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Dear Mr Stephenson

I am writing to inform you of the Government's view of the position of Accrington and Rossendale College following the recent review by the Further Education (FE) Commissioner's team, and the steps that will need to be taken to secure improvement.

As you know, the Skills Funding Agency issued the college with a Notice of Concern for financial health in November 2015. In light of this, I asked the FE Commissioner, Sir David Collins, to carry out an assessment of the college and this was conducted between 7 and 11 December 2015.

The key finding is that while the college has a recovery plan covering both financial and quality issues, this is not sufficiently robust and the targets set were not sufficiently focused to bring about improvement in a timely manner. Thus the college should urgently revise the recovery plan to provide a comprehensive and detailed plan with key milestones, actions and targets to enable the Board to monitor progress. The college should consider commissioning external support to ensure the revised plan's robustness.

Given the significant financial challenges facing the college, the FE Commissioner recommends that it should look to reduce its pay costs by reviewing and updating its teacher contracts. The FE Commissioner further recommends that the college should fully participate in the forthcoming Lancashire area review, but should also begin to explore opportunities for closer collaboration/partnership.

The FE Commissioner makes a number of detailed recommendations for action that the college should take over the coming months, including urgently reviewing the curriculum plan to ensure it is viable and capable of being delivered; that the Executive lead a review of the curriculum planning process to ensure the issue of low class sizes and the inconsistency of contribution numbers is addressed; that the Quality Improvement plan is revised, and that a mentor for the Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality be appointed to support this role in the recovery process.

I have carefully considered the FE Commissioner's assessment, and accept all the recommendations he makes. I note that, in view of the difficulties faced by the college, the FE Commissioner plans to undertake a monitoring visit before the end of the Spring Term. He may wish to make further recommendations in the light of progress at that stage.

Accrington and Rossendale College faces a challenging future. I shall be looking to you, the other members of the Board and the college's Executive team to provide the appropriate leadership in these difficult times.

A summary of the assessment report and recommendations are provided with this letter. This summary and my letter to you will be published on www.gov.uk.

If you have any questions about the assessment, or this letter please contact Karen Riley, in the Skills Funding Agency; karen.riley@sfa.bis.gov.uk in the first instance.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Nick Boles', is centered on the page.

NICK BOLES MP