



Hina Bokhari AM
Chair of the Economy Committee

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London
(Sent by email)

CC: Jules Pipe, Deputy Mayor Planning, Regeneration and Skills

13 April 2023

Dear Sadiq,

London's Adult Education Budget (AEB)

I am writing to you in my position as Chair of the London Assembly Economy Committee regarding the Committee's investigation into London's Adult Education Budget (AEB). This follows a meeting held by the Committee on 7 September 2022, which was attended by the following guests:

- **Jules Pipe CBE**, Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills
- **Michelle Cuomo-Boorer**, Assistant Director for Skills and Employment, GLA
- **Janet Gardner**, Principal and CEO of Waltham Forest College
- **Dr Xia Lin**, Head of Research, Toynbee Hall
- **Anwar Miah**, Peer Researcher, Toynbee Hall and adult education learner
- **James Watkins**, Head of Policy and Public Impact, London Chamber of Commerce and Industry

The Committee also received written evidence from key stakeholders, including training providers, local authorities and representative bodies working in the sector. On 8 September 2022, the London Assembly held a Plenary meeting on the AEB, which was attended by Jules Pipe and Michelle

Cuomo-Boorer. The evidence gathered at this meeting has also been used to inform the recommendations in this letter.

Our investigation set out to understand the impact of adult education on learners, providers and employers since the AEB was delegated to the Mayor at the start of the 2019/20 academic year. The Committee scrutinised the reforms made by the Mayor since delegation, and the impact of these reforms. We asked what further reforms the Mayor could make to the Adult Education Budget, in order to benefit both employers and learners in London, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged learners.

The evidence received by the Committee was broadly positive about the impact that delegation has had on the delivery of the AEB in London. Training providers – particularly those who deliver Adult Community Education – highlighted the advantages of the new funding flexibilities and the introduction of fully-funded learning for those earning below the London Living Wage. They felt that the GLA consulted them and involved them in decision-making, and particularly welcomed the support provided by the GLA during the pandemic. However, organisations representing learners, providers and employers all felt that the GLA could do more to improve the delivery and outcomes of adult education in London.

Expanding participation in adult education

Both the written and oral evidence received by the Committee emphasised the value and importance of adult education for Londoners. Adult education can transform people's lives by enabling them to secure a job and progress in their career. Evidence received by the Committee also emphasised the broader social benefits of adult education, including enhanced health and wellbeing, feeling part of a community and increased confidence.

Despite these many benefits, the Committee heard that adult education is not reaching the number of Londoners that it could do. The written evidence received from the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) highlighted the 'low visibility of adult learning opportunities'.¹ Dr Xia Lin from Toynbee Hall noted at the Committee's meeting that 'once [learners] are inside the adult education system, they benefit from it and they stay and really progress from there, but there is a gap between inside the system and outside'.²

The Committee is aware that the Mayor is seeking to address this issue through the Skills and Jobs campaign³ and the Skills for Londoners Community Outreach Programme, which seeks to engage diverse communities to raise awareness of London's skills offer.⁴ The Committee welcomes these initiatives. However, it is clear that a range of approaches will be required to significantly expand access to adult education.

Dr Xia Lin emphasised the importance of 'co-designing' courses with learners, both in terms of the content of courses and the learning environment. Anwar Miah, Peer Researcher at Toynbee Hall and adult education learner, told the Committee that participation in adult education could be increased if it was offered in more accessible learning environments, such as 'community centres, libraries and primary schools'.⁵ Toynbee Hall's research found that a traditional classroom environment acted as a

¹ Written evidence received from the Workers' Educational Association (WEA)

² [London Assembly Economy Committee - Wednesday 7 September 2022: London's Adult Education Budget](#)

³ GLA, [Mayor offers free skills training to unemployed & low-income Londoners](#)

⁴ GLA, [Skills for Londoners Community Outreach Programme prospectus](#)

⁵ [London Assembly Economy Committee - Wednesday 7 September 2022: London's Adult Education Budget](#)

barrier for some learners, and that ‘co-production of London’s adult education offer, including communication, application processes, course content, and environment is needed to tackle most of the issues within the system’.⁶ This process should be particularly targeted at groups who are more marginalised within London’s adult education system, including disabled Londoners, Londoners with English as a second language, low income Londoners and Londoners with experience of the criminal justice system.

Recommendation 1: *The Mayor should explore further opportunities to ‘co-design’ adult education courses with learners, both in terms of the content of courses and the learning environment, in order to make adult education more accessible, particularly involving more marginalised groups.*

Toynbee Hall’s written evidence noted that ‘where possible, mentors should be provided by educational institutions in the form of experienced learners to help students: Mentors can help navigate course content, signpost to support where needed, and provide advice on what other steps a student could take into adult education’.⁷ The availability of mentors could provide vital support to those already enrolled on adult education courses, but could also help to increase participation by making the overall offer more attractive to prospective learners. Dr Xia Lin told the Committee that many potential learners think that ‘adult education is not for me’.⁸ Mentors could play a role in educating people about the social benefits of adult education as well as the employment opportunities it can open up.

Recommendation 2: *The Mayor should work with colleges and training providers to ensure a greater availability of mentors in order to support new and prospective learners.*

JobCentre Plus (JCP) has an important role to play in signposting people to adult education. The Committee is aware that the GLA works with JCP as part of the ‘No Wrong Door’ initiative, and Michelle Cuomo-Boorer told the Committee that the GLA had started working more closely with JCP since the pandemic.⁹ However, evidence received by the Committee suggests that much more needs to be done to join up adult education with the work of JCP. Toynbee Hall’s research found that ‘Londoners... described finding it difficult to convince work coaches of the benefit of taking an adult education programme’.¹⁰ Dr Xia Lin told the Committee that she would like the GLA ‘to work even more closely with the JCP and to have direct communication through the JCP to claimants to encourage them to take the adult education that they need’.¹¹

Recommendation 3: *The Mayor should work with JobCentre Plus (JCP) to ensure that work coaches consistently promote adult education to learners and support them to access it. He should report back to the Committee on the action that he has taken to do this, and the impact this work has had to date.*

A skills system which addresses the needs of employers

It is vital that London’s skills system works for employers as well as learners. However, the Committee heard that this is not always in case. James Watkins from the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) said that London was experiencing a ‘skills crisis’, as employers ‘are

⁶ Written evidence received from Toynbee Hall

⁷ Ibid

⁸ [London Assembly Economy Committee - Wednesday 7 September 2022: London’s Adult Education Budget](#)

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Written evidence received from Toynbee Hall

¹¹ [London Assembly Economy Committee - Wednesday 7 September 2022: London’s Adult Education Budget](#)

having trouble appointing skilled people who can actually fill the skills gaps in their businesses'.¹² The AEB clearly has a role to play in addressing these challenges. James Watkins noted that 'there is not a demand-led approach in all areas', and highlighted the need for more flexible and agile training. A letter sent to the Committee by Richard Burge, Chief Executive of LCCI, argued that 'the period of training provision which was rooted in set times and locations does not meet the needs of learners or businesses in the 2020s'.¹³

James Watkins argued that modular learning should be made more widely available, stating that 'many businesses... are really crying out for a modular training programme approach'.¹⁴ Module-based provision, rather than full qualifications, can make it easier for learners to fit training around work and other responsibilities, as well as being more responsive to employer need. The Mayor has a key role to play in incentivising providers to deliver more modular training through the AEB.

Recommendation 4: *The Mayor should explore options for incentivising providers to deliver more modular training through the AEB, in order to reach more learners and be flexible and responsive to employer demand.*

The Committee heard that a more flexible funding system would enable colleges to be more responsive to demand. Jules Pipe told the Committee that the Mayor has introduced new rules allowing greater flexibility for 10 per cent of AEB funding, which 'has enabled colleges to provide things like wraparound support and really respond to an individual's needs who otherwise would struggle'.¹⁵ It is clear from the evidence received by the Committee that colleges and other providers welcome the new 10 per cent funding flexibility. However, Janet Gardner from Waltham Forest College noted that this rate is 'below that of accredited qualifications' and argued that increasing the rate above 10 per cent would give providers 'more ability to be responsive and agile quickly'.¹⁶ Citing the example of emerging green technologies, she highlighted how quickly colleges need to adapt to meet employer need in an evolving labour market.

Recommendation 5: *The Mayor should explore increasing the 10 per cent funding flexibility, to enable providers to be more responsive to employer demand and address skills needs related to emerging technologies.*

Subcontracting

The Plenary meeting on the AEB involved a discussion of the auditing of subcontractors. The AEB is audited by the internal auditors to the GLA, and in July 2022 the Assembly's Audit Panel considered a report on AEB subcontractors.¹⁷ The report noted that 'risks are generally managed effectively although some improvement in the application of controls is required'.¹⁸ It noted that 'there is a risk that reports and certificates are not appropriately completed or reviewed by AEB to ensure subcontracting arrangements are in place and in line with AEB procedures' and recommended that 'a process is put in place to ensure all External audit reports and certificates are promptly received by

¹² [London Assembly Economy Committee - Wednesday 7 September 2022: London's Adult Education Budget](#)

¹³ Letter sent to the Economy Committee by London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 20 September 2022

¹⁴ [London Assembly Economy Committee - Wednesday 7 September 2022: London's Adult Education Budget](#)

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ [London Assembly Audit Panel, Thursday 21 July 2022, Agenda reports pack](#)

¹⁸ [London Assembly Audit Panel, Thursday 21 July 2022, Agenda reports pack](#)

GLA/AEB'.¹⁹ At the plenary meeting, Jules Pipe told Assembly Members that 'overall the audit rating was adequate and so it should have been better... Those [recommendations] were all accepted by the GLA and are actively being addressed'.²⁰

Recommendation 6: *The Mayor should update the Committee on what actions he has taken to address the issues identified by auditors in relation to subcontracting, and how he can be sure that these issues will not continue to arise in the future.*

Green skills

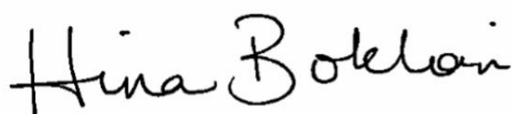
The AEB has a vital role to play in helping Londoners gain the skills needed for the transition to net zero. James Watkins told the Committee that LCCI's 'surveys have found that there is a significant lack of skilled workers when it comes to green procurement issues as well and other issues to do with the green economy'²¹, while Richard Burge's letter to the Committee highlighted data showing that 'businesses are seeking workers with technical green skills'.²² In its submission to the Committee, the London Friends of the Earth Network noted that 'no London College is yet running a Retrofit Coordinator course'.²³ This is despite the analysis carried out by Element Energy for the GLA, which found that 'at the peak, the direct workforce for retrofits reaches 37,000 jobs, which means that close to 900 retrofit coordinator roles will be required across London by the mid-2020s'.²⁴

The Committee is aware that green skills is one of the priority areas for the Mayor's Academies Programme. However, it is clear that there needs to be a substantial expansion of green skills provision if the Mayor is to reach his target for London to be net zero by 2030.

Recommendation 7: *The Mayor should update the Committee on how the Mayor's Academies Programme has led to a growth in green skills provision, and on how he works with employers to address the demand for green skills, especially in relation to retrofit.*

The Committee would welcome a response to this letter by 26 May 2023. Please send your response by email to the Committee's clerk, Jack Booth (jack.booth@london.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely,



Hina Bokhari AM
Chair of the Economy Committee

¹⁹ [London Assembly Audit Panel, Thursday 21 July 2022, Agenda reports pack](#)

²⁰ [London Assembly \(Plenary\) – Thursday 8 September 2022: Question and Answer Session: Adult Education Budget](#)

²¹ [London Assembly Economy Committee - Wednesday 7 September 2022: London's Adult Education Budget](#)

²² Letter sent to the Economy Committee by London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 20 September 2022

²³ Written evidence received from London Friends of the Earth Network

²⁴ Element Energy, [Analysis of a Net Zero 2030 Target for Greater London](#)