



Department
for Education

To all Chairs of FE College Corporations,
College Principals

9 March 2015

I wanted to write to you before the dissolution of Parliament to thank you for your hard work over the last five years in implementing the further education reforms. In my time as Minister for Skills and Equalities, I have been pleased to see the commitment you have shown in grasping the opportunities provided by the reforms to transform the lives of learners. It was good also to see so many of you at the Chairs' Recognition Event last Wednesday. It was a pleasure to speak to you and I hope you found it worthwhile.

There is no doubt, of course, that the reforms have made the role of governor more demanding. As I said on Wednesday, being a governor in FE is both an honour and a major responsibility. The new focus on devolution will increase the demand on governors to develop the right structures to be outwardly accountable and ensure provision is responsive to local needs. I am confident that you can meet this challenge. You may have already seen the short report that we launched at the Recognition Event on the impact of FE governance reform policy. This provides some excellent examples of how colleges are making the most of the reforms and sets out the critical areas for future development which will provide the impetus for the Department and the sector to take FE governance to the next level. The report can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-education-colleges-governance-reform-assessment>.

Since my previous letter in November 2014, we have made progress in a number of important policy areas. On 9 December 2014, we announced the 2 millionth apprenticeship and there have now been over 2.1 million apprenticeship starts over the life of this Parliament. We also published our response to the Technical Consultation on 13 January 2015 and we will continue to trial a new funding model through the Trailblazers in 2014/15 and 2015/16.



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We have also seen traineeships go from strength to strength. All those involved can be proud that over 10,000 young people took up opportunities in the first year of the programme and early evidence shows that around half have already progressed to positive destinations, and a further 5,000 young people started a new traineeship in the first three months of 2014/15. We hope that providers and employers will double the number of quality traineeships this year, which would mean over 20,000 opportunities and an even bigger impact on the life chances of young people.

I would also like to thank you for your support in ensuring all 16-19 year olds are given the opportunity to secure GCSEs in English and Maths by age 19. Data suggests that the vast majority of colleges and providers are on track to enrol all students without A*-C GCSE on approved English and Maths courses and those that aren't quite there are being contacted by the EFA about what further action is needed to support them in this ambition.

GCSE is the central qualification in Maths and English and we want more people to achieve it. However, since not all learners are ready to study GCSEs, it is important there are other ways for people to improve their literacy and numeracy. People following these routes deserve the very best provision leading to a qualification employers recognise and respect. To this end, I have commissioned the Education and Training Foundation to carry out a review of the best way to achieve and accredit maths and English outside of GCSEs, working closely with sector organisations like the Association of Colleges, Association of Employment and Learning Providers, Ofqual and Ofsted. The Review will report its findings by the end of March 2015.

An evaluation of the FE Commissioner-led intervention process has also just been completed, showing how the process is successfully delivering a rapid and robust response to underperformance. The lessons learned from the evaluation report, due to be published shortly, will ensure that this process remains effective in raising standards in the future.

As on previous occasions, I attach a policy brief on recent progress in implementing *Rigour and Responsiveness*. I would be grateful if you would ensure this is disseminated to all your governors.

Please forward any comments you have to the Department's FE Governance mailbox at fegovernance@bis.gsi.gov.uk.



NICK BOLES MP