

Adult Education

The Centenary Commission on Adult Education has [published](#) a report entitled, *Adult Education and Lifelong Learning for 21ST Century Britain*. The commission emerged from adult educators, recognising the historical importance of the 1919 Ministry of Reconstruction Adult Education Committee's Final Report, setting up the Adult Education 100 campaign, setting out a vision for life-wide adult education for the century ahead.

Funding for adult learning and apprenticeships has fallen by 45% in real terms since 2009-10, cutting adult education participation dramatically. The report argues that adult education and lifelong learning must be a permanent national necessity, an inseparable aspect of citizenship, vital to addressing the huge societal divisions and challenges to democracy we currently face.

Key Recommendations:

Framing and delivering a national ambition

- The Government should create an **Adult Education & Lifelong Learning Strategy**, with a participation target to reduce the gap between the most and least educationally active.
- A **Minister with specific responsibility for Adult Education and Lifelong Learning** should be appointed, and report annually to Parliament on progress.
- Adult Learning Partnerships should be established at regional and sub-regional levels, bringing together local and regional government, universities and colleges, community and educational groups, and local employers
- Funding of £250m pa to provide adult education should be restored to local authorities. Adult education should once more become one of their statutory responsibilities
- Funding for Adult community education services and Further Education Colleges should be increased by £1bn pa, and rebalanced towards those who have previously missed out
- Government should provide an additional £50m pa funding for organisations – such as the **WEA** and other Institutes of Adult Learning – that make a contribution of national significance to adult education.
- The **Office for Students**, should require any organisation that wishes to describe itself as a University to provide adult education and lifelong learning, of types appropriate to their role in the local community, compensating for past disadvantages, and utilising radical and engaged forms of education.
- There should be national information campaigns, motivating people to engage in lifelong learning

Ensuring Basic Skills

- An Adult Basic Skills Strategy should form part of the national Adult Education & Lifelong Learning Strategy. Such a strategy would build on the success of the Skills for Life Programme of the early 2000s. This would address the basic skills needed for the changing nature of the workplace, and help close the gap in terms of prior educational attainment – thereby addressing issues of area and neighbourhood social exclusion.

Fostering Community, Democracy and Dialogue

- We support the proposal from the commission chaired by Sir Vince Cable for **Individual Learning Accounts**. In addition we believe there should be a Community Learning Account of £50m pa, rising to £100m over three years, administered by the Adult Learning Partnerships, which will ensure that funding is made available to informal, community-based learning initiatives led by local groups.
- Further education colleges should be mandated to have representation on their Boards from the local authority, community organisations, and trades unions.

Promoting creativity, innovation and informal learning

- Establish an Innovation and Development Fund of £50m pa, rising over three years to £100m pa, to support innovation in community and informal education, and to ensure the spread of best practice.
- A non-profit institution (possibly the **Open University**) should be funded to provide a trusted digital platform accessible to all publicly supported providers of adult education – to prioritise the interests of the individual learner and community-based learning initiatives

Attending the world of work

- As part of enriching the learning dimension of working life for all, employers should provide paid time off work for learning.
- Employers should facilitate the presence and work of learning representatives in all workplaces. The introduction and operation of ‘union learning representatives’ has generally been regarded as a success.
- Employers should be required to report annually on their spending on employee education and training; these figures should be broken down in order to show spending on the top 20% of earners and the bottom 20% within their organisation.
- In many large workplaces the primary employer makes good provision for adult learning, but much of the workforce may be employed by subcontractors: ‘contract compliance’ should be used to ensure the same opportunities are available to all.

- Funding is needed for those in the 'gig economy' to access education and training with no loss of earnings; if this cannot be covered by the Individual and Community Learning Accounts, then an education maintenance allowance should be made available.

STAKEHOLDER REACTION

Dame Helen Ghosh, Master of Balliol College, Oxford and Chair of the Commission said:

'There is a national consensus in favour of adult education and lifelong learning. We need the next government to step up to the challenge, and deliver what is, in the words of the 1919 Report and today's Report, "A Permanent National Necessity". In meetings across the country our Commission found a huge appetite for adult education and lifelong learning - we saw evidence of communities being brought together through imaginative educational initiatives; new groups being formed to analyse and discuss the issues of the day, including the climate crisis; and a desire to understand and prepare for the changing world of work, including amongst those in the 'gig economy' for whom provision at present is scant. Our Commission's recommendations would address all these needs.'

CBI Vice President and Commission member Lord Bilimoria said:

"I commend this Report for showing the way, and I call on the next government to implement its proposals. Serving on the Centenary Commission has been fascinating - such a range of social, economic, political and demographic challenges to tackle, with local contexts so important - and such inspiring examples from across the country of what could be achieved, if only we had a coherent national strategy with the funding and political will to deliver on the ground. Education is so important to us all, as individuals, and as members of our communities. And with the rapidly changing nature of work, with new technological developments continually emerging over the horizon, education for work needs to rise to the challenge - developing capabilities of team working, critical thinking, and reasoning. That's what's needed for our economy, our communities, our society and our democracy."

Welcoming the Report, the Chief Economist of the Bank of England Andy Haldane said:

"This Report contains powerful and compelling recommendations for transforming and embedding adult education. It is an ambitious blueprint, but circumstances today and especially tomorrow call for no less. For three centuries, the UK's education system has had a singular - and very successful - focus: developing cognitive skills in the young. That model is not fit for tomorrow's purpose. The education system of tomorrow needs to span the generational spectrum - young to old - and the skills spectrum - cognitive to vocational to interpersonal. The economic benefits of doing so are crystal clear. The social and civic benefits are greater still.

Social problems of disadvantage, disconnection and division loom large - adult education is one means of tackling those three d's at source."

Sir Vince Cable said

"I warmly welcome the Report of the Centenary Commission on adult Education. Adult education has never been more important and yet it is in decline and is poorly supported by Government. There is great merit in the idea of equipping adults with a learning account which can be used for adult studies as people progress through life. Today's skills and qualifications will often become redundant and we need a mechanism, through adult education, to help people adapt."

Jo Cain, Deputy CEO of the WEA, said:

"We are operating in difficult times, socially and politically and the Centenary Commission's report offers a vision for adult education that meets the needs of communities and individuals across the country to overcome the challenges we currently face. We hope that this new report is recognised by government in the same way as the 1919 report which gave government, national and local, a direct responsibility for ensuring the adequate supply of adult education to tackle the massive social, economic and political challenges of the time. Especially given that today the numbers of adults learners and the funding they receive are at an all-time low, despite the enormous impact of adult education on our society."

"We are delighted that the WEA were involved in the Centenary Commission through our CEO Ruth Spellman as our founder Albert Mansbridge played a key role in the Ministry of Reconstruction's Adult Education Committee back in 1919."