

Mr Dominic Hastings
Deputy Director
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

18 May 2020

Dear Mr Hastings,

West Yorkshire Adult Education Budget Readiness Conditions

The West Yorkshire Combined Authority is now moving forward, at pace, with plans to progress the 'minded to' devolution deal announced in the Chancellor's Budget on 11 March. A critically important element of that Deal was securing greater control and influence over the skills system in our region through devolution of the Adult Education Budget. I can confirm to you that the West Yorkshire Combined Authority will be ready to take on responsibility for, and improve the exercising of, statutory AEB functions from the academic year 2021/22.

This is an important time for West Yorkshire and the wider City Region, and skills are central to our ambition to be a globally recognised region with a strong, successful economy where everyone can build great businesses, careers and lives. As we work to support the region's workforce of 1.1 million people and some 90,000 businesses out of the unprecedented economic crisis resulting from the COVID-19 lockdown, boosting skills and access to training schemes will be central to developing resilient and thriving businesses as part of an inclusive economy which provides people with a decent standard of living.

We have provided today an early draft of our AEB Strategic Skills Plan (SSP), which starts to set out how we will exercise our statutory functions and deliver better outcomes for our residents. Our AEB SSP forms a key part of the Combined Authority's Strategic Economic Framework, at the heart of which sits the Leeds City Region Local Industrial Strategy, a long-term plan to boost productivity, skills and jobs.

We will be consulting on the draft SSP over the coming months, and the final priorities, actions and outcomes will be informed by residents of the region who will most benefit from this refreshed approach to skills delivery. This consultation will help inform our current thinking on commissioning AEB provision for 2021/22 while maintaining stability in our post 16 provider base. We will be working with key stakeholders and providers across the region to ensure that our future offer meets the needs of businesses and residents, supported by evidence based policies and robust procedures.

Also included here is the required suite of documents setting out our organisational readiness for devolution of AEB, demonstrating our understanding of the work and resources required to be ready for delivery from 2021/22. We enclose our self-assessment evidence checklist, which demonstrates the progress we have made to

date. We have embedded where helpful, current processes and procedures, and provided early drafts of AEB related documentation where available, and we will keep DfE informed as they progress.

We are committed to enabling the funding to be transferred and to be an effective skills commissioning organisation. We are now actively looking to recruit into specific AEB posts in core corporate functions to deliver this, as set out in our bid for implementation funding submitted in March. These include a dedicated AEB Manager role to provide strategic oversight and direction of implementation and delivery.

This recruitment is supported by a pan-organisational AEB Project Board comprising key workstream leads who will be supporting AEB implementation activity so that they understand their responsibilities in relation to the AEB and that they are sufficiently resourced to support it.

We continue to develop our relationships with other Mayoral Combined Authorities, building on networks to share good practice and lesson learned and have recently joined the MCA / ESFA 'AEB Policy Implementation and Operations Group'. We will have an agile and responsive skills system that supports communities, progression, good jobs with better pay, apprenticeships and higher-level skills acquisition which together support our economic ambitions.

Although well placed to deliver what will be a challenging process we do not underestimate the risks of AEB devolution. I am confident that with our well-established transparent governance, risk management, appraisal, contract and programme management functions underpinned by a clear plan of how AEB will be embedded and resourced, we will be ready to commence delivery from the academic year 2021/22.

We look forward to working with the Department and the ESFA on the implementation of AEB devolution, and on the wider skills and employment agenda across West Yorkshire to drive inclusive economic growth.

Should you have any questions in relation to our submission, Michelle Burton (Head of Employment & Skills) will be able to assist: michelle.burton@westyorks-ca.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,



Ben Still
Managing Director