



**Gillian Keegan MP**

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills  
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15 July 2020

David Smith  
Chair of Governors  
East Sussex College Group  
Cross Levels Way  
Eastbourne  
East Sussex BN21 2UF

Dear David,

I am writing following the assessment of East Sussex College Group by the Further Education (FE) Commissioner. The FE Commissioner's team conducted an intervention assessment on 19 to 20 November and 4 December 2019, following the issuance of a Financial Notice to Improve (FNTI) by the ESFA in November 2019 due to the college's 'Inadequate' financial health grade.

The FE Commissioner reports that the college's governance and leadership arrangements are weak and unsuited to the size and complexity of the college. It is clear from the report that current management structures have failed to provide clear strategic direction for the college and have not adequately addressed ongoing and emerging issues following merger.

I am particularly concerned by the significant financial challenges faced by the college, which have been aggravated by a failure to provide effective financial monitoring, management and control. In light of financial pressures, and additional risks posed by a potential capital development plan, I must urge the college to strengthen its financial leadership to ensure that the necessary strategy and controls are in place - both at board and senior management level - to fully support financial recovery.

Whilst some good progress appears to have been made in supporting improvement of the curriculum and quality of provision at individual colleges, the lack of strategic leadership and

direction at group level has affected the consistency of the college's approach to quality improvement as a whole.

There has also been an overreliance on subcontracted activity and wholly inadequate preparation for the implementation of T Levels. Senior college leaders must prioritise a review of the current level of readiness for each T level pathway for the coming year to ensure successful implementation. I acknowledge that the college has since set ambitious targets for the reduction of subcontracted provision, which should be rigorously pursued.

Key to the college's improvement is to secure strong and effective leadership that can set strategic direction and address significant concerns and issues facing the college. Whilst the progress you have made to streamline and focus the governance structure is encouraging, the successful appointment of a CEO remains your top priority. I advise you to work closely with the FE Commissioner's team to facilitate the recruitment process and secure a strong CEO with a coherent vision for the college's future.

I have accepted all the recommendations of the FE Commissioner and a copy of the assessment is provided with this letter. This document and my letter will be published on gov.uk.

Please confirm within three weeks to the FE Commissioner ([FE.Commissioner@education.gov.uk](mailto:FE.Commissioner@education.gov.uk)) what actions you are taking to address all of the recommendations and your timetable for doing so.

A copy of this letter and the summary report have been sent to all the following local MPs, whose constituencies include college sites, to inform them of the FE Commissioner's findings:

- Maria Caulfield MP Lewes
- Caroline Ansell MP Eastbourne
- Sally-Ann Hart MP Hastings and Rye

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gillian', with several large, overlapping loops and flourishes.

**Gillian Keegan MP**  
**Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills**