

Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London SW1A 2AA

23 September 2020

*Dear Prime Minister*

The Council welcomes the work of the 2019 Review of Post-18 Education and Funding, chaired by Dr Philip Augar. We would like to offer some advice to support the implementation of some elements of the Review, and propose some principles that we believe should be reflected in the post-18 education system as a whole.

We are focussing our comments on the further education and skills aspects of the Augar Review. We do not comment on post-18 education funding, although we note that any reduction in funding for the post-18 education system overall would seriously damage the government's important goals in research and development. We recognise that Government will need to consider carefully how to implement the recommendations of the Augar Review to avoid unintended consequences.

The UK needs an education system that is capable of providing the wide range of skilled people, ideas and innovations necessary for a thriving and inclusive 21<sup>st</sup> century economy, with equal opportunity and mobility between learning opportunities. There is public value, as well as a value to the individual, from having a well-educated society. The post-18 education system must address the following challenges, which are integral to your vision of the UK becoming the world's most innovative economy:

- Training the scientists, engineers, researchers, entrepreneurs and innovators needed across multiple disciplines to increase the intensity of research and development, and to drive productivity in the UK;
- Addressing the skills mismatch between jobs and employees, ensuring that economic regeneration is not held back by a lack of locally relevant training provision;
- Supporting the 50% of the 18 to 30-year-old population who do not go into higher education but who need high-quality further education and training to support their circumstances and aspirations, as well as the opportunity to access further education during their career;
- Developing an accessible and equitable system that gives the workforce the educational pathways needed across their lifetime amidst the changing demands of the economy. This must include improvements in literacy, numeracy and digital skills, and also support development of practical skills, such as critical thinking, creativity and communication.

The Augar Review provides an excellent starting point for developing policies to deliver these priorities. Drawing on its advice, we suggest that Government should focus on building incentives that support greater diversity and coherence in the education system.

## 1. A system that serves a diversity of learners

We strongly endorse the principles from the Augar Review panel that post-18 education should benefit society, the economy and individuals, and that everyone should have the opportunity to be educated after the age of 18 and throughout their careers. We also agree that the post-18 education system will not deliver the full spectrum of potential economic, social and cultural benefits by market forces alone.

The post-18 education system must cater for a wide range of needs, circumstances and learning arrangements, not only to maximise an individuals' earnings, but to enable them to develop careers that meet their values, interests and ambitions, and that serve the needs of employers and the country. There must be genuine choice and flexibility of provision for learners at all ages, including opportunities to re-skill at all levels of the job market.

This will require a significant diversification of provision across the post-18 education sector to provide the necessary breadth of opportunities nationally, while at a local level meeting employers' needs. Digital technology offers opportunities for innovative approaches to the delivery of learning and assessment to increase accessibility. The challenge for post-18 education will be to support a diverse range of individuals to develop the skills needed in a world of continually changing employment opportunities.

## 2. A coherent, integrated education system offering relevant, high-quality education to all

We welcome the Government's ambition to develop a world-class technical and vocational education system. We also welcome the Chancellor's announcement in the budget of investment in the further education college infrastructure, the National Skills Fund and the new Institutes of Technology.

We suggest that reforming and funding of the further education college network should be considered as part of a **comprehensive** system for post-18 education that aims to promote greater diversity of provision across both further and higher education. We should aim for a post-18 education system with diverse, flexible pathways, so that a wide range of learners can access the provision they need, at the right time, through a route that works for their circumstances.

Government should aim for **complementarity** and mobility between the further and higher education sectors, each with distinct identities, but with well-aligned pathways to ensure there are no gaps or barriers to access high-quality provision. Those pathways must be easy for students to navigate and for employers to understand.

We welcome Dr Augar's proposals on a life-long learning allowance and modular, transferrable courses. Close **collaboration** between providers, including between colleges and universities, will also ensure that the comparability and transferability of courses works in practice, and that learners have wider, more flexible access to high-quality teaching and support. It is particularly important to fill the current gap in high-quality provision for qualifications between level 3 and level 6.

The incentives also need to be in place so that employers can meet their workforce requirements, both nationally and locally. The system of technical and professional qualifications needs to be credible to employers and easily understood by both employers and students. T-levels, apprenticeships, industrial studentships, and the increasing use of employment combined with part-time PhDs, can not only help build the learner's understanding of the workplace. They can also help meet the increasing demand for specialist skills in industry, whilst improving the flow of knowledge between industry and academia. We strongly endorse the review panel's vision of a national network of collaborative FE colleges that provide high-quality technical and professional education, maintain strong relationships with employers, and act as engines of social mobility and inclusion.

We urgently need a more diverse and integrated education system, stimulated and supported by an effective incentive structure which recognises the value of education to individuals and to society as a whole: such a system will help unlock the significant social and economic potential of post-18 education and training.

We would be pleased to discuss these principles further with you or your Ministerial colleagues. We are copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Minister of State for Universities, the Parliamentary Under Secretary for Science, Research and Innovation, the Cabinet Secretary and Permanent Secretaries of DfE and BEIS.

Yours sincerely,



**Dr Patrick Vallance**  
Co-Chair



**Professor Dame Nancy Rothwell**  
Co-Chair