

Government makes U-Turn on college bursary funding

✖ The Scottish Government has confirmed it will reverse the proposed cut of £11.4m for college bursaries as the Budget is voted on today, protecting college bursary funding.

The draft Budget, published in November, included a proposed £11.4m cut to financial help for the poorest college students. However, in opening the Budget debate today, John Swinney, Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth, confirmed that this cut would now be reinstated and the budget would be protected at its current £95.6m level.

Following the publication of the draft Budget, NUS Scotland launched the *Our Future, Our Fight* campaign, calling on MSPs to protect college student support, places, local access and quality in Scotland's colleges. In the three months of the campaign over 80,000 emails had been sent to MSPs from students, staff and the wider community, one of the largest campaigns NUS Scotland has ever seen.

NUS Scotland is welcoming the Scottish Government's decision as a victory for students across Scotland who worked so hard to generate the huge support for the campaign.

Robin Parker, NUS Scotland president, said:

"The decision to reverse this cut to the poorest college students is a victory for thousands of students across Scotland, and a victory for the *Our Future, Our Fight* campaign. The campaign generated over 80,000 emails to MSPs which shows the huge strength of feeling Scotland has for its colleges. The Scottish Government has listened to MSPs across the parliament, and people across the country, and has acted to protect some of the poorest students in the poorest communities. We're delighted and fully welcome that.

"The asks of the campaign were to protect student support, places, local access to colleges and quality. I'm delighted to say that the Scottish Government has delivered to protect opportunities at this difficult time. We fully welcome their decision to reinstate the £11.4m into college bursaries, their commitment to protect places and local access, and we'll work closely with colleges and government to closely monitor the quality colleges are able to offer over the coming year.

"It's fantastic that the money is now in place to provide financial help to the poorest students and we'll now move on to work with government and the colleges to seek reform of the college student support system. By moving away from the current first-come first-served system towards an entitlement-based system, we can use this funding most effectively, offering the best possible support to the poorest college students."

Edinburgh Central MSP Marco Biagi has welcomed today's announcement by Finance Secretary John Swinney of an extra £11.4m to fund college student living costs in 2012-2013 and an extra £8m to fund additional places through the new Opportunities for All programme. Total annual further education student support has been increased by 41% since this Scottish Government took office in 2007, even though overall budgets have been under severe financial pressure in the same period.

Commenting, Marco Biagi said:

"This builds on our commitment to a flourishing but efficient further education sector, as a vital part of ensuring that all young people have the chance to achieve their full potential. At a time when the UK Government's approach to education is to slash and burn, I believe this shows yet again that when Scotland does things differently we do them better."