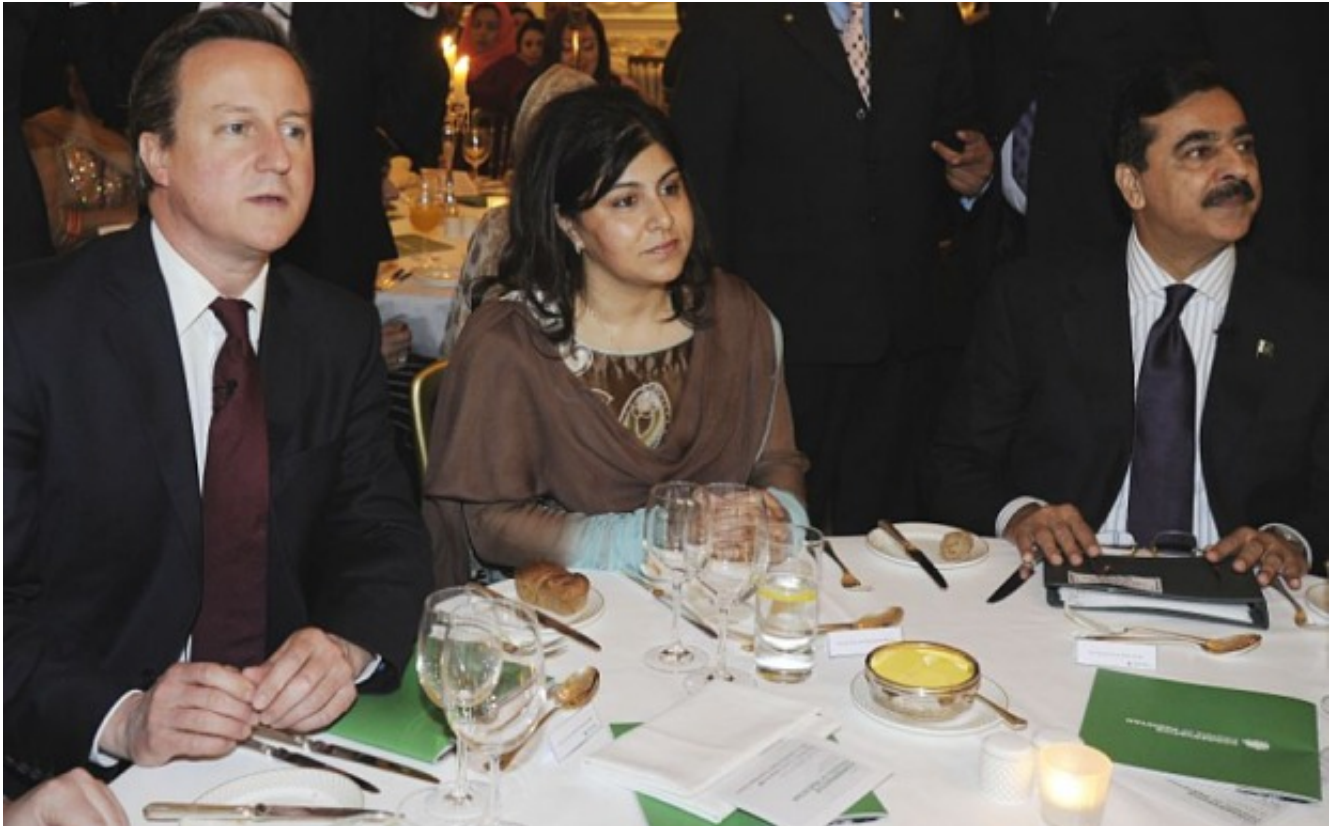


## Are David Cameron's English lessons for Muslim women simply reversing his own cuts?

The Prime Minister has pledged £20 million to help immigrants learn English. But money spent on teaching has dropped by twice that much since 2010



David Cameron with Sayeeda Warsi at a Conservative Friends of Pakistan lunch Photo: Andrew Parsons

By Asa Bennett and Laurence Dodds

4:34PM GMT 18 Jan 2016

David Cameron has called for more more Muslim women to learn English to tackle extremism. The promise of a £20 million programme to help those who can't speak English at all finally master the language, and the threat of deportation if they fail, has certainly attracted headlines.

But Labour is far from happy, with the likes of John Prescott accusing the government of hypocrisy because it has previously cut funding for English lessons for speakers of other languages (Esol).

So a Prime Minister who cut lessons for people to learn English wants to deport mothers who can't err..speak English <https://t.co/3WatGZlwhL>

— John Prescott (@johnprescott) January 18, 2016

So how fair is this critique?

It's true that Cameron's government has just cancelled a £45 million scheme to help people learn English.

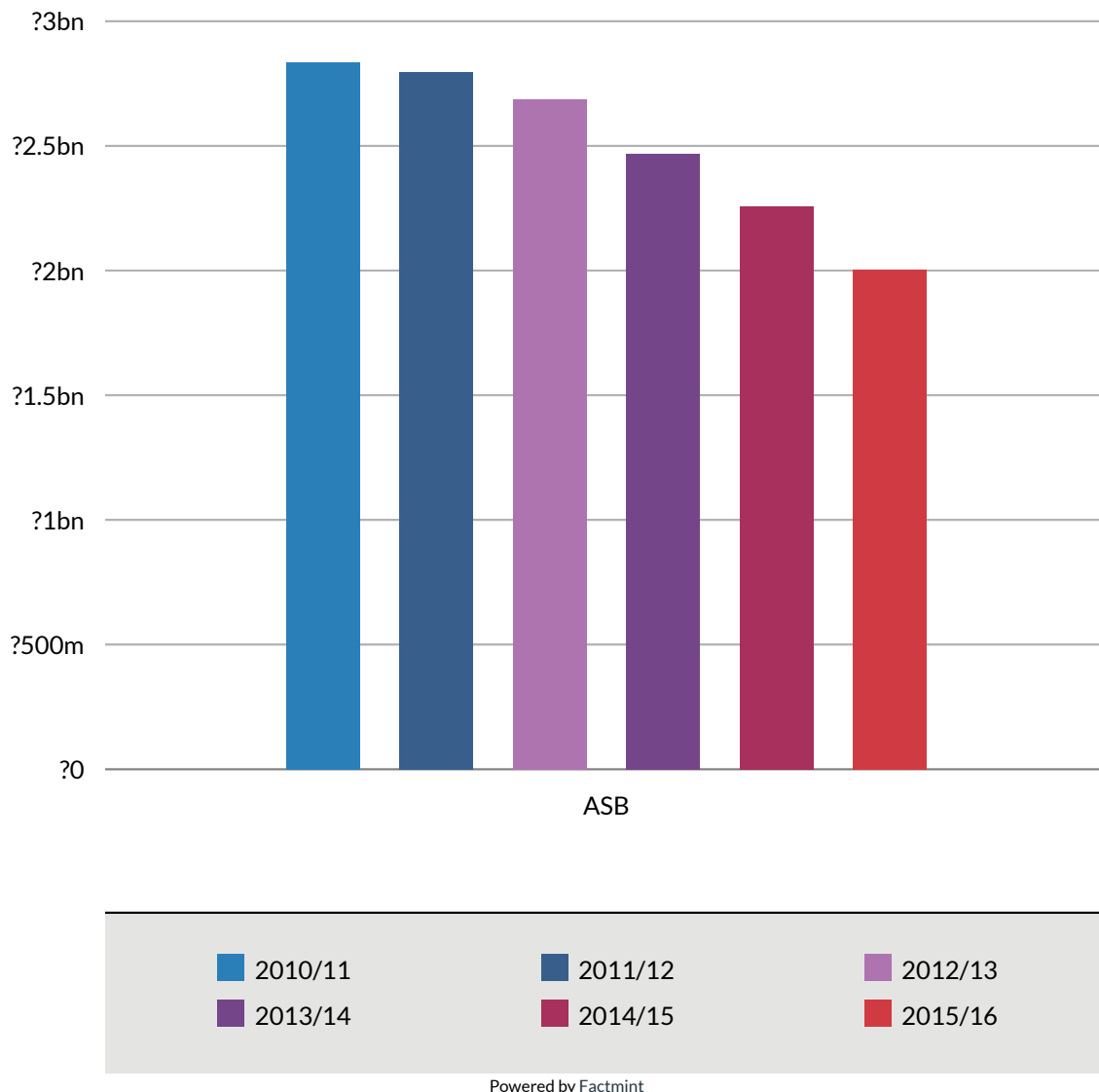
But this wasn't a scheme available to most people. It was a special project administered through Jobcentres, designed for benefit claimants whose poor English skills were stopping them from getting a job. It was one of those "learn English or lose your benefits" deals which campaigners criticise as "workfare".

And, far from being a long-existing part of the budget, it had only just been brought into being – literally months before the election. Officials claim they pulled the plug "in light of low levels of participation" (that is, nobody used it).

So while scrapping it can't have helped the cause of British integration, it may actually be a distraction.

Far more important is the cut in funding for further education colleges.

The squeeze on the Adult Skills Budget



## BIS

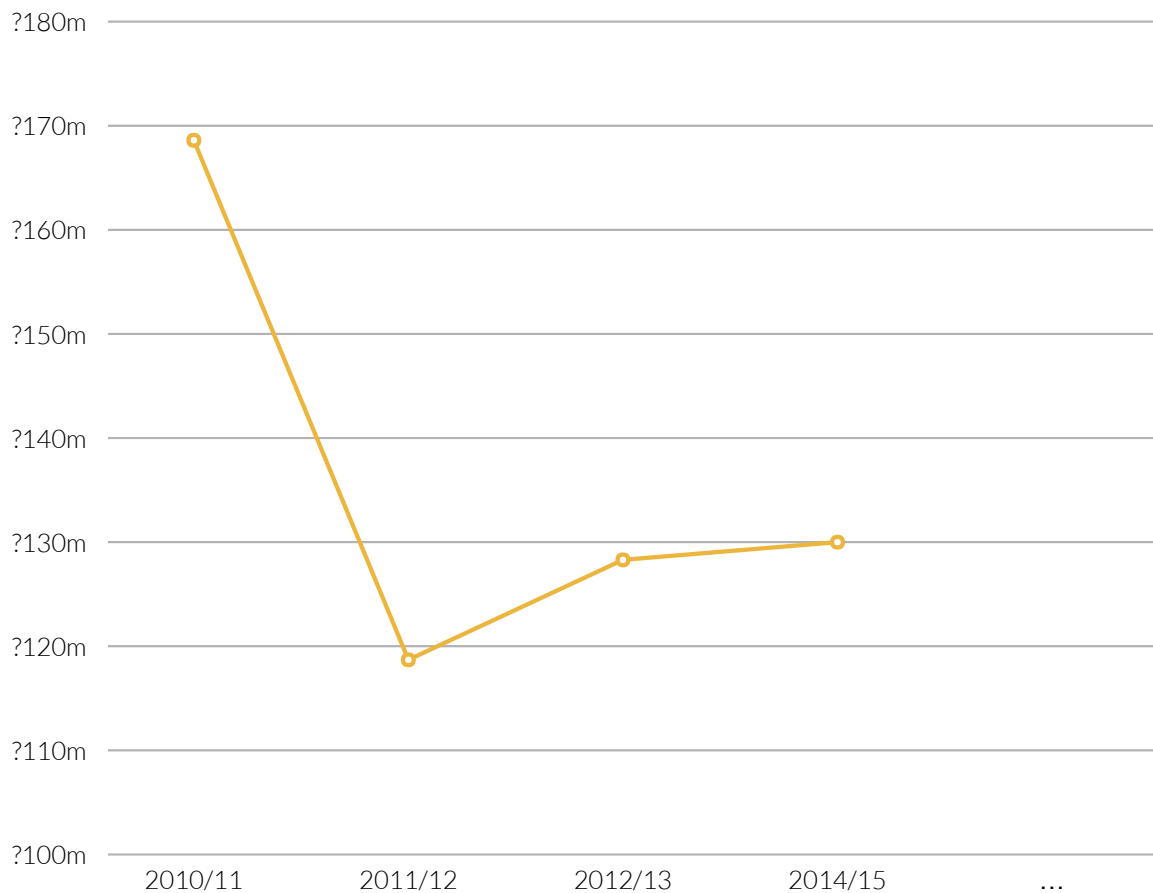
The British government doesn't set aside a "pot" of money specifically for Esol. Instead, it funds colleges in general through something called the Adult Skills Budget. Those colleges then decide how to spend that money based on local demand – and on how much they can recoup from paying students.

The problem is that this budget, like all areas of government, has come under pressure to make "savings" since the Coalition began in 2010. It has fallen by approximately 20 per cent since then and is expected to slide further over the next year.

So while the Government hasn't specifically cut the provision of English lessons, it has cut the budget from which they are funded. And although colleges are free to handle that however they choose, the reality is that most will have cut Esol along with the other courses they provide.

How much? It's hard to say. But in an FOI release the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills estimated a total drop of £39 million between 2010/11 and 2013/14.

## How ESOL funding has come under pressure



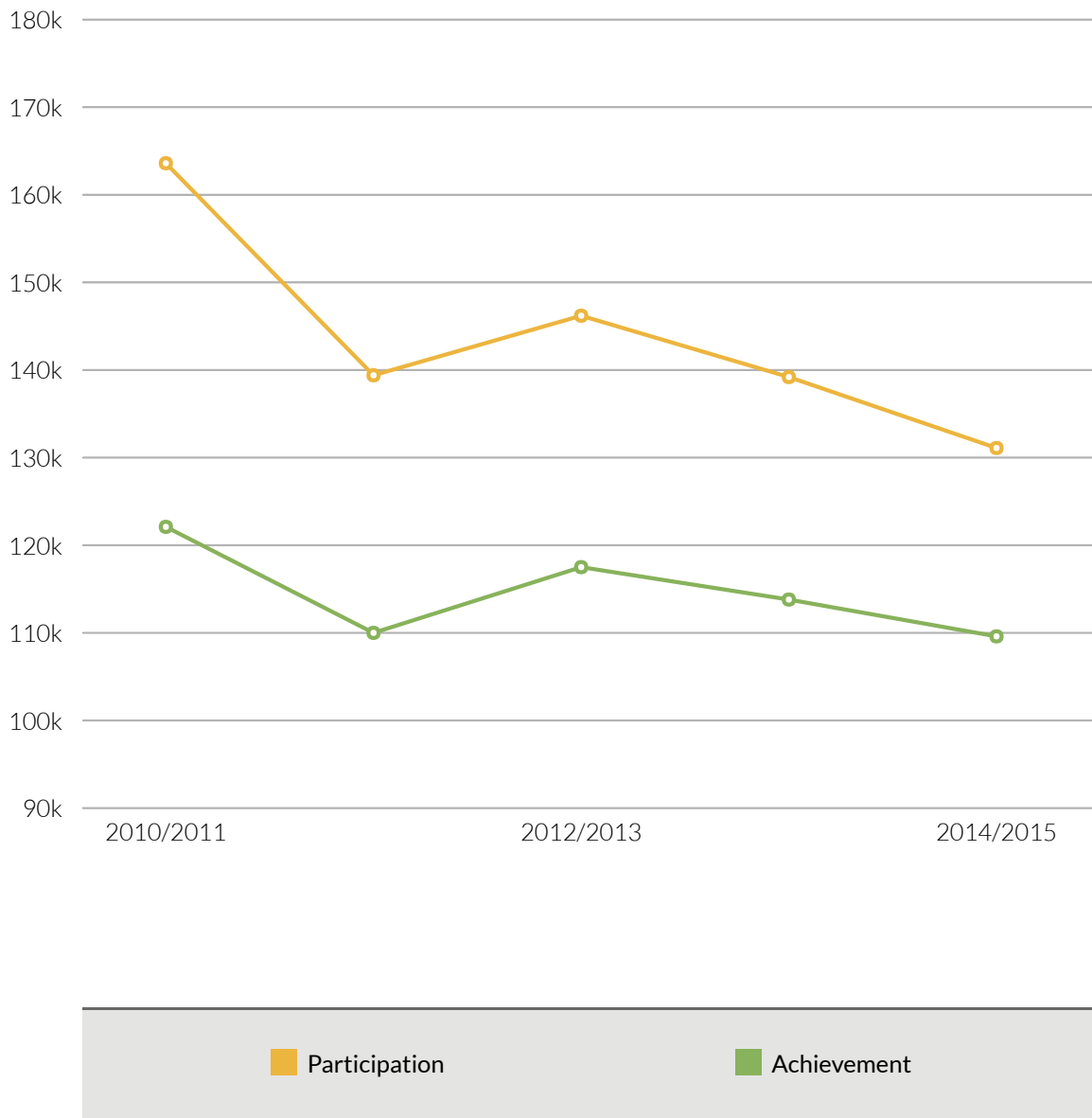
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### Demos/AOC/BIS

We can also see a change in participation. The number of people taking English lessons fell from 163,000 in 2010/2011 to 131,100 in 2014/2015. Meanwhile, the number achieving their Esol qualification fell from 122,100 to 109,600 over the same period.

And it was also the Coalition which tightened rules around who gets free Esol lessons. Before 2011, anyone on benefits was eligible. After 2011, it was only those on JSA or Employment Support Allowance.

### The ESOL squeeze: No of migrants learning English



## SFA

So how does the Prime Minister's £20m pledge fit into this? It builds on a £6 million fund launched in 2013 targeted at Muslim women to help them learn English, which was increased to £8 million the next year.

However, the government looks to still be piling pressure on FE colleges through the Adult Skills Budget, forcing them to potentially cut English lessons further.

The Prime Minister's promised £20 million will undoubtedly help soften that blow. But some will wonder if he is trying to subtly reverse the budget tightening of the last few years.

## P.S.

The Prime Minister bases his English language drive on figures showing that 40,000 Muslim women in Britain speak no English at all, but should the focus be wider? The last Census, carried out in 2011, found that the total number of women in Britain who couldn't speak English

was 91,840.

As Sayeeda Warsi, the Conservative peer and former Foreign Office minister asked on Twitter:

And why should it just be Muslim women who have the opportunity to learn English? Why not anyone who lives in the UK and can't speak English

— Sayeeda Warsi (@SayeedaWarsi) January 18, 2016



How we moderate

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