



Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Committee Office, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

Tel 020 7219 6194/5528 Email efracom@parliament.uk Website www.parliament.uk

From the Chair of the Committee

The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP
Secretary of State for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

29 June 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

The provision of land-based education

I am writing in response to your letter of 17 June in reply to mine of 29 April in relation to land-based education and Newton Rigg College. The Committee is disappointed that you have failed to address several of the serious issues we raised about land based education in England; and especially what the closure of Newton Rigg tells us about the Government's long-standing failure to provide effective leadership and support to the sector.

Your letter does provide some clarity about the legal ability of Askham Bryan College to dispose of the campus and the circumstances of the transfer of Newton Rigg from the University of Cumbria in 2011. However, it did not address the issue of whether the department and its legal advisers approved the "Deed of Release" dated 29 July 2011 between Askham Bryan College, the University of Cumbria, the Young People's Learning Agency and the Chief Executive of Skills Funding. The Committee considers that it is vital for there to be clarity for all concerned that Askham Bryan are legally entitled to sell these assets, and also clarity as to why the Deed of Release purported to absolve the parties from claims of negligence or fraud in relation to it.

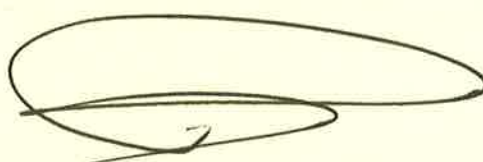

More fundamentally the Committee is concerned with how Cumbria, a county with the rural economy at its heart, will be left without a specialist land-based college for the first time in over a century because Askham Bryan is having to 'sell the family silver' to make ends meet. Cumbrian students seeking to learn the skills their local economy and environment increasingly need, will now have to travel long-distances out of the county.

As I set out in my earlier letter this suggests a failure of Government policy to ensure both that sufficient safeguards are in place to prevent unique local assets such as Newton Rigg being lost to education through such disposals; and that local specialist land-based provision remains viable in areas with lower population density. It is therefore disappointing that you have so far

failed to address these concerns, and set out what steps you will be taking to ensure that previous mistakes are not repeated.

As I said in my previous letter, a national strategy for land-based education is required to meet the challenges the sector faces. At a time of unprecedented change and opportunity in the farming sector and as we seek to tackle the multiple environmental challenges we face, the Government must commit to an approach that recognises the broad benefits of local specialist provision. We note that you intend to provide a summary of the review carried out by Robbie Moore MP shortly, however the Committee also expects that you will directly address how the Government intends to tackle the issues that the Committee has identified and provide the national leadership that is required.

Yours Sincerely



Neil Parish
Chair of the Committee