



Industrial Communities Alliance

The all-party association campaigning on behalf of local authorities in the industrial areas of England, Scotland and Wales

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Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP
Secretary of State
Department for Education

Email to: sec-of-state.ps@education.gov.uk

26 June 2023

Dear Secretary of State,

Apprenticeships

I wanted to draw your attention to the attached report – *Vocation, Vocation, Vocation: making the apprenticeship system work for Britain's older industrial areas*.

I'm told that one of our team (Chris Whitwood) handed you a copy at the recent Northern Research Group conference in Doncaster so the report may not in fact be entirely new to you.

I chair the Industrial Communities Alliance, the all-party association of local authorities in the industrial areas of England, Scotland and Wales. At regional and national meetings over the last year we've given particular attention to apprenticeship.

The shortcomings in the apprenticeship system have agitated officers and elected members from around the country but we've also been heartened by the NRG's call for renewed emphasis on vocational training. As the report explains, our older industrial areas, perhaps more than most, would benefit from improvements in the present system.

In the report we set out six proposals:

- Support the call for vocational training to be placed on an equal footing with academic qualifications

- Establish a national partnership bringing together employers, unions and government
- Remodel the Apprenticeship Levy as a skills fund
- Reserve the 'apprenticeship' label for higher-level training
- Devolve FE and skills funding in England
- Establish an expert body to oversee investment in skills

The feedback we've received is that these proposals command a wide body of cross-party support. At the moment we've distributed the report to quite a number of interested players but not yet released it to the media.

We would be keen to open up a dialogue with your department on apprenticeships. I'd be only too pleased to meet you to discuss the issues but I suspect that a discussion with your officials might be the best first step. Perhaps your officials could contact our National Secretariat (see the letterhead for details) to explore the possibilities.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keith Cunliffe". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cllr Keith Cunliffe
National Chair