



House of Commons  
Education Committee

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# A plan for an adult skills and lifelong learning revolution

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**Third Report of Session 2019–21**

*Report, together with formal minutes relating  
to the report*

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## The Education Committee

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## Summary

The nation faces major skills and employment challenges. The Fourth Industrial Revolution, the changing nature of work, an ageing population, and now the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic all loom large. As a result of the pandemic, unemployment is expected to rise to a peak of 2.6 million people by the second quarter of 2021. To meet these challenges, adults will increasingly need to upskill and reskill throughout their lives. The current approach to education funding is overwhelmingly focused on education before the age of 25. We must move away from this model, towards a system and culture of lifelong learning that encourages education at any age.

There are overwhelming benefits to lifelong learning; benefits for productivity and the economy, for health and wellbeing, and for social justice and communities. Adults who gain level 3 qualifications (equivalent to A level) see a 10% increase in earnings and are more likely to be employed, while research into community learning and mental health found that 52% of learners no longer had clinically significant symptoms of anxiety and depression by the end of their course.

Yet poor access to lifelong learning is one of the great social injustices of our time and there are significant skills gaps which urgently need to be addressed. By 2024 there will be a shortfall of four million highly skilled workers. Nine million working-age adults in England have low literacy or numeracy skills, or both, and six million adults are not qualified to level 2 (equivalent to GCSE level). Participation in adult education is at its lowest level in 23 years and funding fell by 45% between 2008–9 and 2018–19. 49% of adults from the lowest socioeconomic group have received no training since leaving school. We must reverse this decline and offer a way forward.

This can be done through an ambitious, long-term strategy for adult skills and lifelong learning—a comprehensive and holistic vision for lifelong learning that works for every adult in every community. We heard that the lack of a coherent, long-term strategy and vision for lifelong learning has resulted in an unhelpful churn of initiatives, with the adult skills landscape lurching from one policy priority to the next. We found that there are key areas requiring urgent reform, including childcare for adult learners, English for speakers of other languages provision, modular learning, local skills offers, information, advice and guidance, and adult learning for those with SEND. Alongside these, we identified four key pillars that are needed to set the long-term foundation for a revitalised adult education system.

### *A community learning centre in every town*

Adult community learning providers are the jewel in the crown of the nation's adult education landscape. They bring learning to disadvantaged communities, providing a lifeline for adults furthest from qualifications and employment. 92% of Local Authority community learning services are rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted. But there has been a 32% decline in participation in community learning between 2008–9 and 2018–19, with participation falling for five consecutive years.

We are not persuaded that the Department fully grasps the value and purpose of community learning. Nor does it appear that the Department has a vision or strategic approach for boosting this vital area of lifelong learning.

The Department must work with the sector to grasp what data exists on community learning and where any gaps might be. This should include figures for how many community learning centres exist nationally. The Department must set out an ambitious plan for a community learning centre in every town. These do not need to be new buildings or organisations: we should make use of existing organisations and assets, such as colleges, church halls and libraries.

### *Introduce Individual Learning Accounts*

The Department should introduce Individual Learning Accounts, funded through the National Skills Fund. Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) would devolve funding to learners, giving them choice and agency over their learning and career development. The failures of the ILA scheme in 2000–01 have meant that ILAs remain political kryptonite for English policymaking. But provided lessons are learnt, ILAs could kickstart participation and play a key role in enhancing the employment prospects of adults affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Department can build on small-scale schemes close to home. Scotland, for example, spent £3.7 million on funding Individual Training Accounts for around 22,000 adults over 2018/19. Ultimately, we believe Individual Learning Accounts need to have a truly lifelong emphasis, moving beyond a one-off grant, to a system where adults receive several further top-up investments throughout their working lives to revitalise training and upskilling.

### *Nurse part-time Higher Education back to health*

Despite the clear need for the higher-level skills which are key to productivity, part-time higher education has fallen into disrepair. Part-time student numbers collapsed by 53% between 2008–09 and 2017–18, and we heard that the fall over this decade has resulted in over one million lost learners. We must nurse part-time higher education back to full health.

To do so, the Department must instate fee grants for part-time learners from the most disadvantaged backgrounds who study courses that meet the skills needs of the nation. The Department must also extend maintenance support to part-time distance learners.

### *A skills tax credit to revitalise employer-led training*

The picture on employer investment in training is bleak indeed. 39% of employers admit to training none of their staff, and overall, employer-led training has declined by a half since the end of the 1990s.

To restore employer-led training, the Government must introduce tax credits for employers who invest in training for their low-skilled workers.

# 1 Introduction

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## Our inquiry

1. We launched our inquiry into Adult Skills and Lifelong Learning (ASALL) on 26 March 2020. It follows on from the previous Education Committee’s inquiry into adult skills and education, which was incomplete at the time of the 2019 General Election. Our predecessor Committee received 76 written evidence submissions and held one oral evidence session. We have carried forward and drawn on this evidence through our current inquiry. We have also been required to conduct this inquiry in more innovative ways. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we were initially unable to hold traditional oral evidence in-person hearings, and instead elected to write to witnesses with a set of questions. Later, we were able to hold two ‘teleconference’ oral evidence sessions, one with sector experts, and the other with Minister Keegan, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills. We are very grateful to all who took the time to submit their evidence to our inquiry.

2. The Department for Education’s written submission defined adult skills and lifelong learning provision as “education, advice and training for adults (19+) who want to upskill, reskill or move into employment”.<sup>1</sup> The adult education sector is extremely broad and diverse. ASALL encompasses informal and non-accredited learning, basic skills provision, through to higher education qualifications taken by part-time and mature learners. ASALL is delivered through an extensive network of providers, including further education colleges, specialist adult education colleges, independent training providers, training led or funded by employers, Local authority adult community education services, charities and university providers.<sup>2</sup>

3. In order to do justice to the breadth and diversity of ASALL provision, our inquiry considers ASALL in its broadest sense. We examined adult education at all levels, from first-step learning for adults with no qualifications, through to mature learners taking part-time degrees. 49% of adults from the lowest socioeconomic groups have received no training since leaving school,<sup>3</sup> and we remained mindful of this statistic throughout, questioning what can be done to draw this left behind group into lifelong learning.

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1 Department for Education ([ASL0012](#)) Session 2019–2021

2 See for example, the LLAKES Centre, Institute of Education, University College London ([ASL0061](#)) Session 2017–19

3 National Institute of Adult Continuing Education. [Adult Participation in Learning Survey: Headline Findings](#). March 2015

## 2 Why adult skills and lifelong learning matters

4. The UK economy faces a range of future challenges. 2018 research commissioned by the Department for Education highlights that automation and labour market changes are expected to displace many jobs, with estimates varying from 10 to 35% of jobs expected to be at “high risk” of replacement in the next 20 years.<sup>4</sup> 2019 Office for National Statistics research concluded that of a sample of 19.9 million jobs, 7.4% of workers are employed in roles at risk of automation, with lower skilled workers more vulnerable to these changes.<sup>5</sup> Some sectors, such as the green energy sector, will grow, with research predicting 1.18 million new green jobs by 2050 which will spur demand for adults to upskill and retrain.<sup>6</sup> The UK’s population is also ageing. According to the Government Office for Science’s *Future of an Ageing Population* report, in mid-2014, the average age of the UK’s population exceeded 40 for the first time.<sup>7</sup> Evidence from the Northern Powerhouse Partnership points out that upskilling will be “absolutely critical in view of the fact that two-thirds of the 2030 workforce have already left compulsory education.”<sup>8</sup> Written evidence from University College London’s Institute of Education warns:

There has been too little recognition that through the growing use of Robotics and Artificial Intelligence, the labour market is undergoing an unprecedented transformation at an accelerating rate, with knock-on effects in every section of society and every area of life. The consequence is an expanding population confronted by an ever dwindling supply of jobs and a growing ‘GIG’ economy comprising short-term zero-hour contracts interspersed with unemployment.<sup>9</sup>

This was the situation before the Covid-19 pandemic. The Chancellor has warned that the economy is likely to undergo a permanent adjustment to Covid-19, and that not every job can be saved.<sup>10</sup> The Chancellor’s Spending Review speech underlined that unemployment is expected to rise to a peak of 2.6 million people by the second quarter of 2021.<sup>11</sup> We believe now more than ever there is a need to ensure people in the UK are able to upskill and retrain in areas that meet the nation’s needs.

### The benefits of ASALL

5. The benefits of ASALL extend far wider than productivity and skill development, with evidence identifying benefits for communities, social justice and health and wellbeing.

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4 Department for Education. [Barriers to learning for disadvantaged groups: Report of qualitative findings](#). August 2018

5 Office for National Statistics. [The probability of automation in England: 2011 and 2017](#). 25 March 2019

6 Local Government Association. [Local green jobs - accelerating a sustainable economic recovery](#). June 2020

7 Government Office for Science. [Future of an Ageing Population](#). 7 July 2016

8 Northern Powerhouse Partnership ([ASL0042](#)) Session 2017–19

9 Institute of Education, University College London ([ASL0024](#)) Session 2017–19

10 Her Majesty’s Treasury. [Speech: Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak on the Winter Economy Plan](#). 24 September 2020

11 Her Majesty’s Treasury and The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak. [Speech: Spending Review 2020 speech](#). 25 November 2020



### *Economic benefits*

6. There are clear economic benefits, both at a wider societal level, and at an individual level, to participating in ASALL at all levels. Data published by Public Health England, for instance, estimates that the lifetime return on investment of level 1 courses for those aged 19–24 is £21.60 for every £1 invested.<sup>12</sup> The Department’s written evidence reports that adults over 25 with a full level 2 qualification benefit from an average 8% increase in earnings following their course of study, which increases to 10% for adults with a full level 3 qualification.<sup>13</sup> The return on investment increases with qualification level. For a vocational level 2 qualification, the return on investment is £16.17 per £1 invested, which rises to £20.70 per £1 invested for vocational level 3 qualifications, and to £31.47 for degree holders.<sup>14</sup>

### *Benefits for health and wellbeing*

7. The Department’s written evidence also notes that there is “good evidence of wider benefits of adult skills and lifelong learning (health, employment, social life, community), some of which support significant fiscal savings across Government.”<sup>15</sup> Research by the former Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) in 2012 found that for older adults (aged 50–69), adult learning is associated with higher wellbeing, and this impact is at least sufficient to offset the gradual decline in wellbeing experienced as people age.<sup>16</sup> A separate 2012 BIS review of research reported that “adult learning has its greatest impacts in the domain of health and mental health”, and found participation in formal learning courses is associated with a reduction in the number of GP visits.<sup>17</sup> Further benefits are identified in 2004 research by Feinstein and Hammond, who found that participating in one to two lifelong learning courses between the ages of 33 and 42 results in a 3% increase in the probability of giving up smoking, while participating in between three and ten courses increased the percentage of people taking part in exercise from 38% to 45%.<sup>18</sup>

### *Benefits for society and communities*

8. Research commissioned by the Department identifies that post-18 education increases civic participation across outcomes such as likelihood of voting and political engagement.<sup>19</sup> The Workers’ Educational Association (WEA) surveyed 5,000 of their learners and found that adult learning can contribute to stronger communities. Stronger communities can be defined through various indicators, such as the level of belonging and inclusion reported by adults, civic participation, and the likelihood of giving up time for community projects

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12 Public Health England. [Local action on health inequalities: Adult learning services](#). September 2014

13 Department for Education ([ASL0012](#)) Session 2019–21

14 Government Office for Science. [Future of Skills & Lifelong Learning](#). November 2017

15 Department for Education ([ASL0012](#)) Session 2019–21

16 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. [BIS Research Paper Number 92: Learning and Wellbeing Trajectories Among Older Adults in England](#). October 2012

17 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. [BIS Research Paper Number 90: Review and Update of Research into the Wider Benefits of Adult Learning](#). November 2012

18 Feinstein, L. and Hammond, C. (2004) [The contribution of adult learning to health and social capital](#), Oxford Review of Education, 30:2, p199–221

19 Department for Education. [The wider \(non-market\) benefits of post 18 education for individuals and society: Research report](#). May 2019

and volunteering.<sup>20</sup> The WEA found 36% of their learners reported a greater sense of community belonging after taking a course, while 15% became involved in community volunteering as a result of their course.<sup>21</sup>

**9. The benefits of adult skills and lifelong learning are well-evidenced and include benefits for productivity and the economy, for health and wellbeing, and for social justice and communities. To respond to the significant challenges posed by the Fourth Industrial Revolution, an ageing workforce, the skills gap, and the devastating impact of Covid-19, we need to make sure adults can upskill and retrain throughout their lives. Now more than ever there is a pressing need to ensure adult learners are equipped with the necessary skills and education to aid our economic recovery.**

**10. *The Government must commission analysis to identify where the nation's immediate and longer-term skills needs lie. This should be regularly updated, as real-time labour markets data is essential for ensuring that reforms to adult skills and lifelong learning are properly linked to skills needs.***

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20 See, for example: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. [By deeds and their results: How we will strengthen our communities and nation](#). July 2019

21 Workers' Educational Association. [Adult education works: Measuring the WEA effect](#). 2019

### 3 The need for a national strategy

It is important not only to look at other countries in terms of what we can do now but what we ourselves have been able to do in the past. It is only 40 or 50 years since we had an adult education system that was, if you like, world leading. We have thrown that away collectively. We have talked about the last 10 years, but that decline has actually been going on for 30-odd years. We need to rebuild. [Q38](#) [Professor John Holford]

#### The decline in participation

11. Despite the wide-ranging benefits that adult education has been proven to bring, adult skills and lifelong learning is in need of restoration. Alongside a 45% decline in funding for adult skills over the last decade,<sup>22</sup> participation has fallen to its lowest rate in 23 years,<sup>23</sup> and 38% of adults have not participated in any learning since leaving full time education.<sup>24</sup> Iain Murray, senior policy officer at the Trades Union Congress (TUC), told us:

Some of the independent surveys of adult learning show now only about one in three adults are taking part in any form of learning. Participation is down by 10 percentage points since 2010—nearly four million fewer adult learners, with one million fewer adult learners in the FE system and part-time university students down from 250,000 to 100,000.<sup>25</sup>

12. The overall picture is indeed stark:

- Participation rates in adult education have almost halved since 2004, according to the Social Market Foundation;<sup>26</sup>
- Those who do participate in lifelong learning tend to be wealthier, and they are more likely to already have a higher-level qualification. 92% of adults with a degree level qualification have undertaken lifelong learning over the past year compared to 53% of adults with no qualifications;<sup>27</sup>
- 49% of adults in the lowest socioeconomic class have participated in learning since leaving school, compared to 20% in the highest;<sup>28</sup>
- Nine million working age adults in England have low literacy or numeracy skills or both;<sup>29</sup> and
- Nine million adults in the UK lack basic digital skills.<sup>30</sup>

13. There has certainly been no shortage of adult education policy initiatives over the years. All too often, however, these initiatives have been piecemeal, ineffectual and short-

22 Institute for Fiscal Studies. [2018 annual report on education spending in England](#). 17 September 2018

23 Learning and Work Institute, [Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2019](#), December 2019.

24 Ibid.

25 [Q1](#)

26 Social Market Foundation. [\(Adult\) education, education, education: How adult education can improve the life chances of those on low incomes](#). November 2020

27 Department for Education. [Adult education survey 2016: Research report](#). June 2018

28 National Institute of Adult Continuing Education. [Adult Participation in Learning Survey: Headline Findings](#). March 2015.

29 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). [Building Skills for All: A Review of England: Policy insights from the survey of adult skills](#). February 2016

30 Lloyds Bank. [Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2020](#). May 2020

lived, sometimes doing more harm than good, and lacking coherent strategic direction. In essence, the Government's approach is characterised by 'initiativitis'. The Engineering Construction Industry Training Board told us that a comprehensive strategy for embedding lifelong learning is needed:

Crucially, the strategy should not be reduced to single albeit well-intentioned initiatives, rather a holistic approach is required that provides consistent opportunities for adults to access learning and reskilling opportunities wherever they live and whatever their background, either via their employer or on their own initiative.<sup>31</sup>

The failure of the Individual Learning Accounts scheme introduced in 2000 illustrates what happens when an ambitious policy to increase participation is sunk through poor planning and inadequate risk management.<sup>32</sup> More recently, the reform of tuition fees in 2012, and removal of maintenance grants had the unintended consequence of causing numbers of adult part-time learners to plummet.<sup>33</sup> And despite the growing urgency of upskilling and retraining, both the 2012–17 Employer Ownership of Skills Pilot and the 2017–20 National Retraining Scheme concluded with minimal impact, and at significant taxpayer expense.<sup>34</sup> Of course, changes in government and the cycle of Spending Review bidding will inevitably result in old policies being discarded and new ones adopted. But we regret that the substantial churn of adult education initiatives has worked against the implementation of a coherent, long-term strategic vision for adult education.

14. We heard of the importance of developing a culture of lifelong learning, where a flexible learning model allows adults to 'hop on and hop off' learning opportunities and build up towards a qualification.<sup>35</sup> Evidence from the Institutes of Adult Learning, a network of nine specialist adult education colleges, told us:

The education system is geared towards most people's learning taking place before the age of 25 (or considerably sooner in many cases) with only occasional (if any) returns to formal or structured learning later in life. We need a system—and a national culture—which facilitates learning at any age.<sup>36</sup>

Moving towards a culture of lifelong learning will require funding, and the new £2.5 billion National Skills Fund offers a significant opportunity for a large-scale, sustained transformation to adult skills and lifelong learning. But more is needed than simply a new pot of funding. To get the most out of the National Skills Fund, decisions on expenditure must be underpinned by a well-defined, strategic vision of the role and purpose of ASALL in the 21st century. Just over one hundred years ago, the Ministry of Reconstruction

31 Engineering and Construction Industry Training Board ([ASL0048](#)) Session 2017–19

32 National Audit Office. [Individual Learning Accounts](#). March 2002

33 Callendar, C. & Thompson, J. [The Lost Part-timers](#), The Sutton Trust, 15 March 2018

34 A [Department evaluation](#) of the £350 million Employer Ownership of Skills Pilot found "no evidence" that the programme had an impact on employer attitudes to training. [The National Retraining Scheme](#) was a £100 million programme announced in 2017, intended to help adults retrain into better jobs and prepare them for future changes such as automation. The programme did not get further than its pilot phase.

35 [Q100](#). See also: UCL Institute of Education ([ASL0024](#)) Session 2017–19; Institutes for Adult Learning ([ASL0057](#)) Session 2017–19; KPMG LLP ([ASL0062](#)) Session 2017–19

36 Institutes for Adult Learning ([ASL0057](#)) Session 2017–19

published its landmark 1919 report, setting out its vision of adult education as “a permanent national necessity, an inseparable aspect of citizenship ... both universal and lifelong.”<sup>37</sup> Today, we believe an ambition on a similar scale is needed.

**15. Government policy on adult skills and lifelong learning has tended to be short-term, piecemeal, and initiative-led. The result has been a substantial churn of adult education initiatives which has worked against the implementation of a coherent, long-term strategic vision for adult education. Adult skills and lifelong learning is a clear strategic priority, yet participation in adult education is at its lowest rate for 23 years.**

**16. *The Department must set out an ambitious, long-term strategy for adult skills and lifelong learning. This must be a comprehensive and holistic vision for ASALL in its entirety—piecemeal adjustments and one-off initiatives will not deliver the reform needed. These reforms must be underpinned by a shift to more flexible, modular learning so that adults can ‘hop on and hop off’ learning pathways. And we will need much better careers advice to help adults find the best learning opportunities for them.***

*We identify four key pillars to this strategy:*

- i. *First, the Department must ensure there is a community learning centre in every town to ensure the first rung of the ladder is there for adults furthest from qualifications and employment.*
- ii. *Second, the Department must kickstart participation by introducing Individual Learning Accounts, so that every adult has choice and agency over their learning.*
- iii. *Third, the Government must restore part-time higher education by instating fee grants for part-time learners from the most disadvantaged backgrounds who study courses that meet the skills needs of the nation, and extend maintenance support to disadvantaged learners.*
- iv. *Fourth, the Government must tackle the decline in employer-led training through the introduction of a skills tax credit for employers who invest in training for their workforce.*

## Information, advice and guidance

17. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority rightly highlighted that “Post-18 education should be a lifelong experience available to all irrespective of age, situation or income”.<sup>38</sup> Yet the statistics show we are a long way from this ambition. The Learning and Work Institute highlight that 38% of adults have not participated in any learning since leaving full-time education,<sup>39</sup> and the poorest adults with the lowest qualifications are the least likely to access adult training, despite being the group who would benefit most.<sup>40</sup> We heard that careers advice for adults is often not good enough,

37 Ministry of Reconstruction, Adult Education Committee. [Final Report](#). 1919

38 Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority ([ASL0007](#)) Session 2019–21

39 Learning and Work Institute. [Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2019](#). December 2019

40 Social Mobility Commission. [The adult skills gap: is falling investment in UK adults stalling social mobility?](#) January 2019

and is not sufficiently impartial.<sup>41</sup> Poor quality information, advice and guidance (IAG) poses a significant barrier to increasing and equalising participation.<sup>42</sup> The Institutes for Adult Learning (IALs) reported that:

IAL students often tell us how random and unstructured the process of finding out about adult education courses is. Those who are participating are often those who were fortunate enough to stumble on the right piece of information at the right time.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, The Workers' Educational Association told us that:

Participation surveys show how difficult even those already in the education system find it to discover information about learning and funding. For anyone who is not already engaged in adult learning it is unsurprising that participation rates are dropping partly because of the paucity of information available about what's available.<sup>44</sup>

18. Some centralised IAG is provided through the National Careers Service (NCS), which is a free advisory service for adults and young people funded by the Government. Its website acts as a signposting and course directory, there is a telephone helpline, and adults can access face-to-face support. Research commissioned by the Department found that those accessing NCS support are more likely to spend time in education or training in the six months after support is received, although there is no information on the suitability or quality of the learning received.<sup>45</sup> Written evidence submitted to our inquiry supporting the need for a centralised IAG platform to exist, but identified a number of limitations.<sup>46</sup> The Association of Colleges told us that the NCS excludes “hard to reach potential learners who might lack the ability, knowledge and-or resources to engage with the service.”<sup>47</sup> The Workers' Educational Association noted that that the profile of adult learning on the NCS is low, and “much more needs to be done to provide vastly improved IAG to help learners find out about opportunities.”<sup>48</sup>

19. Dr Pember, policy director for HOLEX, told us that the National Careers Service “needs to be larger, bigger, more reach and very local ... it needs to be about guidance and it needs to be about handholding to get that person into that exact provision that would suit them.”<sup>49</sup> Written evidence from HOLEX further suggested that the NCS “should have local arms based in Adult Community Services and these arms should be expanded to include a mentorship service as well as imparting information.”<sup>50</sup> Written evidence from the Institute of Directors suggested that “local, combined authorities and LEPs should

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41 Young Women's Trust ([ASL0022](#)) Session 2017–19; [Q51](#)

42 See, for example: Workers' Educational Association ([ASL0009](#)) Session 2019–21; Birkbeck University ([ASL0002](#)) Session 2019–21; MillionPlus ([ASL0026](#)) Session 2017–19; LTE Group ([ASL0043](#)) Session 2017–19

43 Institutes for Adult Learning ([ASL0057](#)) Session 2017–19

44 Workers' Educational Association ([ASL0009](#)) Session 2019–21

45 Department for Education. [An economic evaluation of the National Careers Service: Research report](#). March 2017.

46 See for example: HOLEX ([ASL0003](#)) Session 2019–21; the Open University ([ASL0005](#)) Session 2019–21; University and College Union ([ASL0023](#)) Session 2017–19; Institutes for Adult Learning ([ASL0057](#)) Session 2017–19

47 Association of Colleges ([ASL0001](#)) Session 2019–21

48 Workers' Educational Association ([ASL0009](#)) Session 2019–21

49 [Q49](#)

50 HOLEX ([ASL0003](#)) Session 2019–21

more broadly play a role in promoting and raising awareness of the different training options available in their local area.”<sup>51</sup> Similarly, the Local Government Association advocated:

Co-designing the development of a locally relevant careers advice offer for young people and adults and the progressive devolution of the Careers and Enterprise Company and National Careers Service funding.<sup>52</sup>

20. An important theme that emerged during this inquiry was the need for an effective communication strategy to bring together all the strands of funding, entitlements and area-based provision. Witnesses were optimistic that with improved promotion, it would be possible to successfully deliver a national lifelong learning strategy.<sup>53</sup> Dr Pember suggested that “an advertising campaign to tell adults what this Government has on offer for them would be quite simple and effective, because one of the main issues with participation is that adults do not know what is on offer”.<sup>54</sup>

21. We suggested to Minister Keegan, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills, that the quality of information, advice and guidance for adults is not strong enough and not sufficiently impartial. The Minister agreed that careers advice is “absolutely a key part that we have to get right and improve. It is not good enough today”.<sup>55</sup> We note that the Government has committed to investing an extra £32 million in the National Careers Service over the next two years, with the aim of meeting increased demand for advice on training and work for those affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>56</sup> The additional investment is welcome, and support for workers affected by the Covid-19 pandemic is a clear short-term priority, but this does not negate the need for a long-term overhaul of IAG.

**22. Adults need clear and impartial advice and support on learning and funding. The National Careers Service is limited and overly centralised, particularly given the extent to which ASALL provision is now devolved. A far more proactive approach to promoting and communicating statutory entitlements and local offers is needed. 38% of adults have not participated in any learning since leaving full-time education—simply waiting and hoping that this group will decide to engage with the National Careers Service is clearly not the basis of an effective strategy.**

**23. *The Department must devolve National Careers Service funding to enable local and combined authorities and local enterprise partnerships to co-design and promote locally relevant information, advice and guidance. The National Careers Service should provide more robust data on employment and learning outcomes to enable adults to make more informed decisions about their learning and development. The Department must also fund an advertising campaign to promote awareness of statutory entitlements.***

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51 Institute of Directors ([ASL0040](#)) Session 2017–19

52 Local Government Association ([ASL0012](#)) Session 2017–19

53 [Q42](#)

54 [Q42](#)

55 [Q84](#)

56 Her Majesty's Treasury. [A plan for Jobs](#). Policy Paper. 8 July 2020

## The need for flexible and modular learning

There is also a long-standing problem in the way that the current funding rules focus on full qualifications and on people taking them for the first time. This does not reflect the needs of adults in a rapidly evolving labour market with changing technology. There needs to be a flexibility to provide a modular-unitised approach to adult learning allowing adults to access the learning they need to progress within their current job roles or to help them move to other jobs throughout their working lives.<sup>57</sup> (Association of Colleges)

24. Written evidence argued that a shift towards modular, credit-based qualifications is increasingly necessary.<sup>58</sup> A ‘hop on and hop off’ approach to lifelong learning would enable adults with busy working lives and caring responsibilities to build up to a qualification over time. Enabling adults to learn and train in a more modular way would also help eliminate the time barrier to adult learning. Research commissioned by the Department identified time as the most commonly cited barrier to adult learning, selected by 52% of respondents.<sup>59</sup> The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) highlighted that this could be particularly beneficial for raising participation in higher technical qualifications at levels 4 and 5.<sup>60</sup> The City and Guilds Group suggested that:

There are not enough qualifications which can be taken in a modular approach or on a part time basis for those who work, and who will need to upgrade, update or even change their skill to remain employed, to enable choice and clear progression pathways.<sup>61</sup>

25. We asked witnesses how a more modular and flexible skills system would enhance retraining. Professor Fraser told us that there is “more and more of a call for bite size learning” and suggested that the Department will need to:

[...] incentivise providers—universities, colleges, adult education providers of all varieties—to create modular pieces and encourage them through policy to stack and combine those in innovative ways to create pathways through is very important.<sup>62</sup>

We are pleased that the Government recently announced that as part of its new Lifetime Skills Guarantee, higher education loans would be made more flexible, allowing courses to be taken in segments.<sup>63</sup> While the details are yet to be provided, we believe this is the right reform and would like to see a more modular offer for skills at all levels. We note that Greater Manchester Combined Authority has already moved in this direction, and are using their devolved AEB to provide:

57 Association of Colleges ([ASL0001](#)) Session 2019–21

58 See for example: Universities UK ([ASL0028](#)) Session 2017–19; LTE Group ([ASL0043](#)) Session 2017–19; City and Guilds Group ([ASL0047](#)) Session 2017–19; The Sutton Trust ([ASL0060](#)) Session 2017–19; Tees Valley Combined Authority ([ASL0006](#)) Session 2019–21

59 Department for Education. [Adult Education Survey 2016: Research report](#). June 2018

60 CBI ([ASL0075](#)) Session 2017–19

61 The City and Guilds group ([ASL0047](#)) Session 2017–19

62 [Qq54–55](#)

63 Prime Minister’s Office. [Speech: Major expansion of post-18 education and training to level up and prepare workers for post-COVID economy](#). 29 September 2020



[...] funded units of advanced training and education at level 3 alongside relevant L2 qualifications, particularly linked to priority sectors, a flexibility designed to help people progress in work by improving, refreshing and updating their skills without needing to complete a full qualification.<sup>64</sup>

**26. The ability to study bite-size modules rather than commit to full qualifications is a much-needed reform that will make it easier for adults to upskill and retrain. Developing qualifications that can be taken in modules will enable adults with busy working lives and caring responsibilities to build up qualifications over time and ensure their skills stay relevant in a changing job market.**

*27. We recommend the Department work with the relevant sector bodies to develop a modular offer for skills qualifications at all levels. This should be linked to those qualifications and courses which meet the skills needs of the nation. The Department must also work with the sector to devise a funding approach that makes it economically viable for colleges and other providers to offer module-based learning.*

## 4 Funding for adult education

### The Adult Education Budget

28. The main source of funding for adult learning is through the Adult Education Budget (AEB), although there are multiple, different streams and pots on top of this. The Association of Colleges told us that adult education and skills funding is “fragmented”, and suggested that the AEB, the National Skills Fund and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund should be bought together into a coherent post-18 fund.<sup>65</sup> However, Simon Parkinson, Chief Executive of the Workers’ Educational Association, warned that a simplified funding landscape might not meet “the diversity of need that we all feel is important.”<sup>66</sup>

29. The AEB has been held constant at £1.34 billion from 2016–17.<sup>67</sup> A 2018 report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that total funding for adult education and apprenticeships fell by 45% in real terms between 2009–10 and 2017–18.<sup>68</sup> The *Augar Review* notably identified this figure as “one of the most important statistics” in its report, and one that “cannot be justified in terms of either economics or social equity”.<sup>69</sup> The decline in funding, together with factors including the introduction of funding restrictions for level 2 entitlements, and the move towards a more loan-based system of funding at levels 3–6, have led to a fall in participation.<sup>70</sup> When we asked the Minister about the fall in adult education funding, the Minister suggested that the 45% figure “does slightly miss the point that at the same time we had a big rise in apprenticeships.”<sup>71</sup> We further questioned the Minister on whether the Department would be making the case to the Exchequer for further increases to adult education funding at the next Spending Review. The Minister told us that the Department’s Spending Review bid is “focused around supporting the FE reform and that White Paper making sure that we focus on technical education”.<sup>72</sup> The Minister did not elaborate on whether the Department would be asking the Treasury for a real terms increase in the Adult Education Budget.

### The need for a long-term funding settlement

30. This year’s Spending Review was only a one-year review, covering expenditure for 2021–22. Ahead of next year’s Spending Review, the Department must focus on adult education and make the case for an ambitious, long-term funding settlement. The Social Market Foundation’s recent report on adult education concluded that measures to revitalise adult education are “unlikely to succeed without a significant increase in resources.”<sup>73</sup> Their report called for a “substantial increase in adult education funding of at least £1.3 billion per annum” to offset the decline in funding.<sup>74</sup> While the new £2.5 billion National

65 Association of Colleges ([ASL0001](#)) Session 2019–21

66 [Q56](#)

67 House of Commons Library. [Research Briefing: Adult further education funding in England since 2010](#). 16 December, 2019

68 Institute for Fiscal Studies. [2018 annual report on education spending in England](#). 17 September 2018

69 Department for Education. [Independent panel report to the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding](#) May 2019, p119

70 *Ibid.*

71 [Q98](#)

72 [Q100](#)

73 Social Market Foundation. [\(Adult\) education, education, education: How adult education can improve the life chances of those on low incomes](#). November 2020

74 *Ibid.*

Skills Fund is a significant additional injection of cash for adult skills, the Institute for Fiscal Studies identified that this would only “reverse about one fifth of the cuts to total spending on adult education and apprenticeships since 2010”.<sup>75</sup> In the 2019 Spending Round, the Exchequer confirmed a three-year funding settlement for schools,<sup>76</sup> and we are persuaded of the need for a commitment of similar ambition for adult education.

31. Further work will be needed to ascertain what level of funding increase is necessary. We heard that levels of AEB funding are not linked to the cost of delivery. Dr Pember, policy director for HOLEX, told us that the community learning strand of the Adult Education Budget “has been capped at an arbitrary level for 10 years”, and “funding allocation is based solely on programmes and does not reflect the actual cost of delivery”.<sup>77</sup> The Association of Colleges similarly agreed that funding rates for adult courses in colleges are not linked to the cost of delivery, and indeed suggested that their initial research has indicated that funding levels “were not viable in terms of covering full costs”.<sup>78</sup>

**32. Adult skills funding has fallen by 45% in real terms between 2009–10 and 2017–18. The consequence of this decline is that the nation’s adult skills and lifelong learning system is in poor shape to tackle the pressing challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, an ageing workforce, skills gaps and the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.**

**33. *For its 2021 Spending Review bid, the Department must properly cost what level of Adult Education Budget increase is needed to meet the urgent and overdue reforms we set out in this report. An ambitious, long-term strategy for adult education will require an ambitious funding settlement. The Department must prepare a case for a three-year funding settlement for adult education.***

**34. *The Department must review funding for adult skills and lifelong learning to see how the various funding streams can be consolidated and made more streamlined and less bureaucratic for providers.***

## Individual Learning Accounts

35. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic struck, the effects of an ageing population, automation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution were already starting to significantly shake up jobs and skills. The growth of new sectors, such as green energy, will spur demand for new skills, making it vital for adults to be able to reskill and upskill throughout their working lives. Yet we also know that adults face barriers to lifelong learning, with research commissioned by the Department reporting cost as a barrier identified by 42% of respondents.<sup>79</sup> We therefore took evidence on Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs). Different forms of learning accounts have been developed in various countries, but essentially they provide a means of devolving choice and funding to the individual through a virtual account or a voucher to spend on accredited education or training.<sup>80</sup> The

75 Institute for Fiscal Studies. [Going further on further education?](#) 4 December 2019

76 HM Treasury. [Spending Round 2019: Policy Paper](#). 4 September 2019

77 HOLEX ([ASL0003](#)) Session 2019–21

78 Association of Colleges ([ASL0001](#)) Session 2019–21

79 Department for Education. [Adult Education Survey 2016: Research report](#). June 2018

80 For further information on forms of learning accounts adopted internationally see: OECD. [Individual Learning Accounts: Panacea or Pandora’s Box](#). November 2019

introduction of the new £2.5 billion National Skills Fund offers a significant opportunity to implement ambitious lifelong learning policies and has reinvigorated discussions on learning accounts.<sup>81</sup>

The spectre of the failure of the 2000–1 Individual Learning Accounts (ILA) Scheme continues to appear every time learning accounts are mentioned. This is not without good reason, and the short-lived 2000–01 ILA scheme is an example of an ambitious policy that was sunk by the Department’s poor planning and inadequate risk management.<sup>82</sup> The National Audit Office’s *Individual Learning Accounts* report provides a comprehensive examination of the Department’s failures, which resulted in a small number of training providers abusing their access to a system to open accounts and appropriate funds.<sup>83</sup> The then Education and Skills Select Committee found that the ILA scheme had collapsed amid two main issues: “its rapid growth had outstripped its expected cost to public funds; and there were suspicions fraud had become so endemic that it could not be eradicated without killing the scheme.”<sup>84</sup> The scheme had a budget of £199 million but actual expenditure exceeded £290 million.<sup>85</sup> The failures of this scheme have meant that ILAs remain political kryptonite for English policymaking. Yet twenty years on, particularly with advances in technology and digital security, this need no longer be the case.

36. Written evidence highlighted that ILAs could stimulate participation in lifelong learning by lowering cost-barriers and encouraging individuals to take ownership over their skills and learning development.<sup>86</sup> Baroness Wolf told us that:

you have to put far more of the power and decision-making in the hands of the individual and that you get better skills for the economy not by asking a Government Department to organise courses for people that they are sent on but by giving them far greater ability to learn skills when they think they want to.<sup>87</sup>

The Chartered Institute of Personnel Development suggested that learning accounts could offer scope for individual and employer co-investment.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, Iain Murray, senior policy officer at the Trades Union Congress, told us:

One of the things we have been considering with the development of the lifelong learning account is that it functions as a wrapper. It makes people aware of their entitlements to funding coming through the state, but it also would facilitate other innovative kinds of funding, for example, employers agreeing to put in some money if an employee puts in some money. There are innovative ways of using lifelong learning accounts to empower people to take up boosted Government funding and also funding from other sources.<sup>89</sup>

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81 See, for example: NCFE & Campaign for Learning. [Making a Success of the National Skills Fund Adult Training and Retraining for All in the 2020s](#). March 2020.

82 National Audit Office. [Individual Learning Accounts](#). 25 October 2002

83 National Audit Office. [Individual Learning Accounts](#). 25 October 2002

84 Education and Skills Committee. Third Report of Session 2001–02, [Individual Learning Accounts](#). HC 561-I.

85 Ibid.

86 Chartered Institute of Personnel Development ([ASL0054](#)) Session 2017–19; Learning and Work Institute ([ASL0064](#)) Session 2017–19

87 [Q16](#) 23 October 2019

88 Chartered Institute of Personnel Development ([ASL0054](#)) Session 2017–19

89 [Q25](#)

37. As the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) 2019 report sets out, various countries have adopted forms of learning accounts to boost adult skills and training.<sup>90</sup> Close to home, versions of learning accounts have been introduced in Scotland and in Wales and there are likely to be lessons that could usefully be learned from their implementation.<sup>91</sup> In 2019, Wales introduced a pilot Personal Learning Accounts (PLAs) scheme targeted at priority groups, such as adults in employment earning under £26,000. Under the PLA scheme, eligible adults receive full funding for college courses in skill shortage areas.<sup>92</sup> Scotland has a system of Individual Training Accounts, which offer a grant of up to £200 for training courses for individuals who are looking for work or looking to progress in work.<sup>93</sup> During the 2018/19 financial year, Scotland had spent £3.7 million on almost 19,000 accounts, and expected over 22,000 individuals to benefit from an account by the end of that year.<sup>94</sup> Further afield, Singapore has a system of learning accounts that was highlighted in several written submissions as a gold-standard model.<sup>95</sup> Unlike the versions in Wales and Scotland, Singapore's 'SkillsFuture Credit' is a universal scheme for all adults over 25. It initially provides adults with S\$500 (approximately £280) to spend on training, which is topped up at intervals. Adults over 40 receive an additional S\$500 credit specifically aimed at mid-career support.<sup>96</sup>

**38. We believe that there is a place for a rigorously designed and independently overseen Individual Learning Accounts scheme funded through the new National Skills Fund. This would put purchasing power into the hands of the individual, enabling adults to take control over their learning and skills pathways. The pilot or first iteration of the scheme should be targeted at groups who have historically low engagement rates with lifelong learning, such as those on low incomes. Ultimately, however, we would like to see the scheme take on a truly lifelong emphasis, moving beyond a one-off grant, to a system where adults receive 2–3 further top-up investments throughout their working lives to revitalise training and upskilling.**

*39. We recommend that the Government develop Individual Learning Accounts, drawing on the lessons learnt previously. These should be funded through the National Skills Fund, and initially should be aimed at unemployed adults and adults in work earning a low wage.*

## Statutory Entitlements funded through the Adult Education Budget

40. Adults who leave full time education with low or no qualifications are entitled to full or part-funding for certain courses funded through the Adult Education Budget. Further education colleges play a key role in delivering these entitlements—the Department's budget for statutory entitlements is £1.3 billion, of which around £850 million is spent in colleges.<sup>97</sup> The Department's evidence sets out the suite of entitlements:

90 OECD. [Individual Learning Accounts: Panacea or Pandora's Box](#). November 2019

91 Ibid.

92 For more information, see: Welsh Government: [Written Statement: Personal Learning Account Programme](#). 16 September 2019

93 For more information, see: Skills development Scotland: [Individual Training Accounts](#).

94 Parliament Scotland. [Question S5W-20769](#). 17 January 2019

95 See, for example: Birkbeck, University of London ([ASL0011](#)) Session 2017–19; City of London Corporation ([ASL0021](#)) Session 2017–19; Universities UK ([ASL0028](#)) Session 2017–19

96 For more information, see: [SkillsFuture Credit](#)

97 Association of Colleges ([ASL0001](#)) Session 2019–21

The AEB fully funds or co-funds (approximate 50% government contribution for co-funding) skills provision for eligible adults aged 19+ from pre-entry to level 3 [...]The AEB supports four legal entitlements to full funding for eligible adult learners aged 19+ without the equivalent of a GCSE pass in English and/or maths and young people aged 19–23 without a first full Level 2 or first full Level 3 and a legal entitlement enabling eligible learners aged 19+ to be fully funded for essential digital skills qualifications at Entry Level and Level 1.<sup>98</sup>

### Digital skills

41. Nine million adults in the UK lack basic digital skills.<sup>99</sup> Digital skills are more necessary than ever before and are vital for employability and productivity. From August 2020, the Department introduced a new digital skills entitlement enabling adults with low or no digital skills to undertake a fully funded course.<sup>100</sup> While it is right that this entitlement has been introduced, evidence criticised the introduction of the entitlement without an expansion to the overall Adult Education Budget.<sup>101</sup> HOLEX told us that providers already fully spend their Adult Education Budget allocation on existing entitlements and support for learners, and stated that while the new entitlement is “a positive and welcome change, it will mean that the available adult skills funding is likely to reach fewer individuals than need the learning and training on offer.”<sup>102</sup> The Association of Colleges also reported “delays in getting information out to the sector regarding the funding and curriculum offer”.<sup>103</sup> The sector was also critical of the Department’s lack of modelling or analysis around participation which would have enabled providers to better forecast financial impact.<sup>104</sup> In a letter to the Committee, the Minister confirmed that the Department did not have an estimated figure for the number of adults expected to take up the new digital entitlement in 2020/21.<sup>105</sup>

***42. The Department should provide additional funding for the digital skills entitlement, and should ensure that any future statutory entitlements coming out of the Adult Education Budget are properly costed and funded. This should be clearly linked to forecast participation levels.***

### Learning at level 2

43. Over six million working adults are not qualified to level 2 (equivalent to GCSE level).<sup>106</sup> Evidence from the Association of Colleges highlights that only 60% of 19 year-olds have reached level 3, while 15% of 19 year-olds have not achieved level 2.<sup>107</sup> Without proficiency in important basic skills, this group is likely to be economically marginalised and frozen

98 Department for Education (ASL0012) Session 2019–21

99 Lloyds Bank. [Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2020](#). May 2020

100 Department for Education (ASL0012) Session 2019–21

101 Association of Colleges (ASL0001) Session 2019–21

102 HOLEX (ASL0003) Session 2019–21

103 Association of Colleges (ASL0001) Session 2019–21

104 Greater Manchester Combined Authority (ASL0004) Session 2019–21

105 House of Commons Education Select Committee. [Letter from the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills to the Education Select Committee](#). 16 October 2020

106 Centre for Social Justice. [The Long Game: How to reboot skills training for disadvantaged adults](#), June 2020

107 The Association of Colleges (ASL0037) Session 2017–19

out of higher qualifications and higher pay. But adult participation in level 2 learning is in a dire state—the *Augar Review* found that the number of adult learners undertaking full<sup>108</sup> level 2 qualifications declined by an astonishing 87% between 2012–13 and 2017–18.<sup>109</sup>

44. The net return on investment for vocational level 2 qualifications is £16.17 per £1 invested, compared to £20.70 per £1 invested for vocational level 3 qualifications.<sup>110</sup> The evidence we received suggested that level 2 qualifications are a key stepping-stone for progression. The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) told us that it is “vital to maintain sufficient opportunities at level 2” so that adults who leave school without GCSE or equivalent education have a second chance at learning.<sup>111</sup>

45. Prior to 2012–13, the Department offered full funding for all adults to take their first full level 2 qualification. The funding rules then changed, and an age cap was introduced. Full funding was still available for adults aged 19–23, but employed adults aged 24 and over were required to pay half of their tuition costs, which the *Augar Review* calculated as around £500.<sup>112</sup> The significant decline in numbers of adult level 2 learners suggests that for too many adults, this has posed an insurmountable cost-barrier. Adults who leave school or college without a full level 2 are likely to have had a poor prior experience of formal education, and may lack confidence in their own abilities, which may further deter them from spending their money on more education.<sup>113</sup> As we examined in chapter 3, lack of awareness of entitlements presents a significant informational barrier to widening participation. We heard from Dr Pember that “One of the main problems we have is that we have free entitlements for people now, whether it be to do basic skills or a level 2, but they do not know about them.”<sup>114</sup>

**46. Adult enrolments on full level 2 courses have fallen by 87% between 2012–13 and 2017–18. Over six million working adults do not have a level 2 qualification. Without the foundation provided by level 2 qualifications, higher level skills and higher pay will be out of reach for many.**

**47. *The Department should remove funding restrictions for first full level 2 qualifications, restoring funding for adults who are over 24 and employed. The Department must fund a promotional campaign to ensure no adult remains unaware of what qualifications and funding they are entitled to.***

### Learning at level 3

48. The Government has announced that as part of its “Lifetime Skills Guarantee”, from April 2021, all adults without a level 3 qualification (A-level or equivalent) will be entitled to full funding for one. Only certain level 3 courses are eligible; the list has been confirmed by the Department and includes 379 different vocational and academic courses.<sup>115</sup> While

108 The Department’s written evidence notes that A full level 2 qualification is equivalent to 5 or more GCSEs at grades 4–9 and a full level 3 qualification is equivalent to 2 or more A levels.

109 Department for Education. [Independent panel report to the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding](#). May 2019, p124

110 Government Office for Science. [Future of Skills & Lifelong Learning](#). November 2017

111 The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (ASL0010) Session 2019–21

112 Department for Education. [Independent panel report to the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding](#). May 2019, p54

113 Trades Union Congress (ASL0074) Session 2017–19

114 [Q42](#)

115 Department for Education. [Guidance: qualifications in new funded offers](#). 9 December 2020

these courses align with national skills priorities, the list does not necessarily reflect local, sub-regional and regional labour market needs and priorities. This runs the risk that the scheme will not deliver for local employers and will be poorly regarded by them. This could also limit the impact the scheme might have in terms of improving the employment prospects of unemployed or low-paid adults. Previously the entitlement to a fully funded level 3 was capped at age 23, so this new announcement removes that age cap. There are economic benefits associated with level 3 learning, and the Department's written evidence reports that adults over 25 with a full level 3 qualification benefit from a 10% increase in earnings, and a 2 percentage points increase in the probability of being employed.<sup>116</sup>

49. Limiting the Lifetime Skills Guarantee to adults who have not yet achieved a 'full' level 3 qualification does not address the need to kickstart retraining among adults who already have a level 3 or higher qualification. This includes graduates who are unemployed, and many in the labour market who already have a level 3 qualification or above who may need to retrain due to adverse conditions in their local labour market or industry that they have previously been employed in. It is a poor use of taxpayers' money for them to be unproductive in the labour market but around 4% of graduates are not in work.<sup>117</sup> A further pressing issue is that poor take-up of the new level 3 offer could undermine the scheme's ambitions. Qualifications at level 3 tend to be two-year study programmes. Unemployed adults need a journey back into the workplace that is as short as possible, not least because, with some exceptions, Universal Credit is not usually available to adults over 21 studying full-time.<sup>118</sup> Enticing skilled lecturers to teach technical level 3 courses could be a further barrier to the success of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee. The median pay for further education lecturers is over £7,000 lower than their counterparts teaching in schools.<sup>119</sup> Colleges can face difficulties recruiting staff with industry experience in specialist skills sectors, as this group tend to have higher salary expectations than colleges can meet.<sup>120</sup> The Department will need to consider how it will ensure the extended level 3 offer is delivered by high-quality teaching staff. Innovative thinking about how to achieve this may be necessary, for example the Department might explore a scheme between employers and education providers whereby industry-based staff are 'loaned' to colleges to teach sections of courses.

50. Before 2013, the government covered full fees for a first level 3 qualification for adult learners who did not already have one. From 2013–14, adults aged 19–23 remained eligible, but full funding was removed for adults over 24 who had to self-fund or take out a loan. Advanced Learner Loans (ALLs) were introduced for adults studying at levels 3–6, who did not meet eligibility criteria for full funding. A number of submissions were critical of the introduction of ALLs, arguing that the shift to a loan-based system acted as a barrier to participation for low paid, low skilled adults that runs counter to social mobility.<sup>121</sup> Written evidence from the Mayor of Greater Manchester argued that "For

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116 Department for Education ([ASL0039](#)) Session 2017–19

117 Higher Education Statistics Agency. [Statistical Bulletin: Experimental SB25. Higher Education Graduate Outcomes Statistics: UK, 2017/18 - Graduate activities and characteristics](#). 18 June 2020

118 Gov.uk. [Guidance: Universal Credit and Students](#). 7 April 2020

119 Association of Colleges. [AoC update on college pay](#). July 2018

120 Department for Education. [National Colleges Process Evaluation: Research Report](#). February 2020

121 Association of Colleges ([ASL0001](#)) Session 2019–21; University College Union ([ASL0035](#)) Session 2017–19; LTE Group ([ASL0043](#)) Session 2017–19; University of Derby ([ASL0051](#)) Session 2017–19; London Borough of Camden ([ASL0069](#)) Session 2017–19; Trades Union Congress ([ASL0074](#)) Session 2017–19



courses at level 3 and beyond, the assumption of loan-funded learning is simply not an option for the most disadvantaged individuals and families who might benefit most from improving their skills-qualification levels”.<sup>122</sup> The Association of Colleges told us:

Numbers of those accessing Advanced Learner Loans have risen only slightly after a year-on-year fall for the previous three years and are a barrier to adults accessing education and training. After COVID-19 this situation is likely to deteriorate as adults will be more concerned about unemployment, debt and providing for their families.<sup>123</sup>

Low take-up of ALLs has resulted in 50% of funding allocated for ALLs going unspent between 2014 and 2019, and the University and College Union further noted that the unspent loan facility is evidence that ALLs “have been unsuccessful in bridging the gap between demand for learning and the requirement to pay fees.”<sup>124</sup>

**51. Qualifications at level 3 have economic and labour market benefits for adults. Level 3 qualifications are also a key stepping-stone to higher level study. We are pleased that the Department has announced an expansion to the level 3 entitlement, so that from April, adults of any age without a level 3 will be fully funded to study certain courses. But, given that unemployment is expected to rise to a peak of 2.6 million people by the second quarter of 2021, we do not believe this commitment goes far enough. Limiting the guarantee to adults who have not yet achieved a level 3 qualification does not fully address the retraining issue.**

**52. *The Department should extend the entitlement to a free level 3 qualification further, so that unemployed adults who already have a level 3 are fully funded to retrain at level 3 in priority skills sectors.***

**53. *Local enterprise partnerships, working with local and combined authorities, should be able to add to the Department’s list of fully funded level 3 qualifications, where that qualification meets local or regional labour market needs. The range of adult education courses should take into account local and regional adult education needs and the regional industrial strategy, where it exists.***

**54. We are concerned that the ambition of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee could be thwarted if take-up of the expanded level 3 entitlement is poor.**

**55. *We recommend the Department fund a national promotional campaign to ensure all eligible adults are aware of the free learning they are entitled to. The Department should work with the sector to identify innovative ways to support adults to take up the new entitlement, such as incorporating accreditation of prior learning, or developing shorter qualifications that can be achieved over one academic year. The Department should work with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to ensure the DWP are providing appropriate guidance and support for unemployed adults to take up advanced skills qualifications, including the expanded level 3 entitlement.***

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122 Greater Manchester Combined Authority (ASL0004). Department for Education. [Further Education and Skills: Participation with Advanced Learner Loans \(2013/14–2018/19\)](#). November 2019

123 Association of Colleges (ASL0001) Session 2019–21

124 PQ, [182695](#), 23 October 2018; University and College Union ([ASL0023](#)) Session 2017–19

## 5 Adult community learning

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### What is adult community learning?

56. Adult community learning is delivered through a diverse network of providers, including local authority adult education services, colleges, and charities. Most community learning provision is at level 2 (equivalent to GCSE level) or below, including non-formal learning which does not lead to accreditation.<sup>125</sup> It covers a wide range of areas, such as English, maths, digital skills and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) qualifications, as well as learning aimed at developing employability skills and improving well-being, family-oriented programmes, and learning for leisure and enjoyment. Written evidence submitted by the Department defines the purpose of community learning as to:

[...] develop the skills, confidence, motivation and resilience of adults of different ages and backgrounds in order to: progress towards formal learning or employment and-or improve their health and well-being, including mental health and-or develop stronger communities.<sup>126</sup>

57. Adult community learning fills a vital role in targeting the hardest to reach adults, including learners in deprived communities, and those furthest from the job market.<sup>127</sup> We know from our own experiences of hearing from constituents that community learning supports adults who cannot even see the ladder of opportunity, let alone climb it. Community learning can act as a stepping-stone to qualifications or even employment. Simon Parkinson, Chief Executive of the Workers' Educational Association, told us that adult community learning

[...] is about being in the communities, highlighting the issues that are important to them, developing content that they will engage with and then building skills off the back of that. If that leads to employment, if that is the right route for people, great, but it also leads to social cohesion or improvement in health and wellbeing, and that has benefits as well.<sup>128</sup>

58. Local authorities play a vital role in delivering community learning. As of 2017, 139 out of the 343 councils in England offered adult community learning services.<sup>129</sup> Council-run or commissioned provision provides a crucial entry point for adults furthest away from formal education or employment.<sup>130</sup> Local authority providers are in a position to link with other services within the authority to identify and refer learners, and leverage their local networks to deliver community learning tailored to the needs of their communities.<sup>131</sup>

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125 Local Government Association. [Learning for Life: the role of adult community education in developing thriving local communities](#), 27 October 2020

126 Department for Education ([ASL0012](#)) Session 2019–21

127 Hoxle ([ASL0003](#)) Session 2019–21; Doncaster Adult Family Community Learning ([ASL0046](#)) Session 2017–19

128 [Q52](#)

129 Local Government Association. [Learning for Life: the role of adult community education in developing thriving local communities](#), 27 October 2020. Some local authorities also share provision.

130 The Hounslow Adult & Community Education Service ([ASL0018](#)) Session 2017–19

131 Local Government Association ([ASL0012](#)) Session 2017–19; Westminster Adult Education Service ([ASL0029](#)) Session 2017–19

Dr Pember, policy director for HOLEX, told us that local authority community education services work with around 500,000 learners per year, and 92% are judged good or outstanding by Ofsted.<sup>132</sup>

59. The Institutes for Adult Learning (IALs), a network of nine specialist designated adult education providers that support over 130,000 adult learners per year, are also key players in the community learning landscape. IALs enrol significant proportions of learners from disadvantaged areas, with no or low qualifications.<sup>133</sup> The Workers' Educational Association, which is one of the IALs, is the UK's largest voluntary sector provider of adult education. It supports around 48,000 learners per year, and in 2019, 38% of these learners were from a disadvantaged postcode, 44% were on income-related benefits and 41% had no or very low previous qualifications.<sup>134</sup> The WEA and the other IALs are central strengths of England's adult education landscape.

60. During 2018–19, 490,300 learners participated in Adult Education Budget funded community learning in England. This is a decline of 25% since 2011–12, and a decline of 32% since 2008–9. It is also the fifth year of consecutive decline.<sup>135</sup> This is a deeply concerning trend.

## The benefits of community learning

61. The value and benefits of community learning are numerous and well-documented through a body of academic and sector research. The Community Learning Mental Health Research Project, a 2017 project commissioned by the Department, found that 52% of learners with clinically significant symptoms of anxiety and/or depression no longer had clinically significant symptoms by the end of their course.<sup>136</sup> A 2018 randomised controlled trial designed and overseen by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government found that learners participating in a community-based English language intervention doubled their proficiency and improved their social interaction skills compared to the control group.<sup>137</sup> Research by the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) surveyed over 5,000 adult learners on WEA courses and found evidence of an extensive array of improved outcomes for individuals, their families and wider communities. 70% of learners reported their self-confidence had increased as a result of their WEA course, 64% of parents reported improvements to their confidence in helping their children with school work as a result of their course, 27% of students took part in activities to improve their local community, and 26% started earning more as a result of their course.<sup>138</sup>

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132 [Q33](#)

133 Institutes for Adult Learning ([ASL0057](#)) Session 2017–19

134 Workers' Educational Association ([ASL0009](#)) Session 2019–21; Workers' Educational Association [Impact Report 2019](#), November 2019

135 Department for Education. [Statistical data set: Community learning](#), 28 November 2019

136 Ipsos MORI, the Centre for Mental Health and Liz Lawson. [Community learning mental health research project: Phase two evaluation report](#). October 2018

137 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, National Learning and Work Institute. [Measuring the impact of Community-Based English Language Provision: Findings from a Randomised Controlled Trial](#). March 2018

138 Workers' Educational Association. [Adult education works: Measuring the WEA effect](#). 2019

## English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision

62. English for Speakers of Other Languages is a vital area of community-based provision. The Government’s 2019 *Integrated Communities Action Plan* highlighted that ESOL provision is “fundamental” for achieving integrated communities, for improving individuals’ confidence and quality of life, and enabling them to access employment.<sup>139</sup> Four-fifths of ESOL providers offer provision funded by the Department for Education via the Adult Education Budget (AEB).<sup>140</sup> The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Home Office also fund ESOL initiatives.<sup>141</sup> A House of Commons Library briefing reports that AEB ESOL funding fell by 56% in real terms between 2009–10 and 2016–17, concluding that the fall in participation from 179,000 in 2009–10 to 114,000 in 2016–17 “followed a very similar trend to funding”.<sup>142</sup> Research commissioned by the Department found that 64% of providers stated their current level of funding was insufficient to meet demands for ESOL provision.<sup>143</sup>

63. AEB funded ESOL provision allows for full funding up to and including level 2 for unemployed learners up to the age of 23. Employed learners, and those over 24, are liable for co-funding.<sup>144</sup> Written evidence reported that fee eligibility rules were a barrier to ESOL participation.<sup>145</sup> We heard from the University of Derby that “Long waiting lists for ESOL courses meant that new migrants struggled to find work and integrate fully into their local communities.”<sup>146</sup> Similarly, written evidence from the City of London Corporation reported that “demand for ESOL is particularly high in central London boroughs, and often outstripped supply”.<sup>147</sup> The Learning, Training and Employment Group further suggested that:

Underfunding of ESOL [...] means that highly-skilled and motivated learners, often migrants, are trapped in the lowest-paid roles (where they are vulnerable to exploitation) rather than being able to contribute and play a full role as UK residents.<sup>148</sup>

64. We asked witnesses about the state of ESOL provision. Simon Parkinson told us that the Covid-19 pandemic had particularly affected ESOL learners who “have struggled most to engage digitally, particularly at entry level, because they are at the start of their journey”.<sup>149</sup> Dr Pember agreed that ESOL is “a worry area at the moment, because those particular learners are not presenting themselves at centres”.<sup>150</sup> Dr Pember further suggested that the involvement of multiple departments and funding streams added unnecessary bureaucracy:

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139 HM Government. [Integrated Communities Action Plan](#). February 2019

140 Department for Education. [English for speakers of other languages: Access and progression](#). June 2019

141 House of Commons Library: [Research Briefing: Adult ESOL in England](#), 25 April 2018

142 House of Commons Library: [Research Briefing: Adult ESOL in England](#), 25 April 2018

143 Department for Education. [English for speakers of other languages: Access and progression](#). June 2019

144 Education and Skills Funding Agency. [ESFA funded adult education budget \(AEB\): funding and performance management rules 2020 to 2021](#). October 2020, p37

145 Hertfordshire Adult and Family Learning Service ([ASL0010](#)) Session 2017–19; Hounslow Adult & Community Education Service ([ASL0018](#)) Session 2017–19

146 University of Derby ([ASL0032](#)) Session 2017–19

147 City of London Corporation ([ASL0021](#)) Session 2017–19

148 Learning, Training and Employment (LTE) Group ([ASL0043](#)) Session 2017–19

149 [Q40](#)

150 [Q40](#)

[...] we just need an ESOL policy that fits into this lifelong-learning strategy, because that is one of the areas where there is duplication of effort, where the Home Office has a different project with different outcomes, and we have DfE, and we have different monitoring and different performance measures. It would be good to see a lifelong learning strategy with an ESOL element within it.<sup>151</sup>

**65. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision can be transformational for adults. Unfortunately, we heard evidence of long waiting lists and demand outstripping supply. And despite the critical importance of ESOL, Adult Education Budget funding for ESOL fell by 56% between 2009–10 and 2016–17, with participation following a similar trend. 2019 research commissioned by the Department for Education also found that 64% of providers stated their current level of funding was insufficient to meet demands for ESOL provision.**

***66. The Department’s lifelong learning strategy must include an ESOL element. The Department should take a lead role for adult ESOL strategy to ensure a more joined up approach to cross-Department ESOL funding and objectives. The Department must undertake analysis to assess current and longer-term demand for adult ESOL provision. Additional funding should then be allocated to areas with highest demand for ESOL provision.***

## Learners with SEND

67. Learners with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) can particularly benefit from participating in lifelong learning.<sup>152</sup> While our inquiry did not specifically include a term of reference on this area, we received several written submissions which addressed this issue. Our Committee will examine this issue further, and question Ministers over the coming year. The majority of submissions focused on the role of community education in providing continuing learning opportunities for adults with SEND. We also heard concerns that when funded Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) end for those aged over 25, there can be limited suitable provision, particularly in terms of pre-employment programmes such as Supported Internships and Supported Apprenticeships.<sup>153</sup> This tallies with our predecessor Committee’s 2019 *Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Report*, which found that opportunities for supported internships and apprenticeships are “limited [...] there is not sufficient support”.<sup>154</sup> Community learning providers offer an important range of continuing learning opportunities for adults with SEND including basic skills, life skills for independent living, as well as courses for leisure and enjoyment.<sup>155</sup> Northern College, for example, told us that 48% of their 2017–18 enrolments were from students with a learning difficulty or disability.<sup>156</sup> This compares to 18% of adult learners overall who have a learning difficulty or disability.<sup>157</sup> We asked the Minister whether there would be additional help to ensure adult learners with SEND can access provision funded through the new National Skills Fund. The Minister assured us that the Department will

151 [Q40](#)

152 West London Alliance ([ASL0016](#)) Session 2017–19; London Borough of Camden ([ASL0069](#)) Session 2017–19

153 West London Alliance ([ASL0016](#)) Session 2017–19; Hounslow Adult & Community Education Service ([ASL0018](#)) Session 2017–19

154 Education Committee. First report of session 2019. [Special Educational Needs and Disabilities](#), HC 20

155 Hertfordshire Adult and Family Learning Service ([ASL0010](#)) Session 2017–19

156 The Northern College ([ASL0013](#)) Session 2017–19

157 Department for Education ([ASL0012](#)) Session 2019–21

“definitely make sure that these courses are accessible to those with special educational needs”.<sup>158</sup> Nonetheless, we are aware that funding pressures can make it challenging for providers to fully support adult learners with SEND. The University and College Union told us that “additional learning support funding is inadequate to create a fully inclusive, accessible learning environment.”<sup>159</sup>

**68. More needs to be done to support adult learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). There are opportunities including supported internships and apprenticeships, and community learning provision. But these opportunities are limited, and support funding is insufficient.**

*69. The Department should work with the sector to assess what additional funding is needed to better support adult learners with SEND. The Department should then introduce a funding premium for adult learners with SEND to ensure there is fully inclusive, accessible provision at all levels.*

## Childcare for adult learners

70. We were particularly interested in the extent to which childcare poses a barrier to taking up learning. We heard some examples of excellent practice, for example the Northern College, a specialist adult community learning provider, offers a children’s centre on site so that parents and carers can take up learning.<sup>160</sup> Overall, however, written evidence suggested that childcare is a barrier to participating in ASALL for those with caring responsibilities, particularly for adults from disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>161</sup>

71. We heard that lack of support for childcare is a particular issue for parents and carers aspiring to access part-time higher education. Department-commissioned analysis of 2014–15 higher education learner data found that 36% of part-time undergraduate students in England had dependent children, compared to 9% of full-time students.<sup>162</sup> Despite this, Professor Fraser told us that part-time students are not eligible for childcare grants and Parents’ Learning Allowance.<sup>163</sup> Dr Pember told us:

If you are a young adult with a child and you want to do part-time HE, you have your childcare, your timing, your travel, you have to be able to maintain yourself in your job. All those areas, all those barriers need to be sorted out, so there needs to be a package there.<sup>164</sup>

We asked the Minister what thought she had given to providing additional support for childcare.<sup>165</sup> The Minister highlighted the universal childcare offer of 30 hours per week and the childcare bursary but told us that the Department “has not looked further than that at having a specific childcare package”.<sup>166</sup> Our predecessor Committee’s report *Tackling*

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158 [Qq69–70](#)

159 University and College Union ([ASL0023](#)) Session 2017–19

160 The Northern College ([ASL0013](#)) Session 2017–19

161 Young Women’s Trust ([ASL0022](#)) Session 2017–19; University and College Union ([ASL0023](#)) Session 2017–19; National Union of Students ([ASL0038](#)) Session 2017–19

162 Department for Education. [Student Income and Expenditure Survey 2014/15: English Report](#), March 2018, p25

163 [Q42](#)

164 [Q55](#)

165 [Q64](#)

166 [Q64](#)

*disadvantage in the early years* identified problems with the 30 hours childcare policy, specifically that it is “entrenching inequality rather than closing the gap”, and places strain on the availability of childcare places for disadvantaged children.<sup>167</sup>

**72. Childcare poses a barrier for parents and carers aspiring to upskill and retrain. More needs to be done to support parents and carers to participate in adult education.**

**73. We recommend that childcare grants and Parents’ Learning Allowance are made available to part-time learners studying for a Higher Education qualification. The Government should look at where childcare might be a barrier and extend the 30 hour per week universal offer to unemployed or low-income adult learners, where the lack of such provision would prove to be a barrier towards training and employment.**

## Department data on community learning

74. Written evidence received during our inquiry identified concerns with the Department’s data on community learning. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority told us that when their Adult Education Budget (AEB) was devolved, the community learning data transferred from the ESFA was “minimal”.<sup>168</sup> Greater Manchester Combined Authority’s evidence noted that data related to community learning “is particularly variable, due in part to its non-regulated nature”.<sup>169</sup> The Minister told us that the Department “has very little data on community learning and I have tried to get a lot more clarity, because it is devolved to a lot of local authorities.”<sup>170</sup>

## Community learning funding

75. The community learning budget was combined into the newly created AEB in 2016, following the Spending Review 2015 settlement. In 2017/18 the community learning budget was 18% (£0.24 billion) of the total £1.34 billion AEB.<sup>171</sup> Dr Pember told us that the community learning budget has been “capped at an arbitrary level for 10 years [...] Funding values do not reflect the real cost of providing current qualifications, requiring increased class sizes and reduced access to support”.<sup>172</sup> Dr Pember further suggested that the “reduction in overall funding and lack of investment has curtailed activity and reduced the support available to many vulnerable learners”.<sup>173</sup> The complexity and bureaucracy of community learning funding is also an issue. There are multiple funding streams that providers can bid for; research by Dr Pember reports that an average community learning provider may have 10 different funding streams, with different funding rules and outcomes.<sup>174</sup> The Centre for Social Justice highlights that this constitutes a “dizzying array of funding streams [...] including, for example, the ESFA’s 16–19 study programme; 19+ AEB non-formula funding; 19+ AEB formula funding; 19+ advanced learner loans;

167 Education Committee. Ninth Report of Session 2017–19. [Tackling disadvantage in the early years](#). HC 1006.

168 Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority ([ASL0007](#)) Session 2019–21

169 Greater Manchester Combined Authority ([ASL0004](#)) Session 2019–21

170 [Q71](#)

171 PQ, [216425](#). 11 February 2019

172 HOLEX ([ASL0003](#)) Session 2019–21

173 HOLEX ([ASL0003](#)) Session 2019–21

174 Pember, S., [Adult Community Education: Supporting place and people: Characteristics of success](#). June 2019

16+ apprenticeships levy funding; the ESF/Communities Lottery Fund; the DfE's Flexible Learning Fund; Heritage Lottery Fund; the ESF/DWP's Way2Work programme; and individual learner fees.<sup>175</sup>

76. Dr Pember further suggested that stakeholders praised the flexibility of the non-formula funded element of the community learning budget and argued strongly for the retention of such flexibilities. The WEA told us that:

A funding model which restricts adult learning to gaining specific qualifications or to a narrow range of skills-for-employment outcomes will not increase participation and will fail to support many of those who are most vulnerable or disadvantaged. The greater the flexibility in entry points for adult learners, the more opportunity there is for people to take part, gain confidence and find self-direction in their learning.<sup>176</sup>

### A strategy for community learning

77. The Minister agreed that community learning plays an important role in engaging the hardest to reach adults and supporting their progression, and told us:

I have visited a number of community learning institutions, meeting people who perhaps had not even thought that this was available for them, would not even have the confidence to walk through the door of a college, who have been helped to the point where they can overcome any barriers and get the basic skills. I have met many now doing level 4.<sup>177</sup>

Nonetheless, we were concerned by the Minister's inability to set out a specific strategy and ambition for community learning, despite our repeated requests for her to do so when she appeared before the Committee.<sup>178</sup> The Minister told us that "we are looking to make sure we have a system that [...] is focused on and aligned with employment".<sup>179</sup> The Minister added that the Department's strategy is to help learners "get access to overcoming some of the challenges they have with basic skills, access to training, more modular training, and more flexible training".<sup>180</sup> Notably, the Minister's response was in direct contrast to what stakeholders told us about the purposes of community learning. Professor Holford suggested that policy "has undervalued adult learning for broader purposes."<sup>181</sup> Simon Parkinson told us, "If we are always talking about courses being badged solely as skill development ... you are going to alienate the very people that you are describing".<sup>182</sup>

78. Essex County Council will be relocating its adult community learning centre to Harlow town library, providing an example of planning policy that both utilises an

175 Centre for Social Justice. [The Long Game: How to reboot skills training for disadvantaged adults](#). 14 June 2020

176 Workers' Educational Association ([ASL0009](#)) Session 2019–21

177 [Q73](#)

178 [Qq71–78](#)

179 [Qq71–78](#)

180 [Q77](#)

181 Professor John Holford ([ASL0076](#)) Session 2017–19

182 [Q52](#)



existing building and brings the ACL provision to the heart of the town.<sup>183</sup> We asked witnesses whether every town should have a community learning centre, and how this might link up with high street planning. Dr Pember told us:

There is coverage, but it is just not big enough. Also, where they used to be able to use school or college sites, so there was a centre, that infrastructure is not there now. If you said to certain people on the street, “Where is your nearest adult education centre?” they might not be able to pinpoint it. I think you are right, Robert: we need a badged centre in every community so people know where to go to, but we also need to keep some of the benefits of the present system, which is very agile, so if a community needs something, or a migrant community moves somewhere, we can put up a centre really quickly.<sup>184</sup>

79. Simon Parkinson highlighted the need for investment in community learning venues:

They are vital not just to adult learning, but to social cohesion. I would like to see investment in those community venues. I think the Department for Education has a significant capital budget that at the moment is used in campuses. Reprovision is perhaps something we could look at there. Then it is a matter of working with colleagues across DCMS and really thinking about, as we see the changing nature of our high streets, the potential to use venues that people are already accessing and getting over that fear of having to walk into a formal classroom. Why are we not using the venues that are in and among them already, that people are comfortable attending?<sup>185</sup>

**80. Community learning appears to have been largely overlooked by the Department. The Department does not have sufficient oversight of what data is available on community learning. Nor are we confident that the Department has a good understanding of what provision exists nationally. The Department’s lack of strategic vision for community learning is concerning and suggests an underlying lack of insight into the benefits and value of community learning. An ambitious, long-term strategy for community learning provision and funding is needed.**

**81. *The Department must work with the adult education sector to develop a better understanding of what data exists on community learning and where any gaps might be. This should include mapping and regularly publishing data on how many community learning centres exist nationally and where they are located. The Department must then set out an ambitious plan for community learning provision in every town, which should seek to make use of existing buildings. The Department should work with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to align its community learning strategy with MHCLG funding to rejuvenate town centres and high streets.***

**82. The community learning budget has been capped at an arbitrary level for ten years. Community learning funding is overly bureaucratic; an average community**

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183 Essex County Council. [Harlow Town Library task group to implement ‘modern learning hub’](#), 22 October 2020; South East Local Enterprise Partnership. “Harlow Library”. 2020.

184 [Q35](#)

185 [Q38](#)

**learning provider may have to negotiate up to ten different funding streams, all with different rules and outcomes. This places unnecessary strain on providers, and takes up time and resources that should be spent on delivery.**

***83. The Department must make the case for a three-year funding settlement for community learning at the next spending review. The Department should review and consolidate the many community learning funding streams to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy for providers.***

## 6 Employer-led training

### The state of employer-led training

84. Changing employment patterns and longer working lives mean adults will need to upskill continuously throughout their careers. Evidence from the Trades Union Congress highlighted that the volume of employer-led training in the UK has declined by a half since the end of the 1990s.<sup>186</sup> Of course, not all employers shy away from training their staff, and many have an exemplary record in this area. But the Government's biennial Employer Skills Survey paints a staggering picture whereby 39% of employers admit to training none of their staff over the last year - a rise of 5% from the previous survey.<sup>187</sup> The 45% real-terms fall in the Adult Education Budget between 2010 and 2018 may also reinforce the decline in workforce training, with evidence from the Federation of Small Businesses suggesting that this reduction has made it harder for businesses to find relevant and affordable training opportunities locally.<sup>188</sup>

85. Low-paid, low-skilled workers have experienced the highest rate of decline in workplace training. Since 2011 workers with the lowest-level qualifications (below GCSE-Level 2) have experienced a cut in workplace training (20%) that is double the average rate of decline (10%).<sup>189</sup> Investment in workplace training favours the already well qualified, and workers with the lowest prior qualifications are the least likely to have received job-related training in the first place. 32% of adults with degree level qualifications participated in in-work training, compared to just 9% of workers with no qualifications.<sup>190</sup> Young adult workers (aged 16–34) are a group who have been hit particularly hard, experiencing a 16% decline in training volumes between 2011–18.<sup>191</sup> Internationally, too, the UK compares poorly when it comes to workforce training. The amount spent per employee on training in the UK in 2015 was just half the average for the EU-28 countries.<sup>192</sup> The fall in workforce training has certainly not been accompanied by a fall in demand for new skills. A research paper by the Industrial Strategy Council notes that the percentage of skill shortage vacancies reported by employers has remained at 22% or above since 2013, yet the UK has historically taken the approach of “trying to recruit its way out of the shortages, rather than train its existing workforce”.<sup>193</sup>

86. Our predecessor Committee asked witnesses how responsibility for funding should be balanced between government and employers. Baroness Wolf told them:

186 Trades Union Congress ([ASL0074](#)) Session 2017–19

187 Department for Education. [Employer Skills Survey 2019](#). October 2020, p8

188 Federation of Small Businesses ([ASL0052](#)) Session 2017–19

189 Trades Union Congress ([ASL0074](#)) Session 2017–19; Green, F. & Henseke, G. [Training trends in Britain](#), TUC (Unionlearn research paper, no. 22), June 2019

190 Office for National Statistics. [Characteristics and benefits of training at work, UK](#). 3 May 2019

191 Trades Union Congress ([ASL0074](#)) Session 2017–19; Green, F. & Henseke, G. [Training trends in Britain](#), TUC (Unionlearn research paper, no. 22), June 2019

192 Social Mobility Commission. [The adult skills gap: is falling investment in UK adults stalling social mobility?](#) January 2019, p18

193 Industrial Strategy Council. [Rising to the UK's Skills Challenges](#). June 2020, p7

If everybody is not obliged to pay in, in some way, then you have this problem that people will not do it because they think other people will just take the training. Employers in this country over the last 30 to 40 years have had a miserable record, by the way, of spending on training.<sup>194</sup>

87. We asked our panel of witnesses from the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), Institute of Directors (IoD) and Trades Union Congress (TUC) whether too many employers regard upskilling and training the future workforce as somebody else's job.<sup>195</sup> Matthew Percival, director of people and skills policy at the CBI, told us that businesses do see the importance of investing in skills, and "it is about finding ways to help them to do so rather than having to overcome a reluctance on their part to recognise its importance."<sup>196</sup> The 2017 Employer Skills Survey reported that 44% of employers would have provided more training for their workers "if they could have done", while lack of funds was the most commonly cited reason for not offering training, cited by 51% of employers.<sup>197</sup> Joe Fitzsimons, head of education and skills policy at the IoD, told the Committee that Covid-19 has exacerbated the problem, "with firms often having to put a red line through some of the learning and development that they would ordinarily invest in within the workforce".<sup>198</sup>

88. Enabling workers to upskill and retrain is a necessity, not a nice-to-have. Two-thirds of the 2030 workforce have already left compulsory education and are in employment.<sup>199</sup> Meanwhile, 7.4% of workers are employed in jobs at high risk of automation, with women, younger workers, and part-time workers more likely to be in roles at higher risk of automation.<sup>200</sup> Matthew Percival told us:

if we look at even just the skills we will need in 10 years' time rather than the skills we need today, almost everybody will need to learn new skills over the next decade and the vast majority of them are already in the workforce.<sup>201</sup>

## A skills tax credit to incentivise training

89. We asked witnesses whether businesses should be offered a skills tax credit to incentivise employers to invest in adult learning and training that meets the skills needs of the nation. A similar policy was proposed by the Centre for Social Justice in their 2020 report *The Long Game: How to reboot skills training for disadvantaged adults*.<sup>202</sup> Their report suggested that a tax relief scheme for training could build on the design of the existing research and development (R&D) tax rebate. Matthew Percival said he "absolutely" thought this should be offered to businesses, suggesting that the scheme should be targeted at small and medium enterprises rather than all businesses, while also making the apprenticeship levy more flexible so that larger levy-paying businesses could

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194 [Q35](#) 23 October 2019

195 [Q11](#)

196 [Q12](#)

197 Department for Education. [Employer Skills Survey 2017: England data tables](#). 16 August 2018. Tables 160 and 161.

198 [Q2](#)

199 Institute for Public Policy Research. [Skills 2030: Why the adult skills system is failing to build an economy that works for everyone](#). February 2017

200 Office for National Statistics. [The probability of automation in England: 2011 and 2017](#). 25 March 2019.

201 [Q1](#)

202 Centre for Social Justice. [The Long Game: How to reboot skills training for disadvantaged adults](#). June 2020

use it on non-apprenticeship training.<sup>203</sup> Joe Fitzsimons told us that a skills tax credit is a policy the IoD has advocated and agreed it should be reserved for training that meets the skills needs of the nation. Iain Murray, senior policy officer responsible for education and skills policy at the TUC, cautioned that it must not be used to reward employers who “are not doing additional training using tax credits but are just doing the same training that they are getting tax credits for.”<sup>204</sup>

90. Our predecessor Committee also asked witnesses whether there should be a tax credit for businesses who reskill their employees. Baroness Wolf told that Committee:

I think there should, if one can figure out a way of doing it that will not be open to massive fraud. It would be a very good idea. As you say, you have double tax credits for research. Why not have double tax credits for training?<sup>205</sup>

**91. Employer investment in training is in decline, with low paid, low skilled workers hardest hit by the decline. A skills tax credit to incentivise employers to invest in training for workers with no or low qualifications will help to revitalise employer-led training.**

*92. The Government must support employers to invest in the development of their workforces. The Government should introduce a skills tax credit, for employers who invest in training for workers. This should be tapered so that the tax credit is more generous to employers who provide training for employees with lower prior qualifications.*

## The Union Learning Fund

93. The Union Learning Fund is a large-scale, successful partnership approach to workforce training in the UK. The fund is managed by the Trades Union Congress and receives funding from the Department for Education. The Department directs the type and level of learning supported by the fund, ensuring that training reflects strategic skills priorities such as English, maths, digital skills and ESOL.<sup>206</sup> Last year over 200,000 workers gained new skills through the fund. Learning supported by the fund is open to all workers, not just those with union membership.<sup>207</sup> The Government announced it would not be renewing the Union Learning Fund after April 2021,<sup>208</sup> with the Secretary of State citing the fund’s admin cost of £4 million.<sup>209</sup> We would like to see a breakdown of the administrative cost figures for Union Learning funded training, in comparison to other similar schemes.

94. An independent evaluation found that the fund delivers benefits for individual workers, for employers, and for the economy.<sup>210</sup> 68% of learners with no previous qualifications,

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203 All UK employers with a pay bill of over £3 million per year pay into the apprenticeship levy. Levy funds have to be spent on apprenticeships. For further information see: House of Commons Library. [Research Briefing: Effectiveness of the apprenticeship levy](#). 7 February 2020

204 [Qq3–8](#)

205 [Q37](#) 23 October 2019

206 Unionlearn. [Union Learning Fund: Prospectus Round 19 2018/19](#). July 2018

207 Marchmont Observatory, University of Exeter. [Union Learning Survey 2018 Results](#). September 2018

208 See for example: PQ, [104714](#), 16 October 2020

209 [HC Deb](#), 23 November 2020, vol 684, col 597

210 Centre for Employment Relations Innovation and Change, University of Leeds. [Evaluation of the Union Learning Fund Rounds 15–16 and Support Role of Unionlearn](#). October 2016

and 47% of those starting with level 1 or below qualifications, gained a qualification at a higher level as a result of Union Learn funded training. 24% gained a qualification at level 3 or higher, 47% of learners gained a qualification at level 2, and 3% at level 1 and entry level. The independent evaluation further found that for every £1 invested in the fund, there is a return to the economy of £12.30. Just under half of employers stated that learning activities would not have taken place without external funding. 77% of employers reported a positive return on the investment they make when supporting union learning, and 43% of employers report that union learning contributes to an increased take-up of further job-related training. We can see no good reason for scrapping funding for a programme with a strong track record of delivering skills training in priority skills areas such as English, maths and digital.

**95. The Union Learning Fund is a crucial programme for delivering workplace training. It has a strong track record of proven effectiveness and should be treated in line with other training providers in both the public and private spheres. It has a vital focus on tackling disadvantage, upskilling low-skilled workers, and offers excellent value for money. The Department has not explained its rationale behind its decision to stop funding the Union Learning Fund. Unless this decision is reversed, we will see the brakes put on workplace learning which will harm workers, employers and productivity.**

***96. We recommend that the Department reverse its decision to cease funding for the Union Learning Fund. To ensure public money is spent as equitably as possible, participation targets should be set mandating that Union Learning funds are split 50/50 between union members and non-union members.***

## 7 Higher education

### The state of part-time higher education

97. Part-time higher education offers a key second-chance route for adults looking to gain higher qualifications later in life, but this route is in poor health. Between 2008–9 and 2017–18, the number of part-time undergraduates fell by 53%.<sup>211</sup> While this figure sits within a longer-term picture of decline, the 2012 tuition fee reforms are widely acknowledged to be substantially responsible for the fall.<sup>212</sup> The 2012 reforms abolished maintenance grants and raised interest fees on student loan debt, while introducing substantial fee increases.<sup>213</sup> The reforms also abolished the means-tested part-time fee grant that had previously exempted part-time students on a low income from paying any tuition fees at all. Previously, around 57,000 part-time students received this per year, with an average grant value of £700.<sup>214</sup> Professor Fraser told us that:

[...] it is a challenge to reach the lost learners. We estimate there are well over 1 million lost learners in the last decade of adults who would have accessed higher education if the fees regime had not changed, and that is a significant number to try to reach.<sup>215</sup>

The former universities Minister, Lord Willetts, has since described this fall in part-timers as an unintended consequence of the reforms that was one of his “biggest regrets” from his time as Minister:

The evidence is that the loans for part-time students have not worked. There has been low take up and people have been put off. We need new mechanisms for helping adults to study part-time, and I accept that the loan model has not delivered for them.<sup>216</sup>

Our predecessor Committee’s *Value for money in higher education report* concluded that the fall in part-time learners was particularly pronounced among adults from lower socio-economic groups.<sup>217</sup> Numbers of the most disadvantaged part-time learners dropped by 42% between 2010 and 2015.<sup>218</sup> Written evidence from Universities UK highlighted that the changes to the funding system had a profound and lasting impact for learners: “following their decision not to undertake higher education study, lost learners largely did not progress in their employment, job title, or household income”.<sup>219</sup>

211 House of Commons Library. [Briefing Paper: Part-time undergraduate students in England](#). 20 January 2020

212 Callendar, C. & Thompson, J. [The Lost Part-timers](#), The Sutton Trust, 15 March 2018.

213 Institute for Fiscal Studies. [IFS Briefing Note BN211: Higher Education funding in England: past, present and options for the future](#). July 2017

214 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. [Interim Equality Impact Assessment: Urgent reforms to higher education funding and student finance](#), November 2010 p17–18

215 [Q36](#)

216 Q1 [Lord Willetts] [Select Committee on Economic Affairs](#), 10 October 2017

217 Education Committee. Seventh Report of Session 2017–19. [Value for money in higher education](#). HC 343.

218 Callendar, C. & Thompson, J. [The Lost Part-timers](#), The Sutton Trust, 15 March 2018.

219 Universities UK ([ASL0028](#)) Session 2017–19

## Characteristics of the part-time learner cohort

98. There is a strong social justice argument for targeting support at part-time learners. Part-time study provides a route to higher skills and higher pay for adults whose work or caring responsibilities may rule out full-time study, and offers a second chance for mature students who may have had a poor experience of school.<sup>220</sup> Professor Fraser told us that part-time flexibility is “hugely important to adult learners”.<sup>221</sup> The part-time learner cohort are more likely to be over 25 and have existing employment or caring commitments.<sup>222</sup>

99. We asked witnesses what needed to be done to revitalise part-time higher education and to widen access to higher qualifications among working adults. Professor Fraser told us

I think it is about doing fee grants that target priority subjects and skills gaps, priority geographies, bringing the maintenance support that we have seen work so well in other parts of the UK appropriately, any anomaly of excluding distance learners from getting maintenance loans, extend things like childcare grants and the parents’ learning allowance to everybody who is studying a recognised qualification, whatever size that may be, and make sure that we don’t continue putting a part-time student premium.<sup>223</sup>

## Maintenance support for part-time learners

100. While the Government announced in 2015 that maintenance support would be extended to part-time students, it has only been extended to part-time students who are studying face-to-face on degree courses (Level 6), with further extensions ruled out.<sup>224</sup> Open University students in England are not eligible for maintenance support due to the distance learning model. Written evidence from the Open University suggests that these restrictions amount to “significant inequalities [...] which deter mature learners”.<sup>225</sup> We are particularly concerned about the detrimental impact of policies that prevent distance learners from receiving maintenance support. Professor Fraser told us that it is:

[...] an anomaly that distance learners are excluded from maintenance loans. They are the only group. It means in effect that only one in 10 part-time students in England can get maintenance loans, only those who are doing face-to-face towards a degree. Removing that anomaly would really help.<sup>226</sup>

We note, too, that the exclusion of distance learners from receiving maintenance is an inequality that is likely to appear increasingly unfair and arbitrary as maintenance loans are extended to students at other institutions whose courses have moved online due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

## 101. Part-time higher education student numbers have been decimated, and numbers of part-time learners from the most disadvantaged backgrounds fell by 42% between

220 MillionPlus ([ASL0026](#)) Session 2017–19; Birkbeck, University of London ([ASL0002](#)) Session 2019–21

221 [Q42](#)

222 Birkbeck, University of London ([ASL0002](#)) Session 2019–21; The Open University ([ASL0005](#)) Session 2019–21

223 [Q55](#)

224 The Open University ([ASL0005](#)) Session 2019–21

225 The Open University ([ASL0005](#)) Session 2019–21

226 [Q37](#)



**2010 and 2015. Flexible part-time university study is a key route for delivering a highly skilled workforce and the Department needs to prioritise reforms that will restore the part-time higher education sector.**

*102. The Department must act to stem the decline in part-time higher education. Promoting access for part-time students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds must be a priority. Means-tested fee grants should be instated for part-time students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds who study courses in priority skill areas. Maintenance support should be extended to all part-time students whether face-to-face or distance.*

## Degree apprenticeships

103. Degree apprenticeships combine paid work with part-time study. In terms of value for money for the student, one of the main advantages of a degree apprenticeship is the ability to gain a degree without paying tuition fees. The Minister, who herself did a degree apprenticeship, told us that “Every piece of my training has been paid for by an employer from the age of 16.”<sup>227</sup> Our predecessor Committee’s *Value for money in higher education* report concluded that degree apprentices are crucial for boosting productivity and widening access for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>228</sup> Universities UK highlighted that increasing degree apprenticeship provision will be crucial for keeping up with the pace of skills and jobs change brought about by the Fourth Industrial Revolution.<sup>229</sup> They suggested that there is a need for a more strategic approach to expanding apprenticeship provision in key sectors, particularly those in which skills shortages are forecast. Birkbeck told us that it is “vital for social mobility that all different groups have access to degree apprenticeships”<sup>230</sup> but suggested that the expansion of degree apprenticeships is too slow and needs speeding up.<sup>231</sup>

**104. Degree apprenticeships are crucial to boosting the productivity of this country, providing an important route to higher education qualifications and bringing more students from disadvantaged backgrounds into higher education.**

*105. All higher education institutions should offer degree apprenticeships. The Department and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education should set out a plan for speeding up the expansion of degree apprenticeship provision in priority skill sectors.*

## Relaxing Equivalent or Lower Qualification funding rules

106. An immediate first step to supporting retraining at higher levels is to reassess current Equivalent or Lower Qualification (ELQ) rules. Most students who hold a higher education qualification are currently not eligible for fee loans for a second qualification at the same or a lower level. Under current ELQ funding rules therefore, with the exception of a small

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227 Q82

228 House of Commons Education Committee. Seventh Report of Session 2017–19. [Value for money in higher education](#). HC 343.

229 Universities UK ([ASL0028](#)) Session 2017–19

230 Birkbeck, University of London ([ASL0002](#)) Session 2019–21

231 Birkbeck, University of London ([ASL0011](#)) Session 2017–19

number of exempt courses, individuals wishing to reskill at level 4, 5 and 6 are not eligible for fee and maintenance loans and need to self-fund. Written evidence from Birkbeck, University of London, stated that:

ELQ restrictions were maybe appropriate for a restricted grant based HE system but under the current loans based system they do seem anachronistic [...] Birkbeck wishes to see restrictions removed on all ELQ subjects in order to promote as much reskilling as possible.<sup>232</sup>

Similarly, Professor Fraser told us that the ELQ rule

[...] constrains student choice about how to retrain once they already have a qualification. I think that removing some of those barriers is really important to encourage people to study more flexibly across their lives. Everything we do funding-wise at the moment encourages people to do a three-year bang at 18, and we have to get beyond that or we will not meet our economic need.<sup>233</sup>

**107. Current Equivalent or Lower Qualification (ELQ) funding restrictions are a barrier for adults seeking to reskill. Higher level skills at levels 4, 5 and 6 are key to unlocking productivity, and a relaxation of ELQ rules is a fundamental strand of a lifelong right to retrain.**

**108. *We recommend that the Department identify courses at levels 4, 5 and 6 which meet the skills needs of the UK economy. Equivalent or Lower Qualification funding restrictions must then be removed for those courses.***

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232 Birkbeck, University of London ([ASL0002](#)) Session 2019–21

233 [Q54](#)

## 8 Combined and local authorities

### Background to AEB devolution

109. Under devolution deals, the Adult Education Budget (AEB) is increasingly moving away from central government to combined authority control. Since 2019, the AEB was divided between the central control of the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and, initially, six mayoral combined authorities (MCAs) and the Greater London Authority (GLA). From August 2020, North of Tyne took on responsibility for administering the AEB, and from August 2021 Sheffield City Region and West Yorkshire will join the list of MCAs responsible for commissioning and funding AEB provision for learners' resident in their areas.<sup>234</sup>

110. In 2019–20, £632 million of AEB funding was allocated to devolved authorities. This represents 49% of the AEB, with the remaining 51% administered centrally by the ESFA. Devolution marks a significant shift in adult skills and lifelong learning policy and funding. 37% of the English population, including Greater London, live in areas with mayoral devolution deals.<sup>235</sup> While it is too early to assess the long-term impact of devolution on adult skills and lifelong learning outcomes, the evidence we received sets out an encouraging picture of MCAs swiftly devising and implementing evidence-led strategies for boosting skills and lifelong learning.

### How well is AEB devolution working so far?

111. Evidence from Metro Mayors suggest that there have been some teething issues with AEB devolution. Evidence from Ben Houchen, Mayor of the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA), stated that the level of data sharing from the Department and ESFA “continues to be a challenge, both in terms of detail and timeliness”.<sup>236</sup> Andy Burnham, Mayor of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), highlighted that ahead of the launch of the new statutory digital skills entitlement in August 2020, the Department “declined to share any modelling-analysis [...] that might have assisted our planning”.<sup>237</sup> Difficulties in escalating issues to ESFA or the Department were also raised, with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) suggesting that routes of escalation take too long and are “strained at times”.<sup>238</sup> TVCA’s submission further highlighted that a lack of arrangements to escalate issues “remains a gap in the formal governance of devolution”.<sup>239</sup> The methodology to derive and allocate AEB funding was also criticised. The annual allocation for MCAs was based on historic delivery using the 2017–18 academic year as baseline. GMCA suggested that this allocation methodology had resulted in a real terms funding fall of £6 million.<sup>240</sup> TVCA agreed that using the 2017–18 allocation baseline meant that a growth in provision that did occur in 2018–19 was not taken into account.<sup>241</sup>

234 Department for Education, [Guidance: Adult Education Budget \(AEB\) devolution](#), 28 October 2020

235 Institute for Government, [English devolution: combined authorities and metro mayors](#), 1 October 2020

236 Tees Valley Combined Authority ([ASL0006](#)) Session 2019–21

237 Greater Manchester Combined Authority ([ASL0004](#)) Session 2019–21

238 Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority ([ASL0007](#)) Session 2019–21

239 Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority ([ASL0007](#)) Session 2019–21

240 Greater Manchester Combined Authority ([ASL0004](#)) Session 2019–21

241 Tees Valley Combined Authority ([ASL0006](#)) Session 2019–21

112. Despite the challenges noted above, our evidence from MCAs painted an impressive picture of AEB devolution working in a highly effective way, enabling MCAs to commission, fund and deliver tailored local offers. Some elements of the AEB are statutory entitlements, and it is mandatory for devolved authorities to continue to fund these.<sup>242</sup> We were encouraged to see that MCAs are frequently leading the way to go beyond the statutory minimums and ensure their residents benefit from more comprehensive and generous offers than were available previously under centralised AEB. GMCA and CPCA told us that they are using their AEB to ensure universal free level 2 education and training for all residents without a level 2 qualification (under national rules the free entitlement is limited to adults under 23, or over 24 and unemployed).<sup>243</sup> TVCA are also considering implementing this expanded entitlement.<sup>244</sup> While each MCA has distinct needs and priorities, a common theme emerging from written evidence is their strategic prioritising of devolved AEB for supporting the most disadvantaged residents. This has led to impressive social justice initiatives such as providing free learning for employed residents earning below the national living wage,<sup>245</sup> and extending participation in the low-wage pilot by raising the income eligibility threshold from £16,000 to £18,000.<sup>246</sup>

113. Iain Murray, Trades Union Congress senior policy officer, agreed that AEB devolution “is giving local areas and their democratic structures the ability to use adult skills funding to meet the priorities of their local areas, including economic inequality and economic deprivation”.<sup>247</sup> He did, however, also warn that AEB devolution “has created some barriers for individual learners who are outside certain postcodes”.<sup>248</sup> Concerns about postcode lotteries of provision was also a concern raised in written evidence.<sup>249</sup> In the final section of this chapter, we examine how an enhanced statutory role for local authorities could reduce regional disparities in provision by empowering local areas to develop tailored skills offers.

## The new UK Shared Prosperity Fund

114. Access to European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) will end in December 2020. Its successor, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), is due to start in 2021. The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF) are two of the main funds within the ESIF. The ERDF is focused on economic support and job creation, while the ESF is focused more on skills and supporting adults to overcome

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242 For a full list of statutory entitlements that must be funded through the AEB see: Education and Skills Funding Agency. [ESFA funded adult education budget \(AEB\): funding and performance management rules 2019 to 2020](#). September 2019, p37.

243 Under current AEB funding rules, the AEB will fully fund a first fill level 2 qualification (excluding English and maths) for 19–23 year olds, or those 24+ and unemployed. Adults 24+ and employed are liable for co-funding.

244 Tees Valley Combined Authority ([ASL0006](#)) Session 2019–21

245 Greater Manchester Combined Authority ([ASL0004](#)) Session 2019–21

246 Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority ([ASL0007](#)) Session 2019–21

247 [Q18](#)

248 Ibid.

249 HOLEX ([ASL0003](#)) Session 2019–21; Workers’ Educational Association ([ASL0009](#)) Session 2019–21; University of Derby ([ASL0051](#)) Session 2017–19

barriers to employment. GMCA outlined their expectation that the level of UKSPF should be at least the same level as current ESIF funding,<sup>250</sup> and should retain key features such as a multi-year funding package and the ability to use match-funding.<sup>251</sup>

115. Evidence from MCAs suggested lessons needed to be learned to ensure the UKSPF is a new and improved version of its predecessor. Their criticisms of ESIF included the “unhelpful” competitive bidding process, and the overly complex and bureaucratic application process. TVCA suggested to us that the separation of ESF and ERDF funded programmes hindered alignment between the interlinked areas of job creation and upskilling.<sup>252</sup> It is a concern that there is already evidence of unhelpful silo working between government departments on designing the UKSPF. In a response to a written question, the Minister stated that the Department “is keen” to work with the Department for Work and Pensions and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government on arrangements for a successor fund to the ESF, but has had no discussions with MHCLG on the replacement to the ERDF “as this does not relate to skills policy”.<sup>253</sup> This contradicts the evidence we received from GMCA, which suggested that “the focus of ERDF is broadly on job creation and ESF on skills and employability, which go hand in hand”.<sup>254</sup> Similarly, TVCA told us “It is also important that UKSPF is not developed and-or implemented in isolation of Business Growth programmes (equivalent to ERDF programmes).”<sup>255</sup>

116. We questioned the Minister on whether funding for the education and skills strand of the new UKSPF would match that of the previous ESF (€4.9 billion between 2014–20).<sup>256</sup> We further asked whether the Department has enough input into plans for the successor programme to the ESF.<sup>257</sup> The Minister told us the Department is:

[...] trying to make sure that over the course of this we have a fund that meets our needs. At the same time, we have more investment going into other areas. Overall, it is not really about the budget lines. It is about addressing the need and making sure that we have sufficient funds to address those who are further away from the employment market, which is what that was addressing.<sup>258</sup>

**117. The new UK Shared Prosperity Fund offers an opportunity to improve on the design and administration of European Structural Investment Funds in relation to the funding of adult skills. Cross-government working will be critical to delivering the cross-cutting agenda this funding supports. We expect the Department to take a far more proactive stance in inter-Departmental discussions on the successor funds for both the ESF and the ERDF, and to ensure that local and combined authorities feed into those discussions.**

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250 The 2019 Conservative manifesto committed to matching existing levels of European Structural Funds in each nation in the new UKSPF. However, it is currently unknown how funds within the UKSPF will be allocated. See: The Conservative and Unionist Party. [Party Manifesto 2019](#). November 2019, p44

251 Greater Manchester Combined Authority ([ASL0004](#)) Session 2019–21

252 Tees Valley Combined Authority ([ASL0006](#)) Session 2019–21

253 PQ, [10449](#), 30 January 2020

254 GMCA ([ASL0004](#)) Session 2019–21

255 Tees Valley Combined Authority ([ASL0006](#)) Session 2019–21

256 European Commission. [The ESF in the United Kingdom](#) accessed 9 December 2020

257 [Q67](#)

258 [Q67](#)

118. *Funding for the education and skills and employability strands of the new UK Shared Prosperity Fund must at least match those of their predecessor funds, and no region should be worse off. Government must involve local and combined authorities on the design of the UKSPF. Funding must be devolved to combined authorities who are best placed to make decisions about how to allocate funding in the most effective way for their communities.*

## An enhanced role for local authorities

119. Local authorities (LAs) are a crucial part of the adult skills and lifelong learning landscape. Professors Tett and Holford highlighted to our predecessor Committee that there used to be a statutory duty for LAs to provide adult education.<sup>259</sup> Some LAs retain elements of this provision and, as of 2017, there were 139 councils in England which offered adult community learning services.<sup>260</sup> Written evidence called for LAs to be awarded enhanced statutory powers and responsibilities for both community learning and skills provision in their areas.<sup>261</sup> Evidence from Hounslow Council suggested that LAs are well-placed to take on additional responsibilities due to their unique understanding of the needs of local economies and their residents.<sup>262</sup> The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) agreed that:

[...] local authorities are in the position to have the deepest understanding of local need and are best placed to be held accountable at a local level for the provision of skills needs in local economies.<sup>263</sup>

120. While there was significant support for local authorities playing a greater role in skills and lifelong learning in their areas, evidence suggested that extensive reform and decentralisation would be needed to achieve this. Written evidence from the Local Government Association argued that centralised funding means local needs are not being effectively addressed, and local councils need greater ability to influence ASALL priorities, funding and delivery. They told us:

The current confusing network of centrally driven and managed employment and skills provision (£10.5 billion in 2016–2017) fails to join up the system and engage people and businesses that most need support. This has contributed to making our skills gap larger and impacting on our productivity. Local areas have little or no influence over these, which is a missed opportunity to target support and make the best use of available resources.<sup>264</sup>

259 [Qq14–15](#) 23 October 2019

260 Local Government Association. [Learning for Life: the role of adult community education in developing thriving local communities](#), 27 October 2020. Some local authorities also share provision.

261 Association of Employment and Learning Providers ([ASL0010](#)) Session 2019–21; Local Government Association ([ASL0012](#)) Session 2017–19; Swindon Borough Council ([ASL0017](#)) Session 2017–19; Culture Learning and Libraries West Midlands ([ASL0019](#)) Session 2017–19; Westminster Adult Education Service ([ASL0029](#)) Session 2017–19; London Borough of Camden ([ASL0069](#)) Session 2017–19

262 Hounslow Adult & Community Education Service ([ASL0018](#)) Session 2017–19

263 Association of Employment and Learning Providers ([ASL0010](#)) Session 2019–21

264 Local Government Association ([ASL0012](#)) Session 2017–19

Similarly, evidence from KPMG LLP noted that while Combined Authorities are able to focus on local skills and lifelong learning priorities, local authorities have little or no power in this regard.<sup>265</sup> Their evidence suggested that:

If changes are to be made to support adult skills and lifelong learning, we need an overhaul of the system. Local Authorities should have the ability to control more of their skills budget but this will need some level of alignment. This could go further and we could give Local Authorities the same powers as Combined Authorities to enable them to take full responsibility for their skills budget and make a real difference on this agenda.<sup>266</sup>

Written evidence from the Local Government Association set out its proposal for further devolution through a ‘Work Local’ model. They suggest that groups of councils, working together with combined authorities and local enterprise partnerships, are awarded powers and funding to plan, commission and oversee skills and lifelong learning. They suggest that this could be achieved by mandating the Education and Skills Funding Agency to devolve the AEB and other centralised skills funding streams. Local labour market agreements would be designed for local areas to offer accountability for these public funds.<sup>267</sup> Further decentralising of adult learning budgets to local areas could help deliver on local needs and priorities, while the suite of national statutory entitlements would ensure that national skills priorities continue to be met. We are conscious, however, that written evidence pointed out that an enhanced statutory role for local authorities could not be successfully delivered without further funding.<sup>268</sup> Between 2010–11 and 2017–18 central government funding to local authorities fell by 49% in real terms.<sup>269</sup>

121. We put it to the Minister that structures need to be in place to enable further devolution of funding and powers, so that local areas are empowered to develop a tailored approach to skills in their area.<sup>270</sup> The Minister told us she agreed “100%”, adding that:

There are two things we need to do. One is to embed the employer-led standards so people are studying things that are truly valuable to employers across this country. The second is to shape that locally and focus that locally based on the local jobs market and opportunities. Those two things are absolutely vital and are the key pillar of FE reform.<sup>271</sup>

**122. Devolution of the Adult Education Budget has enabled Mayoral Combined Authorities to develop locally responsive adult skills strategies. We heard that devolution should go further. The benefits of skills devolution should not be confined purely to those areas that happen to have a Mayoral Combined Authority. Devolution of adult skills should be considered for upper-tier authorities. With their knowledge of local communities, skills gaps and employer needs, local authorities are ideally placed to take on responsibility for mapping and commissioning adult skills and**

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265 KPMG LLP ([ASL0062](#)) Session 2017–19

266 KPMG LLP ([ASL0062](#)) Session 2017–19

267 Local Government Association ([ASL0012](#)) Session 2017–19

268 Learning and Work Institute ([ASL0064](#)) Session 2017–19; Local Government Association ([ASL0012](#)) Session 2017–19

269 National Audit Office. [Financial sustainability of local authorities 2018](#), 8 March 2018

270 [Q91](#)

271 [Q91](#)

**lifelong learning provision. With greater powers and sufficient funding, they could play a transformative role in ensuring every community has a truly local, place-based ASALL offer.**

*123. We recommend that local authorities are awarded powers and funding to take on an enhanced statutory role for mapping, commissioning and delivering adult skills and lifelong learning. The Department must carry out a comprehensive review of the powers and funding needed for local authorities to take on this role.*



## Conclusions and recommendations

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### Why adult skills and lifelong learning matters

1. The benefits of adult skills and lifelong learning are well-evidenced and include benefits for productivity and the economy, for health and wellbeing, and for social justice and communities. To respond to the significant challenges posed by the Fourth Industrial Revolution, an ageing workforce, the skills gap, and the devastating impact of Covid-19, we need to make sure adults can upskill and retrain throughout their lives. Now more than ever there is a pressing need to ensure adult learners are equipped with the necessary skills and education to aid our economic recovery. (Paragraph 9)
2. *The Government must commission analysis to identify where the nation's immediate and longer-term skills needs lie. This should be regularly updated, as real-time labour markets data is essential for ensuring that reforms to adult skills and lifelong learning are properly linked to skills needs.* (Paragraph 10)

### The need for a national strategy

3. Government policy on adult skills and lifelong learning has tended to be short-term, piecemeal, and initiative-led. The result has been a substantial churn of adult education initiatives which has worked against the implementation of a coherent, long-term strategic vision for adult education. Adult skills and lifelong learning is a clear strategic priority, yet participation in adult education is at its lowest rate for 23 years. (Paragraph 15)
4. *The Department must set out an ambitious, long-term strategy for adult skills and lifelong learning. This must be a comprehensive and holistic vision for ASALL in its entirety—piecemeal adjustments and one-off initiatives will not deliver the reform needed. These reforms must be underpinned by a shift to more flexible, modular learning so that adults can 'hop on and hop off' learning pathways. And we will need much better careers advice to help adults find the best learning opportunities for them.*

*We identify four key pillars to this strategy:*

- i. *First, the Department must ensure there is a community learning centre in every town to ensure the first rung of the ladder is there for adults furthest from qualifications and employment.*
- ii. *Second, the Department must kickstart participation by introducing Individual Learning Accounts, so that every adult has choice and agency over their learning.*
- iii. *Third, the Government must restore part-time higher education by instating fee grants for part-time learners from the most disadvantaged backgrounds who study courses that meet the skills needs of the nation, and extend maintenance support to disadvantaged learners.*

- iv. *Fourth, the Government must tackle the decline in employer-led training through the introduction of a skills tax credit for employers who invest in training for their workforce. (Paragraph 16)*
- 5. Adults need clear and impartial advice and support on learning and funding. The National Careers Service is limited and overly centralised, particularly given the extent to which ASALL provision is now devolved. A far more proactive approach to promoting and communicating statutory entitlements and local offers is needed. 38% of adults have not participated in any learning since leaving full-time education— simply waiting and hoping that this group will decide to engage with the National Careers Service is clearly not the basis of an effective strategy. (Paragraph 22)
- 6. *The Department must devolve National Careers Service funding to enable local and combined authorities and local enterprise partnerships to co-design and promote locally relevant information, advice and guidance. The National Careers Service should provide more robust data on employment and learning outcomes to enable adults to make more informed decisions about their learning and development. The Department must also fund an advertising campaign to promote awareness of statutory entitlements. (Paragraph 23)*
- 7. The ability to study bite-size modules rather than commit to full qualifications is a much-needed reform that will make it easier for adults to upskill and retrain. Developing qualifications that can be taken in modules will enable adults with busy working lives and caring responsibilities to build up qualifications over time and ensure their skills stay relevant in a changing job market. (Paragraph 26)
- 8. *We recommend the Department work with the relevant sector bodies to develop a modular offer for skills qualifications at all levels. This should be linked to those qualifications and courses which meet the skills needs of the nation. The Department must also work with the sector to devise a funding approach that makes it economically viable for colleges and other providers to offer module-based learning. (Paragraph 27)*

### Funding for adult education

- 9. Adult skills funding has fallen by 45% in real terms between 2009–10 and 2017–18. The consequence of this decline is that the nation’s adult skills and lifelong learning system is in poor shape to tackle the pressing challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, an ageing workforce, skills gaps and the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. (Paragraph 32)
- 10. *For its 2021 Spending Review bid, the Department must properly cost what level of Adult Education Budget increase is needed to meet the urgent and overdue reforms we set out in this report. An ambitious, long-term strategy for adult education will require an ambitious funding settlement. The Department must prepare a case for a three-year funding settlement for adult education. (Paragraph 33)*
- 11. *The Department must review funding for adult skills and lifelong learning to see how the various funding streams can be consolidated and made more streamlined and less bureaucratic for providers. (Paragraph 34)*

12. We believe that there is a place for a rigorously designed and independently overseen Individual Learning Accounts scheme funded through the new National Skills Fund. This would put purchasing power into the hands of the individual, enabling adults to take control over their learning and skills pathways. The pilot or first iteration of the scheme should be targeted at groups who have historically low engagement rates with lifelong learning, such as those on low incomes. Ultimately, however, we would like to see the scheme take on a truly lifelong emphasis, moving beyond a one-off grant, to a system where adults receive 2–3 further top-up investments throughout their working lives to revitalise training and upskilling. (Paragraph 38)
13. *We recommend that the Government develop Individual Learning Accounts, drawing on the lessons learnt previously. These should be funded through the National Skills Fund, and initially should be aimed at unemployed adults and adults in work earning a low wage.* (Paragraph 39)
14. *The Department should provide additional funding for the digital skills entitlement, and should ensure that any future statutory entitlements coming out of the Adult Education Budget are properly costed and funded. This should be clearly linked to forecast participation levels.* (Paragraph 42)
15. Adult enrolments on full level 2 courses have fallen by 87% between 2012–13 and 2017–18. Over six million working adults do not have a level 2 qualification. Without the foundation provided by level 2 qualifications, higher level skills and higher pay will be out of reach for many. (Paragraph 46)
16. *The Department should remove funding restrictions for first full level 2 qualifications, restoring funding for adults who are over 24 and employed. The Department must fund a promotional campaign to ensure no adult remains unaware of what qualifications and funding they are entitled to.* (Paragraph 47)
17. Qualifications at level 3 have economic and labour market benefits for adults. Level 3 qualifications are also a key stepping-stone to higher level study. We are pleased that the Department has announced an expansion to the level 3 entitlement, so that from April, adults of any age without a level 3 will be fully funded to study certain courses. But, given that unemployment is expected to rise to a peak of 2.6 million people by the second quarter of 2021, we do not believe this commitment goes far enough. Limiting the guarantee to adults who have not yet achieved a level 3 qualification does not fully address the retraining issue. (Paragraph 51)
18. *The Department should extend the entitlement to a free level 3 qualification further, so that unemployed adults who already have a level 3 are fully funded to retrain at level 3 in priority skills sectors.* (Paragraph 52)
19. *Local enterprise partnerships, working with local and combined authorities, should be able to add to the Department's list of fully funded level 3 qualifications, where that qualification meets local or regional labour market needs. The range of adult education courses should take into account local and regional adult education needs and the regional industrial strategy, where it exists.* (Paragraph 53)
20. We are concerned that the ambition of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee could be thwarted if take-up of the expanded level 3 entitlement is poor. (Paragraph 54)

21. *We recommend the Department fund a national promotional campaign to ensure all eligible adults are aware of the free learning they are entitled to. The Department should work with the sector to identify innovative ways to support adults to take up the new entitlement, such as incorporating accreditation of prior learning, or developing shorter qualifications that can be achieved over one academic year. The Department should work with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to ensure the DWP are providing appropriate guidance and support for unemployed adults to take up advanced skills qualifications, including the expanded level 3 entitlement. (Paragraph 55)*

### Adult community learning

22. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision can be transformational for adults. Unfortunately, we heard evidence of long waiting lists and demand outstripping supply. And despite the critical importance of ESOL, Adult Education Budget funding for ESOL fell by 56% between 2009–10 and 2016–17, with participation following a similar trend. 2019 research commissioned by the Department for Education also found that 64% of providers stated their current level of funding was insufficient to meet demands for ESOL provision. (Paragraph 65)
23. *The Department’s lifelong learning strategy must include an ESOL element. The Department should take a lead role for adult ESOL strategy to ensure a more joined up approach to cross-Department ESOL funding and objectives. The Department must undertake analysis to assess current and longer-term demand for adult ESOL provision. Additional funding should then be allocated to areas with highest demand for ESOL provision. (Paragraph 66)*
24. More needs to be done to support adult learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). There are opportunities including supported internships and apprenticeships, and community learning provision. But these opportunities are limited, and support funding is insufficient. (Paragraph 68)
25. *The Department should work with the sector to assess what additional funding is needed to better support adult learners with SEND. The Department should then introduce a funding premium for adult learners with SEND to ensure there is fully inclusive, accessible provision at all levels. (Paragraph 69)*
26. Childcare poses a barrier for parents and carers aspiring to upskill and retrain. More needs to be done to support parents and carers to participate in adult education. (Paragraph 72)
27. *We recommend that childcare grants and Parents’ Learning Allowance are made available to part-time learners studying for a Higher Education qualification. The Government should look at where childcare might be a barrier and extend the 30 hour per week universal offer to unemployed or low-income adult learners, where the lack of such provision would prove to be a barrier towards training and employment. (Paragraph 73)*
28. Community learning appears to have been largely overlooked by the Department. The Department does not have sufficient oversight of what data is available on

community learning. Nor are we confident that the Department has a good understanding of what provision exists nationally. The Department's lack of strategic vision for community learning is concerning and suggests an underlying lack of insight into the benefits and value of community learning. An ambitious, long-term strategy for community learning provision and funding is needed. (Paragraph 80)

29. *The Department must work with the adult education sector to develop a better understanding of what data exists on community learning and where any gaps might be. This should include mapping and regularly publishing data on how many community learning centres exist nationally and where they are located. The Department must then set out an ambitious plan for community learning provision in every town, which should seek to make use of existing buildings. The Department should work with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to align its community learning strategy with MHCLG funding to rejuvenate town centres and high streets.* (Paragraph 81)
30. The community learning budget has been capped at an arbitrary level for ten years. Community learning funding is overly bureaucratic; an average community learning provider may have to negotiate up to ten different funding streams, all with different rules and outcomes. This places unnecessary strain on providers, and takes up time and resources that should be spent on delivery. (Paragraph 82)
31. *The Department must make the case for a three-year funding settlement for community learning at the next spending review. The Department should review and consolidate the many community learning funding streams to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy for providers.* (Paragraph 83)

### Employer-led training

32. Employer investment in training is in decline, with low paid, low skilled workers hardest hit by the decline. A skills tax credit to incentivise employers to invest in training for workers with no or low qualifications will help to revitalise employer-led training. (Paragraph 91)
33. *The Government must support employers to invest in the development of their workforces. The Government should introduce a skills tax credit, for employers who invest in training for workers. This should be tapered so that the tax credit is more generous to employers who provide training for employees with lower prior qualifications.* (Paragraph 92)
34. The Union Learning Fund is a crucial programme for delivering workplace training. It has a strong track record of proven effectiveness and should be treated in line with other training providers in both the public and private spheres. It has a vital focus on tackling disadvantage, upskilling low-skilled workers, and offers excellent value for money. The Department has not explained its rationale behind its decision to stop funding the Union Learning Fund. Unless this decision is reversed, we will see the brakes put on workplace learning which will harm workers, employers and productivity. (Paragraph 95)

35. *We recommend that the Department reverse its decision to cease funding for the Union Learning Fund. To ensure public money is spent as equitably as possible, participation targets should be set mandating that Union Learning funds are split 50/50 between union members and non-union members.* (Paragraph 96)

### Higher education

36. Part-time higher education student numbers have been decimated, and numbers of part-time learners from the most disadvantaged backgrounds fell by 42% between 2010 and 2015. Flexible part-time university study is a key route for delivering a highly skilled workforce and the Department needs to prioritise reforms that will restore the part-time higher education sector. (Paragraph 101)
37. *The Department must act to stem the decline in part-time higher education. Promoting access for part-time students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds must be a priority. Means-tested fee grants should be instated for part-time students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds who study courses in priority skill areas. Maintenance support should be extended to all part-time students whether face-to-face or distance.* (Paragraph 102)
38. Degree apprenticeships are crucial to boosting the productivity of this country, providing an important route to higher education qualifications and bringing more students from disadvantaged backgrounds into higher education. (Paragraph 104)
39. *All higher education institutions should offer degree apprenticeships. The Department and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education should set out a plan for speeding up the expansion of degree apprenticeship provision in priority skill sectors.* (Paragraph 105)
40. Current Equivalent or Lower Qualification (ELQ) funding restrictions are a barrier for adults seeking to reskill. Higher level skills at levels 4, 5 and 6 are key to unlocking productivity, and a relaxation of ELQ rules is a fundamental strand of a lifelong right to retrain. (Paragraph 107)
41. *We recommend that the Department identify courses at levels 4, 5 and 6 which meet the skills needs of the UK economy. Equivalent or Lower Qualification funding restrictions must then be removed for those courses.* (Paragraph 108)

### Combined and local authorities

42. The new UK Shared Prosperity Fund offers an opportunity to improve on the design and administration of European Structural Investment Funds in relation to the funding of adult skills. Cross-government working will be critical to delivering the cross-cutting agenda this funding supports. We expect the Department to take a far more proactive stance in inter-Departmental discussions on the successor funds for both the ESF and the ERDF, and to ensure that local and combined authorities feed into those discussions. (Paragraph 117)
43. *Funding for the education and skills and employability strands of the new UK Shared Prosperity Fund must at least match those of their predecessor funds, and no region*

*should be worse off. Government must involve local and combined authorities on the design of the UKSPF. Funding must be devolved to combined authorities who are best placed to make decisions about how to allocate funding in the most effective way for their communities. (Paragraph 118)*

44. Devolution of the Adult Education Budget has enabled Mayoral Combined Authorities to develop locally responsive adult skills strategies. We heard that devolution should go further. The benefits of skills devolution should not be confined purely to those areas that happen to have a Mayoral Combined Authority. Devolution of adult skills should be considered for upper-tier authorities. With their knowledge of local communities, skills gaps and employer needs, local authorities are ideally placed to take on responsibility for mapping and commissioning adult skills and lifelong learning provision. With greater powers and sufficient funding, they could play a transformative role in ensuring every community has a truly local, place-based ASALL offer. (Paragraph 122)
45. *We recommend that local authorities are awarded powers and funding to take on an enhanced statutory role for mapping, commissioning and delivering adult skills and lifelong learning. The Department must carry out a comprehensive review of the powers and funding needed for local authorities to take on this role. (Paragraph 123)*

# Formal minutes

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**Wednesday 16 December 2020**

Members present:

Robert Halfon, in the Chair

Fleur Anderson

David Johnston

Apsana Begum

Ian Mearns

Tom Hunt

Christian Wakeford

Dr Caroline Johnson

Draft Report (*A plan for an adult skills and lifelong learning revolution*) proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the Chair's draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 123 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Third Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

[Adjourned till 7 January 2021 at 9.30am



## Witnesses

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The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Session 2017–19

#### 23 October 2019

**Baroness Wolf of Dulwich**; **Sir Roy Griffiths** Professor of Public Sector Management, King's College London; **John Holford**, Robert Peers Professor of Adult Education, University of Nottingham; **Lyn Tett**, Professor Emerita, University of Edinburgh, and Professor of Community Education, University of Huddersfield

[Q1–40](#)

### Session 2019–21

#### Tuesday 22 September 2020

**Matthew Percival**, Director for People and Skills, Confederation of British Industry; **Iain Murray**, Senior Policy Officer, Trade Union Congress; **Joe Fizzimons**, Head of Education and Skills Policy, Institute of Directors

[Q1–31](#)

**Dr Sue Pember**, Director of Policy and External Relations, HOLEX; **Simon Parkinson**, Chief Executive, Workers' Educational Association; **Professor Josie Fraser**, Deputy Vice Chancellor, The Open University

[Q32–57](#)

#### Tuesday 29 September 2020

**Gillian Keegan MP**, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills, Department for Education

[Q58–121](#)

## Published written evidence

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The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

ASL numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

### Session 2017–19

- 1 Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) ([ASL0015](#))
- 2 Association of Colleges ([ASL0037](#))
- 3 Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) ([ASL0025](#))
- 4 Barclays ([ASL0044](#))
- 5 Birkbeck, University of London ([ASL0011](#))
- 6 BSW Timber ([ASL0067](#))
- 7 Bynner, Professor John ([ASL0002](#))
- 8 Catholic Education Service (CES) ([ASL0055](#))
- 9 CBI ([ASL0075](#))
- 10 Centenary Commission on Lifelong Learning ([ASL0008](#))
- 11 Central London Forward ([ASL0031](#))
- 12 Centre for Vocational Educational Research LSE ([ASL0034](#))
- 13 Chameleon School of Construction ([ASL0050](#))
- 14 Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA) ([ASL0070](#))
- 15 CIPD ([ASL0054](#))
- 16 City College Peterborough ([ASL0020](#))
- 17 City & Guilds Group ([ASL0047](#))
- 18 City of London Corporation ([ASL0021](#))
- 19 Coventry University ([ASL0072](#))
- 20 Culture Learning and Libraries Midlands (trading as Inspire) ([ASL0019](#))
- 21 Department for Education ([ASL0039](#))
- 22 Doncaster Adult Family and Community Learning ([ASL0046](#))
- 23 Education and Training Foundation ([ASL0027](#))
- 24 Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB) ([ASL0048](#))
- 25 Federation of Small Businesses ([ASL0052](#))
- 26 Good Things Foundation ([ASL0065](#))
- 27 University of Glasgow ([ASL0058](#))
- 28 Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) ([ASL0068](#))
- 29 Hertfordshire Adult and Family Learning Service (HAFLS) ([ASL0010](#))
- 30 HOLEX: Professional body for adult community education providers ([ASL0049](#))
- 31 Holford, Professor John ([ASL0076](#))
- 32 Institutes for Adult Learning ([ASL0057](#))

- 33 Institute of Directors ([ASL0040](#))
- 34 Jisc ([ASL0041](#))
- 35 KPMG LLP ([ASL0062](#))
- 36 Learning Never Stops ([ASL0014](#))
- 37 Learning and Work Institute ([ASL0064](#))
- 38 The LLakes Centre UCL Institute of Education ([ASL0061](#))
- 39 London Borough of Camden ([ASL0069](#))
- 40 London Borough of Hounslow ([ASL0018](#))
- 41 Local Government Association ([ASL0012](#))
- 42 LTE Group ([ASL0043](#))
- 43 MillionPlus ([ASL0026](#))
- 44 National Numeracy ([ASL0059](#))
- 45 National Union of Students (NUS) ([ASL0038](#))
- 46 NCFE ([ASL0036](#))
- 47 The Northern College ([ASL0013](#))
- 48 Northern Powerhouse Partnership ([ASL0042](#))
- 49 Ofqual ([ASL0073](#))
- 50 The Open University ([ASL0045](#))
- 51 Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) ([ASL0053](#))
- 52 Starbucks ([ASL0009](#))
- 53 Sainsbury's Group ([ASL0006](#))
- 54 Stirling Careers Consultancy ([ASL0003](#))
- 55 The Sutton Trust ([ASL0060](#))
- 56 Swindon Borough Council ([ASL0017](#))
- 57 Teesside University ([ASL0063](#))
- 58 Trades Union Congress ([ASL0074](#))
- 59 University of Derby ([ASL0032](#))
- 60 University of Derby ([ASL0051](#))
- 61 UCL Institute of Education ([ASL0024](#))
- 62 University College London ([ASL0035](#))
- 63 University and College Union ([ASL0023](#))
- 64 Universities UK ([ASL0028](#))
- 65 Vose, Madeleine ([ASL0005](#))
- 66 West London Alliance ([ASL0016](#))
- 67 Westminster Adult Education Service ([ASL0029](#))
- 68 Whitehead-Ross Education and Consulting Ltd ([ASL0001](#))
- 69 Young Women's Trust ([ASL0022](#))

### Session 2019–21

- 70 Association of Colleges ([ASL0001](#))
- 71 Association of Employment and Learning Providers ([ASL0010](#))
- 72 Birkbeck, University of London ([ASL0002](#))
- 73 Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority ([ASL0007](#))
- 74 Department for Education ([ASL0012](#))
- 75 Greater Manchester Combined Authority ([ASL0004](#))
- 76 HOLEX ([ASL0003](#))
- 77 Local Government Association ([ASL0008](#))
- 78 Open University ([ASL0005](#))
- 79 Prisoner Learning Alliance ([ASL0011](#))
- 80 Tees Valley Combined Authority ([ASL0006](#))
- 81 Workers' Educational Association (Simon Parkinson, CEO) ([ASL0009](#))

## List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

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All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Session 2019–21

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Getting the grades they've earned: Covid-19: the cancellation of exams and 'calculated' grades	HC 617
2nd	Appointment of the Children's Commissioner for England	HC 1030
1st Special	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2019	HC 668
2nd Special	Getting the grades they've earned Covid-19: the cancellation of exams and 'calculated' grades: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2019–21	HC 812