



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

13 January 2021

Dear Prime Minister

Re: Newton Rigg College

As MPs for Cumbria, the Borderlands and surrounding areas, we write to you today to ask for your support in saving Newton Rigg College in Penrith. We have constituents directly impacted by the future of the College.

The Newton Rigg campus is a nationally-known specialist land-based college and Further Education college of the Eden Valley, with its origins dating back as far as 1874. The college was established on its current site 124 years ago, at the suggestion of Sir Wilfred Lawson, the local MP. The campus runs two farms: a dairy unit at the Sewborwens farm which re-opened in March 2014, and a hill farm at Mungrisdale in the Lake District National Park. Newton Rigg is the only college in England with a hill farm facility.

Cumbria as a county is the second largest producer of red meat, as well as the second largest milk field in the UK. Not only does Newton Rigg train its students to go into the rural economy, it also plays a big role in training people to support the health and social care sector.

Askham Bryan College, who currently own the Newton Rigg campus, made the decision in February 2020 to close the campus. At this point, Neil started a campaign to save Newton Rigg and gathered the cross party backing of all the Cumbrian MPs and leaders of the Local Councils. This led to a strategic review of the site carried out by the Further Education Commissioner's office. As a result, a number of interested parties came forward to take over the running of the campus.

In the week before Christmas, the Further Education Commissioner stated that neither of the current bids which had been put forward were fully compliant. Following meetings with Gillian Keegan MP, Minister for Further Education and Apprenticeships, it was agreed that a short window of opportunity will be given to bidders to ensure their bids are fully compliant before resubmitting their bids. This process is currently ongoing and key stakeholders are engaging actively, with exciting developments.



Colleges such as Newton Rigg are integral to their local and regional communities, and in this case, the college is also vital for the national economy, as it supports many of the Government-led initiatives, such as delivering net zero emissions by 2050. To ensure that such objectives remain at the top of the agenda, it is essential that access to high quality agricultural and environmental education is maintained. Those educated at Newton Rigg will be the farmers and land managers of the future. They will be the ones implementing and driving the necessary changes to reach net-zero and engaging with the new Environmental Land Management Scheme introduced in the Agriculture Act. In addition, this pandemic has thrown into sharp relief the importance of food security and a college such as this will be pivotal in supporting our food security moving forward. As we move to the recovery phase after the pandemic, Newton Rigg has a key part to play in training people and upskilling our communities through 16-19 year old education, adult learning and apprenticeships. Furthermore, there is scope for Scottish institutions and stakeholders to be a part of the solution, unlocking Borderlands funding and being a strong symbol of the nations of the UK working together for the common good, something we know is a priority for your Government.

We must secure a viable future for this educational institution and as local MPs, we would kindly ask that you support us in ensuring that Askham Bryan facilitate a smooth transition to a new provider and are not allowed to close the doors of Newton Rigg and leave Cumbria without an agricultural college.

With kind regards,

Dr Neil Hudson MP for Penrith and The Border

Simon Fell MP for Barrow and Furness

Tim Farron MP for Westmorland and Lonsdale

John Stevenson MP for Carlisle

Mark Jenkinson MP for Workington

Dehenna Davison MP for Bishop Auckland

David Mundell MP for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale