



Mr William Powell AM
Chair of the Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

19 August 2015

Dear Mr Powell

Petition P-04-639 Save Further Education in Powys

Thank you for the letter we received on 5th August 2015 regarding the petition from NPTC Group students.

As a sector, and as a Group of colleges, we support the statement, "We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to reconsider funding cuts that have been made to the NPTC Group of Colleges and to ensure that the educational futures of the students are safe."

The main body of the information provided by the students is correct, although there are a few slight inaccuracies.

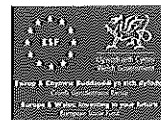
The initial cuts to the further education sector equated to an overall cut of 6.4%, which was the headline figure that was published. However, each college, depending on the extent of part-time provision, received a higher or lower cut. For example, the lowest cut was to St David's 6th Form College, they received a 2.6% cut in funding. The highest cut in funding was to the NPTC Group of Colleges, which received a cut of 8.42%, because we have been successful in addressing the Assembly's Skills agenda and attracting large numbers of part-time students. This 8.42% cut equates to a cut of £2,172,242.

However, this in no way shows the full picture. Last year college cuts were protected to a certain extent by the addition of £12.5m into the sector under the SPPFE fund. This fund was not guaranteed for the next academic year and for our group equated to an additional £1,005,256. Therefore the full cut was £3,177,498 or a cut of 11.85% of our core funding. It is true to say that very late in the academic year, some SPPFE money was allocated, but nowhere near the sums allocated in the previous year. Therefore the real cuts to the group amounted to £3.2m.

This still does not though provide the full picture for the sector. The majority of staff in the sector are on incremental salaries which annually cost the group anywhere between 1.5 and 2% increase on the salary bill. The Teachers' Pension employer contributions rising from 14.1% to 16.4% puts an additional burden on the college in 2015/16. In April 2016, this will be further exacerbated by an average increase in employer NI contributions of 30% due to the ending of 'contracting out'. We estimated that the total reduction to our core budget will equate to approximately £4M.

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In addition, we noted an error in the funding calculation offered to this group and we were under allocated on our core funding for 2015/16 a sum of £489k. Welsh Government accepted this mistake, however this was after all of the announcements had been made.

It is now therefore more accurate to say that the cut faced by this group for the 2015/16 academic year is closer to £3.5M.

We plan to bring in £1m of additional non-core funding in 2015/16 and the large-scale redundancies have not resulted in any compulsory redundancies. This was as a result of the group and the trade unions working very closely together.


The students' statement also refers to losing 50% of our part-time courses and 80% of our staff. This statement is not completely accurate. Our funding for part-time courses (with the exception of Basic Skills, ESOL and LLDD) has been cut by 50%. It is expected that co-investment by employers will make up this shortfall. However, the majority of our part-time students pay their own fees, and therefore we have had to raise our enrolment fees, which in some cases could be as much as £400, in other cases the fees will be much more than £400. However, we have put together a monthly payment plan to help as much as we can, while still trying to meet the demands of our students and employers.

The figure of 80%, in relation to the number of staff we have had to lose is inaccurate. As part of the redundancy consultation process various "pools of staff", where people carried out the same or similar work, were informed that they were at risk of redundancy. However within these pools the reduction required may only have been one member of staff. Therefore 500+ staff were placed at risk of redundancy across the group, although ultimately there were approximately 100 staff who took voluntary redundancy across all of the College campuses.

The students also commented that all full-time courses will be cut by 50 hours. This is in the main factually correct, however course hours are made up face-to-face teaching and directed study. We are implementing a better approach to blended learning which will mean that 50 hours will be set aside for directed study. This does not mean a reduction in course hours, but does mean a different way of delivering the full programme content. We are not reducing the face-to-face contact time on our A level programmes as we already have a reduced academic year because exam boards have brought forward examination dates over the last ten years or so.

The last comment, "these cuts are going to make it impossible for some people to make a future for themselves", is a worrying statement. The group has access to a limited financial contingency fund in order to assist students in purchasing resources for their courses and other costs such as travel and childcare. We also apply a fee remission policy, linked to household income. However, it is inevitable that an increase in cost will make further education less viable to some potential students.

Yours sincerely



Mark Dacey
CEO NPTC Group of Colleges