



The Rt Hon. Gavin Williamson MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Dear Gavin,

Re: Recommendations on addressing lost learning from the APPG on Further Education and Lifelong Learning

As a cross-party group of parliamentarians with an interest in further education, we met recently to discuss the impact that lost learning has had on college students since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

At this meeting we heard from experts in the area about how lost learning will have affected every learner to some extent, despite the speed of colleges shift to online. We heard about a recent report into this subject by the Association of Colleges which found that three quarters (77%) of 16 to 18-year-olds are performing below normal expectations, between one and four months behind, with a similar number of adult students (69%) also below where they would normally be at this point in the academic year. It also found that students on practical courses such as construction, engineering, motor vehicle and hair and beauty have been hit hardest, because it is most difficult to replace practical teaching through online delivery. Nearly three quarters (71%) of colleges are providing additional tuition over and above the tuition fund with many teaching over the Easter holidays to make up for lost learning.

At the same time, we heard about a number of challenges that further education colleges are facing in delivering the much-needed catch-up support that students will need. This is in no small part due to the fact that college finances have been hit hard as a consequence of the significant disruption caused by the pandemic, and compounded by the recent decision by the EFSA to claw back adult skills funding from colleges, and other grant-funded organisations like local authorities, if they miss their 2020-1 academic year targets by more than 10 per cent.

It was clear to us why getting this support right now is so vital - a recent Institute for Fiscal Studies report warned the government that failure to act on lost learning will translate into reduced productivity, lower incomes, lower tax revenues, higher inequality and potentially expensive social ills.

As APPG members and parliamentarians interested in further education, we would urge you to take the following steps to support colleges during this time:

- 1. Reverse the ESFA's decision to claw back Adult Education Budget funding from institutions that have not met 90% of delivery targets for the 2020/2021 academic year** - Research by the Association of Colleges suggests that this decision will be in effect nearly a £60m cut to adult funding, announced eight months into the academic year it applies to, giving colleges little time to reduce costs. We ask for a revised approach that would give colleges the financial security they desperately need at this challenging time. We are calling on your Department to take a business case approach, as was done successfully last year, allowing colleges to set out where and why they haven't been able to deliver 90 per cent of their AEB provision, and for concessions to be made on a case-by-case basis.
- 2. Give students leaving college a fully funded extra year of study if they need it** - This would be through a simple, flexible fund, which allows colleges to design programmes lasting between six months to one year to meet needs and outcomes, with a bursary to support some of the most disadvantaged learners to participate. We ask for this extra year of funded study to ensure that students who have been most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and its related issues, such as digital poverty or caring responsibilities, have the vital skills they need to progress into further education or the labour market.
- 3. Provide colleges with targeted support for the most disadvantaged learners through a 16-19 student premium, just like the pupil premium in schools** - Finally, we ask for colleges to be provided support for some of their most disadvantaged learners who have been hit hardest during the pandemic by giving them access to a 16-19 student premium, very similar to the pupil premium that supports students in secondary schools. There is much evidence that the disadvantage which holds back school pupils continues in the 16-to-19 phase. We ask that the student premium be paid to 16-, 17- and 18-year-olds to reflect the government's commitment to supporting the needs of young people, the skills agenda, and the wider governments social mobility goals. This student premium we expect would cost approximately £100million using the secondary school eligibility criteria and funding level.

As an APPG we have been encouraged by the Government's ambitions for the further education sector, as set out in the recent Skills for Jobs White Paper, and we will be paying close attention to the recently published Skills & Post-16 Education Bill as it progresses through Parliament. Taking these steps will help ensure colleges are able to combat the severe effects that the pandemic has had on teaching and learning. They will also support the Government's overarching goals on skills reform, deliver what young people and adult learners deserve and in addition have clear and obvious economic and social impacts in the years to come.

We look forward to working with you on this in the months ahead.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Aldous MP, Chair of the APPG on Further Education and Lifelong Learning

The Rt Hon. the Baroness Garden of Frognal, Vice-Chair of the of the APPG on Further Education and Lifelong Learning

The Rt Hon. the Lord Blunkett, Vice Chair of the APPG on Further Education and Lifelong Learning

Stephen Farry MP, Vice Chair of the APPG on Further Education and Lifelong Learning

Emma Hardy MP, Officer of the APPG on Further Education and Lifelong Learning