



The Business Services Association
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Gillian Keegan, M.P.,
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills,
Department for Education,
Sanctuary Buildings,
20 Great Smith Street,
London.
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9th November, 2020

Dear Gillian,

Thank you for your letter of 30th October responding to my letter to the Secretary of State, which is much appreciated.

However, I am afraid the letter triggers an increasing sense of despair at the Department's unwillingness to engage on this issue. We are emphatically not requesting shorter apprenticeships. The concerns set out in my previous letter have been expressed for some time, but we have now reached an extraordinary and exceptional period. The grave situation with apprenticeships and training is affecting thousands of people, including many young people who we know are among those most adversely affected by the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I find it very hard to believe that the Government will be uncharacteristically tin eared to the concerns of those who provide and deliver apprenticeships.

We do not believe the current policy in this area is right, just or effective. We know that those currently undertaking apprenticeships are having real trouble completing their qualifications because of current restrictions and the financial challenges facing many colleges is only making the situation worse. We understand the view that the minimum duration is a key element of maintaining apprenticeship quality, however we would emphasise that our proposal is not a shortened apprenticeship but an acceleration of a portion of the skills training attached to an apprenticeship with the further skills, in-depth knowledge, and behaviours to follow.

We have raised issues with training and apprenticeships many times with your predecessors, each one of whom has been too busy to meet with us to discuss the issues. We have always taken a constructive approach with the Department and it is extraordinarily frustrating that the Department for Education lacks the confidence and the time to meet with BSA members on this issue. Our members are strong advocates of apprenticeships and training in general. They have been at the forefront of delivering the Government's policy in this in area but the persistent refusal by the Department to be responsive to constructive suggestions is extremely demoralising.

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I write again at the unanimous request of BSA members to invite you to meet with them. I believe we are all trying to achieve the same thing and to do so will benefit those who need apprenticeships most. I believe there is a way we can work well together, and I hope that this will be possible.

I look forward to hearing from you.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Fox
Chief Executive
BSA - The Business Services Association

Cc: Rt. Hon. Gavin Williamson M.P., Secretary of State for Education
Rt. Hon. Michael Gove M.P., Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Rt. Hon. Alok Sharma M.P., Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
Nadhim Zahawi M.P., Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at BEIS
Alex Hickman, Special Adviser, Prime Minister's Office