trinity University
- Lincoln College
- Liverpool John Moores University
- London South Bank University
- New College of the Humanities
- Newcastle University
- New Model Institute for Technology and Engineering
- Northumbria University
- Nottingham Trent University
- Oxford Brookes University
- South Gloucestershire and Stroud College
- Southampton Solent University
- Staffordshire University
- Teesside University
- University Campus of Football Business
- University Centre Weston
- University College Birmingham
- University of Bedfordshire
- University of Birmingham
- University of Bolton
- University of Brighton
- University of Central Lancashire
- University of Chichester
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- University of Sunderland
- University of West England
- University of West London
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- University of York
- Wrexham Glyndwr University
- York College
- York St John University



Nick Hillman

News

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‘Justice is served’: final T Level awarding organisation revealed

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Awarding giant Pearson has been contracted to develop the legal services T Level, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education announced yesterday.

The announcement means that the institute now has a full house of awarding organisations to develop all 23 of the government’s flagship level 3 qualifications.

It also means that Pearson has the complete set of T Levels under the legal, finance and accounting route. A total of 35 providers are currently preparing to deliver the finance and accounting T Levels from this September. Delivery of the legal services qualification begins in September 2023.

The value of Pearson’s contract totals £3.44 million.

Pearson’s head of technical products Suzanne Hall said “We are delighted to be delivering the legal services T Level technical qualification. We look forward to using our

expertise to support students as they begin their programmes of study and playing our part in developing talent in this vital industry.”

Pearson, along with NCFE, was one of the first awarding organisations to receive contracts to develop T Levels. The very first cohorts of students on its T Levels in digital production, design and development and design, surveying and planning began their studies in 2020 and are due to become some of the first T Level graduates in the country later this year.

Legal services is part of the wave four rollout of T Levels, but was absent from the announcement of wave four awarding organisations back in October.

A spokesperson for the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education said the delay was because there were no successful bidders in the main procurement round for the subject, which concluded in summer 2021.

But a further procurement took place in the autumn after more interest was received. The

spokesperson confirmed the T Level will be delivered in the same timescales as the other contracts in wave four.

Employers and the institute have said that the legal services T Level will improve social mobility by attracting people from more diverse backgrounds into legal professions.

Cassie Williams, a barrister from Bedford Row Chambers, said: “Justice is served when lawyers and people working across legal services come from all walks of life. This T Level will provide the opportunity for this to become a reality.”

Jennifer Coupland, chief executive at the institute, said she “couldn’t wait” to see the T Level rolled out in classrooms and that it will “help open out the profession to people who may want to follow a more direct training route into work”.

This will include, Coupland added, being “an important stepping stone to degree apprenticeships and more conventional degrees.”



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BTECs and A-levels: a tale of two students

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Researchers have called for more tailored support for students with BTECs at university as a new study finds that they are almost twice as likely to drop out than undergraduates with A-levels.

The study, published on Wednesday, also found that while 60 per cent of graduating BTEC students complete their university studies with a least a 2:1, they were typically 1.4 times less likely to do so than A-level students.

Funded by education charity the Nuffield Foundation, the report, titled Educational choices at 16-19 and university outcomes looked at how students' backgrounds, entry qualifications and entry subjects impacted on their educational experience at university.

It is hoped, the Nuffield Foundation says, that a better understanding of the differences in the experiences of students with BTECs and A-levels will reduce educational disadvantages faced by students from lower socio-economic groups while at university.

Researchers found that after accounting for a "rich set" of demographic and prior attainment data, the likelihood of a BTEC student dropping out of university was 11.4 per cent, compared to six per cent for a similar A-level student.

As well as looking at who dropped out of university, the study also looked at the entry qualifications of students who repeated their first year. While fewer students repeat than drop out (just 4.3 per cent probability overall, compared to eight per cent), researchers found a similar pattern. Student with BTECs were found to be 1.7 times more likely to repeat their first year than those with A-levels.

Despite BTECs being accepted university entry qualifications for some time, and millions of pounds having been invested in widening participation, researchers report that students with BTECs have a



24.9 per cent chance at achieving a degree classification below 2:1, compared to 17.7 per cent for A-level students. That gap is larger for students at the lower socio-economic levels.

Drop-out rates are relatively low in the UK compared to other countries, as is the number of students who repeat their first year. The report also highlights that BTECs are a highly effective route to a degree for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

It's worth noting here that the cohorts of students that researchers studied for this work pre-dated reformed BTECs. This means that it is not known what those performance gaps would look like for more recent generations of undergraduates, who would have experienced more external assessment as part of their BTEC.

Differences found in academic performance while at university, explored by using results of modules, are believed to be a big part of the explanation for the differences in the educational experience of university students arriving with BTECs compared to those with A-levels.

The report states "for the one university for which we have data on assessment method by first year module, we find that the performance gap between students with A-levels and BTECs is larger for modules assessed as least in part by written examination, compared with modules assessed by coursework only".

Schools, colleges and universities should

be more mindful of the differences between A-level and BTEC teaching and assessment when giving advice about post-18 options, the report argues. Further, tailoring courses to try and close these gaps, which disproportionately affect students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, rather than just focussing on recruiting them, should be integral to universities' widening participation.

The report's findings provide some challenge to the government's current approach to level 3 qualifications reform, the Sixth Form Colleges Association (SFCA) has said. James Kewin, deputy chief executive at the SFCA, told FE Week: "This welcome research from the Nuffield Foundation shows that the vast majority complete their studies and most graduate with at least a 2:1. The report provides further evidence that scrapping the majority of BTEC qualifications will stop many disadvantaged young people from progressing to university in the future – a key concern of the Protect Student Choice coalition.

"If ministers are serious about making evidence-based decisions on the future of these qualifications, they should respond to the concerns set out in this report by pausing the defunding process until data on reformed BTECs is available and then look at the evidence in the round, rather than focusing exclusively on comparing outcomes between A-level and BTEC students."

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Advertorial

WHAT IS MATH MODELING? (AND WHY SHOULD YOU CARE ABOUT IT?)

Demonstrating the value of mathematics in our communities and lives can be difficult for educators; understanding math modeling can help.

Mathematical modeling refers to the process of creating a mathematical representation of a real-world scenario to make a prediction or provide insight. There is a distinction between applying a formula and the actual creation of a mathematical relationship.

Real-world problems are often complex or messy, but they can be approached with mathematics, resulting in a range of possible solutions to help guide decision making. Both students and teachers are sometimes uncomfortable with the notion of math modeling because it is so open-ended. So much unknown information seems prohibitive and determining which factors are most relevant can be daunting. But it is this open-ended nature of real-world problems that leads to building and applying problem solving skills, creativity, and innovation in mathematics.

Time management can be challenging in developing a reasonable model. Arriving at assumptions that are meaningful and establishing mathematical relationships between variables that make sense in terms of units are important, as is using appropriate tools for your work and not overcomplicating your approaches. Dealing with data is another area where assumptions may need to be made due to lack of data or to data sets being too large or messy for the tools available.

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Mathematical modeling can be thought of as an iterative process made up of the following components. (Note that the word

“steps” is intentionally avoided: there is no prescribed ordering—some may occur simultaneously, and some may be repeated.)

Identify the Problem — Be specific in defining what you would like to find out.

Make Assumptions and Identify Variables

— It is impossible to account for all the important factors in each situation; you must make choices about what to incorporate in your representation of the real world. Making assumptions helps reveal the variables to be considered and reduces their number by deciding not to include everything. Relationships between variables will emerge based on observations, physical laws, or simplifications.

Do the Math — Eventually, a relationship between input and output will allow for a solution to be found.

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Math modeling obliterates the question “Why do I need math?” by demonstrating the value and importance of math in approaching big problems found in our communities, regions, and world. Identifying the important variables and quantifying them—even

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Want to try out your math modeling skills in the real world? MathWorks Math Modeling Challenge (M3 Challenge), a program of Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics (SIAM), is a free online contest for high school juniors and seniors and sixth form students. Teams of 3–5 students solve an open-ended, real-world problem in 14 continuous hours over Challenge weekend. Past competition topics include issues such as the transition of trucking from diesel to electric, universal internet access, substance abuse, food insecurity, plastic recycling, and car sharing. The use of online collaboration tools and resources is encouraged.

Scholarships totaling £75,000+ (\$100,000+) will be awarded in 2022. Extra credit awards are available for teams that choose to write or employ outstanding code as part of their solution. The competition has awarded more than \$1.65 million to date.

For rules, resources, and to register, visit M3Challenge.siam.org.

Register by February 18, 2022

Challenge weekend is February 25–28, 2022 (Friday through Monday)

Footnote:

*Much of the content for this article was written by Katie Kavanagh and Ben Galluzzo of Clarkson University, and is based on ideas presented in **GAIMME: Guidelines for Assessment and Instruction in Mathematical Modeling Education, Second Edition**, Sol Garfunkel and Michelle Montgomery, editors, COMAP and SIAM, Philadelphia, 2019.

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“Questions can be approached in a variety of ways depending on students’ skills and experiences. ...even algebra and basic math can be used to model aspects of the open-ended problem.”
— Katie Kavanagh, Professor of Mathematics, Clarkson University

“Students work together to put forward ideas and models. They ask questions, dig for information, make assumptions, get creative in their approaches, and then provide insight to make decisions going forward.”
— Dr. Suzanne Weekes, SIAM Executive Director

Omicron: January exams start smoothly despite staff shortages

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EXCLUSIVE

College staff absences have spiked since the start of term, but despite the shortages, there appears to have been no major disruption to January exams.

Where challenges have arisen, staff are working extra hours, with managers stepping in to help invigilate vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs) this month.

Some colleges believe there should be an additional exam series in March to help those learners having to defer tests until the summer due to catching Covid.

The Department for Education's latest attendance survey data estimates that one in 25, or four per cent, of FE college teachers and leaders were off on January 6 because of Covid. The figure for support and other staff sat at 3.4 per cent.

This is up from 1.6 per cent of teachers and leaders and 1.2 per cent of other staff on December 15, increases of 150 per cent and 183 per cent respectively.

Geoff Barton, leader of the Association of School and College Leaders, said "any hope" the Christmas holidays would act as a firebreak for schools and colleges "have evaporated".

"The challenges posed by having so many staff absent will continue to put schools and colleges under severe pressure."

It comes as about 300,000 learners sit exams each January, with exam boards having flexibility to bring in adaptations this year because of Covid disruption.

FE Week approached ten of the largest colleges to ask whether they had faced problems and how they worked to overcome them. Of those who responded, four said plans were going smoothly.

However, Stuart Rimmer, chief executive at East Coast College, said their usual bank of invigilators had shrunk for the 1,500 VTQ exams they're putting on this month. This was in part due to current Covid

rates, but also because of staff retiring or taking extra precautions against infection.

He said: "The staff have been absolutely amazing, whether that's short-term cover work or doing extra hours or working on days they wouldn't normally or stepping in to invigilate. We've had to deploy teachers and managers to invigilate some of these exams."

"We've had to deploy teachers and managers to invigilate some of these exams"

Earlier this week, nearly 40 out of 550 staff (seven per cent) were absent, with 25 of these testing positive for Covid, Rimmer added.

Ofqual's framework this year allows exam boards to make adaptations to take into account the disruption students have faced. But it's up to each awarding organisation to make its own choice.

Pearson has extended the assessment window and delayed the start of the series by a week, to allow more time for teaching.

OCR is allowing the start time of its exams to be varied by up to 30 minutes without needing to inform the board.

HCUC, in Uxbridge, said its 4,825 January exams are a "major logistical challenge"

and had created "emergency invigilation schedules" due to staff absences.

A spokesperson said this schedule extends to senior management as well as external invigilators, which has extra costs and training time implications.

The college's usual staff absence rate at this time of year (five per cent) has risen to 18 per cent because of sickness and self-isolation. A spokesperson commended all teams for their "commitment and creativity".

However, a spokesperson said a March 2022 re-sit series should take place before the summer to prevent potential student disadvantage if they have had to isolate this January.

A spokesperson added: "Without a March exam sitting, students will only have a June sitting and no re-sit opportunity. Many are on a one-year programme and cannot defer exam re-sits to a second year."

Meanwhile, independent training providers' January exams appear to be largely unscathed, although their staff absence rates are not published by the DfE.

Simon Ashton, an assistant principal with Nacro, said it has fewer than 50 students taking exams, with only one deferral to the summer so far. But the staff absences are hitting its day-to-day operations, such as not being able to run some practical classes because there are not enough supervisors. Several of its 14 sites had staff levels of below 50 per cent over the last month.

"We've had to be resilient and make the best of it," Ashton said. "We've had to combine classes, and managers have had to step in to help run classes to ensure learners still get a face-to-face session."

"But, for example, in motor vehicle classes, we've had to move to more theory-based work with the staff that we've got."

There will be a focus on practical catch-up as part of the government's 16-to-19 tuition fund, he added.



Owner of defunct provider involved in £20m subcontracting scandal declares bankruptcy

BILLY CAMDEN
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EXCLUSIVE

FROM FRONT

The boss of a defunct training provider has declared bankruptcy as the government seeks to reclaim over £20 million from his firm following a subcontracting scandal.

SCL Security Ltd, founded and run by Andrew Merritt, went insolvent in October 2020 after the Education and Skills Funding Agency kicked the company out of the apprenticeship market.

The decision followed an audit, prompted by several FE Week investigations, which found apprenticeship funding was being used to pay the wages for the 16-to-18-year-olds, which is strictly against the funding rules.

A liquidators' statement for SCL Security was published this week and revealed its debts have ballooned seven-fold over the past year, from an initial £3.85 million to £26.3 million.

The uplift in claims "predominantly relates to claims arising as a result of the ESFA review in respect of monies paid by a number of colleges and agencies", the report said.

Brooklands College subcontracted out more than £20 million to SCL Security over a three-year period and had faced having to repay a similar sum to the ESFA following the agency's investigation into SCL Security, as it was the prime provider responsible for the funding.

It is not clear whether the agency has now agreed to pass the repayment on to SCL Security, or whether it is seeking similar clawback from both providers.

The ESFA refused to comment on the investigation.

Christine Ricketts, principal of Brooklands College, said she could not comment on the clawback or SCL Security investigation but told FE Week her college "continues as a going concern" and has benefited from



a "recent increase in recruitment and improved financial performance".

The college is "well advanced in discussions to resolve outstanding issues" and expects to publish its much-delayed accounts for 2019 and 2020 before the end of this financial year, Ricketts added.

Merritt, who took a director's loan of over £8 million from SCL Security, "decided he had no alternative" but to file for bankruptcy, which was granted in July 2021, the liquidators' statement states.

His main asset was a property owned jointly between him and SCL Security's other director, Kym Rowe. The property is currently on the market and any proposal for repayment would be funded by way of the sales proceeds.

The joint liquidators, Phil Deyes and Anthony Milnes from Leonard Curtis Business Rescue and Recovery, have submitted a claim in the bankruptcy to recoup the overdrawn loan account.

Their report states that although there are currently no funds available to "enable a distribution" to unsecured creditors, it is "considered likely that there will be sufficient funds available to enable a distribution to creditors in part from asset realisations in the future".

However, the liquidators have "not formally agreed" to any claim as yet

from the ESFA. They have "spent a considerable amount of time" reviewing the agency's claim in order to understand the impact on their investigation "both in terms of the liquidators' statutory duties and assessment if these could lead to any other realisations".

Over the past year the liquidators have also received claims from "a college" and another "agency" identified in the ESFA investigation, according to the report.

"Again, time has been spent reviewing the supporting documentation provided in respect of these claims together with the information brought to the joint liquidators attention as a result of the ESFA investigation," it said.

"Due to the quantum and nature of the claims received the joint liquidators instructed lawyers from Andrew Jackson solicitors to provide legal advice in relation to these claims."

The liquidators warn that if these investigations determine there are further monetary claims against SCL Security's directors, it is "uncertain whether these would ultimately affect the overall recovery from this source".

Merritt did not respond to requests for comment.

News

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First permanent chief of freshly merged City of Portsmouth College named

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City of Portsmouth College has announced Katy Quinn as its first permanent principal and chief executive.

Quinn will join the college this summer from Strode College in Somerset, where she has served as principal since 2017.

City of Portsmouth College formed in August 2021 from a merger between Highbury College and Portsmouth College. It is currently being led by interim chief executive Graham Morley.

"City of Portsmouth College is a remarkable organisation, with many unique strengths, a big heart and a fantastic future," Morley said, adding: "I am delighted that Katy will be leading the college on the next phase of its journey."

This role will see Quinn return to college

leadership in the south-east, having held senior roles at Eastleigh College and Canterbury College prior to Strode.

"I am very excited to be joining City of Portsmouth College at the dawn of a new era. I can't wait to get started and work with students, staff and governors as together we strive to make the City of Portsmouth College one of the best FE colleges in the country," she said.

In addition to her college role, Quinn is also a trustee at the awarding organisation VTCT, a member of the AoC's curriculum development policy group and the Heart of the South West LEP's skills advisory panel.

City of Portsmouth College's chair of governors, Paul Quigley, said that Quinn's "wide-ranging skills, experience and enthusiasm for further education were evident to us all and will prove invaluable

to drive our ambitious plans during this exciting period of development, building on the enormous progress that has been made so far".

For this academic year, Highbury and Portsmouth will continue to operate under their separate identities but will come together under one brand in September 2022.

On the recommendation of the FE Commissioner following historic leadership and governance issues, Highbury College has been in 'supervised status' since November 2019.

However, recent board minutes state that the Education and Skills Funding Agency no longer believes it is necessary to attend the college's corporation meetings as "they believe the college now has a strong board and an effective management team".



Katy Quinn



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Advertorial

WORLDSKILLS UK'S SKILLS DEVELOPMENT HUB BENEFITS EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

WorldSkills UK has created the [Skills Development Hub](#), a package of free, high-quality, interactive digital resources designed to support educators in colleges and independent training providers teaching young people to acquire high-quality skills aligned with international best-practice.

The content of the Hub is drawn from unique insights from WorldSkills UK's highly experienced training managers from best practice exchanges with their counterparts in overseas countries and states in the WorldSkills network of over 80 members.

The Hub has been designed to help educators to develop students and apprentices into a workforce of young people equipped with the highest standards of technical and soft skills including time-management, problem solving, good communication skills, adaptability, commitment and motivation. The combination of these technical and 'meta' skills is essential to UK businesses, to enable them to compete successfully in domestic and overseas markets.

Designed to support and complement existing skills development activities, the [Skills Development Hub](#) allows for easy access to seven modules ranging from those for educators' own development (CPD) to those designed for students to be used in classes or remotely:

Professional development for educators

[Coaching learners for high-performance](#)

CPD: Developed in partnership with Grey Matters, this short course draws on approaches used by coaches and teachers across high-performance environments to support and enrich teaching practice using a set of mental and behavioural skills.

[Transferring global best practice](#)

CPD: Based on the WorldSkills UK award-winning [Centre of](#)

[Excellence](#) programme and endorsed by NCFE. This module provides educators with a suite of supporting resources which focus on the seven-step developing excellence framework, created and used by WorldSkills UK to train learners to perform at the highest levels. Activities include case studies; videos; animations and downloadable resources.

Embedding skills competitions: This module provides educators with useful information, downloadable guides, templates and checklists to support the embedding of competition activities in the classroom and to run inter-departmental and inter-college events. Many colleges use these as a precursor to entering competitors for the [WorldSkills UK Competitions](#) which attract over 3,000 competitors each year.

Student-focused resources

Teachers and trainers have a suite of resources to use with students and apprentices, supporting the development of technical, mindset and employability skills. All these resources have been developed by trainers, highly experienced in their vocational areas and renowned experts in performance psychology and organisational behaviour.

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insights from young people and educators across education, industry, sport, music and dance sharing their experience and applied practice.

Technical skills masterclasses: Consisting of more than 23 practical skills challenges designed for students and apprentices working towards a range of technical and vocational specialisms.

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Learners will discover how to develop their personal, professional and technical skills, enhancing their capacity to perform under pressure and demonstrating those qualities and attributes highly valued by employers.

Key features include videos, animations and activities for learners to interact with. Each module contains four lessons.

Create bespoke learning groups

Overall, the Hub gives educators the option to create learner groups to easily allocate specific learning modules to a group of learners or specific students, set deadlines, reminders for completion of the modules and run reports to check individuals' progress and assessment results.

All modules can be delivered face to face or online and as part of a series or on a standalone basis.

Latest developments

The Hub is more intuitive, accessible and easier to navigate than before. There are descriptors added to all dashboards, so both educators and students know exactly where they are on every step of their journey.

Subject to continual development, the Hub remains an inclusive and valuable free-to-access service at the leading edge of teaching practice.

[Register](#)



New safeguarding rules: what colleges and providers need to know

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The government plans to encourage schools, colleges and training providers to trawl the social media of would-be employees and beef up training requirements for governors under proposed changes to safeguarding rules.

The Department for Education also wants child-on-child abuse guidance, which has been published separately since 2017, withdrawn and “incorporated throughout” its main statutory document for education providers.

A consultation was launched this week on changes to the statutory keeping children safe in education (KCSIE) guidance, which now applies to independent training providers as well as colleges. If approved, the changes would come into effect in September this year.

The consultation also seeks views on some changes enacted in 2021 and whether they have worked.

Many of the proposals are technical and involve moving guidance around the document itself. But there are also several substantive changes proposed that will affect the way education settings operate. Here’s what you need to know.

1 Consider ‘online search’ on shortlisted candidates

The DfE’s new draft guidance says that as part of the shortlisting process for new staff, colleges and providers “should consider carrying out an online search (including social media) as part of their due diligence on the shortlisted candidates”.

This “may help identify any incidents or issues that have happened, and are publicly available online, which the school or college might want to explore with the applicant at interview”, the draft guidance states.

2 Ensure governors receive safeguarding training

Although the DfE said that evidence suggests the “majority of governors and trustees” already undertake “some form” of safeguarding training, they intend to make the need for it more explicit.

The new draft guidance states that governing bodies and provider proprietors “should ensure that all governors and trustees receive appropriate safeguarding and child protection training at induction”.

This training “should be regularly updated”.

The consultation document states that training is “essential to ensure new governors/trustees understand their roles and

responsibilities, particular in them taking a strategic rather than an operational approach”.

“This may help identify any incidents or issues that have happened, and are publicly available online”

3 Child-on-child abuse guidance to become statutory

The DfE said it plans to withdraw its separate, non-statutory guidance on sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in school and colleges, which was first introduced in 2017 and last updated in 2021.

An Ofsted review into high-profile school sex abuse revelations last year on the Everyone’s Invited website referred several times to the DfE’s standalone guidance.

The DfE said making it “incorporated throughout KCSIE” would “give the issue the prominence it deserves in statutory guidance”. This will also “remove duplication”, as “much of the content in the standalone advice was already in part five of KCSIE”, the department said.

The guidance will also be updated to use the phrase “child-on-child abuse”, rather than “peer-on-peer abuse”, and to use the terms “victims” and “perpetrators”. The DfE said this was done for “consistency”.

4 Students ‘may not feel ready’ to speak about abuse

In a section on “what school and college staff need to know”, the DfE has added a paragraph that states “all staff should be aware that children may not feel ready or know how to tell someone that they are being abused, exploited, or neglected, and/or they may not recognise their experiences as harmful”.



Remove the universal credit rules blocking people from education



PETER ALDOUS

Chair, All Party Parliamentary Group on Further Education and Lifelong Learning

‘Conditionality’ rules are forcing people to give up their training courses, writes Peter Aldous

Like all MPs, I am regularly contacted by constituents struggling to access the training they need to secure fulfilling and meaningful work. I also speak to employers about the severe skills shortages they face in key areas across the local economy. This is replicated nationally and finding a solution is central to levelling up.

Resolving this issue is complicated and something that governments of all stripes have tried to answer.

There is one area where further education colleges play a key role – supporting unemployed people to train and retrain.

Modest changes to the way the current welfare system operates provide the opportunity to make access to this support from colleges much easier and fairer. I and many other MPs support these changes.

For many, the key obstacle they face is the rigid and complex rules around studying and claiming universal credit at the same time. As those who work in colleges know all too well, recipients of universal credit considered able to work face strict requirements, known as ‘conditionality’.

Typically, they must spend up to 35 hours per week looking for work, provide evidence

of their work search to their Jobcentre Plus work coach and be available to meet with them and attend interviews.

Claimants must also be prepared to give up their training course if they are offered suitable work.

This leaves many in a Catch-22 situation, where they may secure employment in the short term, but are prevented from developing skills that would allow them to get into higher quality, more stable and better-paid employment.

The high employment rate in the 2010s should not disguise the fact that some people have moved from job to job with little chance to train or retrain for more meaningful and sustainable employment with prospects for progression.

Most claimants have a certain number of hours they can study per week and are typically limited to 12 weeks of full-time education and training (with 16 weeks for skills bootcamps), which restricts the options available. Extension to the amount of study time is at the discretion

of work coaches, leaving scope for inconsistency and unfairness.

Claimants can be required to take part in Department for Work and Pensions’ courses that take them out of college courses. Otherwise, they risk sacrificing payments.

“Claimants are left in a Catch-22 situation”

I welcome the steps the government has taken to address the disjointed education and welfare policies in recent years, including skills bootcamps. But unfortunately these are too temporary, creating instability and complexity in the system. This is challenging for people, some of whom already have educational disadvantages, and for colleges to navigate.

At the meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on further education and lifelong learning last

summer, we heard about the important role that colleges play in supporting unemployed people into work through working with the local Jobcentre Plus (as captured in the Association of Colleges’ Let Them Learn report).

To empower colleges to do even more, the report called for the government to reform universal credit rules, removing existing barriers. I wrote to the-then skills minister Gillian Keegan, alongside a cross-party group of parliamentarians, encouraging her to take action.

The Skills Bill currently progressing through parliament is a unique opportunity for the government to commit to reviewing conditionality rules.

A review would enable a better understanding of the barriers to training that claimants are facing. It could show where flexibilities are needed in pursuit of a benefits system that encourages, not prohibits, education and training.

I intend to bring forward an amendment to the bill that would bring about this review with support from MPs across the House. While it may not make it on to the face of the bill, I’m confident that a constructive dialogue with government has been established and positive steps forward can be made.

The cost of taking no action will ultimately be fewer people in stable and meaningful employment, slower economic growth and bigger tax burdens.





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Full details of both roles can be found on the Group's website at: <https://vacancies.tecpartnership.com/>

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TEC Partnership,
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Please clearly state which role you are interested in.

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Interview dates:

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Feature

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Focus: PE and sports, New College Pontefract

'Sport is special – it's in your face'



JESS STAUFENBERG
@STAUFENBERGJ

Sport is often forgotten in discussions of FE. But with Ofsted looking hard at 'personal development', the award-winning PE team at New College Pontefract appear to have backed the right horse

It seems fitting for a feature about fitness that when I visit New College Pontefract, I do an awful lot of exercise (compared to a usual news day, anyway). First off, I take a wrong turn. Striding up one hill, the first two shops I come across in the Yorkshire town are a Chinese takeaway and the largest Haribo sweets shop I've ever seen (the factory nearby is one of the big employers

in the area). There's a lovely market town square, but it's not exactly the healthiest start. Then, having reached the top, I spot the college on a different hill.

Setting off that way, I reach the sixth-form college, which is even more impressive up close. A girls' grammar school before becoming a college in 1987, it is flanked by spanking new astroturf football pitches on its lower slopes, and a rugby pitch on its upper slope. A poster by reception proclaims it has a grade 1 Ofsted (but, I note with approval, the date of inspection is included for transparency: 2014).

Inside, huge numbers of teaching awards and silver sporting trophies bedeck the entrance. A giant map on the wall pinpoints all the schools whose students have chosen

to study with New College Pontefract. The message is clear: we are popular, we are successful, and we are proud.

At the end of last year, the PE department won the 'FE team of the year' at the Pearson teaching awards. When I ask one staff member why they won, I'm told with typical, grinning Yorkshire self-effacement that "our grant writer is really good" – but it's clear the team are playing themselves down. Sport here is hugely valued, in a way that FE perhaps does not always deliver on.

Josh Buxton, a PE teacher and sports coach, explains why PE is particularly special to an education setting, and different to

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Feature

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Focus: PE and sports, New College Pontefract



Cricket at the college



Girls' football

involve walking around half of Pontefract. It's partly because I've handily arrived on a Wednesday, which is competitive sports afternoon, and so everyone is out: there's boys' and girls' rugby, boys' and girls' football, netball, basketball and cricket, as well as golf, badminton, table tennis, athletics, tennis and swimming. That's before you get on to the additional enrichment

CONTINUED

many other subjects. It allows for a sense of community and close rapport with students, he explains. "It's something 90 per cent of the population can engage with – it's an interest for so many people. It gives you something to have a conversation about. My students all know I support Liverpool football club, for example, so if they've lost, there's that two minutes' grief at the start of the lesson," he grins.

Staff may even support, or play in, the same local teams as students outside of college life. Not many subject departments are so closely linked to their students' interests and activities.

Sport also plays a special role in pastoral work, continues Buxton. "For students struggling with motivation or confidence,

the practical side is a chance to relieve stress, make friends. It's so good for physical and mental wellbeing. Some subjects can offer that more than others, and PE is one of those."

We're standing on the edge of the astroturf football pitch now: myself, Buxton and director of sport Tom Shepherd. Buxton's point about the community-building nature of sport is evident, as students cheer their peers from the sidelines. "You get that instant result with sport," says Shepherd later. "You see the crowd of students watching – they're making friends, they're making memories. It's because sports is visible. Other subjects have their eureka moments too, but ours is in your face." It's a good point.

Shepherd is, true to his name, herding me around the many facilities students have at their disposal, which appears to

activities (all students must choose at least one when they start college), which include volleyball, wheelchair basketball and boccia (an ingenious sport like boules that allows disabled and able-bodied students to play together).

But it turns out we're also trekking about because the college does not have many facilities at its own location. The old grammar school site means space is limited and there is one modest sports hall and the rugby pitch. To offer such a variety of activities, the PE team have had to hustle.

Chelsea Branson, vice principal and a PE teacher, explains: "What we've got is links with the community." The college rents the astroturf pitches and the swimming pool from Wakefield Council, for example, and also managed to secure subsidised local gym rates for students, and use of Pontefract's squash and leisure centre too. "We've got a great relationship with that squash club and they're really supportive of community activities," says Branson.

Shepherd takes me to all these sites, and by sheer luck the college's team appears to have won whenever we turn up. The only one we don't visit (over yet another hill) is the golf club, which the PE team recently got permission for students to use too. "That's really good for students learning



Tom Shepherd, director of sport, with the shirts of former high-flying sports students



Learning boccia

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Feature

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Focus: PE and sports, New College Pontefract

CONTINUED

about skill acquisition for the A-level paper," explains Shepherd. "It's a sport most of them will never have done, so they can study how you learn something from scratch."

So rather than having the perfect site, the college has worked skillfully to make the local offer work. The PE team also has the support of local families, says Branson. "I think the wider community puts a strong value on sport, and as a college we are reflecting that wider community," she says.

Parts of Pontefract are in the top ten per cent most deprived areas of the UK, so having a good sports offer is not taken for granted by the community, adds Shepherd.

It also helps to have the senior leadership team on board, he continues. The college is part of the New Collaborative Learning trust, whose chief executive, Richard Fletcher, came from the PE department, is into rugby, and is fully signed up. Meanwhile, college principal Vicky Marks says staff who are sports coaches are paid, rather than expected to just add it to their other tasks (as is often the case in schools): "That gives it status."

She is also a strong believer in "rich provision... College is not just about the classroom, it's about the whole experience," she says. "It's not just about the interests students have when they arrive, it's about



Girls' netball in the leisure centre

inspiring them to try something new."

The trick is to develop the very best sporting students but also to have plenty of sporting offers for those who may be intimidated by sport, says Shepherd. "It's the sport development pyramid. You've got to see to the best sports performers in the college. Students are impressionable, and there's a portion who will follow them more than they will follow you. If you lose that top group, you lose the rest.

"But you also have to offer lots to people who think they might not be sporty. Everyone likes winning, and everyone likes celebrating a point." That's why it's important to offer social netball as well as competitive netball, he explains.

It's nearing the end of my walk, and Shepherd takes me on a final tour to show me what he means. First, we walk down a corridor lined with sports shirts and leotards that have been signed by former students who progressed to national level, world



Wheelchair basketball for both disabled and able bodied students

championships and even the Olympics. They were all supported through TASS – the national Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme. The scheme helps colleges to support athletically talented students with bespoke timetables, special guest speakers and peer support groups, so they can compete.

Next, we poke our heads into the sports hall, where a chaotic game of volleyball is taking place. "I don't know what it is about mixed volleyball, but we've had so many students get involved who don't like other sport," grins Shepherd. "It's great!" The college's competition manager, Andy Green, is integral to making these extra activities happen, he adds.

In FE conversations about policy or funding, sport seems to be rarely mentioned. There's an old New Labour policy document on "the role of further and higher education in delivering the government's plan for sport", but little noise since then (even as schools continue to get sports premium funding).

But the team at New College Pontefract have backed the right horse: in 2019, Ofsted made 'personal development' a key area. It wants to know how a "provider's wider work supports learners to develop their character [...] and helps them know how to keep physically and mentally healthy."

"We welcome that change of direction," smiles Marks. "It matches our ethos."








Boys' basketball in the college sportshall



Josh Buxton, PE teacher and football coach with the sports trophy cabinet

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Opinion

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Why the delay to mental health teams reaching all colleges?



RICHARD CAULFIELD

Mental health lead,
Association of Colleges

Colleges are reporting more suicides and eating disorders – they need more support now, writes Richard Caulfield

Over a year ago we published our mental health survey, with stark results. Now, all the feedback we have from the first term of 2021-22 is that the challenge is increasing. It's driven by more learners presenting with mental health problems and the complexity of the issues they are facing.

Anecdotally we are hearing from a number of colleges that more students are attempting suicide, and that eating disorders are on the rise. The NHS is now struggling to meet demand for eating disorder services.

With over 190 colleges signed up to the AoC mental health charter there is strong commitment within the sector to support the mental health and wellbeing of learners and staff. But there is a limit to the resource that colleges can allocate to deal with the volume of issues, and a limit to employing enough staff with the expertise to support the most complex needs.

Many colleges have been extremely positive about the rollout of the government's mental health support teams and the work driven by the Transforming children and young people's mental health provision green paper.

Colleges such as South Thames College group have been quick to praise the

partnership and support from the trailblazer. But this support will only reach 35 per cent of schools and colleges under the current plans. What does this mean for the 65 per cent of settings who miss out?

We need to ensure all settings have access to these additional resources.

Other areas have focused on further education too. In Greater Manchester, where health monies are devolved, there has been a significant investment in mental health over the past three years, allowing colleges to develop services to test new ideas.

In the first year of the project, Hopwood Hall and Bolton College both set about becoming trauma-informed colleges. Another six have now started to implement a trauma-informed approach, including the specialist college, Bridge College. The feedback has been hugely positive.

“What about the 65% of settings missing out?”

Other work has included a successful partnership with the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapists (BACP) to develop a programme of training in supervision skills. This is so that staff dealing



with the growing number of safeguarding issues can be supported appropriately.

Of course, prevention is better than cure and colleges are increasingly looking for support that can help students and staff to manage their own mental health and wellbeing too, as well as support services.

I am looking forward to seeing what we can learn from tools such as the Fika app (which supports student mental fitness) that many colleges, supported by NCFE, have been implementing this year. Like other initiatives, it will not be a golden bullet, rather another tool in the box for colleges to utilise.

We are also seeing a growing interest in social prescribing, which is where individuals are referred to social support in the community, rather than, or alongside, medical intervention. The Office for Students has recently funded a social prescribing project in Merseyside and Lancashire, and several other colleges are

going down this route with local partners.

There is also synergy with this approach with Good For Me, Good For FE, the volunteering project led by London South East Colleges, Loughborough College and East Coast College, aiming to boost mental health. This has huge potential if we can increase engagement from NHS-funded link workers with colleges.

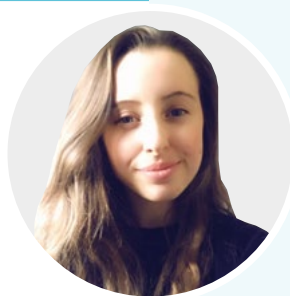
Capacity remains the biggest challenge. Through AoC, we can help colleges access lots of support from the Charlie Waller Trust and elsewhere. However, many of the initiatives I've mentioned cannot be implemented without the capacity.

As we begin 2022, and government and policymakers plan the next phases of education recovery, mental health support must be at the heart of any post-16 strategy. Colleges must be funded to provide the support students and staff deserve and need.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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I wish FE offered a broader range of subjects to study



AALIYAH KENNEDY

Former FE student

Students should be able to study what interests them, instead of the subjects the system prefers them to pursue, writes Aaliyah Kennedy

Further education is a huge player in so many lives. Every young person must stay in education or training until they are 18 years old, and what they do here contributes hugely to what they may progress to.

I have a confession. I long for there to be more choice of subjects in FE. As a former FE student, I know that a large breadth of options allows future generations like mine to widen their experience and minds.

A broad choice of courses allows learners to explore who they want to be, rather than what the system wants them to be.

But sometimes students like me aren't able to continue studying a modern foreign language at college, or can't access the international baccalaureate, which I was lucky enough to do but isn't widely available in FE.

I think the limit on subjects is partly due to government cuts. Funding per student aged 16 to 18 fell by 14 per cent in real terms between 2010 and 2019. Even with the money announced at the recent spending review, college spending per student in 2024 will still be around ten per cent lower than in 2010.

Only since 2020/21 has the rate increased to £4,188 for full-time students. But this is not enough. The Association of School and College Leaders is calling for the funding rate to be increased to at least £4,760 per student so that it is in line with inflation.

“I couldn't continue French at my college”

I'm on a mission to improve education across England with my campaign called Reshaping OUR Education. We completely agree with ASCL's statement.

For myself, I think proper funding would allow FE institutions to offer more of the subjects I would like to have learned. For me, this included French and law, which weren't on offer at my college.

I could have developed my French from GCSE, alongside my other college courses which were an international baccalaureate in global politics and also in history, a WJEC diploma in criminology and a BTEC in business. The availability of French especially would have allowed me to develop more of my interests before considering higher education.

From my personal experience, the international baccalaureate is amazing. It contributed to the confidence, resilience and skills I now have. I did the international baccalaureate careers-related program (IBCP), and there is also the IB diploma programme and partial IB.

The IB allows you to explore a subject in real depth and prepares you for life post-18. It includes aspects that fit well with further education; for example, I learnt how to work independently and as a team through project work and charity events.

In terms of studying a subject further, the global politics IB especially helps you understand the real world better. Whereas the normal A-level politics focuses more on British politics, this was a much broader curriculum of the study of power and sovereignty which is more applicable to the international world we live in.

You also deliver a project on an issue that you care about, which is where Reshaping OUR Education stemmed from! This was the engagement activity in the IB that takes students outside of the classroom.

I wish more FE colleges offered the IB, and I wish I'd been able to study French and law at college too. It would have connected my courses closer together and it might have made me consider a career as a human rights lawyer.

More FE colleges should consider the IB as a model as it opens up pathways for learners. I know that Bridgwater & Taunton College in Somerset offers the IB; but not many colleges offer it in comparison to the total number of colleges.

Cuts have meant many FE institutions have been unable to provide more of a variety of courses, or in some cases courses have also been withdrawn.

I really hope that in future more FE colleges can offer a wide and diverse set of subjects.



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THE STAFF ROOM

Dispatches from the frontline of FE

We must dispel the image of a male coder sitting in a dark room all night

A career in tech isn't all about coding – there are multiple other roles for young people too, writes Sukvinder Kathuria

I am proud to say that I teach a diverse group of skilled people. Among my college students are young adults who are also holding down jobs, who are carers, young mothers and adults who may think mainstream education is not for them.

But there is still lots more to be done to get more women and people from minority backgrounds into careers in technology, my specialist area of expertise. This issue is especially relevant, with the announcement just before Christmas of new skills bootcamps, many of which focus on digital skills.

On December 22 we were told four new areas will have access to the bootcamps: Lancashire, Hull and East Yorkshire, Tees Valley and North of Tyne. The prime minister has previously said the bootcamps are “where you can learn IT, whatever your age”.

However, we also know from FE Week's reporting a year ago that many of the skills bootcamps were dominated by men, and the government's equalities impact assessment had lots of recommendations to bring in more female and minority ethnic learners.

So how can the gender imbalance be changed?

Well, we must first dispel the



SUKVINDER KATHURIA

Faculty lead, Ada National College for Digital Skills

idea of what a career in digital looks like. You don't need to sit in a dark room all night every night coding, be male, and wear glasses, a checked shirt and jeans in order to work in technology. People in tech come from all walks of life.

One student I worked with even changed her A-levels to STEM subjects after being inspired to follow a career in tech and is currently completing an apprenticeship in a well-known multinational professional services company.

“Your thinking skills are as important – if not more – than your technical skills”

We also need to challenge the perception that tech is just about coding. I would argue that isn't true: there are many roles in tech that don't require coding as a skill. This includes helping with digital transformation within a company, product design and project management roles. Junior level salaries within these roles

can reach close to £30,000.

Instead, we need to make it clear to students that projects start at a conceptual level, and that this requires creative thinking, teamwork, the ability to meet deadlines and other transferable skills.

The tech industry is a fast-moving and exciting place to be, where your thinking skills are as important – if not more important – as your technical skills at the outset.

Just like any other industry, if you are committed, you can succeed in this space.

To increase the number of women entering the industry, we cannot wait for people to come to us. Community within the industry is vitally important. For those who have been successful in the industry, it is so important that they help those just starting out. I can say first-hand that companies are reaching out to

diversify and support women and girls to begin their journey and stay in the technology pipeline.

Meanwhile, colleges like ours must continue making a concerted effort to engage people in all communities to give them opportunities in technology. The college prides itself on engaging people from under-represented and diverse backgrounds. The

companies we work with share our mission to improve representation within tech roles.

To those who think it always will be like this, think of pioneers such as English

mathematician Ada Lovelace, and computer and rocket scientist Annie Easley. Or electrical engineer Kimberly Bryant, founder of Black Girls CODE; Reshma Saujani, founder of Girls Who Code; and finally Liane Agbi, CEO and founder of lifestyle website BAUCE.

They each took the opportunity to work in technology and flourished. There are more to come, and I cannot wait to add more names to this list.

There is a talent pool of diverse young digital-savvy individuals out there. If they cannot make it in technology, we as a sector have failed them.



Dispatches from the frontline of FE

THE STAFF ROOM

Got views from the classroom?

Anecdotes about apprenticeships?

Insights into how the sector really works?

Get in touch with us about The Staffroom!

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

This is a brand-new column from FE Week, in which your thoughts will be read by thousands of readers. You will offer on-the-ground perspectives on and experiences of the issues of the day.

Importantly, we are looking for contributors in teaching, learner support and professional services roles across the breadth of FE and skill providers and institutions.

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You will get to boost your professional profile, shake the sector up a little, make your colleagues laugh and prompt senior leaders to think hard about your insights from the frontline.

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- the curriculum
- subject and training areas
- leadership and management
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- environment and sustainability
- pastoral and safeguarding issues
- widening participation
- addressing achievement gaps
- student experience

Introduce yourself to us

We want to hear from everyone, and would particularly welcome pitches from people from an under-represented or minority background. Do tell anyone who might enjoy giving it a go to get in touch with us.

In exceptional circumstances we could discuss you writing under using a pseudonym.

Anyone who wishes to become a Staffroom opinion writer should pitch their ideas to the contact details below. We will then help you to make it take shape!

Write to commissioning editor Jess Staufenberg on jess.staufenberg@lsect.com or find her on Twitter [@StaufenbergJ](https://twitter.com/StaufenbergJ)

MAKING CONNECTIONS: A FORGOTTEN BUT ESSENTIAL EDUCATION NEED

Over the past two years, young people have missed out on a world of experiences, education and events. It's fair to say all areas of their lives have been impacted. But as a nation, we have focused on education as the most significant loss. The Government's Education Recovery Plan is making efforts to ensure no child is left behind, but what about the social skills young people sorely need to catch up on?

While it is critical that educational gaps are plugged, social skills, which are vital in enabling young people to get on in life and forge successful careers, need to be developed.

In fact, one need that spans all areas of life, which was arguably the hardest hit for our young people during lockdown is connection with others. Young people have missed contact and face-to-face social experiences with peer groups, friends, family, tutors, educators and coaches.

Connection builds confidence and trust between people, it's the foundation of the bonds we form and build upon. It is also an essential school and workplace skill that is positively linked to motivation, behaviour, learning and engagement. There is a wealth of neuroscientific evidence that the sense of belonging that comes from connectedness has a significant positive impact on learning, retaining, and applying knowledge and skills. Of equal importance, connection has been presented as one of the top three predictors for student retention. It helps to promote academic persistence, which in turn increases student retention rates.

Similarly, a lack of connection experienced through constant virtual engagement can result in an increased sense of isolation and fatigue which can negatively impact wellbeing and academic success. Specifically, time management and attention can fall victim to prolonged periods of virtual learning and reduced opportunities for social interaction.

Connection is particularly important for

students of colour from underrepresented social groups, as it fosters a sense of belonging and improves retention. First-generation and economically disadvantaged students are also at high risk of dropping out and benefit especially from increased connection.

Bell (2008) found that there is one-factor students point to again and again when asked why they are leaving and that is people. For this reason alone, we cannot support our young people's post-pandemic educational recovery by focusing exclusively on education. We need to take a more holistic view to support social, emotional and educational recovery as part of the one effort.

To ensure the success of education recovery, we need to implement structured mental fitness training alongside offering tutors support with the academic learning effort. In a recent study by Rasco (2020), students receiving an intervention to promote peer-connection were significantly less likely to drop out than their peers in the control group. This suggests that there is a place for this type of training in education to benefit learners and the institutions where they are enrolled.

As part of a Foundation year of Mental fitness, Fika and NCFE have partnered to deliver an evidence-based intervention in Mental Fitness to 69 FE centres. The curriculum comprises seven skills trained at key times of the academic year; Connection, Confidence, Motivation, Positivity, Stress, Focus and Meaning. Following a return of face-to-face education, connection was the first skill delivered to learners. Returning to the classroom had the potential to be



daunting and knowing that connections and relationships make the world go round, we knew learning the skills and techniques to connect with others would be essential for keeping mentally fit and facilitating a positive return for learners. Staff at one FE college told us "It's daunting forming new relationships at college anyway and coming out of Covid has made this even harder for learners. The Connection course helps to foster and support these friendships".

During eight weeks from September to November 2021, 17,870 FE learners completed over 45,000 connection exercises equating to 3,800 hours of learning. These learning hours resulted in a 14% increase of learners' average connection scores. It is worth noting that this education and training involved learning psychologically evidenced exercises to develop connection skills and not just facilitating small-talk in the classroom.

For more information on how Fika and NCFE are supporting staff and learners across FE with mental fitness training visit <https://www.ncfe.org.uk/fika>

Written by Dr Amanda McNamee, Senior Mental Fitness Scientist at Fika

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READERS REPLY

The government must pay young people to enter traineeship

Yes!!! Exactly this. We REALLY do need #pathways into #apprenticeships for our younger people who are not yet ready... Now more than ever. A recent @AppsNorfolk survey found that 39% of Norfolk SMEs responding wanted to pick candidates from a pre-apprenticeship programme!!

Katy Dorman, Twitter

Good proposal but need to separate 16-18s and 19-24s: (a) 16-18s would get £144 per week (£4.81 p/h x 30hrs) instead of means-tested child benefit/ UC paid to parents and bursary grants to young people; (b) 19-24s would get £144 per week v UC of c£61 per week + any passports benefits.

Mark Corney, Twitter

We need huge new initiatives to support new skills and retraining

Great to see in @FEWeek that this campaign has won justice for hundreds let down, and good to see @GordonMarsden banging the drum for @right2_learn and greater investment in lifelong learning for all too.

Matt Waddup, Twitter

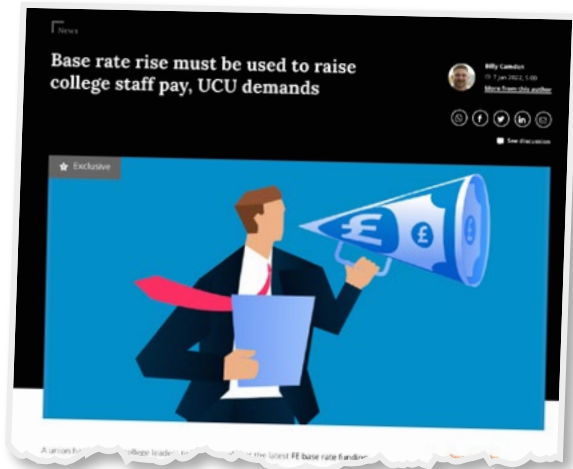
REPLY OF THE WEEK

Base rate rise must be used to raise college staff pay, UCU demands



It's reasonable for UCU to expect any inflation uplift to be used in this way, but if you argue for a link between rises and funding rates, won't it undermine claims, should rates not rise? And adult and apprenticeship rates are not rising, are they?

Ian Pryce, Twitter



Justice: FE Week campaign wins £1.5m relief for victims of loan scandal



Good to see this has been dealt with. Lessons to be learnt about why it's taken so long.

Louise Doyle, Twitter

Bulletin

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Anne Gornall

Co-chair, Northern Skills Network

Start date: January 2022

Previous Job: Executive director, GMLPN

Interesting fact: Anne wears a lot of red... especially at Christmas.

Movers & Shakers

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



Omid Kordestani

Chair and non-executive director, Pearson

Start date: March 2022

Previous Job: Board member, Twitter Inc (concurrent)

Interesting fact: He joined Google as employee #11 and was responsible for its first revenue-generating activities, as well as its first-ever profitable quarter.



Alex Miles

Co-chair, Northern Skills Network

Start date: January 2022

Previous Job: Managing director, Yorkshire Learning Providers

Interesting fact: Alex has played 6 different instruments over the years with her favourite being the Double Bass. She also had a few harp lessons which was actually quite painful.



Emily Austin

Chief Executive Officer, The Association of Apprentices

Start date: January 2022

Previous Job: Partnerships director, Association of Apprentices & Director at The St Martin's Group

Interesting fact: Recently went paragliding off Mount Babadag in Turkey and have skydived at 15,000 feet!



James Swaffield

Managing director, Adult Education, Capita

Start date: January 2022

Previous Job: Apprenticeships director, Capita

Interesting fact: James is a fan of American Football and the Green Bay Packers, and will have his fingers crossed for the upcoming playoffs and Superbowl

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

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FEWEEK

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