



Department
for Education

Annual report of the Further Education Commissioner

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Introduction

It has been a great year for our sector. You have:

- **raised the quality bar** even higher, with 92% of your colleges rated good or better by Ofsted and with plenty of strong contributions to meeting skills needs too!
- **built on the deep relationships you have with employers and others** across the areas you serve to help employer representative bodies publish local skills improvement plans and implement the Department for Education's (DfE) accountability reforms.
- **navigated new challenges** following sector reclassification – including new accounting, reporting, and administrative hurdles, and
- **supported students and their families** through a squeeze on household budgets. I have seen how you have moved mountains to keep them engaged and gaining the skills they need to succeed.



For me and my team, our role has been enhanced, with the Skills for Jobs white paper and subsequent consultations confirming our lead responsibility for supporting college improvement, championing excellence, and providing targeted support where colleges are in intervention or not meeting skills needs. This means coordinating the interests of all parties to create the space those colleges need to focus on improvement. To do this we've introduced single improvement plans and further supplemented the range of support we can provide.

We've delivered lots of support – my team and I have completed 291 support visits over the last 12 months, which is roughly a sevenfold increase since before I started in role. This underlines the change in emphasis I wanted to bring to my time as the FE Commissioner. In addition, we delivered a second round of 'Just One Thing' which included sessions on special education needs and disabilities (SEND) and an induction event for new chairs, principals/CEOs, and governance professionals. We have also delivered the second round of regional roadshows which were enjoyable, and you've shared just how positive and helpful they have been.

We've helped the 13 colleges currently in intervention - we're looking forward to seeing some of these colleges move into post-intervention monitoring and support (PIMS) this academic year.

We've brought practitioner insight into government by working closely with ministers and teams across the DfE and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). There are many small things we've done, but some of the bigger ticket items include supporting the announcement of the new Advanced British Standard, the provision of additional funding

available through the 16 to 18 rate, and working with National Leaders to develop the expert apprenticeship provider pilot.

I am sharing here the 4 aims that will guide my team's work over the coming years, which reflect the ambition I have for our sector and for working with you:

- colleges to be central to the delivery of skills,
- increasing high ratings for quality and financial resilience,
- delivering effective and dynamic Active Support, and
- securing a sustainable and effective landscape.

These aims translate into my 5 objectives which are:

- intervention for the minimum time needed to improve,
- investigate, capture, and share effective practice,
- increase the number of colleges seeking help through Active Support,
- for Active Support to meet your needs, and
- enhancing my team's expertise and diversity.

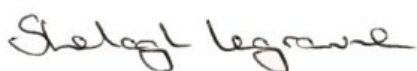
Together, these aims and objectives address the challenges identified by Dame Mary Ney, the National Audit Office (NAO), and subsequently the Public Accounts Committee, when they made recommendations to improve the DfE's approach to intervention.

To help to keep me and my team on task, I've set some key performance indicators:

- 95% of colleges to be aware of our Active Support programme.
- 75% of colleges to have participated in some form of Active Support.
- 75% of colleges to be positive about the support provided by me and my team.
- I want to reduce the time colleges spend in intervention by 50%.
- I want to support colleges to grow their market share of apprenticeship delivery by at least 10%, and
- I also want to support colleges to grow their market share of Skills Bootcamps delivery, by increasing the number of colleges involved, by a minimum of 25%.

Thank you for your flexibility, adaptability and most of all for your ambitions for all your students. The acquisition of skills is an absolute priority for the workforce of today and the future and further education is central to delivering this.

I wish you all a relaxing and peaceful festive break.



Shelagh Legrave, CBE DL
FE Commissioner

Active Support

Diagnostic assessments and health checks

From Autumn 2022, diagnostic assessments were repositioned as health checks and offered as part of the Active Support offer. Health checks are flexible in their approach, with the ability to focus on parts of a college's plan as appropriate, rather than looking at the financial and curriculum plans in their entirety. Available to any college, they are useful to newly appointed principals or CEOs, or where a new finance director has been appointed. Further information on health checks is available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

Structural reviews

Structural reviews are undertaken when a change to the structure of a college or provision may be needed to maintain financial sustainability and high-quality opportunities for learners. Structural reviews are generally conducted as structure and prospects appraisals (SPAs), looking at a single institution. There are also local provision reviews, which can include more than one institution and assess provision across a defined area.

During the 2022 to 2023 reporting year, 1 new structure and prospects appraisal was started, although this was not completed as the college withdrew from the process. In addition, 1 area-based strategic review was started and completed.

The recommendations from completed structural reviews may be subject to negotiations between the department and the colleges, which also undertake their own due diligence process. This will determine the exact form in which the recommended solution may be implemented and the associated timescale.

During the 2022 to 2023 reporting year, the outcomes of 4 structural reviews were implemented. This resulted in 3 college mergers and 1 closure – details are in table 1.

Table 1: FE Commissioner-led structure and prospects appraisal outcomes implemented in 2022 to 2023¹

College	Outcome	Implementation date
Central Bedfordshire College	Merger with The Bedford College Group	01/03/2023
Richmond Upon Thames College	Merger with HCUC (Harrow College and Uxbridge College) to create HRUC (Harrow, Richmond, Uxbridge Colleges)	04/01/2023
Greater Brighton Metropolitan College (GBMet)	Merger with the Chichester College Group	01/08/2022
St Mary's College Blackburn	Closure	01/08/2022
South Hampshire College Group	'Citywide solution' formed by a merger of City College Southampton, Eastleigh College and Fareham College	01/08/2023

¹ The Southampton citywide solution's final implementation date was in the reporting year 2023 to 2024

SPA case study: Harrow College and Uxbridge College (HCUC)

Richmond upon Thames College (RuTC) formally merged with Harrow and Uxbridge College (HCUC) on 4 January 2023 to become HRUC.

The merger was the preferred outcome of a structure and prospects appraisal (SPA) launched in January 2020 after RuTC were placed into intervention due to inadequate financial health.

Completion of the SPA and subsequent implementation of the merger was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and challenges with delayed planning consents and increased cost pressures associated with the more than £80 million redevelopment of RuTC's main campus in Twickenham. This highly ambitious project was initiated in 2015 with strong support from the Greater London Authority in recognition of the poor condition of the estate.

Having tested merger with HCUC against other options including standalone, the RuTC board were convinced by the potential of the merger with HCUC to strengthen quality, develop the curriculum offer (particularly in respect of science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) and T Levels) and secure financial sustainability.

Post-merger it was agreed that HRUC would be offered post-intervention monitoring and support (PIMS) as a way of monitoring progress on merger implementation and channelling support from the FEC team and LocatED. This has included national leader of further education and mentor support; curriculum efficiency and financial sustainability support (CEFSS), and FE adviser support on aspects of quality improvement at Richmond.

Progress and Achievements Since Merger

Senior leaders at HRUC emphasise the importance throughout the merger of investing in people and recognising and valuing the contribution they make. This is underpinned by a shared statement of values and a new strategic plan that is owned by staff across all 3 colleges that together constitute HRUC.

Through periodic PIMS progress meetings we have been impressed with the pace and energy with which the comprehensive merger implementation plan is being delivered:

Important work has been undertaken to harmonise quality policies and processes building on HCUC's outstanding Ofsted grade for quality of education in 2022. This is already impacting on improved outcomes for learners at Richmond, though with further improvements targeted for 2023 to 2024.

The college has made it a priority to strengthen relationships with local schools, underpinned by a new schools engagement strategy and an innovative partnership model for joint sixth form teaching with Richmond upon Thames

school.16 to 19 enrolments are buoyant this year (Richmond numbers are over 5% up on 2022 to 2023)

The final phase of capital works at Richmond is now underway, which will see a new STEM centre opening on time and on budget for 2024 to 2025. This will complete the transformation of the Richmond site and allow the college to take full advantage of the group's STEM expertise as lead on the West London Institute of Technology.

Financial performance at Richmond is improving and on course to achieve breakeven from 2024 to 2025 thanks to efficiency savings arising from the merger coupled with more effective curriculum planning and timetabling. As a group, HRUC's finances remain strong.

Senior leaders at HRUC are not complacent about the continuing actions that are ongoing to achieve the full potential of Richmond but remain convinced that the merger was the right solution for the college, its students and the local community.

Local provision review case study: delivering a 'citywide solution' for Southampton

In 2020, an enhanced review of local provision branded the 'Citywide Solution' was commissioned by the ESFA to address significant weaknesses in the FE skills provision in and around the city of Southampton. The primary objective has been to address the long-standing financial and quality weaknesses at City College Southampton.

Background

City College Southampton has a large campus in the centre of Southampton. It is 1 of 9 colleges within travel distance of Southampton, together with many other private training providers. The significant difficulties City College Southampton has faced over nearly 6 years had weakened the college to the point that external intervention was needed to prevent the potential permanent loss of important city-based skills provision.

The college had a year on year decline in learner numbers, 3 consecutive inspections grading the provision as requires improvement, many years of emergency funding to prevent financial collapse, increasing levels of debt, and a chronic lack of investment. Four attempts to find a suitable merger partner had failed, leaving the future of the college in doubt.

Weaknesses in the city's FE skills landscape were not confined to City College Southampton, and other FE providers were also struggling in a skills ecosystem characterised by overprovision, underinvestment, poor quality, and an increasing trend for learners to choose to study outside of the city at higher performing

organisations, fewer learners were looking to the city-based providers to study level 3 technical qualifications, in stark contrast to the needs of local industry.

Finding a Solution

The project brought together a multidisciplinary team from across DfE and the ESFA, and, due to the complexity, also drew from the expertise of external consultants.

To understand the city's FE landscape, particularly travel to learn patterns, the scope of the project required a wider sweep of FE to include all providers working in and around the city. Of the 25 providers active in Southampton, the project focussed on working with the 8 colleges that delivered the majority of provision for the city's 16 to 18 year old learners. Adult provision was also reviewed.

The decline of good quality provision in the city had been counter-balanced by an increase in high-performing and competitive colleges outside of the city attracting the most able learners to travel to better and stronger organisations. Analysis identified that in 2020 to 2021, fewer than 40% of 16 to 18 year olds living in Southampton chose to study at city-based providers. Not all learners were willing, and/or could afford, to travel to providers outside of Southampton, leaving the very real risk that if sustainable high quality provision could not be secured within the city, an increase in those not in education, employment, or training (NEETs) in Southampton would be a strong possibility.

Fundamentally, Southampton had too many providers for the number of learners wishing to study in the city. A combination of rationalisation, reconfiguration, and strengthening would be the only way to protect the city-based skills provision. Drawing from analysis of available data, 9 potential solutions were developed. The analysis drew from extensive research into every aspect of current and forecast (10 years) need. This included learner needs and accessibility, quality of provision, post-16 demographics, employer needs, estate capacity, travel to learn patterns, local provision needs assessment, financial viability, and leadership.

Every option, including doing nothing, was examined to assess its potential to provide a long term sustainable solution. Finally, the strongest solution was agreed.

Throughout the project, the colleges' fortunes were not stable. Quality improved in some, weakened in others, and financial sustainability of much of the FE skills provision remained a key concern. It was important to recognise the current circumstances of each organisation and forecast what its likely long term position would be, either as part of the solution, or by remaining outside of the solution but a key contributor in the Southampton FE landscape.

Delivering a Solution

After many months of research and consultation, in May 2022, a preferred solution outlining a proposed structure of further education in Southampton was presented to all

stakeholders. It recommended the mutually beneficial merger of 3 small general further education colleges, City College Southampton, Eastleigh College, and Fareham College, into a single organisation, whilst retaining the existing brands and campuses.

Chaired by a national leader in governance, a joint steering group comprising membership from all 3 boards was pivotal in securing consensus, opening debate, and providing important scrutiny. A type B merger, where one corporation continues and the others are dissolved with the staff, assets and liabilities transferring across, was the stakeholders' preferred process. As the initial stages progressed, it was unanimously agreed that Fareham College was in the strongest position to lead the merger and remain corporate. At the heart of the merger was a commitment to each organisation being treated as an equal partner in the process, a recognition that all partners had strengths they could offer the new merged organisation, and crucially, a willingness to resolve 'red lines' as they became apparent to keep the merger on track.

On 1 August 2023 City College Southampton and Eastleigh College corporations dissolved and Fareham College's corporation became South Hampshire College Group.

It is early days, but learner numbers have increased in 2023 to 2024, planned efficiencies are coming to fruition, initial quality indicators are favourable, the estate is under a programme of transformation, harmonisation of process and culture is a priority, and many of the long-term sustainability issues that faced the 3 individual organisations have been addressed during the merger process. There is a mutual confidence that the objective to secure and strengthen post-16 provision for Southampton is finally achievable.

Conclusion

Finding a mutually acceptable solution to a complex, longstanding, and seemingly insurmountable set of circumstances was going to need determination to succeed by all parties. Using a multi-agency evidenced-based approach that engaged all stakeholder groups throughout with regular consultation, communication and updates was the only way to ensure all understood and bought into a solution.

Whilst not all merger proposals will require the breadth of analysis that the Citywide Solution has undertaken, the model and approach of joint agency working, combined with a clear set of objectives, excellent communication, and defined implementation roadmap, was key to achieving a timely and successful outcome.

The 4-year business plan is realistic but ambitious, achievable but challenging, detailed but flexible. It has been endorsed by all parties and will benefit from the oversight and support of the ESFA, DfE and the FEC until fruition.

National leaders of further education and national leaders of governance

National leaders of further education (NLFEs) are serving college leaders and finance directors who have a strong track record of delivering improvement – both at their own colleges and in working with others.

National leaders of governance (NLGs) are experienced college governors and governance professionals/clerks with a strong record of supporting college improvement.

Both NLFEs and NLGs provide mentoring and peer to peer support to other colleges on a range of issues, as well as helping to share best practice. They also led the ‘Just One Thing’ strand of Active Support, which focuses on the lessons learned by CEOs/principals, chairs, and governance professionals when they stepped into the role.

During the academic year 2022 to 2023, NLFEs and NLGs were supporting 80 principals, CEOs and governing bodies. In total, NLFEs and NLGs have worked with over 250 principals, CEOs and governing bodies since this initiative was introduced in 2018.

In 2022 to 2023, 3 serving college governance professionals and 1 college chair designate were appointed as new NLGs. There are currently 8 NLFEs, 2 NLFEE finance specialists and 12 NLGs. More information, and details of current [NLFEs](#) and [NLGs](#), is available on GOV.UK.

Further education leadership mentoring programme

The further education leadership mentoring programme was launched in May 2023. It supports existing and aspiring college leaders with high potential to develop and progress in their careers, as well as assisting them in their current role.

It also aims to create a stronger and more diverse pipeline to the most senior roles in the further education sector.

The programme’s mentors are highly skilled previous chief executives, principals and finance directors at FE colleges and therefore have extensive experience of the FE sector.

During the first round of the mentoring programme in the 2022 to 2023 academic year, 75 mentees were matched with a mentor. The second round of the mentoring programme will be launched during the 2023 to 2024 academic year. More information on [FE leadership mentoring programme](#) is available on GOV.UK.

Curriculum efficiency and financial sustainability support

Curriculum efficiency and financial sustainability support (CEFSS) aims to help FE colleges with costed curriculum and financial planning. Following the pilot in 2021, CEFSS was rolled out to the sector from June 2022 and uptake by the sector has been positive. The team exceeded the initial target of undertaking 20 CEFSS, with more than 35 being completed or in progress in during 2022/23. It is anticipated that demand will remain high in 2023 to 2024.

An evaluation of CEFSS is ongoing, but initial feedback from surveys, detailed case studies and structured interviews has been overwhelmingly positive. Although at an early stage, the evaluation has indicated that some of the colleges from the pilot, and those who have taken up CEFSS since the roll-out, are already benefitting from savings directly attributed to CEFSS ranging from between £250k to £1.27 million, which they will be able to reinvest back into the delivery of education.

Annual strategic conversations

The Further Education Commissioner's team continued to attend the annual strategic conversations (ASCs) held between colleges and the Department for Education.

ASCs build upon the government's response to the recommendations made in Dame Mary Ney's Review of Financial Oversight of FE Colleges and the [Skills for Jobs White Paper](#). The intent was for the Department for Education to move to a stronger and more strategic relationship with colleges and ASCs have enabled us to realise this.

ASCs give colleges the opportunity to showcase their achievements and strengths, and share their vision and long-term strategies. They are also a platform to discuss challenges, emphasise the support available to all colleges, and give colleges the confidence to seek timely advice and support if needed.

Working with local authorities

During 2022 to 2023, the FE Commissioner team piloted areas of Active Support with 6 local authority further education providers. The support offered included curriculum planning, preparing for an Ofsted inspection, strategic planning, and governance. The help and support was provided by the FE Commissioner team, NLFES and NLGs.

There was positive initial feedback from those in the pilot and at HOLEX conferences. This was followed up with formal interviews of the participants in October 2022, which contained excellent feedback. Further evaluation in July 2023 indicated that the impact of the Active Support provided to those in the pilot had significantly raised the quality of education and leadership.

In [Skills for jobs: implementing a new further education funding and accountability system](#) (July 2023), it was announced that the DfE would put “all local authority FE providers into scope for Active Support to enable them to receive support to improve where they need it”. A [webpage](#) is now available which lists the help and support available to local authority FE providers.

‘Just One Thing’

‘Just One Thing’ was launched at the Association of Colleges’ (AoC) Annual Conference in November 2022 during a breakout session titled ‘The Leadership and Governance Dynamic’. The session, described as “a showcase of experiences and key learning of a panel of chairs and CEOs”, had around 110 attendees.

‘Just One Thing’ is targeted at principals/CEOs, chairs and governance professionals in the further education sector, providing opportunities to share practice and experiences. The programme is designed to fill a gap in existing support for FE leaders in a dynamic way – led by the sector, for the sector. It provides resources and opportunities to network which support people in those roles, particularly those who have just started in post, via a series of events and a dedicated website (<https://www.feleaders.co.uk>). As of August 2023, the site hosted 39 videos.

A ‘Just One Thing’ event at City Lit College in March 2023 comprised 4 panel discussions, which included principals, chairs, and governance professionals. It was well attended by a range of FE leaders, and the participants’ feedback has been used in devising how this will be taken forward.

In 2023 to 2024, ‘Just One Thing’ will engage with the new FE leaders from that year. ‘Just One More Thing’ is a thematic brand currently being developed to look at topical challenges faced by the FE sector.



Effective practice guides

Alongside contributing to finance guidance published by the ESFA, the FE Commissioner team published 2 effective practice guides this year – one on [estates planning](#) (November 2022) and one on [curriculum planning](#) (January 2023). The estates planning guide was updated in July 2023, and will be updated again in 2024.

The FE Commissioner team is planning guides for several other areas identified by their work and through discussions with the sector. One of these, on [cultural change](#), was published in October 2023. More guides will be published in 2024.

Local skills improvement fund (LSIF) and quality improvement support

The DfE integrated the funding for collaborative approaches to quality improvement into the recent [strategic development fund](#) (SDF), combining it with a broader range of collaborative activity aimed at improving the overall capacity of FE providers to meet skills needs within a local area.

Improving quality through collaboration will continue to be a key feature of the successor programme, the [local skills improvement fund](#) (LSIF). This funding has been made available to collaborations of further education colleges and other providers across financial years 2023 to 2024 and 2024 to 2025 to enable them to respond to the skill priorities in their respective [local skills improvement plans](#) (LSIPs). This will see investment in new facilities and provision, and support college leaders, governors and teaching staff to develop the skills needed to create a sustainable approach to addressing local skills needs.

An announcement about the funding made available to each area of England was made on 10 November. Many of the projects that local collaborations will be taking forward include proposals aimed at addressing the quality improvement challenges which are shared across FE providers, generating new teaching resources and strengthening the capacity of the FE sector for self-improvement.

FE leaders wellbeing support pilot

In April 2023, the DfE extended its popular [wellbeing support service](#) for school leaders to also include FE leaders. Following an early positive reception to the one-year pilot of the service, the DfE is now considering extending the offer beyond this year.

[Education Support](#), as the only charity dedicated to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of all education staff, are providing the current service. The service offers FE leaders fully funded access to individual professional supervision, and provides a safe

and confidential space to talk with a professional supervisor about, and be supported to process, what is going on for them at work.

As of November 2023, 82 individuals had registered to benefit from the programme of 6 individual sessions, taking a valuable opportunity to focus on their own mental health and wellbeing. Through these sessions, FE leaders have been able to start developing new *coping strategies to feel more fulfilled and in control.*

“My role can be very overwhelming at times, balancing the needs of a range of individuals and competing statutory requirements. I am hoping that professional supervision will provide me with a space to reflect on these challenges and develop strategies to move forward positively despite these.” - *Anonymous FE Leader*

Where necessary, Education Support have also been able to offer access to free counselling delivered by qualified British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) accredited counsellors.

Intervention support

The FE Commissioner and her team reviewed the provision and finances of FE colleges, designated institutions and sixth form colleges subject to intervention during the year, in line with the published policy. These reviews help to identify and agree the specific steps a college needs to take to improve.

The FE Commissioner undertook 3 full initial intervention assessments during the 2022 to 2023 reporting period, 2 of these institutions entered intervention due to financial health and 1 due to quality.

As of 31 July 2023, a total of 15 colleges remained subject to intervention.

Neither the FE Commissioner nor the department want colleges to remain in intervention for longer than is necessary. During the year, 5 colleges have been removed from intervention. When a college exits intervention, the FE Commissioner and their team work with the DfE Place-Based Team to agree a post-intervention monitoring and support (PIMS) plan. Of the 5 colleges removed from intervention, 3 moved into PIMS, 1 merged and 1 dissolved. In addition, 2 colleges moved into PIMS following a merger.

PIMS Case Study: Birmingham Metropolitan College (BMet)

BMet came out of financial intervention in May 2021, and with a new principal and CFO the college has focussed on its journey to good, in terms of both quality and financial health. The principal's drive and passion for providing the best education and training possible for BMet students, and desire and willingness to actively engage with the support available, was key to the rapid improvements under her leadership.

The FE Commissioner continued to provide support and work with BMet, with its post-intervention plan focused in the first year on culture, curriculum planning and teaching and learning. Sense-checking the strategies and processes in place using curriculum planning tools to test robustness of business planning, for example, was an important element of the support provided. The Ofsted inspection in November 2021 was disappointing, but acted as a further catalyst for a focus on teaching staff embracing evidence-based metacognitive pedagogical strategies introduced by an FE Commissioner. The impact of these strategies has taken teaching staff on a journey where learners are able to articulate not just content but the strategy for learning to improve, for example, recall. The college has seen a material improvement in teaching and learning through its learning walks and student feedback. Acting as a critical friend, the FE Commissioner team reviewed management changes, assessing the acceptance and drive for change and culture in terms of curriculum management and quality, which were an important focus for the senior leadership team. The open and transparent approach and the trust developed between the college, FE Commissioner and ESFA team, who were all focussed on the same aim of delivering high quality education in a financially sustainable way, was fundamental to the rapid progress made.

In this last year, with FE Commissioner support, there has been a focus on strategies for adults (adult education budget, higher education and apprenticeships) and a continued review of the effectiveness of new management structures. Management development sessions were also delivered as a part of the post-intervention plan. BMet is now in good financial health, with comprehensive strategies in place to address adult growth, and recently was judged as good by Ofsted.

“The support from the FEC Team has been very welcomed and positively received. It's provided myself and our governors with another set of eyes and ears to critically assess how our strategies and plans were being developed and implemented, as well as offer timely support to help shape direction, particularly in terms of the quality of provision and developing concrete strategies to develop our adult provision.”

– Pat Carvalho, Principal and CEO

Leading and advocating for the sector

Working with ministers and stakeholders

Over the year 2022 to 2023, the FE Commissioner team have engaged with ministers and senior officials in the Department for Education regarding topics including qualification reform, reclassification challenges, and funding simplification.

They have engaged heavily with stakeholders and stakeholder organisations, including at a number of conferences and events throughout the year.

Principals reference group

The [principals reference group](#) (PRG) is currently made up of 8 serving college principals/CEOs. The group supports, challenges, and advises the FE Commissioner in her role of improving performance in FE colleges, and contributes to policy development for colleges in the further education sector.

The PRG met formally 6 times during the 2022 to 2023 reporting period and has advised civil servants on a range of topics including reclassification, the FE capital transformation fund, strategic development fund and local skills improvement fund, post-16 qualification reforms, and the Maths to 18 programme.

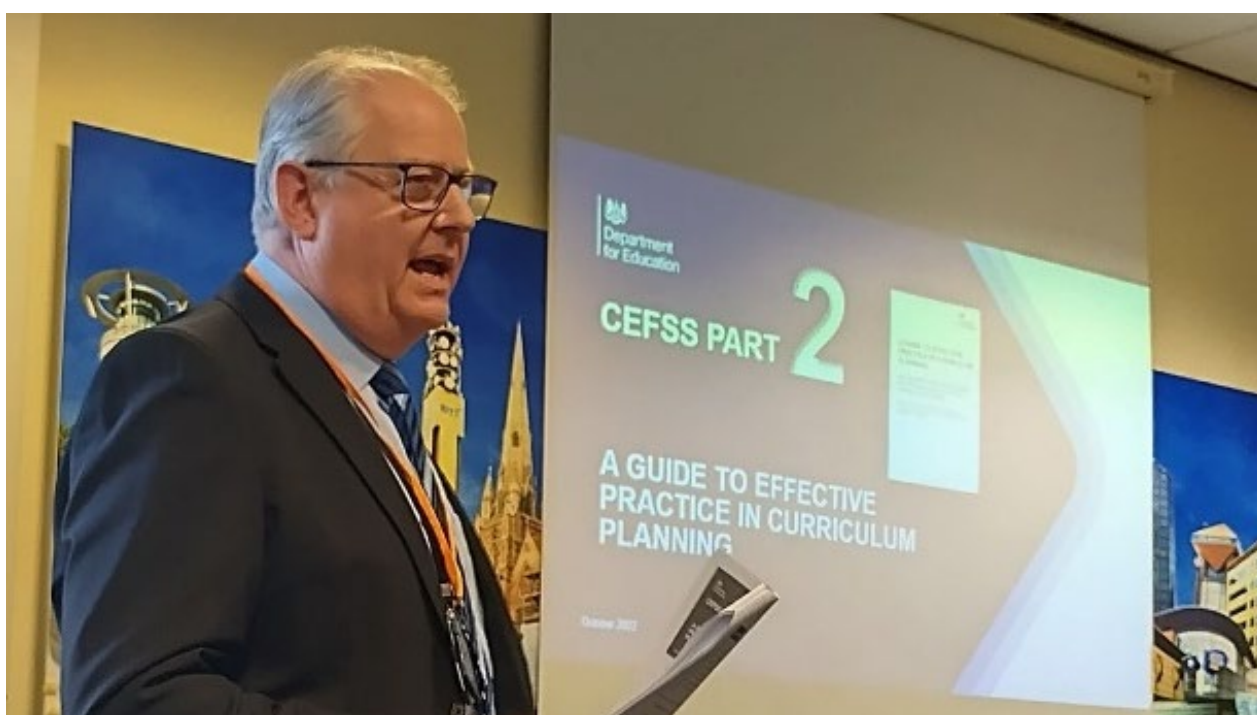


FE Commissioner roadshows

In October 2022 the FE Commissioner team held the first ever round of FE Commissioner Roadshows. These events were held across the country in London, Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds and online.

There was an opportunity to discuss key policy updates surrounding funding and accountability and curriculum efficiency.

The discussions and feedback gathered at the roadshows helps the FE Commissioner team to tailor the Active Support provision and has also helped inform the subsequent annual roadshows which have covered topical policy updates, sharing effective practice, and provided the space for discussions on challenges in the sector.



School and college panel survey

In January 2023 the FE Commissioner team submitted questions to be included in the school and college panel survey (also known as the Omnibus survey) which, for the first time, included a section for FE leaders. The questions sought to establish the sector's general view of the FE Commissioner team and the degree to which the sector was aware of Active Support and likely to engage with it. A total of 31 college leaders responded to the survey and the results were shared in the survey report in July.

Most college leaders (84%) said they knew about the FE Commissioner and their team, and of these, the majority felt positive about them, with the remainder neutral. The majority (81%) said they were likely to voluntarily seek support from the FE

Commissioner team if they experienced an issue that fell within their remit, and over half of colleges who responded to the survey (55%) had already interacted with the team.

Similar questions will be submitted in the autumn wave of the 2023 to 2024 survey to establish whether the sector's view remains consistent.

New members of the FE Commissioner's team

The team were glad to welcome 3 new Deputy FE Commissioners and 3 new FE Advisers, bringing a range of skills and experience and increasing their capacity to offer help and support to all colleges.



There will be a recruitment round for new FE Advisers in early 2024, including some roles focussed on apprenticeships and land-based provision. The FE Commissioner hopes to increase the diversity within the team to more accurately represent the FE sector, and would particularly encourage applications from those who identify with characteristics which are currently underrepresented within the team.



Department
for Education

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