APPG for Further Education and Lifelong Learning

All Party Parliamentary Group on FE and Lifelong Learning

Tuesday 20 April 2021, 3:00pm

Via Zoom

Meeting was opened at 3.00pm

Attendees

**MPs**

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

Toby Perkins MP, Chesterfield, Labour

**Peers**

Baroness Garden of Frognal, Liberal Democrat

Lord Blunkett, Labour

**Observers**

Sally Dicketts, AoC President and CEO of Activate Learning

Alastair Da Costa, Chair of Capital City Colleges Group and Commissioner to the UK Government’s Social Mobility Commission

David Hughes, Association of Colleges

David Mackenzie, Association of Colleges

Lewis Cooper, Association of Colleges

Philippa Alway, Association of Colleges

Fiona Bardell, Association of Colleges

Anna Mowbray, Community Union

Lindsey Kell, Office of Toby Perkins MP

Katherine Slocombe, Office of Karin Smyth MP

Tom Yeldon, Office of Peter Aldous MP

Apologies

Sir Kevan Collins, Education Recovery Commissioner

Peter Aldous gave some introductory remarks and welcomed the Parliamentarians in attendance and speakers. He also introduced and welcomed David Mackenzie who recently joined AoC and will act 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 recently. He also reminded members that AoC are there to advise and assist them with their parliamentary work.

He introduced the meeting’s discussion topic of lost learning. He outlined the potential impact of this as shown in a recent IFS report, including on the productivity gap, students not getting the skills they need, and increased inequality. He then noted that there were two things that were needed; a long-term plan to address this problem, and catch-up funding to support additional teaching hours. He highlighted three overlapping factors facing colleges and their students that are of concern when it comes to the impact of lost learning on students: the impact of digital poverty; the risk that impact of lost learning will be felt even more strongly by those on lower-level courses who may have progressed to college last summer; and those taking practical courses for whom lost learning cannot be made up with more online lessons.

He then introduced Sally Dicketts CBE, AoC President and CEO of Activate Learning. Sally spoke about the impact and consequences of lost learning on both young people and adults, and outlined the findings of AoC’s recent report into lost learning which found that three quarters (77%) of 16 to 18-year-olds are performing below normal expectations, between one and four months behind where they would normally be at this point in the academic year. She outlined the work that colleges have done to try and engage students and motivate them to remain in education during the pandemic. She was also clear however that many students, particularly those on vocational courses and lower-level courses, have lost out on crucial skills development and training.

Alastair Da Costa then spoke about the important role colleges play in improving social mobility. He outlined the impact that the pandemic has had on learners at the Capital City College Group, including that 28% of students have been having to access learning on their mobile phones. He also said that a gap analysis to identify the true extent of lost learning would be beneficial, and that the 16 – 19 Pupil Premium should be extended for college students, which would assist disadvantaged pupils. He stated that the sector is going to need more financial support and described the AEB claw back decision as a “disaster” which will hit colleges at the worst time. He also noted the importance of language, and the dangers of embedding the word ‘lost’ in the narrative around this issue.

Peter Aldous MP thanked Alastair Da Costa and Sally Dicketts CBE for their contributions and welcomed views from the other three parliamentarians on the situation and what work they could do in Parliament to address it.

Lord Blunkett asked the presenters to share more details about the Adult Education Budget claw back and what it entails. Sally Dicketts CBE explained how the Adult Education budget works, the pressures placed on colleges to deliver adult education during the pandemic and the impact of the ESFA AEB claw back decision on her own organization. Alastair Da Costa supported her comments and added that it is hard to budget four months from the end of year.

Baroness Garden asked if there is anything the parliamentarians can do to persuade the government to address this issue. Sally Dicketts answered that a great deal has been going on and mentioned the letter David Hughes of AoC has sent to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor, and that further support would be welcomed.

Baroness Garden further asked if colleges have the capacity to do extended hours or provide more teaching time. Sally Dicketts answered that if colleges were informed that there was X amount of money, they could plan it in though they would need to have enough time to allocate the staff and resources. Alastair Da Costa supported these comments.

On claw back, Toby Perkins said that his understanding of why colleges have not been able to deliver their usual number of adult education courses was primarily as a result of a lack of individuals being referred to these courses by DWP via employability programmes. He asked Sally and Alastair if this was their experience. Sally Dicketts CBE said she recognises that example in her colleges, but also in Activate Learning they have a lot of ESOL learners that due to a variety of factors could not attend. Alastair Da Costa supported Sally’s comments. David Hughes supported these comments outlining his disappointment at how late this decision was made, and that it goes against the spirit of the whitepaper.

Toby Perkins asked a follow up question around what would have happened had colleges been given 12 months’ notice of the claw back decision. David Hughes answered that colleges would have reduced capacity to deliver, rather than incur the costs of staff for 2/3 of the year.

Peter Aldous asked what role the APPG can play in getting the message over to government that this issue needs to be urgently addressed. He noted that Government Ministers are sympathetic and suggested that APPG members should write to the Government on this and ask questions in Parliament.

Lord Blunkett added that the APPG should have 2 or 3 absolute asks of Government on the issue of claw back.

Sally Dicketts called for clarity in messaging from government on this issue and for budgets to be used flexibly by college leaders. Alastair Da Costa supported these comments and detailed the following three asks from government.

* Rectify the AEB claw back issue.
* Implement an Adult Learning Support Recovery program
* Allow colleges to access the 16 – 19 Student Pupil Premium

Peter Aldous MP confirmed that he would write a letter to the Secretary of State for Education regarding these three asks and would ask officers of the APPG to sign it. Lord Blunkett offered his support and affirmed he would be a signatory.

**Actions:**

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

The Chair closed the meeting and outlined the upcoming program of meetings including on the;

* Comprehensive spending review
* FE Legislation in the Queens Speech
* Skills in the post Brexit economy.

Meeting closed at 4.02pm

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