

Friday 12 June 2020

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London  
SW1A 2AA

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing on behalf of the University and College Union to call on the government to do more to secure the future of the post-16 education sector in light of the Covid-19 crisis.

As you may be aware, a recent report by London Economics highlighted a potential £2.5bn loss of income from tuition fees and teaching grants for UK universities. This analysis has been confirmed by the recent large scale study of international students' intentions undertaken by the British Council. In the worst case scenario, the Council predicts losses to the sector of around £2bn from international students alone. The Office of Budget Responsibility also states that education will be the sector hardest hit by the current crisis.

Without government intervention, an estimated 30,000 jobs in higher education are at risk, with a further 32,000 jobs under threat throughout the wider economy. The total economic cost to the country from the reduced economic activity generated by universities alone - due to the loss in income - is estimated at more than £6bn.

In further education - where your party's election manifesto and budget promised a new injection of funding - the Association of Colleges reports that losses could be up to £2bn. Education will be central for our recovery, but it is clearly under immense pressure.

Our sector has always been a critical part of the social and economic fabric of the UK and will be crucial to our country's recovery from the damage done by the Covid-19 crisis. Staff in the sector responded magnificently in the early days of the pandemic and continue to do so, shifting within a matter of days to online teaching in order to support millions of students and continuing to provide expertise and ground breaking research aimed at combating the virus.

Unsurprisingly, though, the crisis has created huge uncertainty and without urgent action we risk losing vital educational capacity just when it will be needed most. The sector needs a clear and coherent plan aimed at retaining capacity and maximising the positive impact that further and higher education can make.

I wrote to the [Secretary of State for Education](#) in April, calling on the Westminster government to take action in the following areas:

1. Underwriting post-16 education by committing to maintain the income of all publicly-funded further and higher education institutions at current levels, and implementing the additional funding commitments for UK research and English further education announced in the recent budget.
2. Requiring institutions to work cooperatively and cross-sectorally to protect the interests of students and local communities, and pool research capacity where there is a wider strategic interest in doing so.
3. Urgently convening a UK-wide group of representatives from institutions, examination bodies, unions and student organisations to agree clear and appropriate pathways for all learners and students.
4. Protecting educational capacity by confirming that furlough arrangements will apply to all staff employed by post-16 education institutions, including those on insecure contracts, and extending the one-year visa extension scheme being offered to NHS staff to all current visa holders.
5. Making a public commitment to protect universities and colleges against closure.
6. Reducing bureaucracy and allowing more time for teaching and research by cancelling all forms of institutional assessment such as the Teaching Excellence Framework.
7. Developing a properly resourced lifelong learning strategy which ensures people of all ages can access the learning they need.

While the government appears recognise the importance of further and higher education to our recovery, the very limited actions taken so far have been inadequate to the great challenges the sector faces and to the crucial task of maintaining the confidence of students and staff.

We now desperately need a clear and coherent plan from the government that guarantees funding and jobs to protect our academic capacity. The country cannot afford to push tens of thousands of teachers, researchers, and education professionals into unemployment at a time when we will need education to be a key driver of recovery.

It is now critical to our country's future that government sets out a clear plan in the seven areas identified and I would welcome the chance to discuss this with you further.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Jo Grady, UCU general secretary