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Dear Colleagues,

I promised to write to answer the questions which I was not able to address during the 2nd July debate on the 'Post-18 Education and Funding Review.' I would also like to reiterate my thanks to those who attended and made a valuable contribution to what is an important subject.

Several noble Lords asked whether the government would make a commitment to a particular course of action. It will of course come as no surprise that I must repeat what I said during the debate, that I cannot commit to any decisions. The independent panel's report forms an important step on the road to achieving our vision of the post-18 education system. Lord Mair and Lord Judd in particular asked about the Government's next steps; I can assure them that now the independent panel phase of the review is complete, we are engaging with stakeholders as we work towards concluding at the Spending Review.

Apprenticeships

On the subject of apprenticeships, raised by several noble Lords during the debate, including Lord Layard, Lord Aberdare, Baroness Garden of Frognal, and Lord Norton of Louth:

I was pleased to have the opportunity to address their issues two days later during the debate on 'Apprenticeships'.

Teachers in Further Education

Lord Aberdare and Lord Storey asked questions relating to Government support for the further education workforce on pensions and recruitment.

We recognise that outstanding teachers and leaders are critical to the success of the further education sector, and to securing the best possible outcomes for learners. That is why we are committed to working closely with the sector to provide support for effective teacher recruitment and retention. Since 2013/14 we have invested over £140m in further education workforce development programmes. Our £5m Taking Teaching Further programme is training up to 150 industry professionals to teach in the sector, and testing effective approaches to building collaboration between further education and industry.

We are providing additional funding to further education providers to cover the cost of Teacher Pension Scheme contribution increases. The Ministry of Housing, Communities

and Local Government is also currently consulting on whether, given changes in further and higher education, we should remove the requirement for these employers to offer the Local Government Pension Scheme to new staff.

Career Management & Careers Hubs

Lord Aberdare, Lord Norton of Louth, Lord Turnbull and Lord Blunkett raised issues relating to career management, with specific mention of careers hubs by Lord Aberdare:

On the subject of career management, we recognise that good careers information, advice and guidance is vital to help people of all ages make informed decisions about their options, including routes into further and higher education. That is why we are training 1,300 Careers Leaders, establishing 40 Careers Hubs and investing over £70m each year until 2020 to support young people and adults.

This includes funding for the National Careers Service and The Careers & Enterprise Company, which is having a positive impact on the quality and coverage of careers education for young people in England. There are now over 2,000 secondary schools and colleges in the Careers & Enterprise Company's Enterprise Adviser Network, which connects them to a senior business volunteer.

On the subject of Careers Hubs, they bring together schools, colleges, universities and employers to share their expertise and improve the careers education on offer to make sure young people have the information they need to make the most of their talents. In May, my honourable friend the Secretary of State for Education announced a second wave of 18 new and two expanded Careers Hubs, backed by a further £2.5m investment, helping to transform careers education around the country. Just over 1,300 secondary schools and colleges (around a quarter of those in England) will now benefit from being part of a Careers Hub.

Schools and colleges will have access to support and funding, including an expert Hub Lead to help coordinate activity and build networks, a central fund to support employer engagement activities, and training for a Careers Leader in each school and college. Employers are vital to the Hub model's success, with all Hubs required to demonstrate strong engagement amongst local businesses and a clear plan for increasing employer engagement. Schools and colleges in the first wave of Careers Hubs are already outperforming the national average across all aspects of careers education.

Student Choice

Baroness Blackstone asked whether Government will ensure that any changes will be flexible, allowing students choice over how long they take to build their skills through acquiring a qualification.

The Government recognises the importance of choice and flexibility to students. That is why the issues the review is focused on, and set out in its terms of reference, include: how to ensure the market provides choice with higher-level degree apprenticeships and shorter and more flexible courses, in particular accelerated degree programmes, and supporting innovative new institutions that can drive competition. As well as: how we can encourage learning that is more flexible (for example, part-time, distance learning and commuter study options) and complements ongoing Government work to support people to study at different times in their lives.

Access and Participation

Lord Storey, Lord Patel, Baroness Deech and the Lord Bishop of Winchester raised concerns about those students from disadvantaged backgrounds and what impacts the recommendations in the independent panel's report may have.

Widening access and participation is a priority for this Government and this review is focused on creating a system that is accessible to all. This means that everyone with the capability to succeed in higher education should have the opportunity to do so, regardless of their background or where they grew up. That is why the review's terms of reference include looking at how we can ensure that people from disadvantaged backgrounds have equal opportunities to progress to, and succeed in, all forms of post-18 education and training. As well as how disadvantaged students and learners receive maintenance support, both from Government and from universities and colleges.

It should be noted that in 2018, 18 year olds from disadvantaged backgrounds were proportionally 52% more likely to enter full-time higher education than in 2009. And that students from the lowest-income households now have access to the largest ever amounts of cash-in-hand support for their living costs. However, participation also has to mean successful participation, which is why my Honourable Friend the Secretary of State for Education has asked the OfS to drive a focus not just on access but on progression, completion rates and ultimate employment. That is why the OfS is funding a new independent 'What Works' centre to help universities meet challenging targets to eliminate equality gaps in higher education within 20 years.

Decline in Part-time HE

Baroness Blackstone and Lord Bichard spoke on their concerns around the decline in the number of part-time students.

This Government recognises the importance of studying part-time and the benefits it can bring to individuals, employers and the wider economy. Shorter degree courses appeal to those who want to retrain and enter the workplace more quickly than a traditional course. We have legislated to increase the total tuition fees for accelerated courses to make them more affordable for providers. Students also save on tuition and living costs but critically for them, graduating and getting into work one year faster than their peers.

The Higher Education and Research Act, placed a duty on the OfS to have regard to promoting choice (including part-time study) and opportunity in the provision of higher education. The OfS targets an element of the Teaching Grant to recognise the additional costs of part-time study - £72 million has been made available for this purpose in 2019/20.

We have already made a number of changes to support part-time and mature learners. Lord Bichard drew particular attention to maintenance loans for part time students and I hope he will be pleased to hear that this academic year, part-time students are, for the first time ever, able to access full-time equivalent maintenance loans.

Impacts on the Devolved Territories

Lord Aberdare and Baroness Garden of Frognaal highlighted the need to look at impacts of the recommendations across the four nations of the UK. Although Higher and Further Education are devolved matters and as such the review is considering the English system only, we recognise the direct impact the review may have on Devolved Administrations and will engage with the relevant governments as appropriate.

As the Secretary of State for Education set out in Parliament on 4 June regarding the devolved nations, I confirm that if there are any spending implications in the proposals we make at the conclusion of the review, and given that education is a devolved matter, funding for the devolved nations would apply in the normal way, including through the Barnett formula.

Productivity

Several noble Lords, including Lord Patten, Lord Layard, Lord Aberdare, Lord Blunkett, Lord Bichard, and Lord Norton of Louth all touched on productivity.

The Industrial Strategy sets out a long-term plan to boost productivity and earning power across the country, including through the four Grand Challenges, which position the UK at the forefront of the industries of the future.

Through the Industrial Strategy, we committed £406m investment in education and skills. In addition, through this year's Autumn Budget the Government has invested over £1bn to support students throughout their education and give people the tools they need to succeed in the new economy.

Within our £1bn investment, we are investing £100 million of new Government funding into the National Retraining Scheme that will allow us to continue to develop the Scheme and start delivering elements of the service to the public this summer; £240m to make Apprenticeships more affordable to Small and Medium Enterprises and £450m to allow businesses to transfer their apprenticeship levy funds to other employers.

I hope this letter has been useful. I will send a copy to all Peers who spoke and place a copy in the House library.

*My best wishes,
James Younger*

VISCOUNT YOUNGER OF LECKIE