



## Blackburn College gets hammered

See page 4

# Government plan an FE Guild

**FE Week Exclusive**

**Warwick Mansell**

**@WarwickMansell**

## Leaked report proposes new body responsible for professional standards

The Government is poised to set up a new professional body for further education, a document leaked to *FE Week* reveals.

The Further Education Guild would act as a “focal point” for ministerial efforts to promote professionalism in the sector, including taking on aspects of the regulation of lecturers through setting professional standards and codes of behaviour.

The Guild would also develop qualifications and support and promote continuing professional development (CPD).

The Guild and an associated proposal to develop a new “Chartered Community College” grade for institutions appear to be part of Government moves to a new professional landscape for FE in which staff will no longer be required to be qualified teachers.

The Guild plan is set out in a paper presented last week to the Further Education and Skills Ministerial Advisory Panel at a meeting chaired by the FE minister John Hayes. The panel makes recommendations to the Government.

The document is being seen as a response to Lord Lingfield’s review of professionalism in the sector, which produced an interim report in

April recommending the scrapping of compulsory registration with the Institute for Learning and an end to the requirement for lecturers to be qualified teachers.

Sources say it is an attempt to offer something in response to criticism of the deregulation move in Lingfield.

*FE Week* has now also learned that Lord Lingfield’s final report, initially scheduled for publication this month, has been put back until early autumn.

The document, “Developing an FE Guild” was written by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) civil servant Jonathan Yewdall and presented to a meeting of the panel, which includes representatives from stakeholder bodies across FE, on Tuesday last week (10th July).

It says: “Reflecting current thinking about modern guilds, key functions and features of an FE Guild are likely to include:

“Acting as an overarching body with end to end responsibility for professionalism and vocational education across the sector, including to own professional standards and codes of behaviour for members; develop appropriate qualifications for

people working in the sector through which people can progress; support individual, subject specific and corporate CPD; [and] support employer recognition of professionalism.”

The Guild would offer institutional and individual membership, says the paper, both of which would be on a voluntary basis.

However, individuals and colleges would be given incentives to join, in that corporate membership of the Guild would be a key criterion for an institution qualifying as a “Chartered Community College” (see page 2).

Individuals would have an incentive to join, too, it says, as the training courses the Guild provided would be linked to higher level qualifications.

The document, which says the Guild would provide a “single, collective focus for raising standards of professionalism and being a custodian of excellence”, would be an “employer-led partnership drawing in employee representative organisations and sector bodies concerned with workforce development”.

The paper also raises questions as to whether the Guild would have any role in lecturers’ pay and conditions and whether it would have any role

to play in handling unprofessional conduct complaints by individuals and institutions.

The Hospitality Guild, which was set up last year for the hotel and catering sector with funding from the Government’s £34 million Growth and Innovation Fund, is being seen as a model for the FE version.

The document does not represent finalised Government policy but sources at the meeting said there was no disagreement voiced among attendees. One source said: “There was widespread consensus that it would be worth pursuing both options, and this is something that is being taken forward. It’s very much John Hayes’s baby.”

Another source said, however, that the document raised questions, such as how a Guild would co-exist with current organisations like the Learning and Skills Improvement Service.

Full details are still to be finalised but an announcement is expected in the autumn, possibly at the annual conference of the Association of Colleges in November.

Participants in the meeting did not want to comment on the record.

BIS was also keeping tight-lipped about the proposals. “We don’t comment on leaks,” said a spokeswoman.

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# Chartered Community College Status planned

## FE Week Exclusive

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Colleges and other training providers could be given the chance to gain “chartered” status as a mark of quality, *FE Week* has learned.

A new “chartered community college” grade would be introduced, with institutions assessed against a range of criteria possibly including the levels of qualifications of their staff, learner feedback and community involvement.

The plans are also being billed as helping immigration officials in their crackdown on “bogus” colleges.

The move is set out in a paper, leaked to *FE Week*, which was presented to the Further Education and Skills Ministerial Advisory Panel last week.

The document, written by Department for Business, Innovation and Skills civil servant Valerie Carpenter, says the introduction of “Chartered Community College Status” would aim to enhance the reputation of the sector, promote quality and improve the training of the workforce.

It would also have the aim of helping “the border agency to be able to recognise legitimate colleges and training providers,” says the document.

Chartered Community College status would apply to colleges, with an equivalent status available for non-college training providers.

The paper says that many providers would meet the criteria for the status “almost immediately”, but that “others would have further work to do to attain it”. “Experts from the FE sector” would sit on panels to assess bids.

Suggested criteria – included in the docu-

ment to “stimulate debate” – include:

- “quality indicators”, including qualification levels in the workforce
- “learner-centred indicators”: student involvement in running the college, excellent customer feedback
- “employer-centred indicators”, such as, again, customer feedback or clarity over fees charged
- “community-centred indicators”: community engagement.
- “open data”

The paper suggests the status should be voluntary, but that there might need to be “incentives”, such as “further freedoms and flexibilities” – to drive initial take-up.

Community colleges exist in the United States and there was speculation this week that this had inspired the term.

Jim Crawley, chair of the post-16 committee of the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers, said: “I have been to community colleges in the States and they are very close to their communities and seem to have a slightly higher status than FE colleges here.

“Chartered Community College status could be a hallmark of quality. A lot of our colleges do some great work, which never seems to get the recognition that it should. So maybe Chartered Community College status could help.

“On the other hand, it could be that all the existing models of good practice that already exist in the sector could be ignored if some new status comes out instead.”

The Chartered Community College idea, which was put forward at the meeting chaired by the FE minister John Hayes, is being considered alongside the establishment of a Further Education Guild (see front page).

Both could become Government policy in the autumn.

## FE Week news in brief

### DfE makes math error

The Education Funding Agency (EFA) have confirmed that the Department for Education (DfE) published an ‘error’ in the new 16-19 formula.

The EFA said: “The diagram of the formula is not completely accurate and should include brackets – but the diagram is only intended to be for illustrative purposes, rather than the final specification for the funding methodology. The error has already been noted, and will be amended in future releases of the document and other information.”

The formula, without the required brackets, was published in the DfE’s *Funding full participation and study programmes for young people* report

### Revised success rate tables delayed further

Revised versions of the 2010/11 Education and Training National Success Rate Tables (NSRT) have been delayed until August, according to the Data Service.

Widespread errors were found in the original NSRT, published on May 24, forcing the Data Service to take down and investigate the data.

A spokesperson for the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) then told *FE Week* they expected the amended versions to be published by the middle of June.

Delegates at the Lsect College Data Conference on 28 June were then told by the Data Service that the revisions would be published in mid-July.

However, the revised NSRTs are still unavailable.

The Data Service website now states: “Our investigation into this issue has determined that there is an error and we have therefore removed the reports temporarily.

“The revised reports, with details on the revision, are expected to be available in August 2012.”

# School leavers choose college over staying on at sixth form

Nick Summers

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More 16 year-olds choose further education over staying on at a school sixth form in 2009/10, according to new data published by the Department for Education.

The statistical first release, published earlier this week, is the first time the Department has revealed the percentage of students progressing to further learning in a school, FE or sixth form college, apprenticeship or HE institution.

The data shows that of 569,115 students, 37 per cent progressed onto FE provision, including general FE colleges – while 36 per cent studied at a school sixth form.

A further 12 per cent progressed to a sixth form college and 4 per cent enrolled as an apprenticeship.

The data also highlights the destination measures for learners in each local authority. The Department said they hope the new

data will encourage schools and colleges to support and prepare their students for further learning which offers “good long term prospects”.

Schools Minister Lord Hill said: “We are opening up access to this new data so people can see how different schools and colleges, and local authorities, perform.

“It gives parents greater information on which to base decisions.”

Six per cent of young people are not represented in the data either because they are in a job, on a gap year or not in employment, education or training (NEET).

The Department warned that the new data could still contain some errors.

“This is the first publication on ‘education destination measures’ and is classified as experimental statistics as the data are still being evaluated and remain subject to

further testing in terms of their reliability and ability to meet customer needs,” the DfE website said.

The statistical first release also showed how many people went on to further learning after taking an A-level equivalent qualification.

It said 64 per cent of young people had studied for at least two terms the following year, with 8 per cent learning at an FE college, 1 per cent at a sixth form college and 3 per cent at an independent FE provider.

More than half were studying at a higher education institution.

Lord Hill added: “It is interesting to see how well some local authorities in more deprived areas, and some schools and colleges in those authorities, do in terms of students going to our best universities, compared to those in other parts of the country.”

# Concessions for 24+ Advanced Learning Loans

**Shane Mann**

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John Hayes, Minister of State for FE, Skills & Lifelong Learning, has announced that the government will introduce a series of support measures for those taking out 24+ Advanced Learning Loans (24+ ALL).

In a written ministerial statement Hayes said, "This is the first time that loans have been available in Further Education, and we want to ensure that appropriate safeguards for learners are in place. I can therefore confirm that we will put in place an extensive and substantial range of support measures alongside the introduction of loans."

The support measures announced included:

- An offer to individuals taking Access to Higher Education courses that on completion of their Higher Education programme, the Student Loans Company will write off the amount outstanding on the loan for their Access course.

- A £50 million bursary fund over two years, disbursed by colleges and training organisations. This bursary is intended to help vulnerable learners such as those with learning difficulties or disabilities, parents who need help with childcare, and ex-military personnel. The level of the bursary fund will be kept

under review.

- Additional information, advice and guidance for adults who are uncertain about loans, provided by the National Careers Service, including a targeted face to face session – a "learning health check" – with a careers adviser for older adults who research published by BIS in May suggest are less likely to respond positively to the idea of taking out a loan.

Commenting on the government's announcement, Shadow Minister for Further Education, Gordon Marsden MP said: "Alongside the further education sector, Labour has been raising concerns on the government's plan for FE loans for months.

"While I welcome these concessions, real fears remain over the impact FE loans could have on the sector. Ministers' own research found that just 1 in 10 learners would still definitely continue their courses if loans were introduced and BIS's impact assessment predicting up to 150,000 could drop out of adult learning altogether – and the way these changes are being brought in without any real parliamentary scrutiny.

The concessions have been welcomed by some who have campaigned and lobbied for changes to 24+ ALL.

David Hughes, Chief Executive of NIACE, said, "NIACE is relieved that Ministers and officials now recognise, publicly, that the

loans policy involves real risks. The Minister listened carefully to our concerns and discussed possible solutions with us. From that the Government has come up with a welcome range of mitigating actions and NIACE will work closely with Government to ensure that any unexpected and unfair outcomes are minimised.

"We will continue to monitor how this works with the hope that our remaining concerns do not materialise. Where they do I am confident that the Minister will want to discuss further actions to ensure that this policy is a fair one in practice. We need to do everything we can to make sure that learners do not miss out on the opportunity to participate in learning and benefit from it."

UCU general secretary, Sally Hunt, said: "This is a welcome step by the government and I am pleased that ministers have listened to UCU and other voices in the sector. However, we remained concerned that despite these new measures thousands of learners will still miss out on a second chance at education."

Graham Hoyle, chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, added that he hoped there would further announcements to come regarding VAT on 24+ ALL for independent providers.

"There is a concern that the big growth over the last two years in Advanced and Higher

Apprenticeships for adults over 24 might cease and actually go into reverse. Adding to this concern would be any levying of VAT on loans in relation to independent provider provision as its independent providers who deliver the great majority of these apprenticeships. As the government is championing a growth in Higher Apprenticeships, I hope that early confirmation that VAT will not be levied will be forthcoming from ministers."

However Jon Richards, UNISON national secretary for education & children's services, argued that whilst changes are welcomed, the changes are being made to something that should not have been introduced. Richards said: "of course any measure that mitigates the impact of these unwelcome loans on the most vulnerable in our society should be commended, but these loans should not be introduced in the first place.

"These loans will force adult learners out of the system, and deny them the opportunity to develop much needed skills for the workplace, skills that, as unemployment continues to rise, are more important than ever before.

"These are grim times, particularly for young people, and if the government does not do more to prevent a lost generation, then the outlook for young people, destined to end up as just another number in unemployment figures, is bleak indeed."

## Newcastle College loses 'outstanding' grade after Ofsted allowed to return

**Nick Summers**

@SummersNicholas

Inspectors were asked to leave Newcastle College after staff complained of "troubling incidents" during an inspection.

Ofsted were assessing NCG (formerly Newcastle College Group) in May when the inspection was cut short.

However, inspectors were given permission to return to the college and complete the assessment several weeks later.

An email seen by *FE Week* and sent to college staff by Dame Jackie Fisher, chief executive of NCG, said: "Unfortunately the inspection came to an untimely end as a result of some troubling incidents.

"However, we finally agreed to allow the inspectors to return and the on-site inspection of NCG has now been concluded."

A spokesperson for NCG told *FE Week* in June they "would not normally comment on any inspection process."

When asked if inspectors were escorted off the college premises during the initial dispute, an NCG spokesperson said "it didn't happen" and was "absolutely not the case".

Newcastle College was judged to be "outstanding" by Ofsted in every area of its last inspection report, published in July 2008.

It is thought that the new report, due to be

published later this month, will downgrade the college from "outstanding" to "good".

NCG will be submitting an appeal to Ofsted to try and improve some of the report's findings.

The internal email adds: "Many of you are aware that the Ofsted inspection was not entirely trouble-free," the email sent to college staff by Dame Jackie Fisher said. We are planning to pursue with Ofsted some outstanding matters which may improve the grade profile. However, based on Ofsted's track record in listening to provider complaints, this must be viewed as unlikely, regardless of how strong our case is." A spokesperson for Ofsted said they were unable to comment on the inspection or individual complaints.

A neighbouring college has also appealed against Ofsted because of "inconsistencies" in the way standards were applied during an inspection carried out weeks before.

Richard Thorold, principal of Gateshead College told *FE Week*: "It appears the overall judgement is, in the main, based on historical data." He added that the inspectors appeared reluctant to apply a fair judgement to the in-year data. This is, in my mind, where the inconsistencies are in the way the standards are being applied across inspections."

Stafford College have also submitted an appeal because of "crucial factual errors".



## New studio schools approved

Michael Gove, the secretary of state for education, has approved the opening of a further 15 Studio Schools

The new schools are due to open in 2013 and 2014 and the Department for Education (DfE) say by September 2013 they expect 30 Studio Schools to be open.

In a statement the DfE said: "Studio Schools are set up with the backing of employers, and are a key part of the Government's drive to ensure the education system gives school leavers the skills that business needs to grow and prosper.

"They offer academic and vocational qualifications but teach them in a practical way. Study is combined with work placements with local and national employers involved in the school.

"Along with University Technical Col-

leges, Studio Schools will increase choice for parents and pupils in communities across the country, help raise standards in vocational education and ensure young people have the skills that employers demand."

The Southampton Studio School was one of the 15 approved, and was proposed by Southampton City College, and "will specialise in Marine and Cruise industries, a major local employer. The school will offer students the opportunity to follow a range of pathways including apprenticeships and HE targeted at local skills gaps via a project based curriculum and work placements developed with the involvement of employers and other local partners, including Business Solent, Meacher's Global Logistics, Royal Yachting Association and Southampton University Hospital NHS Trust."



# Changes to college high grade tables a ‘mystery’

**Holly Wellham**  
@HollyWellham

Unexplained changes to college data tables on what classifies as a ‘high grade’ has baffled colleges, who have seen their high grades drop “dramatically”.

The Association of Colleges (AoC) brought the problem to the attention of their members in a briefing leaked to *FE Week*. The briefing said that “changes seem to have been made to the definitions of high grades in learner responsive performance reports” managed by The Information Authority and that the impact on colleges was “significant”, in some cases “halving” their high grade profile.

Joy Mercer, the AoC’s director of policy, said: “It is a mystery to us as to who changed the definition of high grades in college data tables. AoC has asked The Information Authority to investigate.”

The organisation believes that high grades for GCSEs are now defined as A\* to B rather

than A\* to C. National Diploma Level 3 qualifications (including the Sub Diploma and Extended Diploma) “now seem to need at least one distinction” in their grade to count as a high grade. “Three merits used to count as high grades but don’t seem to anymore,” the briefing added.

Ms Mercer added: “Colleges are always trying to improve the amounts of students who achieve high grades and this feeds into their own data analysis and improvement agenda. Colleges were confused as to why their high grades had dropped dramatically and also whether this would affect Ofsted inspections and performance tables.

“We have been reassured by both that they will not be using any new definition as it had not been agreed.

“It is also unclear which authorities and departments will be using this new definition and which will not. This could lead to a confusing time in colleges as they try to aggregate their own information and cross reference it with centralised data sets.”

## FE Week campus round-up



One of the world’s strongest men has made the trip to Blackburn College to help knock down its seven storey Feilden Street building.

Mark Felix, a strongman competitor and regular entrant to the World’s Strongest Man competition, has joined the staff from the college for the last phase of the building’s demolition.

It is estimated to take around eight weeks, and will make way for a future development zone to extend the campus.

Phil Watson CBE, the vice chair of governors said: “The Feilden Street building has

given both the town and the college around 50 years of service and I’m sure holds lots of memories for those who have worked and studied in it.

“Its demolition is one of the final parts of the college’s master plan to create a world-class campus, which started with the completion of the St Paul’s Centre in 2007, followed by the building the University Centre in 2009 and the Beacon Centre last year and will be furthered enhanced by the creation of specialist STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) building next year.”

## FE Week event

# FE Weekend asks ‘where next for apprenticeships?’

**Natalie Tremlett**  
@NatalieTremlett

The future of apprenticeships was debated by the sector at FE Weekend last Friday. The summer conference, hosted at Morley College, was *FE Week*’s first event looking at the latest updates and policy developments surrounding apprenticeships.

The agenda included speeches on various aspects of apprenticeships, such as funding frameworks, minimum durations and subcontracting. One highlight of the day was the panel debate under the title of ‘What would you say to Doug Richards?’ with speakers from NIACE, Ofsted and NAS, as well as questions and comments from the audience.

Matthew Coffey, national director of skills and learning for Ofsted, kicked off the debate by using the example of his teenage daughter: “The advice that was given to my youngest daughter about her post-16 opportunities was very clear and unequivocal, ‘you will stay on at sixth form’.

“And despite that advice – and perhaps because of what her Dad does – she’s enjoying her apprenticeship, thank you very much.”

He highlighted his concerns about the duration of apprenticeships and the focus on assessment, but also discussed the issues around subcontracting. One key point that was raised that Ofsted have not found a correlation between management fees charged and the quality of service delivered, and furthermore, that the cost of these fees can have a negative impact on apprentices due to reduced staff and visits.

The debate was continued by David Hughes, CEO of NIACE, who joked that he had already spent 10 minutes with Doug Richards and aimed to share with delegates a more eloquent version of the advice he had given him. His speech entailed 5 main elements: apprenticeships are an education; they are for adults too; fair access benefits all; apprentices deserve the best; and listening works.

It was unsurprising that Mr Hughes was particularly passionate on the issue of fair

access for all learners, regardless of age, and voiced his concerns about reduced government funding for 25+ apprentices.

Mr Hughes said the obsession with age needed to be “kicked into touch”, and that the government should be prioritising learners based on their experience of the workplace and phase of their life.

“There are three principle stages – the first job, promotion and change of career, and the education and skills gained from an apprenticeship are vital at all three,” he said. “Another problem is when people talk about return of investment, and when the treasury says that we should invest more in 16-18 year old apprenticeships because the return is over a working lifetime of 40-50 years.

“The government needs to see a wider definition of return, as the current argument that older apprentices have less of a return ignores the economic impact that upskilling or reskilling has on that apprentice’s family, their community, their health, the duration of their working life and that impact on their pension and retirement.”

The final speaker of the panel was Karen Woodward, divisions’ director of apprenticeships for NAS. Her speech focused on the need for clarity on the definition of an apprenticeship and the roles that colleges and employers play.

“A great apprenticeship entwines good quality education with strong employer commitment to the development of people and the skills they gain in the workplace,” she said.

“But there is very little communication between the college that is delivering the education, and the employer that is delivering the on-the-job training.”

Mrs Woodward added that funding was also an issue for the sector, especially when it came to employers contributing to an apprenticeship scheme in-kind or in cash.

“We need to be clear about who’s paying whom for what,” she said.

The crux of the debate was summarised by Mrs Woodward’s closing remarks; that when it comes to apprenticeships: “we have much to be proud of, but there are still many lessons to learn.”





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