

Letter from Gillian Keegan, Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills



Department for Education

Dear Colleagues,

I wanted to write to you and thank you for all of your hard work and continued commitment during what I know is a very difficult time.

We are facing an unprecedented challenge and I recognise that as teachers and leaders working to provide education, training, and assessment and to support your learners, you are on the frontline of our national effort.

UK Covid-19 response

I appreciate that the changes [announced by the Secretary of State last Wednesday](#), to education and training delivery from 23 March, will have a huge impact on you as leaders, as well as your staff members and learners.

Education, training and assessment providers who operate as businesses or charities are able to access the Government's package of measures to support businesses to withstand the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak. [Details of this support are available on GOV.UK](#). We are working closely with HM Treasury to monitor how the support packages are benefitting organisations and to consider any further action which may be required.

I have already heard hugely impressive stories on how providers across the country are reacting – including using online resources to continue to deliver education for your learners, offering support for the community in your areas and establishing crucial communications channels with learners, parents and employers. These illustrate how you are pulling together with ingenuity at this time and typify the spirit that runs through our brilliant further education sector. I'd like to thank you for all the work you have put in so far and for all that is surely to come in the coming weeks.

Funding

I understand that, alongside your priority to deliver learning and care for your students, the situation we are in carries financial implications for many institutions. I am aware of some of the issues you are facing, including those raised by sector representative organisations including the Association of Employment and Learning Providers and HOLEX, and we are working hard to mitigate this impact as much as we can. The Chancellor has announced a series of wider measures to support employers and employees, recognising the significant impacts caused by Covid-19.

For grant funded providers, I can confirm that the ESFA will continue to make scheduled monthly payments for the remainder of the year. Your allocations for 2020/21 will have been confirmed by the end of March, and payments will be made as scheduled. I hope this provides you with the funding certainty you require as you seek to address the impact of responding to Covid-19. For other funding streams, we will be making decisions on where existing rules and models may need to be modified in relation to any planned reconciliation and future year allocations.

We have today published more [detailed operational guidance for FE providers](#) and will continue to add to this to make sure providers have the latest information.

Apprenticeships

In this difficult time, I know that providers and employers are doing their best for their workforce. I want to support that by ensuring that wherever possible apprentices can continue and complete their apprenticeship, despite any break they need to take as a result of Covid-19. I, through the ESFA, am committed to working with training providers, end-point assessment organisations and external quality assurance organisations to mitigate the operational and financial impacts of this disruption and maintain the integrity of apprenticeships. I am hoping that together, with the expertise, support and commitment that you continually demonstrate, we can support apprentices and their employers through these extraordinary and difficult times.

Today we are publishing our [apprenticeship response to Covid-19](#). This document sets out how we are responding to the impact of Covid-19, as part of our cross-Government efforts. We are implementing new measures to make it easier for apprenticeships to continue and complete in a different way if they need to or to break and resume an apprenticeship later when that becomes possible. The document explains the temporary flexibilities that we are introducing to the programme during the pandemic and provides answers to questions related to these changes and other common questions. We will continue updating this guidance in line with new queries and/ or further support measures being introduced.

Alternative arrangements for exams

You will also be aware that we have taken the difficult decision to cancel all exams this summer. This is not a decision we have taken lightly, and we know that this will be disappointing for students who have been working hard towards these exams. We have been working closely with the exam boards and qualifications regulator Ofqual to put in place alternative arrangements.

There are a very wide range of different vocational and technical qualifications as well as other academic qualifications for which students were expecting to sit exams this summer. These are offered by a large number of awarding organisations and have differing assessment approaches – in many cases, students will already have completed modules or non-exam assessment which could provide evidence to award a grade. We are encouraging these organisations to show the maximum possible flexibility and pragmatism to ensure students are not disadvantaged.

Ofqual is working urgently with the exam boards to set out proposals for how this process will work and will be talking to teachers' representatives before finalising an approach, to ensure that the approach taken is as fair as possible. For more details [please see our guidance on GOV.UK](#). More information will be provided as soon as possible.

Communication with the sector

I recognise that the current situation is throwing up queries and concerns that many of you are working through and my officials are already speaking regularly with provider bodies and unions to make sure we are alive to the issues that you are all facing and the questions that you have. I am also in contact with representatives of the sector on the impact of covid-19 and will continue to engage over the coming weeks.

Accurate information is clearly vital at a time like this, and the latest government guidance is available on GOV.UK, including advice for all [education settings](#) and [critical worker classifications](#).

To help maintain the flow of information and ensure we are alive to the issues affecting you all, I would encourage you to keep in touch and raise any queries via your ESFA territorial team or for apprenticeships, via the Apprenticeship Service helpline by telephone on 08000 150 600 or email at helpdesk@manage-apprenticeships.service.gov.uk.

We are certainly in an extraordinary situation and I am extremely grateful for the huge amount of work being done across the sector to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19 on our staff, students, and institutions.

Yours sincerely,

Gillian Keegan, Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills