



**Jennette Arnold OBE AM**

**Chair of the Education Panel**

Gavin Williamson

Secretary of State for Education

(Sent by email)

17 March 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing to you on behalf of the London Assembly Education Panel to share findings from our recent meeting, where we discussed the Adult Education Budget and future reforms to further education. On 10 March 2021, the Panel heard from expert witnesses about the challenges faced by further education providers due to COVID-19, and also focused on the future of adult education in London in the context of the reforms proposed to post-16 education by the Department for Education's (DfE) Skills for Jobs White Paper.

The Panel heard from: Andrew Gower (Principal, Morley College), Asfa Sohail (Principal, Lewisham College), Mary Vine-Morris (London Area Director and National Lead Employment, Association of Colleges), Jules Pipe (Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills, GLA) and Michelle Cuomo-Boorer (Assistant Director - Skills & Employment, GLA).

The Panel welcomes the White Paper, and the focus on further education that it brings from the Government. As Mary Vine-Morris (London Area Director and National Lead Employment, Association of Colleges) said, "we genuinely absolutely welcome the recognition of the role that colleges can play and that further education can play more generally in the world of the skills for jobs". There are, however, five issues that the Panel would like to make you aware of, following our discussion.

## **Investment**

The proposed reforms must be backed by sufficient investment. In previous investigations, the Panel has heard that further education funding has reduced significantly over previous years. An increase in investment is needed to ensure that sufficient learning opportunities are available and providers have sufficient capacity to meet the needs of learners who are otherwise at risk of being turned away.

## **Structures**

The Skills for Jobs White Paper proposes reforms to education structures that sit alongside the structures currently in place in London. The Panel is keen to emphasise that the proposed reforms must be complementary to the adult education responsibilities that have been devolved to London.

## **Digital learning**

In light of the pandemic, there has been a great deal of disruption across the education sector at all levels. For adult education providers, the pandemic has meant a reduced or different kind of offer of support for learners and the need to digitally upskill or re-skill themselves. COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of digital learning, with many providers having to scale up or repurpose their resources to deliver courses online. This also shone a light on digital exclusion and digital poverty amongst learners, an issue that was present before the crisis.

The Panel heard that there could be a greater emphasis on digital learning for the future in the White Paper, especially given the challenge that moving courses online has posed for providers in the last year. Andrew Gower (Principal, Morley College) told us that “with digital matters being much more present for us in life and in work, all things digital will continue to be important. So, too, is some innovation funding or some sort of developmental support for colleges to somehow crystallise the developments that we have rapidly put in place”. Digital skills present great opportunities, not only for the learner but also for the economy as a whole and it is important that this is recognised in legislative reform.

## **Lifelong Loan Entitlement**

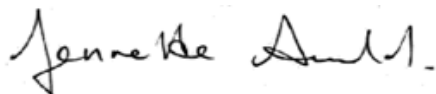
The Panel recognises that the White Paper proposes to implement the Lifelong Loan Entitlement from 2025, which would provide learners with the equivalent of four years’ worth of post-18 education to use over their lifetime. This funding would be available for modules at higher technical and degree levels regardless of whether courses are provided in colleges or universities. The Panel heard that it would be advantageous for learners if the Lifelong Loan Entitlement was brought in earlier than 2025, as providers are currently experiencing a significantly reduced number of learners engaging in part-time higher education as the funding to support them is currently not available.

## **SEND learners**

‘Putting employers at the heart of post-16 skills’ is embedded within the proposed reforms to further education. Learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) require continued support to acquire skills. The Panel recognises that DfE says it will ensure that people with SEND continue to gain direct work-related skills alongside maths and English to increase their employability. As the reforms include an increased focus on involving employers, the Panel believes there is a need to assist employers in supporting SEND learners, alongside the education reforms proposed in the White Paper. As Asfa Sohail (Principal, Lewisham College) told the Panel, “we would appreciate it if we could have some national initiative or local initiative where we can start to upskill employers”.

I hope that you will take the issues we raise into account as the Government develops its proposals for reforming further education. If you would like to engage with the Panel further on these matters, please copy your response to the Panel's Committee Assistant, Lamide Odanye, [lamide.odanye@london.gov.uk](mailto:lamide.odanye@london.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Jennette Arnold'.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM**  
**Chair of the Education Panel**