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| **Time** | **Item** |
| 4.00 – 4.10 | Introductions & opening remarks from the Chair, Peter Aldous MP |
| 4.10 – 4.15 | Speaker 1 – Jo Maher, Chief Executive & Principal, Loughborough College |
| 4.15 – 4.20 | Speaker 2 – David Hughes, CEO, Association of Colleges |
| 4.20 – 4.25 | Speaker 3 – Minister for Skills, Alex Burghart MP |
| 4.25 – 4.55 | Q&A with the Minister and speakers |
| 4.55 – 5.00 | Closing remarks from Chair |

## Introduction & Opening Remarks

Peter Aldous MP opened the meeting and introduced the speakers. He invited that non-parliamentarians attending to ask questions in the chatbox with an accompanying email address and officials would respond to their question after the event. He set the scene for the meeting and outlined the passage of the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill in both the House of Lords and the House of Commons.

## Speaker 1 – Jo Maher

The first speaker was Jo Maher who is Chief Executive and Principal at Loughborough College. She noted that Loughborough college is already working on key aspects of the Bill and that the college are in a Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) and Strategic Development Fund (SDF) pilot area. The college also have an Institute of Technology (IoT) going through the wave 2 process, have secured funding to delivery higher technical qualifications in cyber security and will be delivering T-Levels in waves 2 and 3.

She highlighted that her college’s regional training needs analysis shows that some of their employers are seeking higher level industry placements. However, in their experience, some employers think that technical education is technical education’s problem and that they struggle/ don’t have the capacity to look at the technical education landscape as a whole. She also said that many employers find it easier to say what is missing from a curriculum, rather than starting from scratch. If LSIPs are to be successful, she said we must have a lean and agile approval mechanism to ensure these qualifications are regionally responsive, or it won’t be a regional issue but a centralised one.

When speaking about Loughborough Colleges experience with the SDF and LSIP pilots, she said it was vital that colleges co-construct LSIPs with employers. She also spoke about the need to place the Lifetime Skills Guarantee & including subsequent level 3 qualifications on the face of the Skills Bill. She argued this needed to be in addition to reviewing maintenance support, otherwise, we are not going to reach adults who need support. She said companies such as Amazon will automate their processes and this will mean lower skilled adults going back into unemployment in a few years’ time. She also stated that removing the equivalent or lower qualification rule and enhancing maintenance support will help address the skills gap, promote social mobility and promote economic growth.

## Speaker 2 David Hughes

David Hughes said that the Association of Colleges (AoC) were delighted with the engagement with the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill so far and with the number of people in attendance at the meeting. He noted that the the strong support from all parties for the general principles and direction of the legislation. He then outlined what he considers to be the college sector’s key priorities for the Bill.

The first priority David highlighted was partnership. He argued there should not be a system where employers say “this is what we want” and then colleges have to deliver, but instead the system should build demand for the right sort of skills to drive the right economic development. He highlighted the lack of people with higher technical skills at levels 3, 4 or 5.

The second priority he highlighted was the barrier around universal credit conditionality restrictions. He welcomed the steps taken by the Government on initiatives such as Skills Bootcamps, but argued these were not sufficient and that there are too many people on low incomes who won’t be able to get the skills they need to be able move into better jobs.

The third priority was the Lifetime Skills Guarantee and why it isn’t it on the face of the Bill. He also talked about the importance of retraining and ensuring people can access subsequent level 3 qualifications, due to the nature of the labour market, referencing the Prime Minister’s speech at Exeter College in 2020, where he outlined the changing nature of the labour market and that people will need to retrain several times throughout their careers. He argued that those seeking additional level 3 qualifications to retrain won’t be leisure learners.

The fourth priority was the need for a national strategy for education and skills which incorporates national skills priorities including digital, green skills and healthcare. This would set the framework for LSIPs and. This would engage other departments such as Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS), Department of Housing, Levelling Up and Communities (DHLUC) and the Department of Work and Pensions (DwP).

David noted that while he acknowledges that the minister will say that these items will be in guidance, we would like it to be in legislation.

The Chair thanked David for his contribution and then introduced the next speaker, Minister for Skills Alex Burghart MP.

## Speaker 3 Minister Alex Burghart

The Minister started his speech by acknowledging that the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill is a very important bill for DfE and Government and that they have an opportunity here to build on a number of things that previous administrations have tried to do. He outlined that the Government want a system more aligned to the needs of employers and that is able to provide students with the qualifications the economy needs.

The minister noted that it is about local needs and global competitiveness. Making sure the student and the local FE college are doing a qualification that will lead to a job in that area and the Government want to do it in a way that helps people of all ages and stages in their career journeys and level up.

He continued that this system is also about having the next step ready and available and the specifications that employers want. This will create pathways into the jobs & careers in local areas. He said that collections of ERBs will tell the Government what the skills the local area needs and that a key part of this for the government is the introduction of T- Levels, which are going to give for the first time really substantial work placements as part of the qualifications.

The minister concluded that he is very grateful for everyone and their high-level enthusiasm and positive spirit the direction of the travel of the legislation.

The Chair thanked the Minister for his contribution and opened the floor up for questions from Parliamentarians. Non-Parliamentarians attending were invited to ask questions in the chatbox with an accompanying email address and that ministerial officials would respond to their question after the event.

## Q&A with the Minister and Speakers

**Question from Baroness Garden of Frognal (Lib Dem):** Asked the Minister where he sees the future of BTEC’s and City and Guild Qualifications which have been gold standard for a long time and are understood by students and employers?

**Answer from Skills Minister Alex Burghart:** As the Education Secretary set out in second reading the government intend for T-Levels to be the gold standard qualification at level 3. This doesn’t mean there will be any other technical qualifications available, but they will sit outside the subjects that T-Levels cover, but only at level 3.

He continued that at level 2 there will still be a range of qualifications available, and they are still going through their level 2 review, but they will be not inserting a new qualification at level 2.

**Question from Peter Aldous MP (Cons, Waveney):** This question related to Universal Credit. From my perspective there are people close to the workplace on universal credit and there are people through no fault of their own are a long way from the workplace. The issue of Universal Credit conditionality. There does appear to be a disconnect between the current educational welfare systems and the fact that UC claimants can only study for 12 hours is a barrier.

Asked the Minister what will you do to address this problem? There are lots of vacancies, but not enough people with the skills to do them and notes if we could review the system we could do a lot better.

**Answer from Skills Minister Alex Burghart:** You raise an important point. We want to help people progress. We want to help them step up. We aren’t opposed to introducing some more flexibilities as far as UC is consider. DwP have done this in the Kickstart program which they did at DfE’s request and crucially the treasury likes the Kickstart program. UC claimants can take courses up to level 3 for 8-week courses. We have been openminded about introducing flexibilities when there are particular products in front of them. The minister went on to ask David Hughes what courses those currently on should be able to do but are unable to.

David Hughes noted that this would be a more flexible way of a bootcamp approach and that Bootcamps don’t cover all subject areas and skills needs. It would give colleges some flexibility to offer training for these individuals.

Skills Minister Alex Burghart recognised that some flexibility does exist and if some courses are slightly longer they could look at this – but need some specific courses if he is to have a specific conversation with DwP.

**Question from Lord Clarke of Nottingham (Cons):** Apprenticeships and how the apprenticeship levy system has been working. Since the levy system has been introduced the number of apprenticeships available for young people has decreased. He identified the apprenticeship amendment made in the House of Lords.

Lord Clarke added that larger employers are using the levy to train existing staff and management training. He continued that the intention of the policy must have been to stimulate apprenticeships for young people but the government have rejected the idea of allocating any proportion of the apprenticeship levy for new apprenticeships for young people.

**Answer from Skills Minister Alex Burghart**: Confirmed that apprenticeships are not there for formal senior management training and that he is currently looking at how to engage more people leaving formal education into apprenticeships and this includes degree apprenticeships. Gave an example of meeting apprentices working at Aston Martin. He stressed that we must make sure there are level 3 and level 2 apprenticeships available, and they are looking at the options available. Not in favour in creating a hard quota as it doesn’t give the flexibility the market needs but is sympathetic to his overall concern. Does not plan on legislating on apprenticeships at this time.

Lord Clarke asked that surely the levy was intended to encourage people and finance people to do things they wouldn’t normally do? Is that an adequate reason to leave it untouched in its present state – where its money going round in a circle doing things they were doing before such as management training.

The Minister responded that he doesn’t agree that the money is going round in a circle. There is an enormous amount of level 3 and 4 apprenticeships, and the level 6 apprenticeships are of high quality. He is loath to say he is going to put a cap on level 6 apprenticeships and cut off an increasingly valuable route for young people who don’t wish to go to university.

**Question from Lord Watson of Invergowrie (Lab):** Asked about the amendment on the Baker Clause on careers education and wanted that to be legally enforceable – that hasn’t been accepted and asked why. Secondly, regarding the flagship of the Bill is the lifetime skills guarantee. Lord Watson felt this should have been on the face of the Bill and asked why it has not been put on a statutory footing?

**Answer from Skills Minister Alex Burghart:** Knows that there were some interesting debates in the Lords and continued that he is absolutely delighted there is enthusiasm for the Lifetime Skills Guarantee and pleased there is cross party support, and that people are wishing to make it a permanent fixture of the landscape. However, it is a very new intervention and that most governments would like to retain a degree of flexibility in how new policies are panning out. Hesitant to make a long-term policy spending commitment on a policy that’s still cutting its teeth. He confirmed there is no intention to take it away and still adding improvements to it.

He mentioned the Baker Clause and that the Government is very keen that school students have interactions with technical education providers before they turn 16. They wanted to focus on quality vs. quantity and that 9 interactions was too many.

**Question from Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West, Lab)** Asked about Clause 5 – Duty of FE institutions to review how well their courses are meeting local needs. Believes that there is some draft statutory guidance that FE providers should consult stakeholders she asked if there was space for encouraging providers to engage with the local community and whether they could promote this idea. Gave a background to her experience in adult education and that if you consult with people on what they want to learn then you get more buy in.

**Answer from Skills Minister Alex Burghart:** Acknowledged her perspective and one he recognises from his years at the Centre for Social Justice. Highlighted that their priority is building an employer led system and that employers are front and centre. But also stressed that it doesn’t mean FE providers can’t listen to anyone else and will take her question away.

**Question from Lord Aberdare (C/B)**: Asked what plans are in place to monitor how this is all working? Picked up the idea of a national strategy and noted that many welcome aspects of the Bill. Asked the Minister how he is going to ensure this laudable reform doesn’t go the same way as previous attempts to tackle this issue and these elements fit together to deliver the skills we so desperately need.

**Answer from Skills Minister Alex Burghart:** Stressed that they are creating a sense of local ownership in local communities with local employers.

*The Division Bell in the House of Commons rang and most MPs left the session at this time to participate in the division.*

The Minister continued that in terms on how we check that this is working, mentioned eternal vigilance and that the department will be working with ERB’s closely There is a piece of work which has not been formally announced which will provide data assistance to all involved which will help us follow the progress of this work.

**Question from David Hughes:** Raised the issue of the Levelling Up whitepaper asked for assurance in making sure there is synergy between this whitepaper and what is happening in the skills and that people skills will be central to that?

**Answer from Skills Minister Alex Burghart:** Very much the same things that we are saying to our colleagues in DHLUC as they draft the paper. There are very frequent cabinet committees where these things are discussed.

*Skills Minister Alex Burghart had to leave the session, due to the Division Bell. Chair of the meeting, Peter Aldous MP thanked the Minister for his attendance and answering the questions put to him.*

**Question from Lord Layard (Lab)**: Apologised for joining the meeting late and asked if the Minister was asked about the funding procedures for further education. The issue of the cap which is crucial. Acknowledged that Conservative backbenchers have put forward an amendment and what are the politics of this? Asked if there is any way we could contribute some serious support that funding should be automatic and follow the student as it is in Higher Education.

**Answer from David Hughes, Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges:** Thinks that it is an important amendment but notes that with the hesitancy of the Government to put the Lifetime Skills Guarantee on the face of the Bill, they won’t be happy with FE being a demand led system due to the spending commitment. Even though Higher Education system is demand led and that isn’t the case in FE. The system is fragmented and fears this amendment will be rejected.

Jo Maher had a comment on that colleges need to be co-constructors of LSIPs and notes that in SME’s & in SME saturated areas they want us to provide the solutions for them. They want to be supported to recruit people with the right competencies. She notes that doing one Skills Accelerator Pilot is a six-month job, she doesn’t think the time to build these LSIPs and SDF have been factored in. Her final point was the need to not lose site of parent and student choice and if a young person wants to be a hairdresser or an artist, we have to have that flexibility.

Lord Clarke of Nottingham noted that the funding issue was quite low profile in the public debate and had some thoughts on publicising this as part of the APPG. He supported what was said about the closed nature of FE funding and stressed that FE funding should be on the same footing of university funding.

Lord Layard and Lord Clarke of Nottingham alongside David Hughes and the Chair, Peter Aldous MP spoke about different options in writing a letter to a national publication on the issue

## Closing Remarks from the Chair

The Chair thanked all of the speakers for their contributions and Parliamentarians for their questions during today’s meeting. He confirmed that AoC will be in touch in due course regarding the actions that took place.