I am writing to inform you of the findings of the research the Department for Transport commissioned on bus travel for apprentices, and to update you on government’s next steps towards delivering the manifesto commitment.

The research contract was awarded to Atkins/CH2M last year to explore the possible options for reducing the cost of bus travel for apprentices. The report shortlisted two potential policy options for providing discounted bus travel to apprentices based on the analysis and stakeholder feedback obtained through the research. The first shortlisted option was an operator-led concessionary scheme which would involve negotiating with bus operators across England to provide discounts to apprentices. The second shortlisted option was extending eligibility for the England National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) to apprentices.

Concessionary schemes are already offered to many apprentices by local authorities and individual bus operators. These include discounts for all young people and apprentice-specific schemes, such as the National Union of Students "Apprentice extra card". You will be aware of the guidance related to local authority duties to consider appropriate transport arrangements for people aged 16 plus in education. This includes reference to considering appropriate arrangements for apprenticeships and a revised version was published in February 2019. With regard to rail, you will be aware of the recent announcement by the Department for Transport introducing the new "16 to 17 Railcard" which can be used by young apprentices. The ESFA provides additional payments to employers and training providers supporting apprentices who are young or from disadvantaged backgrounds. This funding can be used to support apprentices with travel costs.
Going further in this area would involve complexities and additional costs to the tax payer. As a result, the focus of this work is on preparing proposals for consideration at the forthcoming spending review. We are keen to work with stakeholders to address how we can best ensure that young people are not deterred from taking up apprenticeships opportunities due to travel costs.

My Department and the Department for Transport will continue to work together to explore options for a solution.

Rt Hon Anne Milton MP  
Minister of State for Apprenticeships and Skills