

## Consultation response from Plumpton College

We are very concerned about the proposed reduction in support for post-16 travel and feel that it will ultimately lead to problems in student recruitment and retention.

1. Last year 81 Plumpton students benefitted from a travel grant and most of these were in band 3 (£600 award). We have a far larger catchment area than most Colleges due to the specialist nature of our provision and our recruitment data for this academic year would indicate that we have a very similar geographic spread of students to last year. This means that we are continuing to attract students from further afield who rely on the post 16 travel grant. Without the grant these students would not be able to meet the cost of transport and therefore not be able to access College.
2. We do have access to the EFA discretionary bursary. Since its introduction we have over-committed funds each year to provide support to students. It does not come close to the amount needed to provide adequate financial support to students and last year we had to over commit by £94,155 to provide a minimum level of support. In the same year we also subsidised our transport network by £170,000 (in addition to any bursaries awarded) which is greater than any differential in funding that our students may attract. The cost of transport is a recurring issue raised by our students in cross-college consultations.
3. Our students do not benefit from Freedom tickets or rail cards. Whilst they are eligible the routes to/from College as so infrequent and poorly timed that they are not able to use them to access College. I raised this point earlier in the year in the consultation programme for the reduction in public routes within the area.
4. We run a private bus service for our students which is a good step towards encouraging independence. I know that there is a push to reduce the reliance on individual taxis in favour of independent travel. We must maintain our routes to allow this transition to take place but without the right funding support systems in place for students we will not be able to do so. Our current routes run at capacity.
5. In assessing future support I'd ask that you ensure that you're aware of the difference in demography between Plumpton and other Colleges. The distance travelled by our students is perhaps the greatest difference and we are increasingly recruiting vulnerable learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. Transport is a greater issue to Plumpton than any other College in the county. Even the current level of support and its delivery mechanism is not enough for many learners.
6. We would prefer that support for our students comes directly to us so that we can assess each student and provide immediate support from the first day of term. At present some families wait around 5 weeks from enrolment before they receive their first payment and struggle to meet the cost of transport in the interim. We would also use this situation to limit the impact of cuts on band 3 students.

I understand the difficulties that you face in being served with Government cuts. The above is potentially one of many concerns that we face over the coming months with regards to student funding. I would ask that you recognise our unique position and the heightened importance that the funding of transport has on our core business. We are not in the same boat as other Colleges.