

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

16th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday
8 November 2023

PE2044: Recommit the £26 million pledged to colleges in the 2023/24 budget

Petitioner	Gillian Geddes
Petition summary	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to reinstate the £26 million pledged to colleges in the 2023/24 budget.
Webpage	https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2044

Introduction

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 5 September 2023.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 398 signatures have been received on this petition.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. A response has been received from the Scottish Government and is included at **Annexe C** of this paper.
6. Further and Higher Education funding was one of the key themes in the Education, Children and Young People Committee's (ECYPC) [Pre-budget scrutiny letter 2023/24](#) and it continued to pursue these issues in subsequent evidence sessions, particularly in the session with the Minister for Further and Higher on [Wednesday 17 May](#) which covered the removal of the £26m increase in colleges funding.

7. The Education, Children and Young People Committee also considered college finances within its college regionalisation inquiry. The [report](#) was published in March 2023.
8. The Committee has included college funding as one of the three strands of its [Pre-budget scrutiny letter 2024/25](#) on 2 November 2023.

Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE2044: Recommit the £26 million pledged to colleges in the 2023/24 budget

Petitioner

Gillian Geddes

Date Lodged:

05/09/23

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to reinstate the £26 million pledged to colleges in the 2023/24 budget.

Previous action

I have contacted John Swinney MSP, Pete Wishart MP and Graeme Dey MSP.

I received a letter from John Swinney who is raising my concerns with Graeme Dey.

Background information

Colleges are deeply disappointed that the funding has been retracted, and they are having to make cuts to courses and staff due to a lack of funding. This is not a lack of ambition from colleges or demands from students or employers.

Numerous Ministers and Cabinet Secretaries had repeatedly assured the college sector and Scottish Parliament that this funding was coming. Yet only 5 months after this was announced (in December 2022) it was withdrawn (in May 2023).

Colleges are needed more than ever now to mitigate poverty in communities across Scotland, providing a lifetime opportunity for people to be able to create a future in the workforce and add to the economy.

Removing funding previously promised to colleges is most definitely the wrong approach to delivering any of these ambitions.

Annexe B

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE2044](#): Recommit the £26 million pledged to colleges in the 2023-24 Budget

Background

The petition calls for £26 million pledged to colleges in the 2023-24 Budget to be reinstated. The petitioner states that colleges are having to make cuts to college courses and staff due to lack of funding. The role of colleges in mitigating poverty, providing opportunities, and supporting the economy is highlighted.

Budget 2023-24 and funding reversal

A resource funding increase of £46 million - £20 million for universities and £26 million for colleges - was announced during the [Budget Statement by the then Deputy First Minister, John Swinney MSP, on 15 December 2022](#).

On Tuesday 2 May 2023, the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Graeme Dey MSP, [wrote to the Education, Children and Young People Committee](#) (ECYP Committee) to announce that the planned resource funding increase of £20 million for the university sector and £26 million for the college sector for 2023-24 would not be going ahead as the money had been identified as a “necessary saving”. In an evidence session with the ECYP Committee on 17 May 2023, the Minister provided further information, stating:

“...this is principally about the teachers’ pay settlement.” – [Official Report, 17/05/23](#)

Table 2 below sets out the budgets for Higher Education and Further Education resource and capital from 2021-22 to 2023-24. The final column highlighted in yellow shows figures following the reversal of the planned resource funding increase.

Table 2: Further and Higher Education Budgets (Level 3)

Level 3	2021-22 Budget £m	2022-23 Budget £m	2023-24 Budget £m	2023-24 Budget (following revision) £m
HE Resource	768.2	789.2	809.2	789.2
HE Capital	346.7	348.0	340.7	340.7
Net College Resource	675.7	675.7	701.7	675.7
Net College Capital	33.7	74.7*	82.4*	82.4*

Source: [Scottish Budget: 2023-24](#)

*Includes £5m to be apportioned between the college, university and CLD sectors

Sector response

In response to the funding reversal, [Colleges Scotland](#) said colleges were “deeply disappointed and dismayed by this U-turn”, describing colleges as “already cash strapped, making cuts to courses and winding down parts of their offer due to a lack of funding”.

[NUS Scotland](#) said the removal of funding was “unjustifiable”.

[The EIS](#) said the decision would impact pay in the college sector, making it “more difficult for college lecturers to get a pay rise commensurate with that of their colleagues elsewhere in the public sector”.

[UCU Scotland](#) urged the Scottish Government to “recognise that improving the life chances of people across Scotland requires investment in education and the people delivering it.”

Lynne Currie

Senior Researcher (Further and Higher Education)

20 September 2023

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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Annexe C

Minister for Higher Education, Further Education and Veterans submission of 3 October 2023

PE2044/A: Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to reinstate the £26 million pledged to colleges in the 2023/24 budget

The Scottish Government is committed to the long-term success of colleges, and we continue to invest nearly £2 billion a year on Scotland's universities and colleges, despite the most difficult public spending environment since devolution.

While I understand the disappointment on the need to take the £26 million saving, we have maintained the college sector's core teaching funding allocation, which is the same as in 2022-23. The £26 million funding was intended to enable strategic change in the sector and was not part of the core teaching funding allocations for colleges. In 2023-24, we also increased college estate funding.

There is also now greater flexibility in the funding provided to colleges, and with the sector and the Scottish Funding Council, we continue to explore further flexibilities, while supporting colleges to deliver for their students. This approach recognises that colleges are responsible for their own operational decisions and are best placed to respond flexibly to emerging challenges.

As part of the programme for government and following on from the publication of the Purpose and Principles for Post-School Education, Research and Skills, the Scottish Government is committed to developing a new funding model for post-school education, which continues free tuition and improves the parity of living cost support on offer for those wishing to study part time or flexibly. We will be working with a range of partners and stakeholders in developing the approach.

More generally, I am committed to progressing the reforms across post school education that I have outlined in the Purpose and Principles, and

I look forward to updating the committee on progress in the months ahead.

Graeme Dey MSP