INSPIRING LEARNING
SINCE 1854

44 Crowndale Road
London
NW1 1TR
Principal: Dipa Ganguli OBE

Sir Keir Starmer
Constituency Office

13th June 2025

Dear Sir Keir,

Re: Urgent Need for a Comprehensive Adult Skills Strategy

I am writing to you as the Principal/CEO of the oldest adult education institution in Europe in your constituency, to express deep concern about the continued lack of investment in adult skills following the recent Spending Review. Despite clear cross-government recognition that adult reskilling is vital to economic growth, productivity and national renewal, this recognition has not been matched by a corresponding financial commitment from the Department for Education.

In recent months, strategies across government including the Industrial Strategy, DWP's Connect to Work initiative, the Immigration White Paper, and various health and defence initiatives, have all rightly identified skills as critical to their success. Yet the Department for Education continues to operate without a dedicated adult skills strategy, making it difficult to justify or direct investment where it is urgently needed.

While we welcome the 2.3 per cent real-terms increase in departmental budgets and the additional £1.3 billion for young people and apprenticeships, the Spending Review once again sidelines adult learners. Children's services are rightly a priority, but the persistent neglect of adult education is not merely short-sighted - it is reckless. The UK is facing significant shortages in critical sectors such as construction, health, digital and green technologies but without targeted action to support all adult learners and not just those who have already benefited the most, we risk undermining our collective ambitions for recovery, resilience and long-term prosperity.

To return adult learning participation to 2010 levels alone would require at least £5 billion in additional investment. This figure does not even begin to address the wider skills gap identified by Skills England. We must urgently shift resources away from costly, inflexible programmes and toward models that work - those that are place based, inclusive, and focused on enabling people to re-engage, build confidence, and progress into sustainable employment.

Beyond the economic rationale, adult education supports social inclusion, wellbeing, and civic participation. The UK is being left behind by other countries including those who have different political positions such as Sweden, Singapore and China and who are significantly increasing their investment in adult learning, recognising that doing so strengthens both national resilience and individual potential. Adult Education provides the foundation that many adults need to progress towards the labour market and once they successfully gain employment, we provide them the skills to progress within their occupation.

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Adult education plays a vital role in contributing to the Government's five priorities.

Kickstart the Economy: As industries evolve and the labour market shifts, retraining and upskilling has never been more important. The Spending Review, unfortunately, misses this broader vision. It reduces skills to a series of disconnected initiatives, scattered across departments, with no clear long-term plan. We urge you to influence the DfE's business planning process to reframe adult education as a strategic national investment, one that enables adults to make a good living as a tradesperson, build homes, deliver net-zero targets, and alleviate pressure on public services.

Become a Green Energy superpower: The World Economic Forum's "Future of Jobs Report 2023" highlights that green jobs are among the fastest growing and most resilient sectors in the European economy. The UK government's goal to become a "green energy superpower" cannot be achieved without substantial investment in green skills training. Adult learning colleges are ideally positioned to help learners acquire skills in renewable energy technologies and sustainability practices. If we are serious about becoming a green energy leader, adults must have access to training to participate in this sector.

Breakdown barriers to opportunity: Adult education is pivotal in offering communities a sense of belonging and enabling them to integrate into UK society.

Building an NHS fit for the future: The NHS is under increasing strain, and adult education helps tackle the projected shortage of 1.3 million healthcare workers by 2030. Moreover, it acts as a preventative mechanism for improving mental and physical wellbeing, reducing pressure on NHS services. Beyond directly supporting healthcare professionals, adult education also improves the overall wellbeing of the population. The Learning and Work Institute recently found that 43 per cent of adult learners reported improved mental wellbeing after participating in education or training. Many healthcare providers prescribe adult learning to support individuals with mild to moderate mental health challenges, further reducing pressure on NHS services.

Take back our street: Building safer communities requires more than policing; it requires giving people the tools to build better lives. Adult education can reduce crime and enhance social cohesion by offering employment pathways to those at risk of falling into poverty or criminality.

Courses in social work and community services provide the skills to support vulnerable populations. Additionally, adult education programs in digital literacy and critical thinking can combat disinformation and misinformation and foster stronger communities. By teaching adults how to identify credible information and engage constructively online, we can help create more united neighbourhoods.

I welcome the commitment to a forthcoming strategy for post-16 education and skills later this year. I sincerely hope this will include a bold, well-resourced and coherent adult skills strategy, with clearly defined roles for government, employers and individuals.

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By investing in adult skills, we invest in people, in the community. It is a failure to recognise the value of social cohesion, intergenerational learning, raising attainment levels of young people through educating and upskilling their support network and creating a civic society. Adult education isn't an extra - it's essential.

Yours sincerely,



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