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Laura Ellis
Chair of Governors
South and West Kent College
Brook Street
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12 December 2013

Laura,

FE Advisers' assessment of K College

I am writing to let you know about the government's view of your college's position in light of the FE Advisers' recent review, and to invite you to confirm the actions your college will now take in response to the significant concerns raised.

As you are aware, in light of the provisional inadequate inspection grade South and West Kent (K) College by Ofsted at its recent inspection, I asked the FE Commissioner and his team of FE Advisers to review the position of your College in line with the intervention policy set out in *Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills* (April 2013). Two FE Advisers lead the review, which was conducted between 6 December and 12 December 2013.

I have now received the FE Advisers' assessment, which includes a set of recommendations. I have accepted all these recommendations. A summary of the findings and recommendations is included with this letter.

As you will see, the assessment identified significant weaknesses in the governance of the College. Strong governance is vital to a college's success. Governors are responsible for the strategic oversight of the college, and in holding the Principal and executive to account for delivery. They are also guardians of public money, ensuring its effective and efficient use. It is therefore essential that the governing body has the skills and experience necessary to fulfil these responsibilities. This is particularly important at South and West Kent College as it implements the outcomes of the Structure and Prospects Appraisal conducted earlier in the year.

In light of the significant weaknesses identified, I am placing South and West Kent (K) College into Administered College status with immediate effect.

Being placed into Administered College status means that I do not believe that the existing governance has the capacity and capability to implement the outcomes of the Structure and Prospect Appraisal; namely to work with the Skills Funding Agency on the transfer of provision and learners to alternative providers by August 2014 and to dissolve the Corporation shortly thereafter. Changes to the composition of the governing body are therefore urgently needed to ensure it has the right mix of skills and experiences to deliver this outcome, and to provide effective strategic oversight of the College and its performance in the interim, including ensuring sufficient resources are in place to manage and lead the College.

It is essential that the governance of South and West Kent College recognises these weaknesses and understands the need for swift and decisive action to protect the needs of learners and ensure efficient use of public funding. Therefore, can you please confirm, in writing, by 10 January 2014 what actions you will take to address the weaknesses to the existing governance and how you will ensure sufficient resources in the Executive team, and your timetable for doing this, taking account of the recommendations made by the FE Advisers.

My officials will be happy to meet with you to discuss this further. Please contact Paul Sayers (paul.sayers@sfa.gov.uk) in the first instance.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Hancock', with a long, wavy flourish extending to the right.

MATTHEW HANCOCK MP

OUTCOMES OF THE FE ADVISERS' ASSESSMENT OF K COLLEGE

1. **There is an urgent need to secure alternative providers through a managed solution.** A lack of clarity over how and when alternative providers will be secured, the recent Ofsted report and declining learner numbers is having a negative impact on the staff and learners at the College. Clarity on how and when the managed solution will be implemented, and a firm and decision transition plan – alongside additional resources in the Executive team – are urgently needed.
2. **The current Executive team needs strengthening if it is to deliver the outcomes of the Structure and Prospects Appraisal.** The current Executive team has the capability to deliver; the FE Advisers noted in particular that the Interim Principal and the Vice Principal who is working with the Agency on the procurement process have a strong skills set and work well together. Additional resources, and some changes, at Executive team level are needed to lead the day-to-day operational management of the College and to support the Agency on the managed solution.
3. **The current governing body needs refreshing, with additional skills and expertise brought in to support the delivery of the outcomes of the Structure and Prospects Appraisal.** Some of the existing governing body have the skills and expertise necessary to provide the necessary strategic direction and oversight of the College, but there is a need for a refresh of the governing body. There is an urgent need for the governing body to appoint new members with skills and experience in financial recovery and quality improvement. This new governing body should actively support the Executive team to work with the Agency on the managed solution, deal with the assets and liabilities of the Corporation and to ensure the Corporation is dissolved.
4. **The College and the Skills Funding Agency should work together to implement the managed solution to secure alternative providers, and deal with the assets and liabilities of the Corporation.** The College should work alongside the Skills Funding Agency in discussions and negotiations with alternative providers, and respective roles and responsibilities in relation to dealing with assets and liabilities should be clarified.
5. **The College should develop a comprehensive transition plan.** The plans should include dependencies and costs and be integrated with the planning developed by any alternative providers. A project team should be set up to deliver the transition and progress with delivering the outcomes of the Structure and Prospects Appraisal should be monitored rigorously by the FE Commissioner and his team of FE Advisers.