

12/12/2022

Dear Secretary of State,

I write as the Cabinet Member responsible for Inclusive Economy and Equalities at Lambeth Council to express deep concern about proposed changes to the model for funding and accountability currently being considered by the Department for Education for the Adult Education budget.

In principle, Lambeth Council is in favour of a broad national model for funding, but we believe that the proposals currently being suggested could result in negative consequences, many of which will affect those of our residents who are most in need of support. Our concerns cover a number of areas:

1. The definition of need, and understanding of outcomes, in adult learning.

There is an array of existing evidence which demonstrates that adult learning has clear economic and social as well as educational benefits through outcomes such as digital literacy, better financial skills, and enhanced parenting skills and, crucially, improved health and wellbeing.

For many, adult learning courses are the vital first step on the ladder of opportunity towards independence and employment. By concentrating on a single outcome (employment), the proposed model both neglects the other, wider benefits of learning and, most importantly, makes no provision at all for adults who do not have immediate employment as their immediate aim but who may well progress towards and into employment over time.

2. The ringfencing of the Adult Education Budget.

The removal of this ringfence would devastate the ability of adult community learning to contribute to the social, economic and health priorities of local, regional, and national governments.

This change would remove the protection that the most disadvantaged adults currently get to access the skills and learning they need to begin their learning journey. A funding methodology which only recognises the value of skills and learning for employment will inevitably result in the virtual disappearance of adult community learning which encompasses wider benefits of learning. If the AEB ringfence does not remain in place, such learning will no longer be funded.



3. Devolution as a valuable tool in the provision of adult learning that considers local needs.

For the effective delivery of adult learning MCAs and the GLA need to be able to respond flexibly to the needs of the region and to have the power to devolve further to sub-regional partnerships and local authorities. Any new national model of funding should therefore protect the MCAs' and the GLA's freedom to shape local skills provision to flexibly respond to local need and priorities.

We believe that the proposed changes will prevent the adult learning system from creating social mobility, undermining the levelling up agenda. We are calling for the following:

- Firstly, we are concerned that there is no evidence that an Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed on the proposals as required under the Public Sector Equality Duty, and this should be completed urgently before any decisions are made. We urge the minister to complete and provide evidence of the findings of this before moving any further.
- We urge the Department for Education to incorporate evidence about the wider benefits of learning when defining 'need'. This should include recognising the educational, social, and economic value of adult learning as both a first step towards employment, and a towards wider skills development and improved health and wellbeing.
- We believe that to fully consider the needs of all adults any changes to the funding methodology must be underpinned by an agreed *lifelong learning strategy* that inclusively joins all post-16 learning and skills together. This would provide a logical framework for funding decisions which would ensure that full learning pathways are provided, and a range of learners and priorities are properly supported.
- Finally, to ensure the principles of devolution are upheld, any new methodology to calculate funding should be developed in partnership with the GLA/other MCAs to ensure local areas retain the ability to shape provision and respond flexibly to local need.

I am writing this letter to emphasise our most pressing concerns and request the Department of Education to reconsider the package of proposals in response. I look forward to a response these requests and urge you to work closely with local authorities, MCAs and the GLA to find a solution that works for all parties and for our residents.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr Jacquie Dyer

Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Equalities, Lambeth Council