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Copy of letter sent to MPs

10 February 2010

Dear

In January the Learning and Skills Council announced the 2010/11 adult Further Education funding allocations. As you know Colleges are by far the biggest providers of vocational training in Britain, with 3,700 Adult Further Education students and 800 Train to Gain students at Hackney Community College alone. Colleges are now facing a cut of more than £200million to their funding for adult students. Our 'adult learner responsive' budget will shrink by 10%, with 20% coming off our Train to Gain budget; a cut of £1.1m.

These cuts will have serious consequences for the ability of this College to respond to local demand, to offer high quality courses and to contribute to the economic recovery. We understand how tough public finances are, and we expected to be facing an efficiency squeeze of about 3%. However, these cuts are averaging 16%, well out of line with the savings in the national budgets for reasons that are not clear to the sector.

You will also know that these cuts come on the back of three years of reductions for Hackney Community College which have seen our adult targets fall from about 5,500 students in 2006 to around 3,000 next year. We do not want to lose high quality courses that are essential to the economy recovery and make a great deal of difference to people in our local community. It also makes no sense when the Government is trying to reduce unemployment to make 7,000 college staff redundant in England with around 35 posts likely to go from Hackney Community College.

I urge you to raise these concerns with Ministers and ask the Government to allow Colleges to be more flexible with their funding so that we can help support these courses where possible by transferring money between budgets - something we are not allowed to do currently. I ask that you seek an explanation for the wide difference between the publicly announced savings and the reality of the cuts Colleges are facing. In addition we understand that there may be as much as £50m in vacancies not filled as the LSC is transferred to new structures. These new structures have been predicated on no reductions in staff numbers, but I do not understand how such promises can be given to the bureaucrats planning the system when we are having to cut front line services to students and make delivery staff redundant.

The distribution of the cuts and efficiency targets casts doubts on the Government's commitment to some of its own policies, particularly in raising skills. Colleges will not be able to enrol and teach the same number of students; any suggestion that Colleges can keep the same number of adult students by simply expanding the number of fee-paying places ignores the current economic climate and people's ability to pay.

Unlike the current debate about university funding cuts - which are prospective - these changes are happening now. They will affect students trying to enrol from September this year.

I know we have your support for the work the College is delivering. You will have seen the local improvements in Level 3 achievement and may be aware that the statistics show that the proportion of unskilled residents in Hackney has reduced from 25% to 15% in the last 3 years. These achievements have arisen in significant part due to the work of this College. I urge you to do what you can to minimise the adverse impact of these recent reductions, which are disproportionate to the efficiency squeeze we know the public sector must share.

Yours sincerely

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

Ian Ashman  
Principal