

Julie James AC / AM
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Sgiliau a Thechnoleg
Deputy Minister for Skills and Technology



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-04-644
Ein cyf/Our ref JJ/00917/15

William Powell AM
Assembly Member for Mid & West Wales
Chair - Petitions Committee
Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

committeebusiness@Wales.gsi.gov.uk

17 November 2015

Dear William

Thank you for your letter regarding Petition P-04-644: The Future of Further Education, in which you ask for my views on further comments raised by the petitioner. I apologise for the delay in responding to you, but unfortunately the letter was not received by my office until earlier this month.

The content of my response does not vary from the message given originally. I can assure you that there is not a single person working within the Welsh Government who would choose to make these cuts if it wasn't absolutely necessary. Unfortunately, this is the reality of the situation we find ourselves in. As mentioned in my previous response, the decisions we make at budget time are guided by the priorities we were elected on in 2011. These priorities for funding have necessitated difficult decisions in other areas of the Welsh Government's budget; and I acknowledge the significant difficulties this has caused for the Further Education (FE) institutions in Wales.

Our focus now must be on ensuring we make the best use of the remaining budget we have available to us. This does not mean that we will stop supporting those adults who are most vulnerable and in need of support, in fact the opposite, we are aiming to prioritise the funding available for those learners.

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1NA

English Enquiry Line 0300 0603300
Llinell Ymholiadau Cymraeg 0300 0604400
Correspondence .Julie.James@wales.gsi.gov.uk

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The petitioner quotes a note received by a college Principal which outlines an expected in-year reduction to the 2015/16 settlement. I can assure you that there is no intention to reduce the 2015/16 budget in year.

Colleges have been informed that future year funding cannot be guaranteed as the outcomes of the Comprehensive Spending Review at Westminster, and further impacts on Wales, have not yet been determined. Colleges have therefore been advised that it would be prudent to model the impacts and plan for a number of scenarios.

The Principal also shared some concern about the proposed meeting I had convened with all Principals and Chairs of Governors. As it turned out, the meeting was welcomed as a 'helpful' meeting by those that attended, and allowed me to once again voice my support for the sector. It allowed me to hear first-hand some of the issues faced by the sector but also gave me an opportunity to challenge the sector to look for opportunities for establishing diverse income streams.

The meeting proved to be an excellent opportunity for Welsh Government and the FE sector to work together to evaluate options and work together to minimise the impact of any reductions on learning, including adult education.

The petitioner recommends that we should 'pool resources' instead of 'scattering and diluting available funding', using the Flexible Skills programme as an example.

The Flexible Skills Programme supports those adult learners highlighted as a concern by the petitioner, and by separating the budget we can ensure that we prioritise the funding to those learners that need it the most. The FE Sector will of course play a major role in ensuring the successful delivery of this programme which should also see the sector benefiting financially.

All activity undertaken via this programme will be evaluated in due course to assess the impact of the intervention.

Regarding the comments about apprenticeship provision, I would like to assure you that we continue to strive to deliver world class apprenticeships, to develop high quality Traineeships; and to add value to the many other programmes we support.

Recently, we expanded the delivery of Higher Apprenticeships in Wales, greatly enhancing the Apprenticeship programme. The vocational and academic combination will contribute greatly to economic prosperity by enhancing an individual's skills, whilst supporting employers and the wider labour market.

Furthermore, colleges have received funding to build capacity to deliver these higher level skills (Level 4 and above) and also support Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to help staff deliver literacy and numeracy qualifications and support. The funding can only be used for CPD for staff involved in 'front line' delivery of FE teaching and learning.

To close, I recognise that this is a very difficult time, and I appreciate that the sector is continuing to deliver during a period of financial unrest. We are doing what we can to mitigate the impact of these funding cuts and will continue to work with the sector to deliver the first class education system we all wish to see.

Yours sincerely



Julie James AC / AM

Y Dirprwy Weinidog Sgiliau a Thechnoleg
Deputy Minister for Skills and Technology