



By Graham Guest, principal and chief executive of Telford College

The Government's £30 billion package of measures to support the economy is providing a great platform for us to work with employers and help lead the skills recovery.

Companies can now receive £2,000 for every hired apprentice under 25 and a bonus of £1,500 for over-25s. This is in addition to the £1,000 already available for taking on apprentices aged 16-18.

And it is already starting to reap rewards. Over the past few weeks we have spoken to many employers looking to take on extra apprentices, and built fresh links with more of the county's biggest employers.

People don't realise just how wide the choice of apprenticeships has become, right up to degree level. Our website which lists all the current opportunities – see www.telfordcollege.ac.uk/live-vacancies

We are also pressing ahead with our acclaimed sector-based work academies, which provide vital skills training for people who are unemployed, and looking to return to the workplace.

As we emerge from the Covid-19 lockdown, more people are 'shopping local' – and that includes education.

Learners are discovering they don't have to travel outside the county to achieve their ambitions, with vocational and academic courses right up to degree level on the doorstep.

Our higher education students are following degree-level qualifications in everything from social science to engineering, manufacturing, and a range of health-related specialisms, and securing some exciting jobs.

It means they are able to study while still living at home, removing the need to wrack up thousands of pounds of student debt.

Our priority throughout the whole Covid-19 crisis has been to save lives, protect student achievement, and ensure they have a place with us in September.

So we will be offering a 'blended learning' timetable for the new academic year, with staggered start and finish times.

It means students will be spending time on campus whenever possible, but with restricted use of social areas.

Many of the online learning platforms which have been operating so successfully for the past few months will continue to be used, to deliver some elements of the curriculum remotely.

We are aware that transport could be an issue for some students in September, and are working on plans to ensure they will be able to travel to college safely.

A lot has changed since March, and we have all been forced to evolve and adapt like never before. I want to say a special thanks to all the Telford College staff, who have done a fantastic job.

We have some exciting new innovations for 2020-21, and believe the future is still very bright. We just have to accept that it's all going to be different in our 'new normal'.