

The Rt Hon David Willetts MP

Minister of State for Universities and
Science

Mary Bousted
Association of Teachers and Lecturers
7 Northumberland Street
London
WC2N 5RD

11 August 2010

25 AUG 2010

Dear Mary,

The Department has received a petition signed by many of your members as part of your 'United for Education' campaign. I am unable to respond individually to each petitioner as some have not supplied their postal addresses. I would therefore ask that you share this reply with your members to ensure all those who have participated in the campaign are aware of the response to the issues raised.

The Coalition recognises the huge contribution which the higher and further education sectors make to our society and to driving the economy. We have a world class education sector which is a tribute to those working within it.

The biggest challenge our country currently faces is dealing with our huge debts. The first and most urgent priority of the Coalition Government must be to manage the deficit. That means we have to reduce public spending during these tough economic times. However, we will do this in a way which minimises the impact on front-line services.

Both higher education and further education have benefited from significant increases in public funds in recent years. We do expect universities and colleges to continue to adopt a determined and rigorous drive for efficiency, as is happening across the whole of the public sector. Of course, Government does not manage universities and colleges, and the leadership and management teams within these institutions will need to make plans to address the funding reductions in the light of their own circumstances. They will do this in a variety of ways. We would urge your members to continue to engage constructively with their institutions in finding the best way through these difficult times.

It is not the case that "our education sector is shrinking" The Coalition Government has found the funding for 10,000 extra places this summer which will enable universities to recruit additional students in 2010/11. This is an investment which will support growth in higher education whilst working towards achieving efficiencies to help us meet the deficit. The net effect is that universities will have some £70m in additional funding compared to the position in January 2010. In addition, by

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identifying savings from other programmes, we are investing in Apprenticeships with 50,000 additional places.

We are supporting institutions, both in HE and FE, to increase collaboration and manage costs, through the £20m shared services element of the University Modernisation Fund. In addition, we are committed to removing unnecessary regulation and bureaucracy so that local colleges are set free to respond to the needs of employers and learners in their areas.

We are currently seeking views on where public investment in Further Education and Skills should be focussed in order to achieve the greatest social and economic benefit, recognising the financial constraints within which we are operating. You can contribute to this consultation at <http://interactive.bis.gov.uk/comment/skills/>. Over the same period, we are also consulting on how best to simplify the funding system whilst maintaining appropriate accountability through informed and empowered customers. This consultation is available at <http://www.bis.gov.uk/FE-funding-consultation>. Both consultation periods run until 14th October and we hope that you will contribute your views

The Coalition is committed to building on the strengths of both Further Education and Higher Education and will continue to work to foster a strong and responsive sector.

Yours ever
David

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