



Gillian Keegan MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills

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Neil Parish MP
Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
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17th December 2020

Dear Neil,

RE: UNION LEARNING FUND

I understand that the decision not to continue supporting the Union Learning Fund after March 2021 was raised at a recent Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee meeting. At the time, the Minister for Farming, Fisheries and Food committed to taking away the Committee's questions and, as the responsible Minister, I am writing to provide further detail on this decision.

Although it is unclear what impact Brexit will have in the short term, it is unfortunately clear that we will have higher levels of unemployment next year - we are already seeing unemployment rise now as a result of the impact of COVID-19 on the economy. We need to help these people reskill where necessary and re-enter into employment. However, the UnionLearn model, although it has done good work in the past, has its limitations which means it is not the solution going forward.

The Union Learning Fund operates mostly through larger employers within unionised parts of the economy. It is not designed to help those out of work or are self-employed – only 2% of people supported via the Union Learning Fund are unemployed with 5% self-employed. We need to support people in all circumstances and in all types of employment. This means we need a wider solution at scale.

We took the decision to no longer support the Union Learning Fund after 31 March 2021 as part of the wider Spending Review discussions and in light of our expanded commitment to skills development through the £2.5 million National Skills Fund, and Lifetime Skills Guarantee. This national fund will support individuals to get the training and qualifications they need wherever they are located and regardless of whether they are able to access the UnionLearn network. This is in addition to the separate £500m Skills Recovery Package which will boost the numbers of apprenticeships and traineeships available.

As part of this expanded commitment, I can confirm all the money will be invested in skills and retraining that will be accessible to all.

I am copying this letter to Ian Byrne MP and to Victoria Prentis MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Farming, Fisheries and Food.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gillian', with a large, stylized flourish above the name.

Gillian Keegan MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills