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for Education

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I am writing to inform you of the Government's view of the position of Somerset College of Art and Technology following the Further Education (FE) Commissioner's recent review, and the next steps that will be taken to secure improvement.

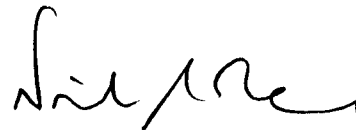
As you know, in light of the 'inadequate' assessment of the college's financial health the Skills Funding Agency issued the college with a Notice of Concern on 8 June 2015. As Minister for Skills, I asked the FE Commissioner, Dr David Collins, to carry out an assessment of the college and this was conducted between 15 and 19 June 2015.

In his assessment the FE Commissioner identifies that Somerset College of Art and Technology has many strengths but that it has struggled to maintain financial stability in the face of demographic changes and a highly competitive environment. I am however encouraged that you have responded to this situation by undertaking your own strategic review. I understand that this process has concluded and Bridgewater College has been identified as a merger partner that will support the college in its drive for improved quality and financial health. While this is a positive outcome I would ask you to make sure you do engage with Richard Huish Sixth Form College to ensure that overall post 16 provision is sustained efficiently and effectively and that local expertise and resources will lead to an increase in the extent and nature of what is on offer for learners and employers in the Taunton area.

I have carefully considered the FE Commissioner's assessment, and accept all the recommendations he makes. I am pleased to agree that your Board and senior management team should be supported in your merger proposals with the aim of resolving the college's present difficulties within the current academic year.

A summary of the Commissioner's assessment report and recommendations is provided with this letter. This summary and my letter to you will be published on www.gov.uk two weeks following the date on which this letter was sent.

If you have any questions about the FE Commissioner's assessment or this letter please contact Paul Lucken in the Skills Funding Agency. He can be contacted at paul.lucken@sfa.bis.gov.uk.



NICK BOLES MP