

# FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION

## Weekly Briefing



WEEK COMMENCING 13<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2020

### *FE and HE*

- The Department for Education [announced](#) a new package of measures for **higher technical education to boost technical and vocational education** and increase the numbers studying these qualifications to **tackle the skill shortages in construction, manufacturing and digital** sectors:
  - New approved **higher technical qualifications to be introduced from September 2020** – these will only be approved where they provide the skills employers need.
  - **Ofsted and the Office for Students** will be responsible for ensure the **quality of courses** is consistently high across HE and FE institutions.
  - New **public awareness campaign** to be launched to showcase the benefits and opportunities that studying a higher technical qualification offers and ensure **students receive the correct information, advice and guidance**.
  - The measures follow the announcement of a Government ‘Kickstart’ scheme to create work placements for young people on Universal Credit, £111 million investment to triple the number of traineeships and careers advice.
- [Open Letter](#) to the Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson from over **350 BAME UK university academics, students and professional support staff** about **addressing racial justice in higher education**. Key points raised in the letter to help with eliminating racism in the sector:
  - **Committees, boards and advisory groups** set up to address racism must be **led by those with first-hand experiences of the issues** and white colleagues must receive coaching on antiracist practice.
  - **Training:** Race quality training programmes must include topics on **institutional racism, white privilege and power and racial microaggressions**.
  - **Hiring:** Universities should **publish by ethnicity, annual data on candidates** who have **applied, for been shortlisted and successful** in securing positions.
  - **Promotion and Progression:** HEIs should have to establish an **independent appeal’s process** and **publish the number of BAME staff achieving promotion and progression** annually.
  - **Funding Bodies & Learned Societies:** publish the **number of applicants for awards by ethnic group**, membership societies should **publish membership by ethnic group**.
  - **Racial Pay Gap:** publish institution data on the **racial pay gap by grade** and how this intersects by gender.
  - All **public data to be disaggregated by ethnic group**.

- Government to create **ringfenced funding for the EHRC** to oversee the above actions and work with the Office for Students to ensure implementation.
- The DfE [published](#) the **Independent review of college financial oversight by Dame Mary Ney**. The review finds that the **EFSA and DfE tools for managing financial failure are unlikely to achieve change for colleges with serious financial issues**. It makes a series of recommendations with a view to improve the support individual colleges and the sector receive:
  - Government to **set out a strategic vision for the further education college sector**.
  - Greater clarity and higher expectations of good governance practice for those responsible for the stewardship of public funds.
  - Create a shift towards **use of forward financial planning and cash flow data away from historical analysis**. There should be further consideration and consultation with colleges on ways to make this more effective.
  - As the government develops new and existing programmes, more **scrutiny should be provided on how and when colleges are paid** so that funding rules can be simplified and aligned which will then support better financial stability and cash flow forecasting.
  - At the next review of the post-16 audit code of practice it is recommended that consideration be given to the effectiveness of the framework for the regulatory opinion.
  - The DfE, the FE Commissioner and the ESFA should review the Oversight Guidance to allow greater flexibility to match actions to individual circumstances, to avoid linear progression through the various types of investigations and reviews and to shorten time periods in intervention.
  - The **ESFA and FE Commissioner should develop a new relationship with colleges** - provide a structural realignment between those fulfilling the liaison arrangements, prevention and support, and those providing intervention.
  - The Department should consider a further round of the **Strategic College Improvement Fund**.
- The Government [published](#) their **response to the independent review**. The Minister for Skills and Apprenticeships, **Gillian Keegan** gave a written statement. Summary:
  - Endorses that the **government must have a strategic relationship with FE colleges**.
  - Recognises that **colleges are part of regional economies and communities** and play a long-term role in raising **productivity and living standards**.
  - Endorses the **collaborative approach between colleges** with the New College Collaboration Fund and the expansion of the National Leader Programmes.
  - Intention to maintain the **FE commissioner role** and **strengthen its alignment with the EFSA** and place the civil service team there.
  - Plans to introduce new **whistle-blowing requirements** for colleges.
  - Plans to **strengthen the governance guide** for college corporations.
  - Further changes will be announced in the **FE White Paper after the summer**.

- The **Office for Students** published the **National Student Survey 2020** [Data](#). Summary:
  - **83%** of the 311,432 students who responded to the survey are **satisfied with the quality of their course**. (84% in 2019)
  - 75% of full-time students agreed that changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively.
  - **67% agreed their course is well organised and running smoothly** (decreased from 70% in 2019).
  - 62% agreed that it was clear how students' feedback on the course had been acted on.
  - 72% agreed that the criteria used in marking was clear.
  - **72% agreed that marking and assessment was fair** and said that they had received timely feedback on their work.
  - 49% of part-time students agreed that their feedback had been acted on by staff – **13% behind their full-time peers**.
  - 58% of part-time students agreed that they felt a part of a community of students, compared to 69 % of full-time students.
  - In total, 68.6% of students from 396 HEIs responded to the survey.
- **Unite the Union** [launched](#) a 'back to work' training programme. The programme aims to ensure that its members whose jobs have been lost have the necessary skills to return to the workplace:
  - Teamed up with the **global edtech company, Olive Group**, to provide an online portal with access to more than **100 accredited courses**.
  - For £4 a month, Unite members and up to 6 additional users can access courses to suit their training needs.
- The DfE published **Further Education and Skills** [Data](#) for England for the first three quarters of the 2019/20 academic year. Summary:
  - Apprenticeship starts to date 271,900.
  - Proportion of starts:
    - Intermediate 31.8%
    - Advanced: 43.7%
    - Higher: 24.5% (66,700) – **26,200 of these were level 6 and 7.**
  - Proportion of starts by age:
    - 16-18: 25.7%
    - 19-24: 29.6%
    - **25 and over 44.7%**
  - 75% of all starts were on apprenticeships standards.
  - 67% of starts were supported by the apprenticeship levy funds.

- **13.1% of starts were by apprentices from BAME backgrounds.**
  - **12.6% of starts were by apprentices with a learning difficulty or disability.**
  - **11,000 traineeship starts – under 19s account for 77%.**
  - 1,624,200 learners aged 19 and over participated in government-funded FE.
- The House of Commons Petition Committee [submitted](#) a report in response to the **347,000 people have signed an e-petition calling for the Government to Reimburse all students of this year's fees** due to strikes and COVID-19 and expects a response from the Government shortly. Key findings:
    - A significant number of students said they are **not receiving the standard of education that they had expected**, feel they are entitled to, or which offers true value-for-money.
    - Many students have **experienced difficulties accessing the online content** that has been made available, particularly those from **disadvantaged backgrounds**, and courses where students need to use university facilities have been particularly affected.
    - Students have also faced practical challenges as a result of the outbreak, including in many cases **loss of income and difficulties with accommodation.**
    - Do not believe that there should be a universal refund or reimbursement of tuition fees to all university students as some universities have been able to provide courses in a way that students believe is good value for money.
    - Students have a **right to seek a refund or to repeat part of their course** if the service provided is substandard, but the exact circumstances in which students should expect to receive a refund or repeat part of their course are not clear.
    - Recommendations to Government:
      - work with universities, the OfS, and Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education to **produce guidance on when current and future university students may be entitled to seek a refund or to repeat** part of their course
      - Establish a new system which **enables all students to easily seek a full or partial refund of their tuition fees**, or to repeat part of their course;
      - Ensure that **all students are advised of their consumer rights** and are given **clear guidance on how to avail themselves** of these if they feel their university has failed to provide an adequate standard of education.
      - Provide **additional funding to universities to enable them to pay any refunds.**
      - Consider making **additional funding available to students who might want to extend their education after the outbreak**, and provide ongoing employment advice and support beyond graduation in an extremely challenging employment market.
- The **Higher Education Policy Institute** published a [Policy Note](#) – *PhD students and their careers*. Key findings:
    - 88% believe their doctorate will positively impact their career prospects.

- PhD students are almost equally more (33%) and less (32%) likely to pursue a research career after they started their PhD than before, with the majority stating academic (67%) research or research within industry (64%) as a probable career path.
  - The most commonly cited **reason for a PhD student wanting to leave academia is the lack of work-life balance.**
  - PhD students are more confident their degree is preparing them for an academic research career (81%) than one straddling both academia and industry (47%), or a non-research career (33%).
  - They are **less confident of their training in managing people (26%), finding career satisfaction (26%), applying for funding (22%) and managing budgets (11%).**
- The DfE [launched](#) a new Government scheme to **support English universities at risk of financial insolvency** as a result of the covid-19 pandemic:
    - Universities will be able to **apply for Government support** to develop restructuring plans with conditions designed to focus the sector towards the future needs of the country including delivering high quality courses with good graduate outcomes.
    - New [Higher Education Restructuring Regime](#) with independently-chaired Board.
    - The scheme aims to support the role universities play in their local economies and maintaining the country's science base.
    - **Repayable loans** will only be provided as a **last resort measure.**
- The DfE announced an **extension of the [Opportunity Areas programme](#)** to support young people hit hardest by the pandemic across 12 areas of the country:
    - **£18 million expansion** aims to level up outcomes in employment and education and targets lost learning.
    - Additional maths and English tutoring for students to get them **ready for college and sixth form.**
    - Careers and enterprise company offering 1.3 million secondary school pupils work experience.
- The APPG for Students published a report – ***Reforming Student Finance: Perspectives from Student Representatives.*** Summary:
    - Student finance and the cost of living:
      - Students generally felt that **current levels of maintenance support are inadequate.**
      - Support should be increased, and **non-repayable means-tested maintenance grants should be reintroduced.**
      - The **relative reduction in maintenance funding** was a concern as household income thresholds had not risen with inflation.

- The current **London weighting does not address the different costs of living** all around the UK
- Moving to **monthly payments**, instead of the current termly instalments.
- Effects:
  - Many students without savings or money from their family to plug the gap, take up significant amounts of part-time work and take out commercial loans.
  - **Attainment and ability to study can be affected by the financial stress** and the impact of taking on too much part-time work– **increase in drop-out rates over the last 5 years.**
- Information, advice and guidance:
  - Student representatives generally felt that there was **not adequate information about the various costs of being a student.**
  - Student representatives were also angry about the way that **UCAS has advertised commercial loans.**
- Different **funding agencies differ in their timing of payments** and their treatment of estranged students.
- Students felt that there needs to be **better support for distance learning.**
- **Nursing, midwifery and allied health students:** Shortage of course funding, Students **much less able to work** alongside their studies to support themselves, **lack support for Childcare** and lack of information or support for placements.

### Parliament

- **Movements:**
  - **Julian Lewis** MP for New Forest East had the Conservative Whip removed.
- **Bishops: Duty – Birmingham**
  - The **Bishop of Salisbury** asked the Government about support for improving hygiene and food in East African countries and UK aid giving to these countries.
  - The **Bishop of Birmingham** asked the Government about steps they are taking to ensure trade agreements insist that all UK imports are produced by workers with good conditions and dignified pay.
  - **The Bishop of Birmingham** asked the Government about plans to relocate the House of Lords to York, keeping the two Houses together and recommended Birmingham as an alternative location.
  - **The Bishop of St Albans** spoke in the Committee Stage reading of the Agriculture Bill. Bishop Alan and highlighted the significance of food security throughout history, the current locust swarms in east Africa, Asia and the Middle East and offered support for amendments which recognise the importance of locally produced food.

- The **Bishop of Durham** asked the Government about children living in poverty and whether they will agree to review and assess the evidence that the two-child limit negatively impacts children in working families.
  - The **Bishop of St Albans** responded to a Government statement on the end of the Brexit Transition period. Bishop Alan asked whether there will be sufficient resources and access to knowledgeable people to assist SMEs going through the transition period.
  - The **Bishop of Birmingham** presented the Church of England Channel Islands Measure for Royal Assent. The motion was agreed.
- The House of Commons **International Development Committee** published their Fourth [report](#) of Session – ***Effectiveness of UK aid: potential impact of FCO/DFID Merger***. The paper highlights a series of concerns about the **negative impact of the FCO/DFID merger on the effectiveness of aid spending** and asks the Government to set out an evidence-led rationale for any change, expected costs and intended benefits that justify the costs from the merger. Key points:
    - **Poverty reduction should continue to form a central** part of the Government’s international policy.
    - UK aid should be **focused on the very poorest and most vulnerable people** in the poorest countries.
    - There should be continued **adherence to both the letter and spirit of domestic development legislation**, including the OECD DAC definition of Official Development Assistance, the **0.7% target**, poverty alleviation, gender equality, transparency and independent evaluation of impact.
    - The UK would do much better to demonstrate international political leadership on humanitarian relief, poverty reduction and other development issues by **retaining a Cabinet-level Minister for International Development**, responsible for the totality of the UK’s ODA spend.
    - The loss of an independent DFID **risks damaging the quality of UK aid and undoing development gains**.
    - Government should **set out how it intends to capture and retain DFID expertise** in doing development well and what plans are in place to rapidly **train FCO staff**.
    - Recommend that the House of Commons **creates an Official Development Assistance Select Committee** tasked with scrutiny of the totality of UK aid spending and echoing the Independent Commission for Aid Impact’s remit.
    - Also recommend that the Government **retains ICAI in its current form** in order to provide thorough, independent scrutiny of the UK’s aid budget.
- **Written Questions for Answer:**
    - **Emma Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment his Department has made of the **effect of covid-19 outbreak on agricultural colleges**.
    - Gillian Keegan:** We are aware of the financial impact COVID-19 has had on post-16 providers, including Agricultural Colleges. We will continue to **pay grant funded**

**providers, including Agricultural Colleges, their scheduled monthly profiled payments for the remainder of the 2019/20 funding year and funding allocations for 2020/21 have been confirmed.** The funding system also provides a programme **cost weighting uplift for agriculture courses** delivered in eligible land-based settings, reflecting their higher costs. For colleges in significant financial difficulties the exiting support arrangements remain in place, including short-term solvency support via emergency funding.

- **Mick Whitley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps the Government is taking to help **increase the number of apprentice places available in the construction industry.** **Gillian Keegan:** Apprenticeships will have an important role to play in creating employment opportunities, particularly for young people, and in supporting employers in all sectors to access the skilled workforce that they need to recover and grow following the COVID-19 outbreak. We will **ensure that there is sufficient funding to support all businesses wanting to take on an apprentice this year** and will provide further details in due course. There are currently **86 high quality construction standards at different levels**, designed by industry to equip individuals with the skills that employers want. A **further 12 standards are in development.** The PM recently announced a £5 billion Capital Investment Plan to accelerate infrastructure projects aimed at stimulating the sector and help to recruit and retain staff including apprentices. We are working with the sector to encourage take up of new apprentices and continue to work with employers including Persimmons Homes and Balfour Beatty through our Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network (ADCN) to promote best practice in recruiting and supporting apprentices from diverse backgrounds and under-represented groups including Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) and women. Introduce a **new payment of £2,000 to employers in England for each new apprentice they hire aged under 25**, and a **£1,500 payment for each new apprentice they hire aged 25 and over**, from 1 August 2020 to 31 January 2021.
- **Karin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether the **£1 billion support package to tackle the impact of lost teaching time announced on 19 June 2020 will include funding for 16-19 providers.** **Gillian Keegan:** Many FE providers are already open for 16-19 learners on the first year of a two-year study programme and all learners under 19 years old can be offered a face-to-face meeting before the end of the summer term - subject to the required safety measures being met. Colleges should plan on the basis that, from September 2020, all learners will return to a full high-quality education programme. We are currently working through the implications of the Covid-19 disruption and are reviewing options on how students can be supported to make up for the disruption to their learning.
- **Baroness Whitaker:** To ask Her Majesty's Government how they intend to apply the findings and recommendations of the report by the **Social Mobility Commission Apprenticeships and social mobility: fulfilling potential, published on 24 June, to members of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities.** **Baroness Berridge:** Apprenticeships are an excellent way to access a wide range of rewarding careers and offer considerable value to individuals. We **welcome the Social Mobility Commission's finding that apprenticeships boost employment and reduce the gap in earnings**



**between people from disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged backgrounds.** We are supporting employers, apprentices and training providers during this challenging time, and we remain committed to ensuring that high-quality apprenticeship opportunities are as accessible as possible to all people from all backgrounds, including young people from Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities. We have worked with some of the country's most influential employers through our Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network to promote best practice in recruiting and supporting apprentices from diverse backgrounds. Our Apprenticeships Support and Knowledge programme also supports schools across England to provide disadvantaged students with information on apprenticeships. We are focused on how we can make sure more people and businesses can take advantage of apprenticeships in the future, especially small and medium sized businesses in disadvantaged areas.

- **Zarah Sultana:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of **abolishing student-funded tuition fees for (a) nursing, (b) midwifery and (c) allied healthcare students** from the academic year 2020-21.  
**Michelle Donelan:** The current system for funding tuition fees for nursing, midwifery and allied health professional students has enabled us to open up the number of training places that universities can offer in these professions and to increase the amount of living costs support available. From September 2020, **eligible new and continuing nursing, midwifery and many allied health professional students on pre-registration courses at English universities will also receive an additional new non-repayable grant of £5,000 to contribute to their living costs.** Funding up to a further **£3,000 is also available for students who choose to study in an area or a specialism that is struggling to recruit students** or for **helping students with childcare costs.** This funding is in addition to the support that students can already access through the student loans system and the existing learning support fund, which includes funding for childcare, travel and exceptional hardship. The government has also recently announced that the **maximum loan for living costs will be increased by 2.9% for the 2020/21 academic year.** It will be up to **£9,203 for eligible full-time undergraduate students living away from home.** Maximum tuition fees for undergraduate courses, and the subsidised fee loans available from the government to pay them, will remain at £9,250 for a standard full-time undergraduate course in the 2020/21 academic year. This is the **third year in succession maximum fees have been frozen.**