 APPG for Further Education and Lifelong Learning

All Party Parliamentary Group on FE and Lifelong Learning

Wednesday 9 June 2021, 3:00pm

Via Zoom

Meeting was opened at 3.00pm

Attendees

**MPs**

Peter Aldous MP, Waveney, Conservative (meeting host and APPG Chair)

Ian Mearns MP, Gateshead, Labour

Lia Nicci MP, Great Grimsby Conservative

Stephen Farry MP, North Down, Alliance Party

**Peers**

Lord Puttnam

Lord Aberdare

**Presenters**

Teresa Frith, Senior Skills Policy Manager, Association of Colleges

David Warnes, Deputy Principal: Strategy, Planning and Communication, West London College

 Kathleen Henehan, Senior Research and Policy Analyst, Resolution Foundation

**Observers**

Gary Neeve, National FE and HE Policy Adviser, Church of England

David Hughes, Association of Colleges

Shaid Mahmood, Chair, Leeds City College

David Mackenzie, Association of Colleges

Lewis Cooper, Association of Colleges

Philippa Alway, Association of Colleges

Fiona Bardell, Association of Colleges

Tom Yeldon, Office of Peter Aldous MP

Adrian Kirov, Public Affairs Manager, Worldskills

Josh Smith, Public Affairs Manager, UFI

Apologies

Baroness Garden of Frognal

Baroness Vere of Norbition

Robin Walker MP, Worchester, Conservative

Kerry McCarthy MP, Bristol East, Labour

Dame Margaret Hodge, Barking, Labour

Baroness Eaton

Peter Aldous gave some introductory remarks and welcomed the Parliamentarians in attendance and speakers. He also introduced and welcomed AoC as the Secretariat to the Group and noted how helpful support from AoC has been in providing information for various debates and questions in parliament. He also reminded members that AoC are there to advise and assist them with their parliamentary work.

Peter Aldous MP welcomed all members to Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Further Education and Lifelong Learning (APPG), noting that the meeting was quorate and that the group met all qualifying requirements.

**Election of Officers**

Peter Aldous MP was duly elected as Chair of the APPG.

Baroness Garden of Frognal was duly elected as vice chair.

Lord Blunkett was duly elected as vice Chair

Stephen Farry MP was duly elected as vice chair.

Emma Hardy MP was duly elected as an officer.

**The Officers of the Group are:**

[Peter Aldous MP,](http://www.parliament.uk/biographies/commons/peter-aldous/4069) Conservative, Waveney – Chair

[Lord Blunkett](https://members.parliament.uk/member/395/contact), Labour, Vice-Chair

[Stephen Farry MP,](https://members.parliament.uk/member/4856/contact) Alliance, North Down – Vice-Chair

[Baroness Garden of Frognal,](https://www.parliament.uk/biographies/lords/baroness-garden-of-frognal/3842) Liberal Democrat – Vice-Chair

[Emma Hardy MP,](https://members.parliament.uk/member/4645/contact) Labour, Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle - Officer

Ian Mearns MP moved the motion, with Lord Puttnam seconding.

Peter Aldous then moved onto the meeting’s discussion topic of how colleges support the unemployed. He pointed out that with the furlough scheme ending on the 30th of September and with 249,000 young people being currently economically inactive this is a timely discussion. He highlighted the recently published ‘Let them Learn’ report from the Association of Colleges which acknowledges the programs put forth by DwP and DfE, however these programs are not acting in tandem and the way that the current welfare system is set up can sometimes make accessing training difficult.

He then introduced Teresa Frith, Senior Skills Policy Manager, Association of Colleges who spoke firstly about how the report came into being. Initially part of a member survey and showed that 40% of colleges surveyed described their relationship with employers and JCP as strong. However, this meant this 60% of respondents did not think their relationship was strong. It became a report on how we might strategically influence and improve these relationships and showcase best practice. Teresa spoke about the report's recommendations and highlights that these can be implemented on an individual, local, and national level. Teresa noted that overall, it is about partnership, by seeing how pulling a range of things together you can create more than you could alone. The research and case studies support the fantastic results that come from colleges and JCP working in partnership.

Deputy Principal of West London College – David Warnes then spoke about the relationship the college has with its local JobCentrePlus . Although he notes, it is not just the local job centre, the college undertake a regional approach with other colleges in the area and employer organisations. David gave a key example of their approach around the kickstart scheme, this scheme while good in terms of getting people off unemployment into work has a cliff edge after 6 months. The college work in local region with mentors to get individuals through the 6-month placement and to keep them in employment, usually within their original provider. David noted some of the challenges the college faces implementing programs as due to some of their provision being within a devolved authority the rules around unemployment and universal credit is complex and the college has to manage individual expectations about what they can and cannot access. David welcomes the Government’s initiatives but notes that they do not seemed joined up and are operating in silos which does not allow colleges to embed them into the work they can do long term and measure its impact.

Senior Policy Analyst from the Resolution Foundation, Kathleen Henehan spoke about some of the reasons for optimism in the employment space. As of April, furlough levels have fallen by a third and employment figures are positive. Although, she notes, challenges do remain. People that are employed is still 3% lower than it was pre-pandemic, in particular, people in low level work. Kathleen also notes that unemployment is due to worsen a little bit from July and at the end of September when the furlough scheme is due to be phased out. Typically, lower paid workers are the hardest hit both in terms of employment levels and the quality of work such as the increase in zero-hour contracts. The pandemic has heightened the decline of sectors such as retail, but Kathleen highlighted there are opportunities for change such as the move to net zero, the impacts of Brexit and our aging population.

Peter Aldous MP thanked Teresa Frith, David Warnes and Kathleen Henehan for their contributions and welcomed views from the other parliamentarians on the situation and what work they could do in Parliament to address it.

Ian Mearns MP spoke about how individuals might need to retrain at the same level as due to economic and technology changes their skills base may no longer be relevant in the local economy. He noted about having to have a culture change in business towards training and having a more systematic model in terms of Chambers of Commerce and referenced the German model.

Lord Puttnam noted that he will be speaking during the second reading of the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill and notes the lack of maintenance grants in the bill and that it is a flaw in the bill if the Government are interested in levelling up. David Hughes noted that the AoC would be happy to provide him further information and work with him on this. With David noting that one of the key issues is universal credit claimants and the need to focus on those in need of basic digital skills and level two and three qualifications.

Lord Aberdare noted that he too will be speaking during the second reading and asked for further clarification on what the role was going to be of employer representative bodies and what the role now would be for LEP’s? He also pointed out the importance of careers education and guidance. David Hughes noted that the AoC is currently in conversation with Lord Baker regarding the Baker Clause and careers advice in guidance in schools.

David Hughes from the AoC noted that the government has been very nervous about allowing people time to study as if it was a luxury. He identified the tension between education and jobs, and we are not suggesting we keep people getting jobs for years, but it is more about getting people sustainable and better jobs rather than revolving unsustainable work.

Lord Aberdare suggested that one of the key things that is important is thinking in terms of pathways rather than in terms of jobs. Getting you into a career, rather than just the next job.

Lia Nici MP noted her support of the Baker Clause and that some of the issues stem from employers not really knowing how to get involved and they expect to have oven ready students come in and that quite often is not the case, and she is happy to work with colleagues to find solutions in the long term.

Peter Aldous asked the three speakers if they had any closing remarks. Teresa Frith, noted that she is feeling enthusiastic, and she is looking forward to working with everyone to contribute either through the bill or on the ground. David Warnes concurs with the comments raised and echoed the thinking about the join up between DfE and DwP and maintenance grants for Universal Credit Claimants and Kathleen Henehan said that it was a fascinating discussion of the barriers that exist and is happy to provide further information to those interested.

Closing the meeting, Peter Aldous stated that the APPG should put some staging posts in the ground and bring them to the attention of government as now is the best time whilst the bill is going through parliament, even if it does not go into the bill itself. He confirmed that he would write a letter to the Minister of Apprenticeships and Skills Gillian Keegan outlining what was discussed and inviting minister Keegan to the next APPG meeting before the summer recess.

**Actions:**

**AoC to draft up this letter and send to APPG members for signatories for comment and signatures.**

Meeting closed at 3.00pm

1