



Gillian Keegan MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills

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To all MPs in England

17th April 2020

Dear Colleague,

SUPPORT FOR APPRENTICESHIPS AND THE FURTHER EDUCATION SECTOR

I am aware of the enormous challenge faced by the Further Education sector in continuing to deliver training in the current circumstances, and of the financial uncertainty that many providers are facing as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Our message to the British public is clear: stay at home, in order to protect the NHS and save lives.

It is our aim that the Further Education sector, as far as is possible, remains open for business where it is safe to do so and in adherence to the Government's guidelines. We want to ensure that learners are supported and that their training can continue, and so we have already introduced flexibilities to encourage providers to deliver training remotely and via e-learning, and end-point assessment organisations to assess remotely. I am delighted that many have already made significant efforts to respond and adapt to this challenge. We have also confirmed that furloughed apprentices can continue to train online and undergo end point assessments, ensuring not only that apprentices can remain engaged with and complete their learning during this unusual period, but that training providers and assessment organisations can continue to earn revenue.

Where learning cannot continue for safety reasons, we are keen that providers remain active where that is still possible. We have enabled employers and training providers to initiate a break in learning where the interruption to learning due to coronavirus is greater than four weeks.

We recognise that the sector will be instrumental in upskilling our workforce and supporting people back into work when we have defeated coronavirus together, but that for now there remains uncertainty around when specifically that will be. As the Chief Medical Officer has said, 'The key thing is to get to the point where we are confident we have reached the peak and are now beyond it'.

In recognition of the significant disruption the sector is facing we will be introducing targeted financial relief measures for those providers that need it, where they hold direct contracts with the Education and Skills Funding Agency, and where we pay in arrears for actual delivery rather than on a monthly profile. In line with Cabinet Office guidance, we will provide relief where delivery has been impacted under providers' adult education and apprenticeship contracts with the Education and Skills Funding Agency. This does not apply in relation to apprenticeships funded from employer digital accounts where the contractual relationship is between the employer and the provider.

Our intention in providing this targeted support is to enable high-quality providers to remain active where that is still possible and safe. We shall set out further detail on these measures and the criteria for accessing them next week. In doing so we will ensure that this support is targeted at those providers who need it, with proven track records for delivering quality training, and that it takes account of any wider support providers have accessed from HM Treasury or elsewhere.

Where it is not possible to continue to deliver training at this time, and we know that this is proving more challenging in some sectors, providers are of course entitled to access the unprecedented package of financial support made available by HM Treasury to support businesses to protect jobs and provide access to loans. The Business Interruption Loan Scheme in particular will help to ensure that training providers are able access credit when they need it, providing government-backed loans of up to £5 million to small and medium businesses.

I hope you and your families are doing well, and I look forward to seeing you as soon as we can return to Parliament.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gillian', with a large, stylized flourish above the name.

Gillian Keegan MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills