

GLA Adult Education Budget Roadmap Consultation – Central London Forward Response

August 2021

Central London Forward (CLF) is the strategic sub-regional partnership of the 12 central London local authorities.¹ Our goal is to improve the lives of residents by working together to drive inclusive growth.

1 – Stimulate collaboration and partnerships

Q1a. What are the key considerations for creating effective guidance on good subcontracting and collaborative working?

Q1b. How can partners in London work together differently to develop sustainable infrastructure that supports a more joined-up, integrated skills, careers and employment offer?

Central London Forward (CLF) member boroughs share a vision for an integrated careers and skills landscape which promotes collaboration and co-design.

Boroughs see current procurement practices as a barrier to more joined up working. We would welcome the GLA developing a process that is focused on co-creation with users and partner organisations, and co-delivery with the latter.

GLA's guidance on good subcontracting should seek to ensure that subcontracting enables a wider variety of organisations to access AEB funding and deliver high quality provision, particularly small and specialist providers. It should also seek to ensure good value for public money where subcontracting is in place, including ensuring there is a genuine educational benefit of the arrangement, and oversight over provision within the supply chain.

CLF supports the No Wrong Door approach outlined in the draft AEB roadmap. We share the overarching aims of the approach, but we would value more information on its details.

Recommendation: Develop a flexible No Wrong Door project, that is developed through a genuine and active co-design process. A genuine No Wrong Door approach must harness partnership working and develop a set of agreed shared outcomes for service users.

Recommendation: If any resource is delivered online as part of the No Wrong Door approach, the GLA should take into consideration the significant number of Londoners who do not have digital access or the digital skills necessary to use online provisions, and should consider alternative options for these individuals.

Recommendation: The GLA should continue working with sub-regional partnerships (SRPs) as part of the No Wrong Door programme. We would welcome an approach that supports SRPs to bring together existing provision, creating shared programme infrastructure, and data agreements. The project should focus on complimenting and boosting existing service capacity.

The Community Conversations grant to enable community organisations to take part in the consultation is welcome. But engagement must go further, and ensure that all anchor institutions form a key part of the collaboration process during the consultation and beyond.

2 – Facilitate learning that meets London's needs

Q2a. What are the key considerations for a process that will enable providers and employers to develop learning packages relevant for London's industries?

Ensuring that education and training provision meets the skills needs of employers – now and in the future – is vital both for individuals accessing training, and for employers.

Engaging employers in the development of learning packages is therefore crucial in ensuring that provision meets their needs. We need to think about how we use the evidence on why past engagement with employers has not always proved successful to build a better strategy for future engagement.

Recommendation: The GLA should continue to build their relationship with employers and utilise the Mayor’s powerful role as a convener to do this. We must establish a shared approach to engaging with employers to reduce the risk of mixed messaging.

Recommendation: The GLA should highlight to employers the benefits of engaging in the design of learning packages, so that provision better meets their needs.

Recommendation: SMEs are an important part of our economy and are more susceptible to skill shortages than large corporations. The GLA should consider how SMEs can be engaged in the development of learning packages, making the process as simple and user-friendly as possible.

Recommendation: The GLA should enable providers to take a flexible and responsive approach to delivery which allows them to work with employers and adapt courses to ensure that they match employers needs.

CLF believes that both London’s residents and businesses would benefit from the wider use of skills and employment outcomes agreements.

Research as set out by [UKCES and AoC](#) showed that outcomes agreements can help to ensure that skills provisions match local economic need. In May 2021, CLF launched our [Health and Social Care Employment and Skills Outcomes Agreement](#). This was the result of engagement with employers, skills providers and our boroughs. It represents a set of mutually agreed outcomes for learners that aims to ensure skills provision matches employer’s needs, and residents are supported into good work.

Recommendation: The GLA should explore the use of skills and employment outcomes agreements in key priority sectors across the capital.

CLF would welcome clarification on how the GLA will work with employers and providers in the development of Local Skills Improvements Plans, and where LSIPs will lie in relation to existing strategies and plans.

CLF welcomes the GLA’s ambition to boost the availability of timely, granular, local labour market information (LMI).

Recommendation: The GLA should ensure that LMI that is gathered should be shared promptly and widely with all partners who could benefit from access, including providers, employers and local authorities. Our boroughs would also welcome data broken down by protected characteristics to help shape our approach to delivering more inclusive services.

Q2b. What are the key processes for how your organisations and its partners develop learning programmes?

n/a

Q2c. What are the skills challenges for your local area/business/sector both now and in the next 5 years?

Basic skills

While London has the most qualified workforce of any region of the UK, many Londoners still lack higher level qualifications. Central London residents who lack higher level qualifications face a larger employment gap and wage gap compared with other regions ([CLF 2019](#)). The pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on workers with lower levels of qualification

Recommendation: AEB provision should focus on engaging residents who do not have qualifications or who have low level qualifications. Provision should help these individuals to build the skills and qualifications, to develop their confidence, and to progress.

Sector specific skills

CLF set out the biggest skills challenges for the central London area and how we can tackle them in our [Skills Strategy 2019](#). Our skills strategy focused on six priority sectors:

- Health and social care
- Financial and professional services
- Construction
- Tourism, hospitality and retail
- Science, technology and engineering
- The creative industries.

These sectors all faced skills shortages on the eve of the pandemic. The impact of the pandemic, along with changes to migration rules following Brexit, risk exacerbating these skills gaps. There has been a significant decline in the total number of non-UK nationals working in the UK following the pandemic, with a particularly sharp drop in the number of EU nationals working in the UK. This will particularly affect London – which has the highest proportion of EU nationals in the workforce, and sectors such as construction, tourism, hospitality and retail, and financial and professional services, which have been particularly reliant on EU nationals.

Recommendation: To tackle these skills shortages, the GLA should consider supporting further provision of shorter, more flexible courses, that have been developed in direct response to specific employer needs.

The Financial Services sector is vital to central London's economy. There is a significant skills gap in this sector, with 31% of firms in London reporting skills shortage vacancies. Skills challenges for the sector include data, digital and tech skills, as well as the soft skills required to leverage technology. Small and medium enterprises in particular require support in identifying skills needs and accessing relevant training opportunities. ([FSSC, 2021](#))

Our boroughs see the green economy as crucial to London's future. Eleven of our twelve boroughs have declared a climate emergency, and all of them include the green economy in their recovery plans.

It is clear that there are significant gaps in skills provision which will support people into green jobs. There will be increasing demand for green jobs and skills in the future, including through the need to retrofit and insulate a large number of domestic and commercial properties across the sub-region. We welcome the GLA's research mapping current green skills AEB provision. CLF is also undertaking research into current and future demand for

green jobs and green skills across the sub-region. The research is led by WPI Economics and the Institute of Employment Studies. We would welcome continuing to work with the GLA on this issue, so that we can ensure skills policy better supports the growth of this crucial sector.

3 – Prioritise skills that support progression

Q3a. What are the key considerations for supporting and enhancing a London offer at levels 3 and 4, particularly where it can support the most disadvantaged Londoners to progress into employment in sectors key to London’s economy?

CLF welcomes the level 3 entitlement through the National Skills Fund. CLF also welcomes the Mayor of London’s intention to extend the offer to Londoners with a level 3 but who are unemployed or low paid. This would extend opportunities to a large group of Londoners who could benefit from the support.

Extending the offer further to level 4 provision could benefit more Londoners still, and open up access to qualifications which have even greater labour market returns.

The GLA should consider focusing the additional level 3 and level 4 entitlement on the provision that would best meet London’s current and future labour market needs. This should involve both assessment of the labour market returns of qualifications, and the views of employers. This would ensure the investment helps deliver maximum benefits both for learners and for employers.

There should be consideration of the capacity of the market to deliver this provision. Private providers are less likely to take on higher level provisions due to the increased risk and impact on cash flow of longer programmes. The GLA should consider how it will support capacity building if demand cannot be met.

New Level 3 and 4 provision should be delivered flexibly as possible for learners, making use of blended learning.

Fully funded ESOL up to entry level 3 is vital in supporting a significant number of learners. If fully funded by the GLA or lobbied on to receive central government funding, we could support more learners into ESOL provision, supporting those individuals into future learning and the labour market.

Q3b. What are the key considerations for ensuring the GLA can stimulate provision at entry level up to level 2 that shows positive outcomes for learners, employers and communities?

Entry Level to Level 2 courses can have significant benefits for learners that go beyond the qualifications themselves. Supporting learners through these levels can help improve confidence, motivation, and mental health, as well as supporting people to progress in learning and employment. We therefore welcome the GLA’s decision to continue focusing the majority of AEB provision on entry level up to Level 2.

In order to support progression, provision at entry level to level 2 should be complemented by high quality careers information, advice and guidance, to support learners to progress onward to levels 3 and 4.

Adult learners at this level often face a number of barriers and challenges. Provision must be as flexible as possible, enabling learners to access the support that they need, and learn in a way that works for them. Provision must also include wrap around support.

Recommendation: Provisions should have a strong emphasis on personalisation and offer bespoke support to those who need it, such as offering a variety of access points to provision.

Q3c. What are the key considerations for employers and skills providers to work together to embed essential employability skills into learning packages?

Improving employability skills – alongside other benefits relating to health and wellbeing and civic participation for example – is a key aspect of adult education. Adults should be able to access learning packages which help them to improve their employability, by developing the skills, knowledge and behaviours to succeed in the world of work.

CLF support the Fusion Skills approach that has been championed by the Lifelong Learning London Central Group. Fusion skills are based on [research led by NESTA](#) . They harness the core skills and habits needed to be a successful learner and help learners develop them and apply them to employment to be a successful employee. The skills are based on engagement with employers to understand their needs and could form a core part of all adult education provision. The [Find Fusion](#) site demonstrates how these are being used by some London providers already.

Recommendation: The GLA should consider how Fusion Skills may be integrated into AEB funded skills provision in London.

High quality contact with employers – including work experience placements – can be effective in supporting learners to develop their employability. However, many skills providers can find it hard to support their learners to access appropriate work experience, particularly for health and social care courses.

Recommendation: The GLA should plan an approach on how employers can be engaged to deliver placements, and to formalise the relationships between skills providers and the employers necessary to deliver placements.

4 – Develop an improved understanding of the social and economic impact of adult education

Q4. What are the key considerations for developing an improved understanding of the impact of adult education and making use of a new baseline of social and economic impact?

The London Learner Survey could be a powerful tool for understanding the impact of adult education. Through strengthening the evidence base, the survey could help to make the case for investment in adult education. By providing information on the impact of provision, the survey could also help both to identify and share best practice, and inform commissioning. This could help to increase the overall quality of provision, and the benefits it delivers for learners.

For local authorities, the survey could help to quantify and demonstrate the impact of our Adult Community Learning provision beyond employment.

Recommendation: We would welcome the GLA committing to using the London Learner Survey project as a continued foundational shift to outcomes-based commissioning to ensure the best possible outcomes for learners.

As noted, a shift to an outcomes-based commissioning approach would make use of evidence of social and economic impact to deliver provision that brings the most benefit to the learner. Outcomes agreements based on different sectors across London can act as a step towards this approach.

5 – Embed strong measurement of social and economic impact

Q5a. What are the key considerations for integrating new information and data on impact areas and learner feedback into future skills delivery?

Q5b. What are the key considerations for measuring and incentivising outcomes through future initiatives?

We welcome the emphasis on measuring the social impact of learning, alongside its economic impact. Adult education can play a vital role in supporting people to access employment or to progress in work. But it can also deliver significant social benefits, from improved health and wellbeing, to supporting social inclusion and participation. Any attempt to measure outcomes, particularly those from Adult Community Learning, must be able to assess the social impact of provision.

While it is legitimate to expect providers to collect data in order to understand the impact their provision delivers, the requirements on providers should be reasonable and proportionate. The GLA should ensure the data that is collected adds value, and that the burden of information collection on providers is limited. This is particularly important for smaller and specialist providers.

In considering the use of impact measurements to incentivise providers, the GLA should consider the risk of perverse incentives. In the employment support sector, the use of payment by results contracts has in the past incentivised providers to focus support on those who have the least need, rather than those who need more support. Impact measurements and approaches to incentivisation should therefore be sensitive to soft outcomes and 'distance travelled', in order to avoid providers from being disincentivised from working with those who might most need support.

As noted, this year CLF launched our Health and Social Care Employment and Skills Outcomes Agreement. This was the product of engagement with our local authorities, and employers and skills providers in central London. Early engagement and co-design was vital to the project, and an emphasis on agreeing outcomes first and the metrics and activity behind them afterwards proved effective. We look forward to working with the GLA on using the Health and Social Care Outcomes Agreement within the GLA's Health and Social Care Academy work.

6 – Create and expand programmes derived from best practice

Q6a. What are the key considerations that you would like to see in our future commissioning of new adult education provision?

Flexibility is key to a commissioning process that delivers good support to learners and delivers the best possible outcomes. It will ensure that provision can be tailored to meet the needs of residents, communities and employers. Provision should allow for flexibility that can be adapted to learner's needs – such as offering remote learning, flexible hours

Recommendation: The GLA's commissioning process should champion outcomes-based commissioning and look at the social and economic impact that learning has beyond achieving the qualifications. The new procurement exercise presents a good opportunity to trial this approach.

It is important that when commissioning provisions the GLA seeks to meet current and future local economic need.

Recommendation: The GLA should ensure the commissioning process is based on labour market information and proper engagement with employers (including SMEs) in order to meet sector specific needs.

Q6b. What are the examples of skills and employment programmes that are especially impactful that future commissioning of adult education in London should take into account?

7 – Raise awareness of London's adult education offer

Q7a. What are the key considerations for outreach and promotional campaigns about adult education and how can we ensure these effectively engage London's communities and places facing educational disadvantage?

In addition to ensuring high quality provision, boosting demand for adult education, particularly among those who could most benefit, is crucial in maximising impact.

Local authorities are well placed to co-design and deliver promotional campaigns around adult education. Local authorities have a good understanding of their local communities, including of which groups face educational disadvantage. Central London local authorities have a variety of communications channels; from borough-wide magazines to social media, that can help access potential learners. Central London local authorities also have strong established links with community organisations within their boroughs, including those serving groups who face educational disadvantage.

Recommendation: The GLA should work closely with London Boroughs to co-create and deliver promotional campaigns around adult education.

Q7b. How can the GLA work with local partners to create higher quality referrals into and out of adult learning, so that Londoners can access the right opportunities on their journey to work?

Supporting local partners to understand what provision is available, and to make high quality referrals, can help boost participation in adult learning, particularly among those who could most benefit from participation.

As part of the 'No Wrong Door' approach, we should seek both to support referrals in to adult education provision in order to boost participation, and referrals from adult education provision to other appropriate support – including employment support for those who are ready to seek work.

Recommendation: The GLA should work with boroughs to map existing employment and skills provision, and ensure information is readily accessible to organisations in order to support high quality referrals.

Recommendation: The local community links and referral networks that providers are linked into should be considered within the AEB commissioning process.

8 – Create a representative and inclusive adult education system

Q8a. What are the best ways for the GLA to promote and showcase examples of best practice in delivering adult education to providers and employers?

Q8b. What are the key considerations for the GLA in supporting a skilled, inclusive and representative adult education workforce?

Our boroughs would value the collection and sharing of equalities data in relation to the delivery of AEB funded provisions. Officers can use this data to support conversations and to develop policy that promotes a more inclusive skills landscape that supports disadvantaged and underrepresented groups.

We would welcome additional support in developing a more sustainable recruitment pool of teachers with the correct skills and qualifications. A shared pan-London offer for the Continued Professional Development of Adult Community Learning staff would help to promote this.

We need to think about how we attract more teachers directly from industry backgrounds. Potential options include using business networks to encourage secondments, the use of visiting lecturers, and flexible teaching hours.

9 – Invest in physical and digital learning spaces

Q9a. What are the key considerations for the GLA in improving digital connectivity and access to devices for learners?

Q9b. What are the key considerations for stimulating more opportunities for accessing physical learning settings for learners who are unable to engage in digital learning or in more formal classroom settings?

Digital skills are increasingly important as foundational skills. It is estimated that 90% of jobs will require at least basic digital skills within the next 20 years. Beyond employment, basic digital skills are vital both to accessing learning, and to participating in society.

Learning providers have increasingly made use of online learning, including as part of a 'blended learning' approach, which combines the benefits of both online and in person learning. This shift was accelerated by the pandemic, which required many providers in London to shift learning online.

The shift toward blended learning and online learning can have significant benefits, both in improving the quality of provision, and supporting access. However, accessing digital learning remains a key challenge for many potential adult learners in central London.

These barriers relate both to digital access – having an appropriate digital device and reliable connection – and to digital capabilities – having the skills and confidence to use digital technology.

CLF has some experience of overcoming digital barriers to support. We shifted our Central London Works employment support programme online during the pandemic, including providing dozens of digital devices to participants in order to continue accessing support.

Recommendation: The GLA should work with learning providers and local authorities to ensure that digital devices and connections are available for learners who would otherwise not be able to take part in learning.