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Support for students in Further Education (FE)

As you will be aware, the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) was discontinued in England back in 2010. Its replacement, the 16-19 Bursary, was introduced in 2011 with a significantly lower budget. Analysis provided by the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that the change had a relatively modest effect on participation and attainment in its first two years, but that this disproportionately affected low-income young people.

When asked about reintroducing the EMA earlier this year, the Government said it has no plans to do so.

Although money for education catch-up was announced at the Budget and Spending Review in October, I know there has been a warning from within the sector that this does not fully reverse a decade of austerity within FE. The former Education Recovery Commissioner has said “the short-term saving offered by a limited recovery programme will be dwarfed by the long-term cost of successive cohorts leaving education with lower skills, an effect that will be most apparent in our poorest communities”.

Pupils in FE have faced significant disruption over the pandemic. Despite the considerable importance of these years, they have received significantly less support for catch-up from the Government. As a result, those young people who have seen their exams cancelled or disrupted are moving onto a new, vital phase of their education, having missed core learning but with less support in place to help them succeed.

To support those young people who have faced the greatest disruption in the last year, I believe we need a new, two-year, time limited, Further Education Recovery Premium, available on the same basis as the Pupil Premium is in secondary schools. This could help reach young people who do not currently receive the Pupil Premium because of their phase of education.

The pandemic has shone a light on the problems that our schools, colleges and early years providers were already facing. At a time when our economy has to adapt to major challenges, I am concerned that investment in skills remains lacking.

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