

SECTOR DEVELOPMENTS...

COLLEGES IN ENGLAND FACING AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT

The recently published Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) 2018 Annual Report on Education Spending in England shows that further education in England has borne the brunt of austerity cuts more than any other education sector. Over the period from 2010/11 to 2017/18, FE and Adult Education budgets have been slashed by £3.3 billion. Within this total, spending on students aged 16-18 in colleges has been cut by £1 billion and on students aged 16-18 in schools by £0.6 billion (or around 15%). Spending on those aged 19+ have been slashed by £1.7 billion (or around 45%) resulting in a loss of more than a million adult learners. The cuts have also had a significant impact on enrolments in many key skill areas. For example, as a result of the combination of spiralling fees, cuts and course closures, enrolments in engineering have fallen from around 150,000 per year to around 50,000 per year, and health and social care enrolments have fallen from around 680,000 to 220,000. Both of these sectors are facing severe skills shortages. FE staff have also been disproportionately affected by the cuts. Since 2010/11, pay for FE teachers has fallen by 25% in real terms, and the pay gap between teachers in colleges and teacher in schools now stands at around £7,000. Further funded pay rises have been agreed by the government for schools, but not for college staff. Since 2010/11, the number of teachers in colleges has contracted by around 24,000 (around a third of the total teacher workforce). Staff have been lost through being made redundant as college budgets have been cut, but low pay has also forced some teachers to quit to look for higher paid work. Recruitment and retention of staff to key subject areas (such as those required to deliver the new T-Levels) has become a major problem. FE has faced and overcome many crises in its history, but at a time when more politicians than ever are professing their love for FE, the reality is that most people working in colleges now seriously believe that multiple pressures bearing down on the FE sector in England threaten its very existence. Maybe this was always the government's plan. The IfS report can be accessed at the link below.

<https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/comms/R150.pdf>

CAMPAIGN FOR FAIRER FE FUNDING

Thousands of FE learners, staff and college leaders marched on parliament earlier this month (October) to demand fairer funding for FE. The march was organised by the University and Colleges Union (UCU) in partnership with the Association of Colleges (AoC) as part of 'Love our Colleges Week'. Almost all FE colleges were involved. The march ended with a rally in Parliament Square during which the leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn declared his support for the FE sector and called on those present to 'Stand today for properly funded colleges and properly paid staff'. As well as the march on parliament, college leaders, staff and students lobbied their local MPs to plead the case for more funding for FE and organised their own local events to celebrate the important impact that colleges have on their local communities. Meanwhile, the chair of the House of Commons Education Select Committee, Robert Halfon, has written to Philip Hammond, the Chancellor of the Exchequer to urge him to 'look very carefully' at the core level of funding for students in FE and to recognise 'the stark disparity between funding for pre-16 and post-16 education'. Mr Halfon's letter follows the recent Education Select Committee hearing on FE funding, during which FE sector leaders urged the government to end the 'mania' for spending money on initiatives and to focus instead on providing adequate core funding. A copy of Mr Halfon's letter to Mr Hammond can be found at:

<https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/Education/Correspondence/Letter-to-Chancellor-of-the-Exchequer-regarding-Further-Education-funding-15-October-2018.pdf>

And a YouTube video showing highlights from the rally can be seen at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPhCcM_vdC0

SFCA LAUNCHES ITS OWN FAIRER FUNDING CAMPAIGN

The Sixth Form Colleges Association (SFCA), whilst supporting the AoC's 'Colleges Week' initiative, was not an official partner and has now launched its own campaign entitled 'Raise the Rate', which calls for the funding base rate for all full-time 16-18-year-old learners to be increased to £4,760. For 16 and 17-year-olds, this would represent an increase of 14% on the current £4,000 base rate. For 18-year-olds taking a third year of a sixth form course it would represent an increase of 44%.

ANY MESSAGES OF HOPE OF EXTRA FE FUNDING FROM THE 2018 PARTY CONFERENCES?

In a word 'no'

Conservative Party Conference

In his speech to those attending the recent Conservative Party conference in Birmingham, *Damian Hinds*, the Minister for Education in England announced that an extra £38 million would be made available over the next five years for colleges involved in teaching the first T-Levels. Mr Hinds said that the extra funding was intended to allow these colleges to purchase 'cutting edge equipment and facilities, including computers and equipment for those studying digital pathways and heavy plant and machinery for those taking construction'. Mr Hinds also announced that £40 million would be shared between the 21 colleges that had been designated Mathematics Centres of Excellence to help test and share new ways of teaching students who are re-sitting mathematics GCSEs. He did refer to the need for a greater focus on FE in general and told delegates 'Many of our state schools and large parts of our university sector, are world class. But there is another area which, in years gone by, has not received sufficient focus. I'm talking about technical and vocational education, which for decades has not had as much attention as it should'. Mr Hinds also said 'We are also going to be reviewing higher level qualifications, those at so-called Level 4 and 5, that are the direct alternative to going to university for young people at age 18. We will also carry on our design work on the National Retraining Scheme, so that all throughout their lives people have the opportunity to upgrade and change their skills, and that lifelong learning stops being a phrase and starts being a reality'. However, although Mr Hinds spoke of the need to give more focus to FE, he gave no commitment to raising the woefully inadequate level of FE core funding. The biggest clue yet to the likelihood that this is unlikely to change any time soon is that Mr Hinds has pulled out of speaking the Association of Colleges' (AoC) annual conference in November. You can watch Mr Hinds' speech to the Conservative Party conference at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RHE7WBE6KOM>

Addressing a smaller number of delegates, *Anne Milton*, the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills in England, who has long professed to be the person 'knocking loudest on the Treasury's door to make the FE sector's case', spoke about apprenticeships and skills. But presumably because the term 'FE' is not included in her title, she had very little to say about FE or colleges. Or perhaps she thought that those attending wouldn't be particularly interested.

During his speech to the party conference, *Philip Hammond*, the chancellor of the exchequer announced that £100 million was to be made available for the National Retraining Scheme and said that skills were at the front of the government's economic strategy.

Labour Party Conference

In her speech to those attending the Labour Party Conference in Liverpool, *Angela Raynor*, the Shadow Minister for Education in England said that she wanted to take all publicly funded schools in England back into the 'mainstream public sector' (i.e. council control). She told delegates that 'We'll start by immediately ending the Tories' academy and free schools programmes. They neither improve standards nor empower staff or parents'. (This is presumably despite the fact that 37 of its own MPs, including shadow ministers, are sponsored by the Co-op, which has its own multi-academy trust, has opened 13 academies with a further 27 in the pipeline and has ambitions to become one of England's largest academy groups). However, Ms Raynor said very little about Labour's plans for FE in England and her speech did not include

any new policy announcements or any details about existing policies. She did speak in a little more detail about Labour's proposals for the formation of a National Education Service (NES) and the establishment of a new Commission for Lifelong Learning, first suggested in the party's 2017 Election Manifesto, which she said would be 'tasked with integrating further and higher education', although no details were provided on what this would entail or how it would be funded. You can watch Ms Raynor's speech to the Labour Party conference at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=647z9m5wA7g>

In his speech to a smaller number of delegates, the Shadow Minister for FE and Skills, *Gordon Marsden* refused to rule out taking FE colleges back under local authority control and said that, under plans set out for the NES, local communities would be 'collectively responsible' for the education institutions within it, including colleges, and would be 'empowered, via appropriate democratic means, to influence change where it is needed'. Mr Marsden also said that Labour was 'looking at the potential for initiatives being done under devolution with local authorities'.

Some found it disappointing that neither Ms Raynor nor Mr Marsden made any further reference to Labour's earlier Manifesto commitment to abolish FE and HE tuition fees in England and to restore maintenance grants (including Education Maintenance Allowances for needy 16-18 full-time college students). Neither did they make any further specific commitment to raising the current inadequate level of FE core funding if elected. To be fair though, they did call for the current FE Advanced Learner Loan underspend to be spent on adult education provision and they did write to Philip Hammond ahead of the budget to request urgent new funding for the further education sector as a whole.

ANY MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR EXTRA FE FUNDING FROM THE CHANCELLORS OCTOBER 29 BUDGET STATEMENT?

No.

As part of his budget speech, Philip Hammond, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, said, 'we will make sure that British workers are equipped with the skills they need to thrive and prosper'. However, he was probably referring to the £100 million package for National Training Scheme he announced at the Conservative Party conference because the most significant announcements he made seemed to involve schools and apprenticeships. These include the following:

- £400 million to made available for schools in England as a one-off capital payment to enable them to buy such things as additional computers and laboratory equipment. This is the equivalent of around £10,000 per primary school and £50,000 per secondary school.
- From April 2019, the amount that small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) will be required to contribute towards the cost of the training any apprentices they take on will be reduced from 10% to 5%. The government will pay the remaining 95%. This, said the Chancellor, was 'a £695 million package to support apprenticeships'. Apprentices aged 16-18 employed at firms with fewer than 50 staff are fully funded.
- Mr Hammond suggested that the target of 3 million new apprenticeships by 2020 was still alive and kicking when he said, '...through the apprenticeship levy we are delivering three million new high-quality apprenticeships in this parliament'.
- Existing private finance initiative (PFI) schemes will continue in order to avoid prohibitive contract cancellation fees and penalty charges, but no new PFI schemes will be approved.

Incurable optimists will need to hold on to their hopes until the next 5-year spending review (next year) for any signs of an increase in FE core funding. You can watch the Chancellor deliver his budget speech at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mh3mtThy9S8>

Mr Hammond begins his speech 30 minutes into the video.

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION (DfE) SPENDING CLAIMS TO BE INVESTIGATED BY UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Meanwhile, in response to accusations from school leaders that the government was failing to provide adequate funding for schools in England, ministers said that not only were schools getting 'more money than ever', data compiled by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) showed that the UK was the 'third highest spender on education in the world'. However, it has now emerged that the government data submitted to the OECD includes the money spent in providing tuition fee and maintenance loans for university students and the money spent by parents on private school fees. The DfE still insists that the figures are 'accurate', but has since admitted that its education spending claims 'are not limited to public spending on schools'. As a result, the DfE's and education ministers' claims on education spending in England are to be investigated by the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA). UKSA reports directly to Parliament and will rule on whether the DfE figures could be regarded as misleading.

There is a further twist to this issue which could see £billions being added to public sector deficit figures. While ministers and head teachers are arguing over the real level of school funding, there is a separate debate ongoing about how the real cost of HE tuition fee loan finance is measured and presented in the public accounts. Damning reports from two senior parliamentary committees argue that by not including the cost of student finance in the public accounts, the expenditure is 'effectively made invisible' and that the Chancellor's claims to be reducing the public sector deficit is a 'fiscal illusion' if this is achieved by removing the escalating cost of loans from public spending. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has now been asked to adjudicate on whether the money loaned to students every year for tuition fees and maintenance (much of which will never be repaid) should appear as a cost in the public finances. Last year, £17 billion was lent to students, with about £3 billion received in repayments.

However, by including the cost of providing loans for HE tuition fees within its definition of education spending (see first paragraph of this section), the DfE may have unwittingly signalled to the ONS that it actually agrees that the cost of loans should be counted as public expenditure. If the ONS rules that this is the case it will add £ billions to the current public sector deficit.

RESTRUCTURING FUND LIKELY TO BE UNDERSPENT

The application window for financial assistance from the £726 million Restructuring Fund made available by the DfE to assist with the implementation of area review recommendations has now closed. However, the latest ESFA Progress to Date Report (which provides information on allocations agreed to September 2018) has revealed that government approval has been given for just £330 million (or 45% of the total funding available). This is expected to increase as last-minute applications are signed off, but nevertheless, fears are now being expressed that £millions may go unspent. Both the restructuring facility and any further exceptional financial support are expected to be withdrawn when the new college insolvency regime comes into effect early next year, at which point colleges have been warned that they are 'on their own'. The ESFA progress report is included in the second section of the ESFA document '*Further education area reviews: funding to restructure colleges*' and can be accessed at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-16-education-and-training-institutions-apply-for-financial-support-for-area-reviews?utm_source=93fa0da8-9d5e-4284-9246-344d15125119&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate

REPORT RECOMMENDS UTCs SWITCH RECRUITMENT TO 16 AND SPECIALISE IN 16-18 TECHNICAL EDUCATION

A **new report** by the Education Policy Institute (EPI), entitled '*UTCs: are they delivering for young people and the economy?*', analyses the performance of University Technical Colleges (UTCs) since their introduction in 2010. At present, there are 50 UTCs in England, with another 10 having closed or converted into a different type of institution. Key findings in the report include the following:

- **Despite overall growth in the number of UTCs in England, most are struggling with student numbers**

- **Over half of UTC students leave before completing their studies.** Students with lower GCSE results, special educational needs and those from disadvantaged backgrounds are the least likely to complete their course.
- **A large proportion of UTCs receive poor inspection outcomes from Ofsted.** 1 in 5 were rated 'inadequate' (twice the national average), 2 in 5 were rated 'requires improvement' (four times more than the national average) and just 4% were rated 'outstanding' (compared to 22% of other schools).
- The average grade obtained at GCE A level in UTCs is a D, compared to the average of a grade C in all other state funded institutions.
- **Students taking technical and vocational qualifications at a UTC perform close to the national average – (but higher than those in FE colleges).** On average they achieve a distinction in applied general qualifications (mainly BTECs) and Tech levels.
- **UTC students perform well when retaking their GCSEs,** improving their grades in English and mathematics by around a third of a grade.
- **20% of UTC leavers go on to an apprenticeship, which is three times the national average (7%).**

The report's key recommendations include the following:

- UTCs have struggle with admissions at age 14 because England essentially has a pre- and post-16 system. **Consideration should therefore be given to changing the admissions age from 14 to 16.**
- **With provision starting at age 16, UTCs should focus on delivering high-quality technical qualifications including the new T-Levels.** This should allow UTC students to progress to higher levels of technical education in Institutes of Technology, National Colleges, university, or other providers.

David Robinson, Director of Post-16 and Skills at the EPI, said, 'With low take-up, high dropout rates and poor student progress, our research shows that the long-term sustainability of University Technical Colleges is becoming increasingly uncertain'. He went on to say 'Rather than small modifications to the way in which they operate, it is clear that UTCs require fundamental remodelling. In order to remain viable institutions, they should consider admitting students at 16, focusing on existing high-quality technical qualifications, and becoming a central component of the delivery of new T-Levels'. This would, in effect, result in UTCs becoming technical sixth form colleges and would place them in direct competition with existing sixth form and FE colleges.

Lord Agnew, the Minister for Academies has now revealed that the government is actively lobbying the Baker Dearing Trust and other UTC policy makers to support a move away from recruitment at 14 so that they are 'not in conflict with surrounding schools and that local areas can work in harmony with one another'. Meanwhile, the Wellsway Multi Academy Trust (MAT) has announced that the Bath Studio School which the MAT currently runs, is to close. This means that almost half of all studio schools which, like UTCs offer a vocational curriculum for 14-19-year-olds, have now closed, or announced their intention to close. A copy of the EPI report can be found at: <https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/UTCs-2018-EPI-.pdf>

YEAR-ON-YEAR MONTHLY APPRENTICESHIP STARTS INCREASE, BUT OVERALL NUMBER OF STARTS ARE STILL DOWN

The DfE has published its latest data on apprenticeships. The figures show that number of apprenticeship starts rose year-on-year from 20,900 in July 2017 to 25,200 in July 2018, an increase of 20.6%. This is the first increase following a protracted period of worsening year-on-year falls in previous months. However, apprenticeship starts are still significantly below the figures in July 2016, when 44,100 starts were reported, with the smaller numbers being attributed to the introduction of the apprenticeship levy in April 2017. The data also shows that there have been 369,700 apprenticeship starts reported to date between August 2017 and July 2018. This means that starts for 2017/18 to-date are down by 25% on 2016/17 and 27% on the pre-levy 2015/16 year. A copy of the latest DfE data can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/apprenticeship-and-levy-statistics-october-2018>

OFFER FOR SALE OF ROATP LISTED 'SHELL' PROVIDER RAISES CONCERNS

Organisations listed on the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers (RoATP) are required to have been through a robust application process that 'considers due diligence, capability, quality and financial health to assess their capability to deliver high-quality apprenticeship training'. However, concerns have been regularly expressed about how robust the RoATP application process actually is, with for example, one-person organisations with no prior apprenticeship delivery experience being successful in their application to be listed on the register and potentially being given access to £millions in apprenticeship funding. It also appears that more than 700 training providers listed on the Register are currently not actually delivering apprenticeships. Some of these firms are thought to be 'shell companies' that do not actually have any staff or assets, and their only value being derived solely from being listed on the RoATP. It now seems that the owner of at least one of these firms is seeking to cash in on this value after it was discovered that a broker had advertised the sale of a 'shell' provider that was listed on the RoATP for a price of between £50,000 and £60,000. A spokesperson for the company handling the sale insisted that no ESFA rules were being broken, and that the only requirement was for the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to be informed whenever there is a change in the ownership of a provider, at which point it is up to the ESFA to carry out its own due diligence on the new owners. New applications to join the RoATP has been closed since October 2017 while the application process was being reviewed. Although the register was meant to finally reopen last month (September) it has not, and it remains unclear as to when it actually will open. This means that the market value of any providers listed on the RoATP that are offered for sale is likely to continue to rise. A copy of the advertisement can be found at:

<https://mailchi.mp/education-and-skills/roatp-roto-registered-training-provider-for-sale?e=bc9719bb31>

CITB REACHES AGREEMENT WITH COLLEGES ON 'REVERSE SUBCONTRACTING'

The Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) failed to win a direct non-levy apprenticeship ESFA contract and in August attempted to get colleges to agree to 'reverse subcontracting' arrangements whereby it would charge those colleges holding direct ESFA non-levy contracts a fee of least 28% of the contract value in return for providing access to CITB member firms and the provision of other services, such as learner recruitment and completing the associated paperwork. After a suggestion by the AoC that this could be against ESFA funding rules, the CITB's proposals were placed on hold to allow for further negotiations to take place. An agreement has now been reached which is said to be compliant with ESFA requirements. The agreement involves colleges paying the CITB a £700 fee for 'sign-up services', where the CITB will source learners and employers for the college, with paperwork filled out to the point where the college can take control. The CITB will also charge those colleges that request the service, a fee for carrying out site visits to monitor an apprentice's progress in his/her on-the-job training and to provide feedback to the college. For a two-year apprenticeship programme the CITB says that a minimum of six visits should be carried out at a cost of £150 per visit, although the actual number of site visits will remain a matter for the college to determine. Colleges that opt to use both services can expect to pay the CITB a total around £1,600 per learner which is around half of what was originally proposed by the CITB.

ANNUAL APPRENTICESHIP LEVY TRANSFER FACILITY WILL RISE FROM 10% TO 25%.

Large levy paying employers are continuing to use very little (currently around 10%) of the levy funds they are entitled to. This usage is thought unlikely to increase for the foreseeable future because monthly apprenticeship starts figures continue to remain at well below pre-levy levels. In May 2018 large firms were allowed to pass up to 10% of their unused annual levy funds to smaller firms in their supply chain. However, in order to encourage more firms to become involved in apprenticeship delivery, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Hammond, has now announced that with effect from April 2019 the amount of levy funding that can be transferred will be increased from 10% to 25%. The measure, whilst generally welcomed, has given rise to concerns that the increase in levels of funding that can be transferred could cause a rise in the number of fraudulent inducement payments from the recipient firms.

FUNDING BANDS FOR 12 APPRENTICESHIP STANDARDS PUBLISHED

In May, the DfE requested that the Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA) should carry out a review of the funding bands of 31 apprenticeship standards to provide assurance that they were pitched at the right level and represented value for public money. Following sign off by the Minister for Education in England, Damian Hinds, 12 of the 31 apprenticeship funding bands subject to review have now been published. Of these 7 have had their funding rate reduced, 3 have remained the same, while a further 2 have had their funding rate increased. Funding band reductions will take effect on 1 January 2019, while increases took effect on October 6. Mr Hinds has not yet received or considered the recommendations for changes to the funding bands for the remaining 19 standards, including three IfA funding band reduction recommendations that were appealed against (see section below).

TRAILBLAZER GROUP WINS APPEAL AGAINST FUNDING BAND RATE CUTS

The 12 funding band rate changes announced above do not include the Level 6 Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship, the Level 5 Operations Departmental Manager nor the Level 3 Team Leader/ Supervisor bands, which between them accounted for almost 20,000 starts in the first nine months of 2017/18. The three standards were set to have their funding rates significantly reduced, with the Chartered Manager standard being cut from £27,000 to £22,000 per apprentice, the Operational/Departmental Manager standard being cut from £9,000 to £7,000, and the Team Leader/ Supervisor standard being cut from £5,000 to £4,500. However, the Trailblazer group for the standards led by the Chartered Management Institute (CMI), and supported by more than 150 employers lodged an appeal against the IfA's original recommendations for the rate reductions. The appeal was upheld by the appeal panel and the three standards have now been sent back to the IfA to have new recommendations for funding bands to be assigned to them which may, or may not, be more acceptable to the Trailblazer group.

DFE PUBLISHES 'FURTHER EDUCATION OUTCOME-BASED SUCCESS MEASURES: 2015 TO 2016'

The DfE has released figures relating to the outcomes of 1.1 million FE learners in England who completed an FE course between 2013/14 and 2015/16. The DfE data also provides details of earnings of those who studied on an FE course between 2010/11 and 2015/16. The data shows (amongst other things) that:

- Those completing a higher apprenticeship courses earned on average salary of £17,400 after one year, reaching £26,700 after five years.
- Learners completing an intermediate apprenticeship courses received an average salary of £13,500 after one year, rising to £17,900 after five years.
- There was a big difference in earnings depending on subject. For example, those who achieved an advanced engineering qualification started on an average salary of £27,400, but those achieving an advanced learning support qualification started on an average salary of £12,800.
- On average, annual earnings rose by 7% every year for those who completed intermediate apprenticeships, 6% every year for those who completed advanced apprenticeships and 11% for those who completed Level 4 apprenticeships.
- There was a serious gender related pay gap. Five years after taking a higher apprenticeship, men were earning an average salary of £29,000 but women were paid only £25,000. A similar pay difference is found in advanced apprenticeships, with men earning £21,000 after five years but women earning just £16,000. The starkest difference can be found in Level 6 courses, where women, on average, began their careers on £23,000 while men earned a starting salary of £38,400. Five years after study, this gap rises even further, with women on £24,600 and men on £42,700.
- Sustained employment (classified as being in paid employment or self-employment for five of the six months between October and March after completing a course) was the most common destination for FE learners. The figures show that 65% of learners were in sustained employment, with 5% of those self-employed and 13% continuing to study for higher level qualifications alongside their employment.
- Of 221,400 learners who had been receiving out-of-work benefits when they began their FE course, 46% ended up in sustained employment.

- 61% of learners who completed an HE access course were enrolled on an HE course the following academic year.
- The number of learners completing a traineeship increased from 4,750 in 2013/14 to 17,230 in 2015/16. Of those who took a traineeship in 2015/16, 51% were in sustained employment a year later and 30% were in sustained learning, of which 18% progressed to an apprenticeship

A copy of 'Further education outcome-based success measures: 2015 to 2016' can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/further-education-outcome-based-success-measures-2015-to-2016>

DFE PUBLISHES LATEST DATA ON EMPLOYER SATISFACTION WITH FE PROVISION

The DfE has published the latest '*FE Choices employer satisfaction survey: 2017 to 2018*', which shows a small decline in satisfaction with every type of FE provider. The survey, which elicited responses from around 55,000 employers revealed that 87.8% were satisfied with the provision delivered by independent training providers (ITPs), while 84.4% were satisfied with the provision delivered by general FE colleges. Both of these figures are marginally lower than scores for 2016/17 are, when 88.1% were satisfied with provision delivered by ITPs, and 84.6% were satisfied with provision delivered by FE colleges. A copy of '*FE Choices employer satisfaction survey: 2017 to 2018*' which also contains employer satisfaction ratings broken down into various categories of provision, can be accessed at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fe-choices-employer-satisfaction-survey-2017-to-2018>

IFA CONSULTS ON THE DRAFT CONTENT FOR THREE MORE T-LEVEL PATHWAYS

The IfA has launched a consultation on the draft content of three new T-Level pathways. These are Onsite Construction and Building Services Engineering (Construction Route), and Digital Support and Services (Digital Route), all three of which are expected to be available from 2021 onwards. The consultation will run until 12 November. This is the second batch of T-Level draft content to have gone out for consultation. The first batch covered the three pathways scheduled to be introduced from 2020 covering Design, Surveying and Planning (Construction Route), Digital Production, Design and Development (Digital Route), and Education and Childcare (Education and Childcare Route). The consultation document can be accessed at:

<https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/about/consultation-launches-on-content-for-t-levels/>

BBC WITHDRAWS OFFER TO PROVIDE T-LEVEL WORK PLACEMENTS

The BBC, one of the largest public sector employers in the UK, originally said that it would offer industrial placements for students taking a T-Level in the Digital Production, Design and Development pathway (Digital Route), which is one of the first wave of the qualifications scheduled to be offered in 2020. However, the Corporation has apparently now decided to withdraw the offer, with a spokesperson stating that that 'the need, dependencies and risks associated with having under-18s in our workforce are, in our view, significant and costly for this specific pilot'. The spokesperson went on to say that the Corporation will now 'observe the outcomes and findings other participating employers identify, after which we will review our position'. The BBC is the latest employer to withdraw from offering T-Level placements amid concerns about the cost and the amount of staff time they can afford to spare in supporting learners. A DfE spokesperson said, 'We have been working with over 1,000 employers to pilot T-Level style placements. To support these placements, we are investing nearly £60 million in 2018/19, with further funding to come'.

UUK AND CBI CALL FOR CHANGES TO STUDENT FUNDING TO REVERSE COLLAPSE IN PART-TIME STUDENT NUMBERS

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the main employer representative body and Universities UK (UUK), the main universities representative body, have joined forces to call on the panel overseeing the government's Review of Post-18 Education and Funding in England to take more account of the needs of part-time adult learners, as well as school leavers on full-time degree courses. In a joint statement they say that a generation of 'lost learners' in England are missing out on the chance to develop the skills at university that employers and the UK economy need, because of the cost and time it takes to study part-time and a lack of flexibility around life commitments and work during study. In particular they point to the

rise in tuition fees in England as a major deterrent for part-time learners, who might have jobs and family responsibilities and were reluctant to take on such levels of debt. According to figures quoted by Universities UK, for all types of degrees, part-time learners in England fell by 51% over the period between 2010/11 and 2016/17. The UUK and the CBI recommend:

- The evolution of the Apprenticeship Levy into a more flexible 'Skills Levy' so that it can cover a wider range of training and offer more flexible study options.
- The provision of greater levels support for students moving between work and study across their lifetimes, with the education system supporting shorter and more flexible courses.
- More collaboration between employers and higher and further education, to help learners progress on to qualifications between GCE A-Levels and a university degree.

A copy of the CBI/UUK joint statement can be found at:

<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2018/joint-uuk-cbi-statement.pdf>

And a copy of the main project findings can be accessed at:

<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2018/the-economic-case-for-flexible-learning.pdf>

DEGREE GRADE INFLATION CONTINUES TO RISE

Data released by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) earlier this month relating to the 2016/17 year shows that the number of first class and upper second-class honours degrees awarded continues to increase. Last year, 26% of students (100,495) graduated with first-class honours, an increase of 40% in just four years. The data shows that more than three quarters of all students graduated with upper second-class (2.1) honours or above. The year-on-year rise has raised concerns that the upward trend is devaluing qualifications and making it harder for employers to differentiate between graduates. A spokesperson for the Institute of Student Employers (ISE), which represents major corporate and public sector employers, said that there are an average of 44 applications for each graduate job and that most graduate recruiters now expect a 2:1 degree as a minimum requirement. Responding to these concerns, the new Office for Students (OfS) has warned it will name and shame universities found to be deliberately inflating grades in order to improve their league table rankings and to increase their recruitment (and tuition fee income) in the absence of any student number cap. The OfS also reiterated its calls for the creation of sector-wide standards for awarding degrees. A spokesman for the DfE said that suspect institutions would be subjected to detailed monitoring and analysis and, if found to be breaching regulations, would face harsh punishments, including fines, suspension and even stripping of their degree awarding status. The DfE says that it also proposes to use the new Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF), to discourage lower standards. Introduced in 2017, the TEF ranks universities as Gold, Silver or Bronze by assessing multiple factors such as the student experience and quality of teaching (although no teaching is independently observed). A panel of experts will then review evidence on whether each university is awarding excessive numbers of firsts and 2:1s. Meanwhile, although universities remain responsible for awarding their own degree grades, a spokesman for Universities UK (UUK), which represents HE institutions, said it intends to introduce its own recommendations for curb degree grade inflation. The HESA data can be accessed at;

<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students>

MINISTER EXPRESSES CONCERN AT THE FALLING NUMBERS OF WHITE BRITISH WORKING-CLASS BOYS ENTERING HE

The HESA data also shows that the overall number of white British people accepted at universities has fallen by more than 2% (34,000) since 2013/14, despite an overall rise in the number of students entering HE. Other ethnic groups, meanwhile, saw significant increases in HE participation over the same period, with the overall number of black students up by 11%, Asian students by 12% and those from other or mixed ethnic backgrounds by 18%. White British working-class boys from a disadvantaged background have the lowest rate of HE participation. Black Caribbean boys from a disadvantaged background have the next

lowest rate of HE participation, but are nevertheless still twice as likely to progress to HE than their white British counterparts. At the launch of a £24 million school improvement programme targeting the North-East, Damian Hinds, the Education Minister for England has now called for schools system in England be challenged over why white British working-class boys are the least likely of any ethnic group to progress to university. Mr Hinds said, 'It's absolutely right that we challenge ourselves to do things like increasing access to university for young people from black and minority ethnic communities, but we must remember that disadvantage is not limited to a single ethnic group. White British disadvantaged boys are the least likely of any large ethnic group to go to university. We need to ask ourselves why that is and challenge the government, universities and the wider school system to change that. It's vital that we do this to make sure that no part of our country feels as though it has been left behind, and that every community feels like this is a country that works for everyone'. The HESA data can be accessed at:

<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/01-02-2018/widening-participation-summary>

EDUCATION SECTOR AMONGST THE TOP 10 FOR BEING IN BREACH OF THE NEW GDPR

The EU initiated General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) now forms part of the data protection regime in the UK and, along with the new Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018), came into force on 25 May 2018. A survey of 1,002 UK workers in full or part-time employment in the education sector, carried out by Probrand (a 'provider of IT products, cloud services, managed IT services and IT solutions') has revealed that since the introduction of the GDPR earlier this year, 54% of educational organisations failed to wipe the memory off redundant IT equipment before disposal. The survey also found that 78% of educational organisations surveyed do not have an official process or protocol for disposing of obsolete IT equipment and that 59% of workers in the education sector admit they wouldn't even know who to approach within their company in order to correctly dispose of old or unusable equipment. The fines involved in a GDPR breach can potentially run into £ millions, along with other costs, such as reputational damage and the negative impact on customer trust and loyalty, which are also likely to eventually become financially detrimental. A guide to the GDPR and its legal requirements is available at:

<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/>

AND FINALLY...

Catering students at a local FE college were encouraged by their tutors to set up a shop in the college reception area where students, staff and members of the public could buy any excess food produced by the students during their practical lessons. The shop was divided into sections including meat, bread and cakes. The most popular by far in terms of volume and value of sales was the cakes section and a journalism student who was also a reporter for the student union magazine decided to write an article on the shop for the next edition, focusing in particular, on why the cakes were so popular. When questioned on this, the catering student who had been put in charge of the cakes section said that it was all down to the quality and freshness of the cakes, combined with a very competitive pricing policy. The catering student was asked to give examples of this and said, 'Well, on the bottom shelf I have my iced buns, cream horns, jam tarts, doughnuts, apple turnovers, almond swirls and other cakes all at 50p each. Then, on the next shelf up, I have my selection of rum-babas, crème brulees, brandy infused crepes, gateaux slices and other sweets at £1.00 each. Then on the top shelf I have my premier selection of cakes all at £1.50 each. The reporter looked at the bland looking cakes on the top shelf and, failing to see anything special about them, asked why they were more expensive than the others. 'Ah!', replied the student, 'Well you see, those are madeira cakes'.

Alan Birks – October 2018

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