

Adult Education Budget Evaluation 2022-23: Overview of Findings and GLA Response

The Mayor welcomes the key findings from the 2022-23 Adult Education Budget (AEB) Evaluation report which marks another year of successful AEB delivery to Londoners following delegation of this budget to City Hall. Policy changes and flexibilities introduced by the Mayor for 2022-23 further improved accessibility and supported more Londoners, particularly those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, to benefit from various training courses and progress into further studies or work.

The report uses quantitative analysis of AEB Individualised Learner Record (ILR) data since the 2019-20 academic year, combined with GLA administrative data and qualitative insights from in-depth interviews with 20 AEB-funded providers, 20 learners and 3 stakeholders. This evaluation report outlines several key successes and areas for attention for the GLA which are summarised below.

Key Findings

The post-Covid 19 rebound which began in 2021/22 strengthened in 2022/23.

After learner numbers reduced between 2018/19 and 2020/21, learning aim starts were at 473,000 during 2022/23, a 4 percentage-point increase since 2021/22, and the highest since devolution in 2019/20. The volume of learners who started a learning aim increased by 3 percentage points (Adult Skills) and 5 percentage points (Community Learning).

Overall, providers were satisfied with the fourth year of AEB delegation. Key areas of satisfaction were the delivery team relationships, GLA's collaborative approach, and the consultation that informed policies. Providers were positive about having their own Delivery Manager, and felt communication was consistent or had improved over the last year. Providers were positive about GLA communications and felt the approach had improved since AEB delegation. They particularly liked the provider forums/ webinars and welcomed the increase in these during 2022/23.

Evidence on policies such as the Level 3 flexibility, the non-formula funding flexibility and full funding for learners receiving below the London Living Wage (LLW) shows increasing provision during 2022/23, aligned with the overall objectives of improving access to learning for disadvantaged groups, improving local flexibility and supporting economic recovery. However, there continues to be a risk that some providers lack capacity to expand future provision at Levels 3 and 4 due to issues such as staff recruitment challenges.

In line with strategic objectives to improve the accessibility of adult education and skills for more disadvantaged Londoners, **this increased participation is being successfully targeted at Londoners who are unemployed or are employed below the LLW**, as shown by the increasing proportion of learners who are fully funded through the LLW full entitlement.

ILR analysis shows a continuing focus on learners from ethnic minorities (who are more likely to be in the low-income, disadvantaged groups that the GLA is seeking to support). While the data indicates a slight increase in the proportion of AEB-funded learners who are disabled, this is still an area that warrants additional focus from the GLA and providers.

Areas for attention

- 1. Continued dialogue and consultation with providers and their stakeholders.** Stakeholders in particular welcomed the GLA's partnership-based approach to working with the adult education sector and appreciated that the GLA has listened and acted on feedback. Some of the providers who took part in the interviews or survey would like more frequent forums and webinars from the GLA.

GLA response Regular mechanisms are in place to have discussions with providers which include webinars and face-to-face meetings. These enable the GLA to explain clearly any rule changes and new policies whilst taking the views of providers into account. Any new policy changes that are introduced are shaped by early engagement with providers to ensure that they are implementable. The GLA has started to bring providers together to share best practice where they face common challenges, for example, in administering the London Learner Survey, which was introduced following extensive consultation with providers.

- 2. Simplification of the AEB funding rules enabling greater flexibility to respond to learner and employer needs.** Similar to previous years, some providers felt that simplification would improve their capacity to use the funds flexibly, and therefore more effectively, for example through greater local flexibility.

GLA response The GLA funding rules have been substantially revised which has enabled providers to use funds more flexibly. We continue to work with the DfE to influence further changes which can streamline the rules which we cannot introduce on our own. To improve readability of the funding rule we have moved some very detailed information into appendices.

- 3. Higher performance thresholds** for providers that are over delivering. Similar to 2021/22, in the qualitative interviews, providers who regularly met delivery targets expressed a desire to see higher thresholds for over-performance to incentivise and reward high-performing providers, and stimulate growth in provision.

GLA response Within the context of tightening budgets the GLA has continued to provide over payments where providers have exceeded their original targets due to learner need. In 2023/24 the GLA paid several providers up to 103% of delivery where they have over performed. In addition, the GLA continues to make the case for a fairer funding settlement for London so that the skills needs of Londoners can be met as there is currently not enough skills supply to meet the demand for growth.