

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-04-639  
Ein cyf/Our ref JJ/00345/15

William Powell AM  
Chair - Petitions Committee

committeebusiness@Wales.gsi.gov.uk

*Dear William*

20 May 2015

Thank you for your letter of 11 May to Huw Lewis AM on the petition you have received regarding Saving Further Education in Powys. As this falls within my portfolio I am replying to the concerns that have been raised.

Following discussions with NPTC Group of Colleges I would like to highlight a number of inaccuracies that have been stated in the petition:

- The actual Welsh Government cut in their budget was £3.6 million not £4 million;
- Not all “part time courses” have been cut. NPTC Group have received a reduction of £262, 255 in their part time funding for 2015/16;
- NPTC Group has entered a 45 day consultation period with staff. The aim is to make cost savings which has resulted in some staff being put “at risk of redundancy”. However, actual numbers are still not known but the figure of 80% is very inaccurate;
- Some learning programmes are at risk of 50 hours reduction but this is still subject to consultation and NPTC Group are looking to increase the use of “blended and e-learning” to ensure learners still receive an appropriate learning experience. This could be an average cut as some programmes would not require the full amount of time allocated due to the size of the qualification; and
- £400 for “Mature Learners “course fees in completely inaccurate. The NPTC Group have made no proposals which would specifically impact on mature students.

As a result of the cuts imposed on Wales by the government at Westminster, the Welsh Government’s budget is around 8% lower in real terms than it was in 2010/11. We have been clear with everyone working in every public service in Wales about the financial challenges this has created.

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*Wedi'i argraffu ar bapur wedi'i ailgylchu (100%)*

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The Post-16 FE budget has had to be reduced by £14 million. As a consequence, part time provision delivered in Further Education has been the hardest hit, with a 50 per cent reduction in funding. We have striven to protect learners as much as possible, and have protected provision for our 16-19 year olds.

As we work through these difficult times, it is more important than ever that we focus not just on the resources that are available but how we use them to best effect to achieve the best outcomes for young people.

The Welsh Government has statutory duties to provide education for learners up to the age of 18, therefore proposals for cuts to public funding have been designed to protect these learners as much as possible. However, in contrast to previous years, this funding will be subject to a 2.6 per cent efficiency reduction. This is also true for school sixth forms.

We have also protected our most vulnerable learners, so Adult Basic Education (ABE), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and discrete provision for learners with moderate or profound learning difficulties have not been subject to the 50 per cent cut.

It is no small thing to have protected provision for those aged 16-19. We have been able to maintain funding for Traineeships, and are continuing to fund Apprenticeships for those aged 16-24 and Higher Level Apprenticeships. We fought hard in the recent budget settlement to mitigate some of these cuts and we secured an additional £5m funding for additional apprenticeships in 2015-16 and 2016-17.

Mindful that we have to plan for the future and that we will continue to have to make tough decisions about funding priorities into the future, our new Policy Statement on Skills is designed to prioritise funding for learners aged 16-24 as well as ensuring continued support for all-age Higher Apprenticeships. Part of this is a recognition that we simply cannot continue with a situation where the government is the sole source of funding for skills training. Clearly, we will continue to provide support where we can but we need to see employers increasing their level of investment. This long-term challenge requires cultural change but is something which must be tackled if we are to achieve our key goal of a financially sustainable skills system in Wales over the next decade. Our new *Flexible Skills Programme* will receive £3.9 million to support the skills and employment needs of companies that play a strategic role in the economy

Officials are also working on establishing a new Skills Priority Programme to deliver part time high level skills training to employed adults.

We will, therefore, expect both Local Authorities and FE institutions to prioritise their delivery and deliver not only to the 16-18 cohort, but also to maintain their high level skills provision and support for those learners considered most vulnerable.

I must also stress that all Further Education Institutions in Wales are autonomous bodies and it is up to them how they prioritise their provision in line with Welsh Government priorities.

We have striven to protect our young people from the worst of the cuts we have had to endure from Westminster and we will continue doing this over the next few years. We also remain committed to Further Education and officials are working across departments to mitigate some of the damage caused by the reductions in funding and to determine new, and more sustainable, ways of working in the future.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julie', written in a cursive style.

**Julie James AC / AM**

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