

Skills for Londoners

Heart of London response to the Greater London Authority draft Skills and Adult Education Strategy for London

January 2018

About us

Heart of London Business Alliance serves as the voice for 500 businesses and 100 property owners in the Piccadilly & St James's and Leicester Square areas. Our purpose is to support the commercial wellbeing of the businesses and organisations we represent, and ensure our areas remain integral to London's West End offer as a place for people to visit, live, trade and work.

Summary of draft strategy

The Mayor has published a draft of a Skills and Adult Education Strategy for London. The strategy looks to ensure that all Londoners have the skills they need to succeed economically and in wider society, and for businesses to have access to a pool of talent to compete in the global market. The strategy outlines plans to create a post-16 technical and vocational education and skills system that meets the needs of Londoners and businesses.

The strategy calls on London's businesses, of all sizes and sectors, to outline what they need and what they can contribute to build the workforce of the future.

Our response

We welcome the publication of this strategy, particularly its recognition of the strategic importance of the tourism and culture industries. Heart of London will look to embrace the opportunities presented by the new initiatives to shape skills policy and adult education for these sectors. The strategy identifies tourism as one of the key strategic growth sectors for investment, and we will look to represent the industry to support the GLA to design and deliver training to meet identified gaps. We know that getting more Londoners passionate about customer facing roles in retail, hospitality and tourism is vital to the continued prosperity of the West End.

Detailed responses

The strategy identifies three principles to guide a new skills and adult education offer in London; below we respond to each of these principles in turn:

1. Empower all Londoners to access the education and skills to participate in society and progress in education and in work

We welcome the focus on skills for all ages of the workforce. The new all-age careers information, advice and guidance service that better responds to local economic and social needs is especially welcome, and we would look to incorporate the hospitality sector into the options available for this service.

2. Meet the needs of London's economy and employers, now and in the future

Heart of London supports the creation of a London sector-skills board to advise on aligning skills provision with industry requirements in key sectors in London. We particularly welcome that the tourism and culture industries are identified amongst key sectors with significant growth potential and opportunity for impactful investment.

Heart of London represents key sectors of the West End, the heart of the capital's tourism offer. With a wide and unique cultural, hospitality, office and retail offer, Heart of London is best placed to support the strategy's vision for providing the skills that these sectors need. We would therefore ask that Heart of London be considered for a place on the London sector-skills board as the representative of leaders in these key industries to London's future.

We also welcome the promotion of investment in skills and workforce development (including apprenticeships), as well as the commitment to working with further strategic sectors in London to improve the relevance and quality of training to meet skills needs. Many of the businesses we represent are particularly concerned about the post-Brexit implications for skilled staff in the hospitality sector. We want to work with our members, the GLA and Government to ensure that we promote the hospitality sector as a desirable career for Londoners, boost the skills of those entering the industry and retain staff through a clear and aspirational career path.

3. Deliver a strategic city-wide technical skills and adult education offer

We support the strategy's aim to create a more collaborative and strategic skills system in London, which considers London's specialisms in close partnership with providers. Representing the wide range of industries that we do, we believe that a collaborative and strategic approach from the GLA, with partners such as Heart of London, would benefit all of the businesses we represent.

The London Skills and Employment Knowledge Hub proposed in the strategy we believe will be important to help identify the shortages that already exist in some industries, as well as help identify those areas where the existing shortages could be exacerbated in the future. As we have said, particularly in the hospitality sector there already exists a shortage of skilled staff, to have this problem monitored will measure the success of the policies outlined in this strategy, as well as the impact of external shocks such as Brexit.

Conclusion

We broadly support the policies outlined in this strategy. We know that changing skills requirements, due to both technological change and the threat to the availability of talent following Brexit, are key challenges for employers in London. We are pleased that the strategy acknowledges particular concerns for those sectors that rely on migrants from the EU such as hospitality and construction where a third of the current workforces are EU nationals; London already has demand for higher level skills and over a fifth of London's employers report that vacancies are hard to fill due to skills shortages.

Heart of London would welcome the opportunity to contribute to particular strategies to directly address skills shortages in the industries we represent; specifically, we would ask that Heart of London be considered for a place on the London sector-skills board.