

Dr Hudson: “The coronavirus pandemic throws into sharp relief the importance of food production and security, and the critical areas of health and social care. Newton Rigg College in Penrith in my constituency has over 1,000 learners and 130 staff, and trains people in vital areas such as agriculture, land-based studies and health and social care. The college has now been listed for possible closure in July 2021 by its host institution, Askham Bryan College, creating much uncertainty over its future. Does my hon. Friend agree that colleges such as Newton Rigg are vital for our rural communities, and will the Department for Education and other Departments work with me and local stakeholders to try to secure a viable and sustainable future for that prized asset of both Cumbria and, indeed, the wider UK?”

Gillian Keegan, Minister for Further Education: “My honorable friend is absolutely right. Our further education colleges are vital for supporting young people in rural communities to get the skills they need. I am aware that the governors at Askham Bryan College have made an in-principle decision to close the Newton Rigg campus from July 2021. Indeed, my hon. Friend and I have now met twice with the Further Education Commissioner to discuss this, at my hon. Friend’s request, so I know he will continue to campaign on this issue. My officials are working with the college and stakeholders to ensure that learners and communities in and around Eden Valley continue to have access to high-quality further education.”