

Members briefing on defending jobs and defending education

At this time of recession, political parties have admitted that education and skills are at the centre of economic recovery. Yet across the country the trends are apparent: cuts, closures and job losses.

UCU fully recognises the constraints on public spending during tough economic times but the only way to ensure education does the job MPs and the country expects, is to ensure it is fully funded. France, Germany and the US (to name only a few countries) have all invested in education through the recession – but we are seeing swingeing cuts.

The further education system is feeling the strain of being asked to do more for less with cuts to funding while more and more people need to equip themselves with education and skills to beat the recession.

In higher education, the government has been warned by the union and institutions alike that the cuts that are being handed down could bring the sector 'to its knees'. UCU, the Russell Group of Universities and Universities UK are united in saying that the cuts we are seeing have the capacity to decimate the university system and damage it for decades to come.

UCU represents 120,000 educators who work in higher, further and adult education. Each sector faces substantial challenges and sweeping cuts. Below you will find a brief summary of the problems faced and the scope of the cuts.

Further and Adult Education

Jobs lost so far and at risk today: almost 1,500

Further education colleges are often the first port of call for those who have lost their jobs and who need to retrain, but many lecturers themselves are facing redundancy.

FE colleges are on the front line of combating unemployment and work tirelessly to meet the needs of local communities. Such institutions often work with mature students, part-time students and those who need to update their skills or gain their first qualifications after less successful attempts at school.

Further education faces the following challenges:

- An overall cut to funding streams of 3%;
- A 6% cut in Train to Gain funding means that colleges will get 6% less per student – they are being asked to do more for less;
- 10% reduction in adult apprenticeships just as those who have been made redundant and need to retrain;
- Skills for Life funding is down £30 million while student numbers are up by 20,000;

- Developmental Learning cut from £330 million to £186 million and with numbers dropping from 583,000 to 212,000
- Overall, BIS expects a loss of over 130,000 adult learners on top of the 1.4 million adult learning places that have already fallen by the wayside;
- A large number of colleges have still not been compensated for the money they lost in the college building fiasco.

Higher Education

Jobs lost so far and at risk today: almost 5,500

Higher education is facing a huge funding crisis.

In the last year the following cuts to HE in England have been announced:

- Efficiency savings (2009 budget) - the sector has been told to find £180 million;
- Pre-Budget Report - £600 million will be slashed from HE funding by 2013;
- Grant letter – an overall 6.6% cut in HE budget for 2010 – 2011, with a real terms cut of £88 million for teaching and research.

The fact is simple – our higher education system, which has been world leading, cannot sustain these cuts. Teaching, research and the student experience will suffer. There will be bigger class sizes, fewer university places and a staff that will buckle under the burden of more students, more marking, less face-to-face teaching time and a real lack of time or resources to conduct research. The days of staff who are on the cutting edge of their professions and passing this knowledge on to students in manageable class sizes, will be a thing of the past.

Across the world, the reaction to the recession has been to invest in education funding – France are investing 11 billion Euros, Germany 18 billion. The Obama administration is pumping cash into science, technology and energy research.

In contrast in England, for the first time in a decade, the spending per student is set to decrease.

How a Member of Parliament can help:

Write to the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills about the funding crisis in education; let him know that you support investment in further, adult and higher education;

Write to manifesto coordinators to urge them to include investment in education in their party manifestos for the general election;

Ask the Chair of the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee to examine in detail current funding for further and higher education.

They can support you and your branch in defending jobs and education locally.