



Department  
for Education



Department  
for Business  
Innovation & Skills

Trevor Rees  
Chair  
Stockport College  
Town Centre Campus  
Wellington Road South  
Stockport  
SK1 3UQ

Minister for Skills and  
Enterprise

1 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0ET  
T +44 (0) 20 7215.5000  
E [enquiries@bis.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@bis.gov.uk)  
[www.bis.gov.uk](http://www.bis.gov.uk)  
[www.education.gov.uk](http://www.education.gov.uk)

17 December 2013

I am writing to let you know about the government's view of your college's position in light of the FE Commissioner's 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 Skills Funding Agency's decision to judge the College's financial health as inadequate and the Ofsted inspection, I asked the FE Commissioner to review the position of your College in line with the intervention policy set out in Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills (April 2013). The FE Commissioner completed his assessment on 6 December 2013.

I have now received the FE Commissioner's assessment – a summary of which is attached – which includes a set of recommendations. I have accepted all these recommendations.

As you will see, the assessment identified significant weaknesses in the governance and leadership 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.

In light of the significant weaknesses identified, I am placing Stockport College into Administered College status with immediate effect.

Being placed into Administered College status means that I do not believe that the existing governance and leadership has the capacity and capability to deliver the quality improvement and financial recovery needed to protect learners and make efficient use of public funding. Changes to the composition of the governing body and the executive leadership are therefore urgently needed to ensure it has the right mix of skills and experiences to deliver the financial and quality improvement of a large and complex organisation, and to provide effective strategic direction to the College. The governing

body also needs to ensure it can provide sufficient scrutiny and challenge to the executive leadership over how it is delivering quality and financial improvement, and for ensuring that the leadership has the capability to deliver this improvement. The FE Commissioner has recommended the funding agencies join the Board; however because of concerns about potential conflicts of interest we will implement this recommendation through observer status.

It is essential that the governance and leadership of Stockport 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 20 January 2014 what actions you will take to address the weaknesses to the existing governance and leadership, and your timetable for doing this, taking account of the recommendations made by the FE Commissioner.

The FE Commissioner's assessment also identified concerns about financial management and the long term financial sustainability of the College. I have therefore asked the FE Commissioner to lead a Structure and Prospects Appraisal of Stockport College, beginning in January 2014 and reporting back to me on the outcomes of the Appraisal at the end of March 2014.

If you have any questions about the FE Commissioner's assessment or this letter my officials will be happy to meet with you to discuss. Please contact Anne Gornall ([anne.gornall@sfa.bis.gov.uk](mailto:anne.gornall@sfa.bis.gov.uk)) in the first instance.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Hancock', written in a cursive style.

**MATTHEW HANCOCK**

## **OUTCOMES OF THE FE COMMISSIONER'S ASSESSMENT OF STOCKPORT COLLEGE**

- 1. The College should be placed into Administered College status.** Significant changes need to be made to the governing body and Senior Leadership Team.
- 2. The governing body should be refreshed with new appointments in the areas of quality improvement.** The governing body is not sufficiently focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning, and student outcomes. There is no clear action to address the problems and insufficient oversight and scrutiny of the Post Inspection Action Plan. The governing body has not provided sufficient challenge and scrutiny of the Senior Leadership Team.
- 3. A member of the Skills Funding Agency and the Education Funding Agency should join the Board to provide professional oversight.**
- 4. An FE Commissioner lead Structure and Prospects Appraisal should take place between January and March 2014.** There are questions over the long term sustainability of the College, and whether it can continue to operate as it is currently structured.
- 5. The existing Senior Leadership Team should be supported by the addition of an Interim experienced Principal/ex Principal and Director of Quality while this review is underway to address the significant issues being faced by the current student cohort.** The Senior Leadership Team has been subject to continuous churn since 2009 creating discontinuity. There is a lack of focus on quality. Several senior managers have responsibility for aspects of quality improvement over recent years, with no clear lines of accountability. The Post Inspection Action Plan needs further work to ensure there are clear, measurable actions and effective mechanisms for monitoring progress.
- 6. Urgent discussions should be undertaken to resolve the issue of St Thomas's.**