



Rt. Hon. DAVID LAMMY MP

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Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP
Minister of State for Apprenticeships and Skills
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings, 20 Great Smith St
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19th January 2017

Dear Robert

We are writing to you following the adjournment debate on Adult Education and the Future of Night Schools on Friday 13th January. We firmly believe that education does not end at 18 and as such we are pleased that the House had an opportunity to debate adult education. However, we are writing to gain further clarification on a number of issues.

Firstly, the Government's Post-16 Skills Plan – a 60 page document – dedicates only a couple of short, insubstantial paragraphs to adult education that fail to set out a new approach, new investment or new ideas. The Plan includes a promise to "say more about" the Government's "approach to lifetime learning for adults" at some point in 2016.

However, no further such approach or strategy has been forthcoming, and during your response on Friday 13th January you failed to confirm whether such an approach or strategy would be published and indeed when we can expect it to be published. As the Government Office for Science has warned, lifelong learning is an "urgent issue for public policy in the UK" – so when can we expect the Government's strategy for adult education to be published?

We call on you to come up with a national strategy that works across departments in recognition of the huge range of beneficial outcomes that adult education has for individuals, our economy and society in general – not least in terms of employability and helping people return to work, but also in terms of tackling mental ill health and social exclusion.

Secondly, we recognise that the adult education budget has been frozen in cash terms, yet this will mean a cut in real terms and comes on the back of 40% cuts to the adult skills budget between 2010 and 2015 as well as 57% cuts in spending on the non-apprenticeships aspects of this budget. The number of adult learners fell by 10.8% in just a single year between 2014 and 2015, and the number of adults achieving Level 4 awards of above has fallen to just 3,900 – a staggering 75% fall in just two years.

You will be aware of the gaping skills gap that is holding back our economy. Skills shortages already account for a quarter of all job openings and the situation is about to get a lot worse if we leave the Single Market and businesses can no longer employ skilled workers from other European Union countries to plug their skills gaps.

Moreover, if 2016 taught us anything it is that we can no longer afford to ignore the people and communities who feel "left behind" – the parts of our country where many people feel trapped in low-income jobs with little prospect for change. We call on you to invest in adult education so that working class people can get the skills they need to access the growth sectors in our economy and to ensure that the proceeds of economic growth are felt across all parts of the country, particularly in communities outside of London and the South East.

When education and skills provision does not keep up with a changing economy and jobs market then inequality is exacerbated and it is those at the bottom who lose out most. We believe that all adults must have access to flexible, affordable and accessible education and training that will equip them for the modern jobs market and takes into account other commitments adults have as employees, parents and carers.

We look forward to hearing from you regarding the Government's strategy for lifelong learning and plans for investing in our adult education system.

Yours sincerely

Rt Hon David Lammy MP



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