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Lord Jamieson
House of Lords
SW1A 0PW

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'De James'.

12 May 2025

During the debate on 6 May relating to the transfer of Adult Education Functions to Cornwall, East Midlands and York and North Yorkshire, I committed to write to you to clarify central government requirements on local areas to deliver national programmes with their devolved Adult Skills Fund allocation, and how much of that funding remains for local areas to spend on other priorities.

The Adult Skills Fund is not ring-fenced, and local areas have the freedom to decide how they will invest this funding to meet their skills priorities.

However, this government has been clear that a consistent overall adult learning offer on essential skills provision also needs to be retained nationally. That is why, as part of their devolution deals, local areas assume the duties set out in statute around providing free courses for adults using Adult Skills Funding to deliver national Statutory Entitlements for free English, maths, digital, first full Level 2 and first full Level 3 provision for 19-23 year olds.

Across all ten existing Mayoral Strategic Authorities, a total of £798m was made available in the academic year 2023/24 in devolved Adult Skills Funding. Of this, the Department for Education estimates that around £127m (16%) was spent on Statutory Entitlements, leaving a large portion of the budget to spend how they want. And indeed, many devolved areas are choosing to increase the eligibility thresholds beyond those set nationally, so that more adults in their local area can access this provision.

Devolved areas also receive delegated funding for Free Courses for Jobs and Skills Bootcamps. In the English Devolution White Paper published in December 2024, we committed to combine and un-ringfence funding for the Adult Skills Fund, Free Courses for Jobs, and Skills Bootcamps from 2026/27 onwards for Mayoral Strategic Authorities. This aims to give even more flexibility to local areas to deliver adult skills provision that is best for their local area.

In the corresponding House of Commons debate on 1 April 2025, Minister Daby was asked a similar question by the member for Harborough, Oadby and Wigston, relating to funding for statutory entitlements. I have attached her letter for information.

Further information about Adult Skills Fund, the associated statutory entitlements, and reporting requirements for devolved local areas on spend and outcomes is available at the following:

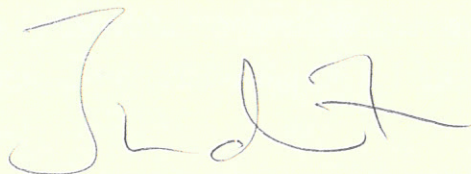
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adult-skills-fund-funding-rules-for-2024-to-2025/adult-skills-fund-funding-rules-2024-to-2025#section-2--esfa-funded-asf>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adult-education-budget-devolved-grant-determination-letters-2023>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-accountability-framework/english-devolution-accountability-framework#accountability-to-government-1>

I hope this clarification is helpful on the important points that you raised, and I will place a copy of this letter in the House library.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. Blake', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Baroness Blake of Leeds, CBE