

## Template text for letters to MPs

I am writing to express my deep concern at the impact of current further education policy and funding pressures on adult and community education.

Community learning provides vital opportunities for many adults to return to learning, build their confidence and improve their life chances, but it is facing unprecedented pressure.

The current programme of area reviews seeks to reduce the number of colleges and increase specialisation with a strong focus on employability. This will lead to fewer opportunities for other kinds of learning which provide vital stepping stones into higher level courses, particularly for those furthest from employment. It will also pose a particular geographical challenge for some communities who may have to travel farther to access learning as colleges are reorganised.

Two major funding changes are also affecting community learning. First, the ESOL mandate worth an estimated £45m to colleges and local authority education services in 2015-16 was withdrawn in July, just weeks before some courses were due to start. This has led to a significant reduction in ESOL provision.

Second, the removal of the £210m ring-fence for community learning, announced in December's skills funding letter, will reduce the incentive for colleges to ensure a rounded community learning offer as the government continues to prioritise employability skills and shift funding towards apprenticeships. It compounds the impact of a cut of almost 40% to non-apprenticeship adult skills funding since 2009, which has seen around 1.3 million adults lost from learning.

These changes risk pulling the ladder out from even more of the most vulnerable in our society who would benefit from community learning to reduce isolation, retrain or build confidence before pursuing an apprenticeship or vocational qualification.

Figures from the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) show that the net present value of further education is around £20 per pound of investment. In addition to the economic benefits, those who take part in learning as an adult are shown to be healthier and more active citizens. In order to ensure that everyone can access the learning they need, we must have secure public funding which supports a wide range of courses and subjects.

I attach a briefing prepared by the University and College Union (UCU) which outlines the benefits of, and challenges faced by, adult and community education in greater detail.

As your constituent, I would ask you to consider raising your concerns about this issue in the House. I would also welcome the chance to meet with you for a more detailed discussion about the local impact of changes on community learning.

I look forward to hearing from you.