

SECTOR DEVELOPMENTS...

DFE ANNOUNCES ADDITIONAL FUNDING TO SUPPORT THE DELIVERY OF T-LEVELS

The Department for Education (DfE) has confirmed base T-Level funding rates, which will range from £4,170 to £5,835 per year per student depending on the subject area. The department has also announced a further package of funding to support the introduction of T-Levels. This includes the following:

- *Funding to accommodate potential under-recruitment:* The DfE initially estimated that the first cohort of T-Level students in 2020 would be around 2,500, but then subsequently revised this down to 2,000. However, a report by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) based on interviews with around half of the 50 providers that will deliver the first wave of T-Levels suggests that they expect to recruit an average of 20 students each. If this is the case, it means that just 1,000 students would be taking the new qualifications in that year. The DfE has therefore said that it will allow up to £90,000 per provider available as a 'tolerance' against any under-delivery of predicted student numbers.
- *Funding to accommodate initial set-up costs:* The DfE will make an additional one-off payment of £30,000 per provider for each new T-level they offer in 2020, along with a payment of £20,000 per provider for providers involved in delivering a T-Level transition year for Level 2 students not quite ready to take the Level 3 T-Level. The payments are in recognition of the costs associated with such things as extra equipment, helping to design of the new qualifications and in identifying suitable work placements.
- *Funding to support mathematics and English:* Providers will receive a £750, one-off payment per student to support English and mathematics provision in T-Level programmes up to Level 2 for those students who require it. The DfE did *not* agree to calls to make the payments in each year of a T-Level programme, or to increase that rate in line with inflation, and argued that the £750 payment should, on average, be enough to pay for 70 hours of tuition in each subject in each year and that 'while some students will need additional study in English and/or mathematics for two years, some students will achieve their Level 2 qualification in these subjects within one year'.
- *18-year-olds taking T-Levels will be funded at the same rate as 16 and 17-year-old students:* This is a reversal of the 17.5% cut in funding for students aged 18. In December, it was announced that the amount of funding given to colleges, schools and sixth forms to deliver education for 16-18 year olds would be frozen for the seventh year running. It is therefore unclear if this reversal will also apply to other post-16 courses. Under current arrangements, 16 and 17-year-olds on full-time study programmes are funded at a base rate of £4,000 a year, but this funding is cut to £3,300 for students aged 18.

All of the above, along with the funding for various other T-Level funded initiatives, some of which are mentioned in the sections below, seems to suggest that the government could find extra resources for FE if it wanted to. The latest information on T-Levels and T-Level funding is available in the ESFA document 'T-Levels: Next steps for providers', which was updated on 18 June, and which can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/t-levels-next-steps-for-providers>

DFE PUBLISHES TENDER FOR PHASE 2 - T-LEVEL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The DfE has published an invitation to tender for a contract worth 'between £40 million and £82 million' to design and deliver the second phase of a professional development programme for teachers involved in delivering T-Levels. The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) was awarded the contract for the first phase of the programme, which was specifically designed to support teachers who will be delivering T-levels in 2020, but this contract will end in March 2020. The new tender says that the organisation selected will design and deliver the second phase of the programme from 2021 onwards, and will be expected to work on the project from April 2020 until July 2024. The DfE says that work on the project could start 3 months earlier in January 2020, 'to ensure a smooth transition from the ETF offer' and that it may extend the contract for another 2 years, up to July 2026, if necessary. The tender document says that the contractor must be able to 'design and deliver a programme that:

- Improves the capability of teachers to deliver T-Levels by developing their understanding of what the content, structure and aims of a T-Level qualification are.
- Raises standards of teaching, both generally and within subject-specific areas.
- Helps to ensure the industry-relevance of teachers' subject knowledge.
- Strengthens the teaching of English, mathematics and digital information technology within T-Level subject specialisms.
- Facilitates and supports greater collaboration and sharing of good practice between providers.

Contractors are required to submit their tenders to the DfE by 12 July. More information is available at:

<https://www.contractsfinder.service.gov.uk/Notice/703819b8-2311-45bf-a037-ef38e3e3b47b?p=@FQxUIRRPT0=NjJNT08=U>

DFE FUNDING TO RECRUIT 'EXPERIENCED INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS' FOR T-LEVELS

Presumably based on a misconception about the numbers of teaching staff in FE colleges who already have substantial industrial experience and skills-based expertise in the subjects they are teaching, the DfE has decided to allocate a total of £5 million to 45 providers to assist them to recruit up to 160 'experienced industry professionals' to teach on the first new T-Level courses. Some observers have speculated that, as with other staff recruitment, this might prove a bit difficult because, as was pointed out in the recent Auger Review, the most significant barrier to recruiting qualified and experienced teachers to the FE college workforce is 'simply a lack of money'. This is made worse by the fact that FE is competing directly with schools, universities and business, all of which can offer more attractive rates of pay to experienced industry professionals. (eg a full-time FE teacher in FE in England earns, on average, around £5,000 less than a secondary school teacher and approximately £13,000 less than a higher education lecturer). And just for good measure, in February this year the DfE scrapped FE teacher bursaries to help recruit new staff in shortage areas and for subject knowledge enhancement for existing staff (whilst of course retaining and enhancing similar bursaries for teachers in schools).

DFE ANNOUNCES FUNDING TO 'EXPLORE WAYS OF DEVELOPING LINKS BETWEEN FE PROVIDERS AND INDUSTRY

Perhaps based on another misconception, in this case that colleges do not already have any meaningful links with employers, the DfE has decided to provide a further £900,000 for 22 projects designed to explore ways of developing links between FE providers and industry. The additional funding for this programme, and the one in the section above, is a part of the DfE funded 'Taking Teaching Further' (TTF) initiative, which was designed jointly by the Association of Colleges (AoC) and the Education and Training Foundation (ETF). More information can be found at:

<https://www.et-foundation.co.uk/supporting/support-teacher-recruitment/taking-teaching-further/>

ONLINE TOOLS FOR PRACTITIONERS AND ORGANISATIONS TO SELF-ASSESS READINESS TO DELIVER T-LEVELS

Organisations and individuals that will be delivering T-Levels in 2020 can now access practitioner and organisational self-assessment tools to help to assess their readiness to do so. The tools are available on the ETF's 'Foundation Online Learning' website and are funded by the DfE through the ETF T-Level professional development programme mentioned above. There are two main categories of tool. These are:

- *The practitioner tool:* This focuses on assessing the professional development needs of teaching staff to enable them to effectively deliver T-Levels, along with advice on next steps and other T-Level professional development opportunities that are available.
- *The organisational tool:* This is intended to help organisations identify whether they have appropriate systems and processes in place (e.g. for workforce development, curriculum planning and employer engagement) to enable the effective delivery T-Levels. There are two main areas of focus - the first is the development needs of chief executives and other senior staff within an organisation, while the second is the development needs of department heads and/or curriculum managers.

There is no charge to use the tools, but users must be registered and logged into the 'Foundation Online Learning' website to use them. The website can be found at:

<https://www.foundationonline.org.uk/course/index.php?categoryid=30>

NFER PUBLISHES REPORT ON PROVIDERS' READINESS TO DELIVER T-LEVELS

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) has published a report entitled *T-Levels: How are providers preparing for delivery?*. This is the report referred to in the first section of the newsletter above, which identified the potential under-recruitment of T-Level students in 2020. The report's main focus is assessing on how well prepared colleges and other providers are to deliver T-Levels which, as mentioned above, was based on interviews with 25 providers that will be involved in delivering the first wave next year. The report says that these providers feel that they have been kept well informed about T-Levels and have welcomed the support they have received from the DfE, the ESFA and other government agencies. The report also says that they are confident that they have the staff expertise and capacity to deliver the first three T-Levels levels. However, providers did express a number of concerns, which include:

- The tight timescale between the T-Level qualification specifications being made available (which are not expected until February or March 2020) and the first teaching commencing (in Sept 2020). This, they say, does not allow much lead time for detailed curriculum planning and staff training.
- Practical concerns relating to the 45-day minimum industry placements. These include a lack of large employers in rural areas, competition with other work-based learning providers seeking placements for students, and challenges faced by some students in travelling to and from work placements.
- The duration and time demands of T-Level programme content may make it difficult for some post-16 students to access them, and in particular those with part-time jobs and/or caring responsibilities.

The report goes on to recommend that the DfE gives further consideration to:

- The form and content of the transition year course for those Level 2 students who need it.
- Monitoring how the endemic challenges facing the FE sector, such as inadequate funding, low staff morale, low levels of remuneration and difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified and experienced staff, will impact on the delivery of T-Level programmes.
- How to effectively facilitate the sharing of experiences and good practice with the 64 providers recently chosen by the DfE to deliver the second wave of T-Levels in 2021.
- Providing more clarity on such things as progression routes to and from T-Levels and, in particular, the requirements are for progression from T-Levels to degree and other higher-level apprenticeships.

A copy of the NFER report can be found at:

<https://www.nfer.ac.uk/t-levels-research-study-how-are-providers-preparing-for-delivery/>

RESPONSES TO DFE REVIEW SAY BTECS SHOULD BE RETAINED

Ministers have been consulting on proposals to rationalise the existing plethora of post-16 vocational qualifications by ceasing to fund those qualifications that are deemed to overlap with T-Levels, or that can't be shown to be effective in helping young people progress into further study or work. The consultation, which is part of the DfE's *Review of Post-16 Level 3 and below qualifications in England* closed on 10 June, but for those interested, a copy of the consultation document and supporting papers can be found at:

https://consult.education.gov.uk/post-16-qualifications-review-team/post-16-level-3-and-below-qualifications-review/supporting_documents/Post%2016%20level%203%20and%20below%20qualifications%20review%20%200Consultation%20Document.pdf

In general, responses to the consultation appear to show that proposals for the rationalisation of around 13,000 different publicly funded vocational qualifications are welcomed, as is the introduction of T-Levels to replace most of them. However, at the same time, concerns have been expressed about the possible abandonment of Business and Technician Education Council (BTEC) qualifications. The case made for *not* withdrawing funding from BTEC qualifications seems to coalesce around the following arguments:

- Although they may not be qualifications that the majority of politicians are likely to be familiar with, BTECs are qualifications that are generally well regarded by schools and colleges and each year are taken by around 200,000 16-19-year-olds and even more aged 19+.
- They are understood and respected by most employers. Research suggests that almost two-thirds of medium-sized businesses have hired one or more people with BTEC qualifications in the last 5 years.
- They are available at different levels and can be taken full-time or part-time, by young people looking for their first job, and by older people already in work seeking to improve their skills or to return to work. They can also be combined with other qualification as part of a young person's study programme.
- BTECs are accepted by every single university in England (other than Imperial College London) and are regarded by them as being dependable qualifications for assessing an applicant's suitability for degree level study. More than a quarter of young people going to university last year did so on the basis that their BTEC qualifications met all, or a part of, the university's entry requirements.
- The DfE has said that it wants to develop a new suite of Level 4 and 5 technical and vocational qualifications to bridge the gap between Level 3 courses and undergraduate courses at universities, and in doing so has presumably forgotten (or perhaps never knew) that BTEC Higher National qualifications are already available in more than 40 technical and vocational subjects.

T-Levels, on the other hand, are designed to be equivalent to three A-Levels, to be taken by young people aged 16-19, either full-time or in a small number of cases, as part of an apprenticeship. They are not available to older people wanting to retrain or re-enter the labour market. And while some young people are clear about the career path they wish to take from an early age, evidence suggests that the overwhelming majority of young people in the final year of their GCSEs and aged just 15 or 16 are not yet ready to make fundamental choices about which occupation they want to pursue. Although, in terms of qualification options, the government seems to want young people to make a binary choice between A-Levels and T-Levels, many consultation respondents argued by that by retaining three broad qualification routes at age 16 (the A-Level academic pathway, a career-focused BTEC pathway leaving options for both further academic study or entry into a career at age 18+, and a more specialised technical pathway based on T-Levels) would provide a better post-16 choice for young people. Amongst those bodies which have argued for the retention of BTECs are the following:

Ofqual: Ofqual said that there was a risk that a barrier to student progress may be created if alternatives to T-Levels and A-Levels are unduly restricted. Ofqual said that it was particularly concerned about the impact of this on disadvantaged learners, who may not be suited to studying either A-Levels or T-Levels. Ofqual argued that because of this alone, there will often 'be valid reasons why similar qualifications can and should exist'. A copy of Ofqual's response to the review can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofquals-response-to-governments-review-of-post-16-qualifications-at-level-3-and-below>

The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP): Like Ofqual, the AELP argued that the choice between T-levels and A-Levels may not be suitable for all young people, nor will they cover every occupational area where other qualifications such as BTECs already sit. Because of this, said the AELP, it was important that a variety of Level 3 options are available to learners, so they can select a qualification that best suits their learning needs and aspirations. The AELP response to the review can be found at:

<https://www.aelp.org.uk/resource-and-information-centre/resource-and-information-centre/submissions/submission-65-aelp-response-to-the-review-of-post-16-qualifications-at-level-3-and-below-in-england/>

The Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB): FAB said that 'taking an axe' to all vocational qualifications at Level 3 and below is a retrograde step and that young people require more choices available to them than just academic A-Levels and T-Levels 'if only to ensure there are real opportunities for social mobility'. A copy of the FAB response can be found at:

<https://awarding.org.uk/federation-of-awarding-bodies-response-to-the-department-for-education-consultation-review-of-post-16-qualifications-at-level-3-and-below-10-june-2019/>

The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) and the Sixth Form Colleges Association (SFCA): The ASCL and SFCA submitted a joint response which said that, 'Forcing students down a path of either A-Levels or T-Levels at age 16 does not give any greater guarantee of progress towards a student's intended outcome. On the contrary, our view is that this risks leading to more students dropping out of education altogether'. The joint response went on to say, 'Adopting the middle ground of an applied route that sits between academic and technical routes is, in our view, likely to result in better outcomes for the cohort at Level 3 than presenting all students with a binary choice between an academic or a technical route'. The response also said that 'Consideration must be given to the impact of these proposals on the thousands of people who have undertaken BTEC and other qualifications which could, in the future, be considered worthless, or no longer understood by employers'. The ASCL and SFCA joint response can be found at:

<https://sfcawebsite.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/document/050619-SFCA-response-to-Level-3-qualification-consultation.pdf?t=1559905925?ts=1559905925>

The Association of Colleges (AoC): Principals of AoC member colleges have already collectively warned against the scrapping of all applied general qualifications and particularly BTECs. The AoC's own response to the consultation reflects this but the content is too complex to summarise briefly. A copy can be found at:

https://www.aoc.co.uk/system/files/Review%20of%20post-16%20qualifications%20at%20Level%203%20and%20below%20in%20England%20-%20AoC%27s%20response%20June%202019_0.pdf

Employer representatives: The CBI said that the government 'should not underestimate the impact of prematurely ending funding for existing qualifications such as BTECs'. This view was supported by the findings of a poll of employers commissioned by Pearson, the BTEC examination board, and carried out by YouGov. The survey found that the majority of respondents supported retaining applied general qualifications such as BTECs, as a post-16 option alongside A-Levels and T-Levels.

SKILLS MINISTER PROPOSES NEW PRE-EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME FOR 16-24-YEAR-OLDS

Traineeships were launched by the coalition government in 2013, but in recent years they have been overshadowed politically by such things as apprenticeships, the development of T-Levels and other educational reforms. A traineeship is currently the main education and training programme for 16-24-year-olds who have achieved few, if any, qualifications on leaving school. The aim of a traineeship is to help these young people prepare for an apprenticeship, work or further study. A traineeship programme can last for up to 6 months and the content focuses on English, mathematics, information technology, preparation for work and work experience. Although numbers recruited to traineeship programmes have been falling recently, the latest DfE data reveals that around three-quarters of young people who do complete a traineeship go on to start an apprenticeship, further study or get a job within 12 months of completing. In an attempt to resurrect the programme, the DfE says that is providing £20 million through the Adult Education Budget (AEB) to help colleges and other providers to encourage more young people to take traineeships.

Some observers have therefore found it surprising that the Minister for Skills and Apprenticeships in England, Anne Milton, has announced her intention to introduce *another* pre-employment programme to help 16-25-year-olds prepare for an apprenticeship, work or further study since most, if not all, of the features of Ms Milton's proposed new initiative seem to be already covered by traineeships. It therefore unclear whether the programme will replace traineeships or will be offered in parallel with them, but Ms Milton has said that her new programme will *not* be called a 'traineeship' as this could be 'slightly misleading'. Ms Milton says that she has spoken to other ministers at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the DfE about her proposals, but it appears that she has not as yet consulted the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE). Some might regard this as being oversight of some significance, but by way of explanation, Ms Milton said that she did not want to bother staff at IfATE since they were 'busy working with employers designing apprenticeships', and that in any event, she didn't think that the proposed new programme 'should sit with them'. Nor, apparently, has Ms Milton yet discussed her proposals with her own departmental civil servants. This, she said, was because she would like to see the programme implemented without the usual consultation, review and pilot process, 'because

it would take forever'. She said that instead, she wanted 'ministers to come together and put money into a pot' to make the new programme work. Ms Milton said that she would like to see the programme up and running by January 2020, but conceded that this would depend on whether she still remained in her ministerial post in the wake of any future 're-shuffle' by the new Prime Minister.

TEACHER RETENTION IN FE WORSE THAN FOR ANY HIGH-SKILLED JOB IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

The Social Market Foundation (SMF) has produced a report which shows that more than one in five (21%) FE teachers leave the sector each year, either to take up better paid jobs outside FE or lose their jobs through redundancy caused by funding cuts. The report says that the annual FE teacher retention rate is now the worst for any high-skilled job in the public sector and that 'This is at least in part a consequence of policymakers' wider neglect of the FE sector'. The report goes on to say, 'the exodus of talent from the sector is a testament to this neglect'. This mirrors one of the findings of the Auger Review, which says that 'The recruitment of high-quality teachers and leaders is made challenging by direct competition from schools, universities and business, all of which typically offer more attractive rates of pay for comparable roles'. The SMF report also says that 'politicians have ignored the crucial role that FE plays in teaching and training millions of the most disadvantaged people in Britain' and points out that of the 2.2 million people aged 19 and over studying in FE institutions, more than half are from the lowest income households and that almost a third of *all* FE students (683,000) are from the most deprived 20% of the population.

In addition, the SMF report draws attention to the numbers of leaders and managers leaving the FE sector. The report says that 'Colleges need strong leaders who can deliver opportunity for learners and skills for their local economies'. To stem the loss of potential future leaders, the report recommends that the DfE should increase funding for the training and development of FE staff. This would include providing FE teachers with a clearer path to leadership roles, the development of a formal qualification similar to the National Professional Qualification for Headship in Schools, and the establishment an independent FE staff college, similar to the National College for Teaching and Leadership. (Anyone old enough to remember Coombe Lodge?). More information is available at:

<http://www.smf.co.uk/neglected-further-education-faces-exodus-of-talent-think-tank-warns/>

AUGUST 18 - MARCH 19 APPRENTICESHIP STARTS INCREASE BY 9% ON THE PREVIOUS YEAR

The latest DfE data shows that apprenticeship starts for the period August 2018 to March 2019 were up by 9% on the same period in 2017/18, but were still 21% down on the same period in 2016/17 (the year before the apprenticeship levy reforms were introduced). The data shows that between August 2018 and March 2019 there were 285,000 apprenticeship starts compared with 261,200 starts in the same period in 2017/18, and 362,400 in the same period in 2016/17. The data also shows that the number of people starting apprenticeships on the new apprenticeship standards has increased by 66% compared with the same period last year. The latest apprenticeship data can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/apprenticeship-and-levy-statistics-may-2019>

AUGER REVIEW RECOMMENDATION ON INSPECTION ARRANGEMENTS IS THE FIRST TO BE IGNORED BY THE DFE

Ofsted's remit for inspecting apprenticeships currently ends at Level 5, but the Auger Review recommended that this remit should be extended to cover all apprenticeships, including those at Level 6 and above. This, says Auger, would help to avoid 'wasteful duplication of resources' and 'ensure consistency in standards and in-house expertise'. However, after finding that Level 6 and 7 apprenticeships *without* a prescribed HE qualification (e.g. a degree), are being offered without any checks whatsoever on their quality, the DfE has given the responsibility for inspecting this type of provision to the Office for Students (OfS). These providers are not required to be entered on the OfS register and consequently, the OfS appears to be unclear on how it will carry out the required inspection. There are only a small number of higher-level apprenticeships that do not have a prescribed HE qualification aim, but the decision to give the responsibility for assessing the quality of these providers to the OfS, rather than Ofsted, is significant because it is the first example of a failure by the DfE to implement an Auger review recommendation. This

has led some to fear that, in the run up to the forthcoming Spending Review and given the resignation of Mrs May (who initiated the review), other Auger recommendations may not be implemented either.

THE OFS APPROACH TO ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF HIGHER-LEVEL APPRENTICESHIPS

For information, the approach taken by the OfS to regulating and assessing the quality of higher-level apprenticeships at Level 6 and above is very different to the approach taken by Ofsted when inspecting provision at Level 5 and below. The OfS says that, like Ofsted, it 'employs a risk-based approach to quality assurance'. But, says the OfS, 'Providers accepted for entry on to the OfS register will already have met a high threshold for quality and standards'. Therefore, says the OfS, inspection will be restricted to monitoring higher-level apprenticeship providers 'on an ongoing basis to ensure that quality is maintained'. Even then, the OfS contracts out much of this to the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), which conducts reviews of the quality of provision in HE institutions (including higher-level apprenticeships) on its behalf. But these are not inspections of the type Ofsted conducts. For example, a considerable notice period is given by the QAA prior to a visit, no teaching observations are carried out, and no inspection reports with grades are published. This has led some to argue that the HE tradition of (largely) self-regulation of quality standards appears to have now been extended to degree and other higher-level apprenticeships.

MORE FE COLLEGES RECEIVE HE TEACHING EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK (TEF) AWARDS

A number of FE colleges in England already have a TEF award for the quality of their HE provision, and this year a further 25 FE colleges have received one. Universities and FE colleges offering HE programmes are given a gold, silver or bronze rating or, if there is not enough data for a full assessment, a provisional rating. The category of the teaching award given is evidence based and no actual observation of teaching takes place. Of the 25 FE colleges given a TEF grade this year, 2 received a gold award, 8 received a silver award, 12 received a bronze and 3 received provisional awards, with the FE sector as a whole performing proportionately better than the HE sector.

SECOND NATIONAL COLLEGE REQUIRES EXCEPTIONAL DfE FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The National College for Creative Industries (NCCI), which opened in 2016, has followed the National College for High Speed Rail (NCHSR) to become the second National College to require additional DfE funding to enable its auditors to sign off its accounts as a going concern. The NCCI had a target to recruit 1,000 learners by 2021, but had only recruited 167 learners by the end of the last year academic year. The shortfall in recruitment has resulted in the college's expenditure being almost 50% higher than its income. This, in turn, resulted in the college generating an operating deficit of more than £612,000 and being given an 'inadequate' financial health rating. To enable its accounts to be signed off, the NCCI received £600,000 in exceptional support from the DfE. This was in addition to a £1.25 million working capital loan, £745,000 of which was drawn down in 2017/18, with the remaining £505,000 being drawn down in 2018/19. The DfE has also re-profiled the college's loans and deferred the start date for the loan repayments from this March to March 2023. However, the continuation of funding support after next month (July) is under review and the college is looking for potential partners as part of a structure and prospects appraisal (SPA) exercise. To add to its problems, NCCI's student achievement rates for 2017/18 were just 50%, although a college spokesperson claims that the achievement rate for 2018/19 is currently 92%.

Last November, amid growing concerns about the progress of the National Colleges project, the DfE published a tender inviting organisations to bid for a contract to evaluate the performance of National Colleges and to identify issues that may have adversely affected their development. A copy of the tender document, which contains the terms of reference for the evaluation (which started in January and is expected to finish later this month) is available at:

<https://www.contractsfinder.service.gov.uk/Notice/4a7ec27c-87ca-45b0-a430-c3f27d57be57?p=@UFQxUIRRPT0=NjJNT08=>

UNISON CALLS FOR TRAINING FOR STAFF IN HANDLING WEAPON-RELATED INCIDENTS

A recent UNISON survey of 845 support staff in FE and sixth form colleges carried out between March and April this year, including canteen workers, learning support assistants, technicians and librarians, has revealed that several staff and students have suffered serious injuries as a result of offensive weapons being brought into colleges. Staff reported that knives, machetes, hammers, metal bars and even a gun were amongst the items that have been used in student-on-student assaults, gang attacks or incidents of violence against staff. The vast majority of respondents (90%) said they had received no training on how to deal with teenagers who bring weapons into college and almost a quarter (23%) said that they felt weapon-related crime is a growing problem where they work. Serious incidents reported include:

- Gang members armed with hammers chasing a 17-year-old student through a college. A male and female support worker had to act as human shields between the teenager and his assailants until college security and the police arrived.
- A student dying from fatal chest wounds after being stabbed outside college.
- Armed police being called after a student brought a gun onto campus.

Some of the staff who responded said that they had themselves been injured by a weapon that had been brought into college, while many others knew colleagues who had been harmed in such incidents. (Knife crime in England and Wales in 2017/18 reached its highest level in 8 years, with over 40,000 offences involving a knife or sharp blade being reported). More information on the Unison survey is available at:

<https://www.unison.org.uk/news/2019/06/college-staff-need-training-handling-weapon-related-incidents/>

ESFA ANNOUNCES DETAILS OF ESF CONTRACTS AWARDED FOR APRIL 2019 - JULY 2021

The UK's gross annual contribution to the EU central budget is around £19 billion. Against this, the UK receives a rebate of around £5 billion which reduces the gross contribution to £14 billion. The UK then gets around £5 billion of the remainder back through cash received through bids, grants and direct allocations of funding from EU agencies such as the European Social Fund (ESF) and European Regional Development Agency (ERDF). This reduces the UK's annual net contribution to the central EU budget to around £9 billion. The UK is required to bid for ESF funding for skills development. Bids must meet EU criteria which, in the case of skills development, includes such things as:

- Improving access to employment for 'inactive' people, including the long-term unemployed and people 'far from the labour market', through local employment initiatives and support for labour mobility.
- Helping to achieve the sustainable integration of young people (aged 16-24) into the labour market.
- Promoting 'active inclusion'.
- Providing 'equal access to lifelong learning for all age groups in formal and informal settings to upgrade their knowledge, skills and competencies for the workforce, by promoting flexible pathways including careers guidance and validation of acquired competencies'.

Any ESF funding awarded usually needs to be match-funded (typically around 50% of the cost) by the UK government department, agency or other UK organisation that sponsors the bid. The process of providing matched funding is called 'co-financing'. In the case of promoting skills development in England, it is the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) that is the co-financing organisation. In the case of funds received for EU projects in England that are co-financed by the ESFA, the agency invites bids from providers to deliver the projects on its behalf. However, the ESFA retains responsibility for ensuring that outcomes specified in any bids made are achieved. ESF projects are audited and funds can be 'clawed back' by the EU if these outcomes are *not* achieved. With reference to the latest round of ESF allocations covering the period from 1 April 2019 to 31 July 2021, the ESFA has now announced the names of the 47 providers in 38 different Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) areas, that have been awarded contracts to deliver ESF projects collectively worth a total of £315 million on the ESFA's behalf. The ESFA says that contracts were awarded after 'a stringent procurement process, which adhered to EU rules for open, fair and competitive tendering, and which was conducted in accordance with the Public Contract Regulations 2015'. The ESFA says that the projects will focus on:

- Helping develop the skills of young people and adults.
- Enhancing existing workforce skills.
- Helping young people secure employment or progress to further education and training.
- Helping those who find it hard to engage in education and training and/or who are in areas with higher rates of youth unemployment.

More information is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/esf-2014-to-2020-programme-list-of-contracts>

DFE EXTENDS SUPPORT FOR EU STUDENTS FOR ANOTHER YEAR.

Concerns have been expressed that uncertainty over fees and loan support for students from elsewhere in the EU caused by Brexit could cause a drop in EU student recruitment and a loss of income to the universities. In response, the DfE has confirmed that EU students applying to universities in England in 2019 and 2020 will *not* be treated as overseas students and that they *will* continue to pay the same fees and be eligible to access student loans and other student support for the entire duration of their course as if they were home students. The DfE announcement follows a similar one made by the Scottish Government of 'continuing status' for EU students, which in this case means paying no tuition fees. The Russell Group of universities claims that EU students are worth around £4 billion to the UK economy each year in tuition fees (assuming that loans are eventually repaid) and in local spending on accommodation etc. Around 37,000 EU students are currently in the process of applying for places on degrees courses at English universities to start in 2019

UNIVERSITIES UK EXPRESSES CONCERNS AT AUGER REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS ON HE FEES AND FUNDING

Responding to the publication of the Auger Review, Universities UK (UUK) has called on the government to carefully consider the potential consequences of the review recommendations 'for students and our world-class higher education sector'. UUK said that it 'welcomes proposals to encourage more people to undertake post-18 qualifications' and that the review recommendations 'include some positive measures that UUK has long been making a case for', such as:

- A focus on encouraging more flexible learning to ensure the most diverse range of learners can benefit from higher and further education
- Replacing maintenance loans with grants for those students most in need.
- Capping the rate of interest students pay on their loans.

However, UUK said that it had a number of serious concerns about the recommendation. These include:

- If university fees were to be cut to £7,500, 'there is a considerable risk that the government will not make up the funding gap in full (around £1.8 billion a year) through increased teaching grant funding, which would be a bad deal for students'.
- Whether any replacement funding provided by the government to cover income lost to universities as a result of cuts in tuition fees will be allocated in a way that allows universities to continue offering diversity and choice, or whether it will come with strings attached.
- Potential restrictions on access and choice based on narrow conceptions of value.
- The removal of loan funding for students on foundation years, which UUK says is currently an important route for students from challenging or deprived backgrounds to make the step into HE.
- The knock-on impact of changes for universities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- The inevitable confusion these proposals will cause for students, their families, schools and the HE sector about what happens next and when.

More on the UUK response to the Auger Review is available at:

<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/news/Pages/Top-up-guarantee-needed-from-government-if-fees-are-cut,-warns-UUK.aspx>

MOST UNIVERSITY VICE-CHANCELLORS STILL ATTEND THEIR OWN REMUNERATION COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Despite a number of damaging pay and perks scandals and calls to improve transparency around how vice-chancellors are remunerated, in 2017/18 only 26 universities did *not* allow their vice-chancellor to attend committee meetings at which their remuneration was determined. In addition, two-thirds of universities still refuse to share the minutes of their remuneration committee meetings. These findings were obtained via a Freedom of Information (FoI) request made by the University and College Union (UCU), which was sent to 158 universities, which 21 universities refused to respond to. Of the 137 universities that did respond, the vice-chancellor was allowed to attend meetings at 109 of them and was a full member of the committee at 9 of them. Last November, a House of Commons Education Committee report on value for money in HE said the current system of self-regulation for senior management pay was 'totally unacceptable' and that vice-chancellors should never be allowed to sit on their own remuneration committees. The report said that this should be enforced by the OfS, which UCU has now labelled a 'paper tiger' for refusing to deal with the continuing problems surrounding senior pay and perks in universities.

NEW REPORT HIGHLIGHTS GAP IN DEGREE ATTAINMENT BETWEEN WHITE & BAME STUDENTS

The National Union of Students (NUS) and UUK have published a joint report entitled '*Closing the gap*', which deals with the disparity in levels of degree attainment between black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students at UK universities, and their white peers. The report draws on Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data which shows that in 2016/17, around a quarter (24%) of UK domiciled full-time undergraduates at UK universities were BAME (which is a higher proportion than in the population as a whole). However, although there was an increase of more than 50% in the number of BAME full-time undergraduates in the UK in the period between 2006/7 and 2016/17, the data shows that in 2017 only 71% of Asian students and just 57% of black students were awarded a first or an upper second honours degree, compared to 81% of white students. Additional data shows that the level of qualification these students achieved *before* attending university did not adequately explain the differences in the level of degree awarded to different ethnic groups. Universities insist that they have *not* lowered entry standards to attract more BAME students and the report does acknowledge that many universities have worked hard to reduce the gap. But the report also says that much more needs to be done to reduce the disparity and recommends ways that universities can address this. These include:

- Providing strong leadership. University leaders should lead by example in demonstrating a commitment to eliminating the BAME attainment gap (e.g. by vice-chancellors signing up to an online pledge to work with students on this).
- Developing racially diverse and inclusive environments, and ensuring that BAME students have a good sense of belonging.
- Gathering and analysing detailed data on the attainment gap.
- Sharing evidence of what works and what does not.

The Office for Students (OfS) has now set a target for the UK HE sector to eliminate the gap in degree outcomes by 2024/25. A copy of the report can be found at:

<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2019/bame-student-attainment-uk-universities-closing-the-gap.pdf>

OXFORD UNIVERSITY ADMISSION FIGURES SHOW INCREASE IN PLACES FOR BAME STUDENTS

Applications for places at Oxford university from BAME students are up by around 50% over the last four years and the 2018 intake at the university saw a record 18.3% of all undergraduate places taken by UK domiciled BAME students. However, amongst this intake, only 2.6% were from a black African and Caribbean heritage. Despite the numbers of black students increasing overall, only one UK black student was admitted for geography, two for physics and none for biological sciences, and in 12 of Oxford's colleges, fewer than five black students had been recruited to any course. Admissions data also shows that the proportion of places going to overseas students continues to increase. As an example of the scale of

this, in 2018 more places at the university had been taken by students from Singapore than from the whole of the north-east of England. More information is available at:

<https://www.ox.ac.uk/about/facts-and-figures/admissions-statistics?wssl=1>

WEAK COLLEGE INFORMATION SYSTEMS SECURITY ADDS TO THE GROWING RISK OF EDUCATION CYBER FRAUD

Blacked-out images of two GCE A-Level mathematics questions were recently posted on the internet, along with an offer to provide a copy the whole paper for £70. This is not a new phenomenon, with similar leaks having also happened in each of the last two years. Nor is the ability to purchase fake, but very credible, certificates, diplomas and degrees online, or to purchase essay, assignment and dissertation writing services online. But researchers from the internet security firm Kaspersky, say that this growing education fraud industry has now been added to by people, who for a price, will hack college and university information systems and change a student's attendance records and grades. Kaspersky says that a single online search carried out by researchers on 12 June revealed a number of suppliers that offered grade hacking services, along with easy-to-follow order forms enabling a 'customer' to select the subject, level of degree, diploma or certificate and issuing institution of their choice, and how they wanted their grades and/or other records to be changed. The researchers also tested some of the most widely used college and university information systems and found that many relied on user names and passwords to authenticate access for teachers, students and even parents, that were worryingly easy to hack. Meanwhile, De Montfort University and Northumbria University have been recognised by the National Cyber Security Centre and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council as Academic Centres of Excellence in Cyber Security Research. They join a list of 17 other institutions across the UK which are recognised as producing cutting edge research in cyber security.

<https://www.itsecurityguru.org/2019/06/21/grade-hacking-services-and-fake-diplomas-easily-available-online-during-exam-season/>

STUDENT WINS PAY-OUT FOR EXAGGERATED BENEFITS OF A 'MICKEY MOUSE DEGREE'

A graduate from Anglia Ruskin University sued the university for what she described as the 'exaggerated prospects' falsely given by the university in respect of what she described as a 'Mickey Mouse degree'. Ms Wong graduated in 2013 with a first-class honours degree in International Business Strategy, but subsequently claimed that the university had exaggerated the prospects of the degree providing her with a lucrative career in international business and sued them for false advertising. The County Court of Central London initially ruled in the university's favour and ordered Ms Wong to pay £13,700 towards the university's legal costs. But when Ms Wong appealed, the university's insurers wrote to her, apparently offering her £60,000 as an out-of-court settlement against her claim for damages and legal costs. A spokesperson for the Anglia Ruskin University said the settlement with Ms Wong was reached without the university's agreement and that the insurers had 'acted negligently and against the university's interests'.

REPORT SAYS PARENTAL CHOICE IS MAIN DRIVER FOR SOCIAL, ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS SEGREGATION IN SCHOOLS

A new Nuffield Report produced by researchers from the University of Bristol and Cardiff University has revealed that parental choice of school has been the main factor behind much higher levels of segregation among school children from different socio-economic, ethnic and religious backgrounds than was previously the case. The report says that contrary to encouraging integration and equal opportunity, parental choice is leading to schools becoming more socially homogenous than ever before. The report concluded that policymakers need to carefully consider the effects of parental choice on pupil segregation, and recommended that school admissions should be coordinated at local authority level rather than being just at the discretion of parents and individual schools. (And good luck with that, one observer was reported to have said). A copy of the report can be found at:

<https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/sites/default/files/files/Wilson%20and%20Bridge%20report%20April%202019.pdf>

AND FINALLY...

Students in a BTEC Media Studies class at a local FE college were working on a verbal history project. Part of the project involved filming old people from the neighbourhood being interviewed about their experiences when they were children. One old chap, who said that he would be 89 next birthday, was asked to talk about his experiences of shopping when he was a child, and to give the students an idea of how different it was then compared to what it is like today. He thought about this, looked up at the ceiling for a bit, and then said, 'Well, when I was a boy, my mother would send me down to the corner shop with 5 shillings, which is just 25p in today's money, and I'd come back with 2 loaves, 3 pints of milk, 6 eggs, a big hunk of cheese, a box of tea, 4 bottles of beer and 10 Woodbines, and I'd still have most of the money she gave me left. You wouldn't be able to do that these days. Too many bloody security cameras!'

Alan Birks – JUNE 2019

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