

Dear Colleagues,

I wanted to take the time to write to you and thank you for all of your hard work and continued commitment during what I know is a very difficult time.

We are facing an unprecedented challenge and I recognise that as teachers and leaders working to provide education and support to learners in your institutions, you are on the frontline of our national effort.

UK COVID-19 response

I appreciate that the decision [announced by the Secretary of State on Wednesday 18 March](#), that FE providers should stop classroom delivery from 23 March, other than for vulnerable young people and dependents of critical workers, will have a huge impact on you as college leaders, as well as your staff members and learners.

I have already heard some hugely impressive stories on how colleges and other providers across the country are reacting – including using online resources to continue to deliver education for your learners, offering support to schools in your areas and establishing crucial communications channels with learners and parents. These illustrate how you are pulling together with ingenuity at this time and typify the spirit that runs through our brilliant further education sector. I'd like to thank you for all the work you have put in so far and for all that is surely to come in the coming weeks.

Funding

I understand that, alongside your priority to deliver learning and care for your students, the situation we are in does carry financial implications for many institutions. I am aware of some of the issues you are facing, including those raised by the Association of Colleges in a letter to the Secretary of State on 17 March, and we are working hard to mitigate this impact as much as we can. The Chancellor has also announced a series of wider measures to support employers and employees, recognising the significant impacts caused by COVID-19.

I can confirm that the ESFA will continue to pay grant funded providers their scheduled monthly payments for the remainder of the year. Your allocations for 2020/21 will have been confirmed by the end of March, and payments will be made as scheduled. I hope this can provide you with the funding certainty you require as you seek to address the impact of responding to COVID-19.

Because of the activity-based funding model for apprenticeships specifically and independent training providers generally, we are urgently looking at the impact of the current disruption and how we can help to mitigate that. For other funding streams, we will be making decisions on where existing rules and models may need to be modified in relation to any planned reconciliation and future year allocations.

For colleges in significant financial difficulties, the existing support arrangements remain in place including emergency funding. Please do speak to your ESFA territorial team about this.

We are also working on more detailed operational guidance, which will be circulated as soon as possible.

Alternatives arrangements for exams

You will also be aware that we have taken the difficult decision to cancel all exams due to take place in schools and colleges in England this summer. This is not a decision we have taken lightly, and we know that this will be disappointing for students who have been working hard towards these exams. So that we can ensure students can progress to the next stage of their lives, including going onto university, further study or an apprenticeship this autumn, we have been working closely with the exam boards and qualifications regulator Ofqual to put in place alternative arrangements.

There are a very wide range of different vocational and technical qualifications as well as other academic qualifications for which students were expecting to sit exams this summer. These are offered by a large number of awarding organisations and have differing assessment approaches – in many cases students will already have completed modules or non-exam assessment which could provide evidence to award a grade. We are encouraging these organisations to show the maximum possible flexibility and pragmatism to ensure students are not disadvantaged.

Ofqual is working urgently with the exam boards to set out proposals for how this process will work and will be talking to teachers' representatives before finalising an approach, to ensure that the approach taken is as fair as possible. For more details please read our [news story](#). More information will be provided as soon as possible.

Support

In terms of other avenues of support at the moment, Richard Atkins the FE Commissioner (FEC) and his team of highly experienced Deputy FECs and FE Advisers have offered their services to college leaders that would like to talk through plans, concerns and issues. Our pool of National Leaders of Governance (NLGs) also stand ready to offer any support they can. If you would like to arrange a phone conversation between yourself and a member of the FEC team or an NLG, please do email [**FEC.OPERATIONS@education.gov.uk**](mailto:FEC.OPERATIONS@education.gov.uk).

Communication with the sector.

I recognise that the current situation is throwing up queries and concerns that many of you are working through and my officials are already speaking regularly with provider bodies including The Association of Colleges, and with unions, to make sure we are alive to the issues that you are all facing and the questions that you have. I am also in contact with representatives of the sector on the impact of COVID-19 and will continue to engage over the coming weeks.

Accurate information is clearly vital at a time like this, and the latest government guidance is available on GOV.UK, including advice for all [education settings](#) and [critical workers classifications](#).

To help maintain the flow of information and ensure we are alive to the issues affecting you all, I would encourage you to keep in touch and raise any queries via your ESFA territorial team.

We are certainly in an extraordinary situation and I am extremely grateful for the huge amount of work being done across the sector to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on our staff, students and institutions.

Yours sincerely,

Gillian Keegan, Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills