

**Written evidence submitted by The West Midlands Combined Authority Adult and Community Learning Alliance (ACLA) on behalf of West Midlands Combined Authority**

**Closing the Learning Gap – Opening Up Opportunities for Adults**

The purpose of this call for evidence is to gather the views of key stakeholders, partners and providers on their top priorities for adult learning in 2016 and over the next 5 - 10 years.

The deadline for written evidence is 20 May 2016.

**When responding please state whether you are responding as an individual or representing the views of an organisation.**

*Please tick the appropriate boxes below*

	I am responding as an individual
What is your name, job title, address, email and telephone number?	
√	I am responding as an organisation
What is your name, job title, address, email and telephone number?	
Joanne Keatley Principal of Birmingham Adult Education Service Birmingham Aston Learning Centre 99, Whitehead Road, Aston, Birmingham B6 6EJ	

Please tick a box from the list of options below that best describes you as a respondent.

	Business representative organisation/trade body
<input type="checkbox"/>	Business

	Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)
√	Local Authority/ Combined Authority
	Local authority provider of adult and community learning
	Specialist designated institution
	FE College
	FE sector representative organisation/trade body
	FE independent learning provider
	Higher Education Institution
	FE charitable or not-for-profit learning provider
	Other education (please describe)
	Trade union or staff association
	Charity or social enterprise
	Student representative body
	Individual
	Policy adviser (please specify area of interest)
	Other (please describe)

### **Introduce yourself**

I am representing the collective response of the West Midlands Combined Authority, specifically the Adult and Community Learning Alliance (ACLA). ACLA is an informal alliance of 6 local authority adult education providers: Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton.

### **Executive summary**

- Many things are working well in the sector for adult learners but stability in funding and a smooth transition to a devolved Adult Education Budget are essential for the future.
- The contribution of adult learning to improving health and well-being (which are prerequisites for progression into and within employment) is very significant and needs to be recognised in future devolution arrangements.
- Partnerships are strong, particularly to support unemployed adults with low skills and low/no qualifications into work. Strong partnerships with

Public Health are essential for improved health and well-being for adults and their families.

- Achievement rates, wider outcomes and learner satisfaction rates are all high in Adult Learning and the Pounds Plus model works well in Community Learning to demonstrate added value.

**Written submissions are invited addressing the following points:**

**What is working well and/or not working well with regards to adult education in England?**

<b>Working well</b>	<b>Not working well</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good reach into disadvantaged communities and good engagement of disadvantaged groups (mental health, ALDD, newly arrived)</li> <li>• Highly personalised approach to learning - tailored to individual needs</li> <li>• HE in FE – cost effective, gives access to non-traditional students, good support</li> <li>• Employability partnership working – institution, JCP and employers</li> <li>• Recruitment of staff from non-traditional backgrounds</li> <li>• Partnership work with VCOS to engage hardest to reach</li> <li>• Localism – drive to get providers to work more collaboratively to use their funding in amore aligned way to meet local needs is gathering momentum</li> <li>• Contribution of adult learning to health and well-being outcomes (especially mental health)</li> <li>• Good quality provision demonstrated by high achievement rates and positive Ofsted outcomes nationally for local authority providers and many FE and SDI providers.</li> </ul> <p><b>Specific to West Midlands Combined Authority ACLA:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear aim of creating jobs, enhancing skills, developing prosperity and driving economic growth through the delivery of a coherent programme of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large number of providers with financial difficulties – reduced funding, rising employer costs</li> <li>• Lack of funding stability over past 5 years has not been helpful in ensuring continuity of service and a positive image for the sector. The Autumn Spending Review in November 2015 provided a welcomed opportunity to stabilise, but failed to take account of rising employer costs (including apprenticeship levy)</li> <li>• Low proportion of men engaged in adult learning provision - curriculum offer is often “feminised ” through lack of resources</li> <li>• Shift of funding to apprenticeships and low take up of apprenticeships – not always an appropriate route many low skills adults</li> <li>• High level of “out of area” delivery by providers and no information, or influence /control over out-of-area providers who deliver within LA and LEP areas</li> <li>• Insufficient staffing capacity to meet needs and deliver high quality English and Maths</li> <li>• Plethora of academic staff contracts and salary arrangements – salaries in ACL sector are low compared to FE colleges which makes retention and recruitment of staff difficult</li> <li>• Quality assurance not strong where there is a high level of subcontracting</li> </ul>

<b>Working well</b>	<b>Not working well</b>
<p>community based adult learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear focus on the need to provide learning opportunities for adults with low or no qualifications and skills and those who are disadvantaged and vulnerable.</li> <li>• Quality of provision with 2 Ofsted outstanding and 4 good providers in the group.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insufficient investment in leadership development in ACL sector</li> <li>• ACL infrastructure is generally under resourced – strapped Local Authorities, no access to capital funding in past, no financial reserves to draw on, salaries low</li> <li>• Accommodation utilisation generally low</li> <li>• Level 3 loans policy – unmitigated disaster! Participation by adults (especially women from disadvantaged communities) in L3 learning has declined dramatically since introduction of loans. No amount of marketing or selling the benefits of funding learning through loans will address the fact many of the target learners are from low income groups and already in debt</li> <li>• Governance arrangements in LA ACL sector are patchy</li> <li>• National providers like WEA not in on Localism agenda – operating in isolation</li> </ul>

**What policies and/or practices best motivate disadvantaged adults to engage in adult learning?**

- Engagement activities in community settings – family learning, outreach and partnerships with VCSOs
- Financial support for travel, childcare, course and accreditation fees
- Creating a welcoming, inclusive and supportive environment in local learning environments
- Having a positive learning experience
- Adult pedagogy with tutors professionally trained to teach and assess adults
- Learning with others who are returning to learning, re-skilling and overcoming health and well-being issues.
- Respect for diversity and equality of opportunity
- Personalised support to achieve their learning goals
- High quality impartial advice and guidance that enables adult learners to see their pathway to a better future – better health, better prospects, greater contribution to their community and locality.
- Opportunities to volunteer and undertake meaningful work experience
- Line of sight to positive progression and improved prospects

## **Do we have a sufficient demand-led approach to adult education? If not, what more needs to be done?**

- The devolution of the Adult Education Budget to Combined Authorities and areas with devolution deals should progress the journey to a more demand led approach to adult education. It should lead to more appropriate, better-targeted and higher quality support for inclusive economic growth and better places to live in.

## **What evidence is there on the impact, added-value and/or cost-effectiveness of adult education?**

FE Choices survey results in 2014/15 show

1. Community Learning Satisfaction Survey 2014 to 2015 published end of October 2015 - 32,300 learners from 185 providers participated:
  - 94% **would recommend their course or activity** to a friend or relative
  - Three-quarters had acquired **new knowledge and skills**
  - Over a third were **more likely to progress to another course**
  - A third had **gained more confidence**.
  - Over a quarter were more likely to **get a job or progress at work** as a result of taking their course
  - For nearly two thirds the main outcome was they had **gained more skills or knowledge**
  - For those aged over 40 the second most frequently cited outcome was an improvement in **health and wellbeing**
  - Those under 40 years old were more likely to identify **progression on to another course**
  - For the West Midlands Combined Authority ACLA group: FE Choices survey results showed learner satisfaction to range from **9.1 to 9.3 out of 10** for ACLA members.
2. Pound Plus and Value for Money
  - The 'Pound Plus' strategy is embedded in many community learning providers as a way to show how they are maximising the value of public investment. Generating additional income and revenue is central to the objective of driving up participation within a very constrained public funding environment.
  - For the West Midlands Combined Authority ACLA group: Pounds Plus calculations show that 18% value is added to the combined Community Learning funding of the combined authority footprint.
3. Lots of evidence via surveys from NIACE reports, BIS report 2013

**Name three major policy developments necessary to secure the future of adult learning in 2016 and over the next 5 -10 years?**

- Policy to explicitly link value of learning on health – including mental health – ageing, immigration, social cohesion and family support.
- Policy to ensure better support for disabled people and those with health conditions – gaining traction for Internships for disabled people in the workplace
- Policy for funding stability – no more shifting of funding to apprenticeships; reinstate funding 19+ for L2 and L3 (rethink on loans); give ESOL parity of entitlement to full funding - in line with Maths and English.

	If your submission is confidential and you do not want it published please tick the box.
√	Please confirm that have read the Terms of Reference and Guidelines on written submissions at: <a href="http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/research/wea/call_for_evidence/">http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/research/wea/call_for_evidence/</a>