

STUDENT CAMPAIGN FOR ADULT EDUCATION IN LONDON

Detailed Briefing Paper

BACKGROUND TO THE CAMPAIGN:

Students from the four London Specialist Designated Institutions (City Lit, Morley College, Mary Ward Centre, Working Men's College) are campaigning to make the Government and the London Assembly aware of the damaging consequences of recent changes in funding priorities for the provision and accessibility of Adult Education in London.

The Case for Adult Education:

The importance of adult education and Personal and Community Development Learning is not in doubt.

"The economic mission will not be the sector's sole purpose. Education and training for personal fulfilment, community development and the love of learning all have an important place and will be sustained..."

"...we remain strongly committed to learning for personal fulfilment, civic participation and community development, and are taking steps to strengthen the range and quality of such provision."

"Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances."
March 2006. (Government White Paper)

"We also recognise the importance of personal learning and learning for its own sake."

LSC Publication: "Raising our game. Our Annual Statement of Priorities." October 2006.

The widespread and far reaching benefits of adult education are also recognized by both the Government and interest groups:

"There are millions of people in this country who pursue training and skills not for any job-related purpose but for personal development, civic and social engagement, pleasure and interest. That includes millions of people who have retired and others sustaining the fabric of family and community life. While the economic and vocational purposes of skills are vital, they are in no sense the whole story. A cultured and civilised society must also sustain a wide range of opportunities to gain skills and acquire knowledge for their own intrinsic value. Investment in personal and community learning secures health and citizenship benefits for individuals and communities."

"Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work."
Government White Paper. March 2005.

“Adult learning has an important role to play in contributing to the development of employment-related skills but it does more too – promoting social cohesion and active citizenship, creating and sustaining cultural value and contributing to public health and general well-being in quantifiable ways. The benefits of learning are not confined to the private realm, although education and training undoubtedly improve individual life-chances.”

NIACE: “The Case for Adult Learning: Access all areas” Nov 2006.

Role of the SDIs in London:

The SDIs were established to widen participation in adult education. The institutions gave disadvantaged and low waged people access to education in work skills, academic subjects and cultural studies. Their aim was to promote learning and help people to progress in their work and social lives. The founders of the SDIs realised that giving people from different backgrounds a chance to socialize was a valuable way of encouraging social integration and developing community cohesion. This role is just as important in today’s multicultural London. Maintaining a diverse curriculum in the SDIs, that includes skills training, academic and cultural studies, is essential to encouraging understanding, mobility and cohesion within London’s community.

Government Spending Priorities – The Skills Agenda:

The Government is right to prioritise spending of public funds on skills, employability and progression, with particular focus on younger learners. But, this has led to a reduction in funding for non-priority areas, such as courses aimed at personal fulfillment or community development. In these areas, learners or employers are expected to pay a larger proportion of the course cost, to offset the reduction in subsidy. The Government’s stated objective is that adult learners will have to pay around 50% of course costs by 2010, except for priority courses and priority learners who will be given additional support. The lowest priority courses will receive no subsidy at all and the full cost of these courses must be covered by fees.

Impact of Funding Priorities on General FE Providers and SDIs:

General FE Colleges provide a range of courses that include most of the Government’s priority areas, with the bulk of their work focused on vocational, skills based, accredited courses for younger people. It is relatively easy for these organizations to rebalance their teaching programmes to match Government priorities.

The majority of courses offered by the SDIs address non-priority areas, including a large amount of Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL). Public funding for national provision of PCDL courses is frozen at £210m between 2005/06 and 2007/08 – which represents an inflation cut in real terms each year. Government funding to the SDI Colleges in London for this type of work has fallen significantly in real terms since 2005/06 and is planned to continue falling in real terms during 2006/07 and 2007/08.

The changes in funding priorities have much more effect on the SDIs than General FE Colleges and their students.

Consequences of Funding Cuts to SDIs

Erosion of Expertise and Infrastructure:

Loss of funding has led to class and departmental closures within the SDIs. Teaching expertise and support infrastructure that has taken years to build is being lost. This undermines the medium and long-term quality of tuition and breadth of curriculum offered by the SDIs. Expertise and resources lost, will be very difficult to reinstate in the future. The core teaching activities of the SDIs are threatened as a consequence of reduced public funding.

Narrowing Participation:

The majority of students of the SDIs have seen course fees rise by more than 10% each year since 2005/06. Fees are expected to rise at a similar rate until 2010. The increased fees are excluding some students from participating in Adult Education, especially those people on low incomes or pensions. The size and availability of Concessionary Fees has been reduced, which means that many students who have low income, but do not qualify for Concessionary Fees, can no longer afford to study.

Narrowing Curriculum:

The rise in course fees has led many individuals to enrol on fewer courses during a particular academic year. This reduces class sizes, making some courses financially non-viable. The consequence of rising fees is to reduce social inclusion and equality of opportunity. Personal and Community Development Learning is becoming affordable only to an affluent elite. This is contrary to the founding principles of the SDIs that were established to widen participation in education.

Public Funding for SDIs

The cuts to public funding of SDIs need to stop and future funding needs to be protected to ensure the medium and long term stability of the SDIs. Public funding is vital if SDIs are to deliver their mission of widening participation in adult education, providing opportunity for all adults and building social cohesion.

It is right that the Government should expect SDIs to develop other revenue streams and that those students who can afford to should contribute more to the cost of their education. However, the work of SDIs needs to be underpinned by sufficient public funds to enable the colleges to develop their teaching expertise and support infrastructure, invest in high quality facilities and preserve equality of opportunity by providing financial support to disadvantaged and low-income students who cannot afford to pay rising course fees.

Solving the Funding Gap:

The SDIs need to be protected from future cuts in public funding.

This could be achieved if the Government rebalanced its FE funding priorities to reflect the different profile of work conducted by SDIs compared to General FE providers, recognised the wider benefits adult education brings to the community and rationalised the bureaucratic burden placed on SDIs by the need to give progress reports to a myriad of Government Agencies as a consequence of receiving public funding.

Rebalancing funding priorities:

The SDIs deliver a very different profile of courses compared to General FE providers; a high proportion of the SDIs work is PCDL. This means that the change in spending priorities have a disproportionate affect on SDIs. Although many of the SDIs have undertaken more priority work in recent years, there is a limit to how much more can be accepted without SDIs failing to deliver their core missions.

Furthermore, many SDIs are using revenue generated from full cost courses to cross-subsidise work done in priority areas that are not fully funded from the public purse. The proposed withdrawal of funding from ESOL courses is a case in point. If public funding for SDIs continues to fall and course fees rise driving class sizes down, the SDIs will have to reduce their core PCDL activity, which will also reduce the amount of staff, infrastructure and money available to cross-subsidise the priority curriculum areas.

Cross-departmental funding:

There is a strong case that Adult Education should receive funding from a range of government departments, in recognition of the wider social and health benefits it delivers. The Government has accepted the validity of this proposition with respect to local authorities, but a concerted cross-departmental approach is needed at Whitehall.

“We recognise that people access education and training for a number of reasons and that what people value is driven by more than skills or economic objectives. The Government remains committed to learning for its own intrinsic value, including for learning for older people. This is why we have safeguarded a budget for learning for personal and community development at £210m pa in 2006/7 and 2007/8. But we want to reinvigorate this type of learning. Too much is poor quality which does not meet the changing needs of local communities. This is why we have asked the LSC to convene local partnerships to plan and co-ordinate this type of learning. Crucially the partnerships will include a wide range of partners including local authorities, and cover the range of related learning not funded through LSC but funded by local authority sports, recreation and cultural budgets, and also local health budgets, ESF, etc. The partnerships will also include representatives of local communities and learners.”

“Further Education: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2005-06, HC 1712.”
Education and Skills Select Committee.

Reduction of Bureaucracy:

The Government accepts that simplifying the systems for planning and funding FE provision would reduce the bureaucratic load on FE providers. This would enable a greater proportion of revenue to be used to deliver teaching, instead of administration. However, similar savings could be made if the number of reports the SDIs have to make to Government agencies as a consequence of receiving public funds were reduced.

THE SCAEL CAMPAIGN

SCAEL Campaign Message:

1. The Government is right to prioritise spending of public funds for Further Education (FE) on the “skills agenda” and younger learners. It is also right to expect adults to make a greater contribution to the cost of their own education, if they can afford to do so.
2. However, the balance of funding priorities is critical. The impact of funding policy differs dramatically between FE providers depending on the profiles of courses offered and learners served.
3. The shift in funding priorities has affected Specialist Designated Institutions (SDIs) much more than General FE providers, because the majority of the SDIs core curriculum and learner base are non-priority areas for funding. If the SDIs change the profile of courses they offer to align with Government priorities, this would radically change the nature of the colleges and undermine their mission and distinctive purpose of providing all adults with access to a broad range of learning opportunities.
4. The consequences of reduced funding for the SDIs include:
 - a) loss of teaching expertise and support infrastructure as a result of cost saving measures
 - b) narrowing participation as increasing fees exclude low-income earners and pensioners
 - c) narrowing of the curriculum offered as falling class sizes make more courses insolvent and force closures
5. Funding priorities need to be rebalanced, with more public funding allocated to the SDIs to prevent institutional collapse and off-set the impact of rising course fees on low-income earners and pensioners.
6. Public money could be released to support increased funding of the SDIs by:
 - a) more cross-departmental funding of adult education – joined up government should enable budgets controlled by the Department of Health and the Department of Culture to contribute towards funding adult education.
 - b) reduction of bureaucracy by simplifying the number of reports the SDIs have to make to Government agencies as a consequence of receiving public funds. Reform of the auditing processes and the agencies would yield considerable cost savings both to the Government and to the SDIs.
7. The London SDIs are valued highly by their students, because they offer much more than just a course. SDIs are learning communities, where ideas, values and experiences are shared amongst people from different age, social and cultural groups. They play an important role in building social cohesion and cultural life in London.
8. A rebalancing of funding priorities and financial support for low-income learners is needed to avoid institutional collapse and adult education becoming affordable only to the affluent few.

What are we trying to achieve?

We want the Government to:

- Understand the damaging consequences FE funding policies are having on the London SDIs, their learners and the wider community
- Recognise that these funding policies have a greater impact on the SDIs than other FE providers because much SDI provision is in non-priority areas
- Rebalance FE funding policies to give additional support to the SDIs
- Provide additional financial support to low-income earners to off-set the impact of rising course fees and to encourage broad participation in adult education
- Secure more money for SDIs by building cross-departmental budgets amongst Government departments, to reflect the widespread benefits adult education provides to the community.
- Reduce the bureaucracy required to track the work of FE providers and invest the savings in teaching provision.

Targets for Lobbying:

The Government, not the LSC, is responsible for setting policy on public funding. It is best that the SCAEL Campaign focuses on lobbying the Government and elected representatives (London Assembly) who have the authority to influence and change policy.

Write a letter to your MP

- Say you are a constituent
- If one of the Colleges is in your constituency say so
- Explain the SCAEL Campaign Message
- Make your letter personal – say how the funding cuts have affected you, your course and your college
- Mention that Adult Education benefits your community
- Ask your MP to raise these issues with the Minister of State for Education and Skills
- End your letter with a question, or an offer to meet your MP, that invites a reply

Write to other influential MPs

The House of Commons, Westminster, London. SW1A 0AA. www.parliament.uk

Bill Rammell, MP: Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education.

Barry Sheerman, MP: Chair, The Education Select Committee.

Patricia Hewitt, MP: Secretary of State for Health

Tessa Jowell MP: Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

Write to the London Assembly:

The London Assembly, City Hall, The Queen's Walk, London. SE1 2AA

www.london.gov

Ken Livingstone: Mayor of London.

Brian Colman: Chair of the London Assembly

Dee Dooney: Chair of the Economic Development, Culture, Sport & Tourism Committee.

Jennette Arnold: Chair of the London Health Commission

Joanne McCartney: Chair of the Health & Public Services Committee

Media:

- Local newspapers
- National newspapers
- Local interest groups

Action Plan:

Within each of the SDIs:

We expect the Campaign to be driven by student representatives at each of the SDIs. Individual students will be encouraged to write to their MP and appropriate member of the London Assembly outlining the SCAEL Campaign message, making it relevant to their own college. Posters will be distributed to each SDI advertising the Campaign and the website.

The SCAEL Coordinators:

The SCAEL coordinators will:

- Arrange face to face meetings with key members of the Government and the London Assembly to present the SCAEL Campaign issues.
- Collate copies of student letters that are sent to elected representatives to create a Campaign Dossier
- Seek media publicity for the campaign.

Student Campaign for Adult Education in London – Coordinators:

Chair: Steve Green, Chair of Student Executive Committee, Morley College Stevegreensrg@aol.com 0797 388 5006

Secretary: Laura Barker, Vice-Chair of Student Executive Committee, Morley College. laura@barker488.freeserve.co.uk 02085407419

Rules of Engagement:

It is important that we

- Accept that the Government has a right to prioritise spending
- Emphasise that the campaign is both originated and driven by students of the four Specially Designated Institutions (SDIs)
- Represent our case positively – champion the benefits of adult education and fight to defend equality of opportunity
- Speak with one clear voice

Additional Information:

See the accompanying SCAEL document called “*Support Information*” on the website for detailed descriptions of Government policy, statements from the Learning & Skills Council and references to key source documents.

Useful Contacts:

- National Government:
 - Constituency MPs – Westminster
 - House of Commons London SW1A 0AA
 - www.theyworkforyou.com
 - www.parliament.uk
 - listing of London MPs
www.parliament.uk/directories/hciolists/clmgtr.cfm
- London Assembly
 - www.london.gov.uk/assembly/assembly_about.jsp
- NIACE
 - www.niace.org.uk

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