



16 August 2018

Jules Pipe  
Deputy Mayor, Planning, Regeneration and Skills  
City Hall – Greater London Authority  
The Queen's Walk  
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Dear Jules

### **Skills for Londoners Framework Consultation**

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the development of a Framework for the devolved Adult Education Budget. The timing of the consultation is unfortunate, coinciding as it has with the summer holidays. Nevertheless, we are confident that this is only part of your on-going sector engagement and AoC and colleges in London remain committed to helping deliver the Mayor's ambitious Skills Strategy.

We have submitted a detailed response to the questions raised and indicated our willingness to continue to help shape a skills and education system, which delivers for all Londoners. Whilst recognising that many of the issues raised will require much more detailed consideration I would wish to underline some fundamental points which we feel particularly strongly about.

We all appreciate that devolution comes with a set of challenges however, the responsibility to make the most of the opportunity is critical. Flexibility in the system to enable colleges to respond more effectively to learner and employer need is key. Understanding skills needs and aligning both provision and student demand cannot be under-estimated. Learners need support to make informed choice and the crucial market stimulant is high quality, independent careers advice and guidance drawing on both accurate and up-to-date labour market data and real engagement with employers looking to recruit.

Whilst embracing the principles of promoting diversity, social mobility and inclusion we must resist falling into the trap that Adult Education Budget is simply considered remedial; remedial study performs an important role but further education also creates technical and vocational pathways that deliver great jobs below degree level. Precisely the technical jobs which employers identify as hard to fill and are so critical to strong productivity and a vibrant economy in the Capital.

Underfunding is sadly symptomatic of much of the public sector these days; chronic underinvestment in further education has left the sector in a precarious position and learners and employers without the range of services they need. London needs a strong advocate for additional investment in order to reverse the downward trend in adult participation, broaden the range of provision and invest adequately in college staff and buildings to meet the Capital's social and economic needs. Without further funding even the most welcome attempts to widen participation will be done at the expense of a reduction in provision and will impact adversely on learners elsewhere in the system.

This also means that we can ill-afford to divert funding from learners. We appreciate the absolute need for the Mayor to be accountable for the use of public funds. However, given that national adult education funding rates have not increased for nine years, we must resist any temptation to replicate the worst aspects of ESIF accountability and avoid, at all costs, the introduction of bureaucratic or burdensome systems that impact on colleges and intrusive evidence requirements which can discourage learners.

We would ask you to trust colleges as grown up partners who share your aspirations for London and Londoners. Colleges are not simply delivery agents but anchor institutions in their community and a massive regional resource. They deserve to be respected as equal partners, sharing the risk and the responsibility for delivering a more strategic adult education and skills system tailored to meeting London's needs. On this basis we are not opposed to an increased focus on outcomes and welcome the acknowledgment that outcomes are not just about supporting learners into work but include progression and the wider social benefits of adult education. However, evidence has shown payment by results to be a flawed approach and we would continue to encourage you to consider other means of achieving your goal.

Finally, we have an understandable anxiety about stability, not because we cannot manage change but because the sector has been plagued with reform at every level. Recognition would be helpful, that the Adult Education Budget, important as it is, funds one aspect of a college's offer and sits alongside 16-18 provision, apprenticeships and other activity, often including HE. We would welcome your commitment to robustly trialling any initiatives, assessing impact and anticipating the non-intended consequence of policy shift.

We look forward to continuing to work in partnership to deliver the Mayor's vision for a city for all Londoners and an education and skills system which is the envy of the world.

Yours



Mary Vine-Morris  
Area Director (London) and National Lead Employment  
Association of Colleges