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Minister for Education and Skills  
Welsh Government  
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Our ref: CE9976RL

19 December 2013

Dear Minister

### **Education Bill**

Recently I visited Coleg Elidyr which is situated in the north of my constituency near Llandovery as a guest in their 40<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration. Coleg Elidyr is an institution providing specialist further education and training for young people aged 18-25 with learning difficulties for individuals not suited to general provision. In my short time at the College I learnt about the transformative impact specialist provision can have on very vulnerable individuals. I am proud that the College is located in my constituency. The College was the first of its kind across the British State, and its model has been copied by countless other institutions. A path finding success which we should celebrate and help develop due to the person centred approach it provides to complex and vulnerable individuals.

Staff at Coleg Elidyr were very concerned at some of the proposals included in your Education Bill, which I understand is at Stage 2 of the legislative process.

The main concern of Coleg Elidyr relates to Assessment Arrangements and in particular the intention of transferring responsibility for assessments to Local Authorities. The College is concerned that the arrangements as proposed might not take into consideration the full range of post-16 options available, particularly including specialist provision such as provided by Coleg Elidyr.

Coleg Elidyr inform me traditionally there has not been much strategic collaboration between Local Authorities and specialist providers and the new assessment arrangements you propose might mean that individuals who should receive specialist provision are not allocated to suitable providers.

Coleg Elidyr understand that the bill aims to provide assessment guidance that specifies the requirement to assess for the needs of the individual, but by placing the responsibility on Local Authorities there will be an incentive to assess on the basis of the cheapest option.

There is also a clear issue as to how will vulnerable young people and their families will get the best advice in terms of the options available to them at this stage of their educational development.

The College also has concerns about the timescale and resourcing of the change. They understand that the first assessments will be conducted by Local Authorities from September 2014 which allows very little time for local

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Jonathan Edwards AS / MP

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authorities to identify deficits in their knowledge base of post-16 options and to implement the necessary procedures and training for those responsible for carrying out assessments. The timescale outlined by the Bill will not allow sufficient time for Local Authorities and specialist providers to develop a collaborative approach, in particular for Local Authorities to have a joint approach so that specialist providers like Coleg Elidyr do not find themselves having to deal with twenty two LA's, each with their own criteria for determining assessments.

The implementation of similar changes in England led to huge variations between the requirements of Local Authorities. I would hope that you would want to ensure that this will not happen in Wales and that there will be uniformity to ensure a seamless transition. I would hope that the Welsh Government in particular would be minded to ensure that there are strict protocols in place in relation to contractual arrangements and payment schedules between Local Authorities and Specialist providers.

Paragraph 28 of the guidance of the Bill notes that your new arrangements will lead to better value for money. The College are unclear as to how judgments for value for money will be reached considering that outcomes for specialist providers and general Further Education are so different. Often in complex cases such as those catered for at Coleg Elidyr, the cheapest option will not be the best option. What measures will you be placing in the Bill to ensure that full costs of meeting an individual's needs are taken into account when comparing mainstream and specialist provision.

The College inform me that experience in England following similar changes indicates that there is growing duplication between mainstream and specialist providers, leading to excess capacity and a waste of resources. Far from greater collaboration it's led to competition - an unintended consequence I'm sure you will probably wish to avoid.

In short Coleg Elidyr and other specialist providers are concerned that unless the Bill provides clear guidance in relation to admissions it could seriously impact the business model of specialist providers and more importantly limit the life chances of extremely vulnerable individuals. These individuals deserve the best support we as a society are able to provide. Specialist providers such as the College therefore need to be protected as a result of Education Bill.

Yn gywir iawn,

**Jonathan Edwards AS/MP**

**Dwyrain Caerfyrddin a Dinefwr / Carmarthen East & Dinefwr**

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