

Adult Education Budget Evaluation 2023/24

Greater London Authority

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1 Executive Summary

Since August 2019, the Mayor of London has been responsible for the capital's share of the Adult Education Budget (AEB), allocating funding to providers and setting priorities regarding adult education and skills. The overarching aim of delegation is to align adult learning and skills funding policy and programmes with regional skills priorities and local learner needs.

This report is part of a series that is produced for the AEB evaluation. It is based on secondary analysis of data from the Individualised Learner Record (ILR), together with qualitative analysis of interviews with AEB-funded providers and learners, employers, adult learning sector representative bodies, and a discussion with AEB provider managers.

Learner volumes and enrolments

In 2023/24 **enrolments were at the highest level they have been since the AEB budget was delegated** to the GLA in 2019/20, standing at 488,000 in total. This represents a 15% increase in enrolments since 2019/20, showing the AEB is delivering strongly against aims by providing an increasing amount of provision for adults in London, despite no change in real terms funding. The majority of this increase has been driven by Adult Skills enrolments.

More learners are doing multiple courses, indicative of progression. The main increases have been at entry level (the 'gateway' level for many disadvantaged learners, especially with ESOL needs) and Level 3. Priority sector subject areas like Health, Public Services and Care, Construction, Planning and the Built Environment, and Arts, Media and Publishing (synonymous with the creative industries) have seen solid growth.

Data shows an increasing proportion of learners from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, and in the over-50s age bracket (although the latter continues to be under-represented compared with the London population overall).

For the first time since the AEB budget was delegated to the GLA, the total paid to providers in 2023/24 (£339m) exceeded the total funding allocation (£337m), driven by over-delivery in Adult Skills. This is reflective of the COVID-19 recovery that the GLA has supported but it also reflects that the funding received from government has not increased in line with inflation. While this recovery is positive, it is not sustainable for the GLA to support continuing over-delivery, without an increase in funding.

Learner outcomes

Taking part in AEB-funded learning has positive benefits for learners. The London Learner Survey (LLS) for 2022/23 shows that almost half of AEB-funded learners reported positive economic outcomes (46%), relating to moving into work, achieving better pay or a more secure job. Level 3 learners were more likely than average to report a positive economic outcome, while those who had completed Entry or Level 1 courses were more likely to report progression to further learning. This underlines the foundational nature of those courses, which can act as a gateway to higher levels.

Almost all AEB-funded learners (94%) reported a positive social outcome from learning, relating to factors like improved wellbeing, confidence and a wider social circle. Learners aged 50+ were more likely than average to report a positive social outcome, and there was only a marginal difference between learners who reported a health condition or disability, and those who did not, unlike with

economic outcomes where learners with a health condition or disability were less positive. This underlines the wider benefits of engaging in learning.

Policy flexibilities

Since delegation, the GLA has introduced a range of different policy flexibilities, which aim to support the contribution the AEB makes to meeting the strategic goals as set out in the [Mayor's Skills Roadmap](#). The **proportion of AEB learning delivery through policy flexibilities has increased every year**, from 10% to 22% in 2023/24. This demonstrates that a growing proportion of AEB-funded learning is being tailored to the GLA's specific priorities.

For example, in terms of the goal to **improve access to Level 2, 3 and 4 learning in key sectors, Free Courses for Jobs, Level 3** delivered another increase in enrolments in 2023/24 compared with the previous year. This flexibility has been positively received by providers, allowing them to develop higher level provision. However, many providers who took part in the qualitative research identified teacher recruitment and retention challenges as a possible obstacle to future expansion.

As an example of policy flexibilities making it **easier for Londoners in need to access AEB-funded provision**, the GLA has **removed the three-year residency requirement for Londoners on certain immigration schemes**, and introduced the 12 month permission to stay in the country requirement. This policy was well-received by providers as it enabled them to offer more ESOL, basic skills support, and skills provision to disadvantaged learners. Some providers suggested that removing the 12 month permission requirement would offer them even more scope to reach such learners. The London Factor uplift, increased in 2023/24, was also being used to support outreach and improve access for disadvantaged learners.

In terms of examples of **equipping disadvantaged adult Londoners with qualifications and learning that supports wellbeing, movement into work or progression in work, Funding for License to Practice accreditations in sectors like construction and hospitality** saw a continued increased enrolments in 2023/24. This is an important funding stream because it directly addresses employers' skills requirements and many providers have established links with relevant employers in order to funnel learners to job opportunities once they have completed the qualification. **Full funding for learners in receipt of less than the London Living Wage** is a key flexibility for the AEB, not only because it delivers the most enrolments compared to other flexibilities but also because the LLS shows that it tends to produce more positive outcomes compared with other Adult Skills enrolments. Over the five years that this flexibility has been used, enrolments have grown from 34,460 to 49,600 between 2019/20 and 2023/24, expanding the opportunity for learners earning a low income to achieve a positive economic or social outcome.

Jobs and Skills for Londoners

The Jobs and Skills for Londoners (JSfL) programme was introduced to provide training provision for Londoners who are out of work or in low-paid jobs to access training needed for positive economic and social outcomes.

In 2023/24, providers spent 90% of their JSfL funding, with 50% of provision focused in the five London priority sectors. A higher proportion of this provision was at Level 3 and Level 2, than AEB-funded learning overall, which is important when considering the future impact on learners' economic outcomes.

The evidence for 2023/24 shows that the programme is **effectively targeting key learner groups** including learners from Black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds, and disabled learners. It will be important to **increase participation among learners aged 50+**, who are under-represented among JSfL funded learning, despite being one of the priority groups.

Conclusions and areas for attention

Evidence over time 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** and a **growing share of participation in these flexibilities**.

Where there are increases in participation, the data shows these are being successfully targeted at Londoners who are unemployed or earn below the LLW, **in line with strategic objectives to improve the accessibility of adult education and skills for more disadvantaged Londoners**.

Analysis of participation in AEB-funded learning also shows a continuing focus on **learners from Black, Asian and other minoritised groups** (who are more likely to be in the low-income, disadvantaged groups that the GLA is seeking to support). The proportion of AEB-funded learners from these groups continues to outstrip the proportion in London as a whole. LLS data also shows that Black learners report more positive economic outcomes from their learning.

One group where the GLA may want to focus more attention is learners with **long-term health conditions and disabilities**. Participation data over time has shown only small increases in participation among this group. Programmes with specific job outcome targets, like the Jobs and Skills for Londoners programme, could include specific targets for learners with long-term health conditions and disabilities which reflect the additional support they may need.

Given that the LLS shows the most positive economic outcomes for Level 3 Adult Skills learning, the GLA should **consider expanding funding for those qualifications in priority sectors**. Funding for **licence to practice** courses in construction, and health and social care will become more important as these areas need more skilled workers in the coming years. Early years is another area where more recruits will be needed as the government's expanded childcare entitlements are rolled out.

Turning to medium-term objectives, these include:

- Increased collaboration between AEB providers, employers, community organisations and public bodies. The Jobs and Skills for Londoners programme is an example of where this is being achieved.
- Providers supporting Good Work and Net Zero ambitions for London, including supporting more Londoners into good jobs. Evidence from the LLS shows positive employment progression, while the Jobs and Skills for Londoners programme builds good work into its job outcomes targets.
- Equipping more disadvantaged Londoners from migrant groups with English language skills, and more disadvantaged Londoners to achieve vocational qualifications and develop work-related skills. Increasing participation in learning through flexibilities like removing the three-year residency requirement, has resulted in wider access to learning for London's migrant groups and increased ESOL participation. Furthermore, the combination of flexibilities, alongside employment-focused programmes like Jobs and Skills for Londoners, is delivering skills and qualifications in priority growth sectors.

- Supporting more Londoners to pursue learning that supports wellbeing and mental health. Evidence from the London Learner Survey shows that learners report positive social outcomes from their learning, across both Adult Skills and Community Learning.

A key longer-term aim of reforms to the AEB is for the GLA to be able to **target funding to the most impactful approaches**. Results from the LLS demonstrate that learner outcomes vary by provision and demographics. As this evidence builds over time, the GLA can use it to help target AEB provision to ensure that the economic and social benefits of adult learning are optimised for disadvantaged Londoners.

2 Introduction

Context

Delegation of funding for adult learning and skills

- 2.1 Since August 2019, the Mayor of London has been responsible for the capital's share of the Adult Education Budget (AEB), allocating funding to providers and setting priorities regarding adult education and skills. This covers skills provision for learners aged 19+ including Adult and Community Learning, but not apprenticeships. It is delivered by a broad range of providers, comprising general FE colleges, local authorities (LAs), Independent Training Providers (ITPs), Institutes of Adult Learning (IALs) and a small number of universities.
- 2.2 The overarching aim of delegation is to align adult learning and skills funding policy and programmes with regional skills priorities and local learner needs. This gives regional authorities more control so that they have a central role in reducing skills shortages, facilitating opportunities for learners to progress into 'good work' and improving social interaction and wellbeing within their local communities, through adult learning.
- 2.3 The Greater London Authority (GLA) allocates the vast majority of the AEB to approved providers as an annual block grant where the provider has freedom in what education and training to deliver as long as it complies with the AEB Funding Rules. The remainder of the AEB allocation is distributed through a mixture of grant agreements and funding that is awarded through a competitive tendering process. This report refers to the AEB as it is based on data for the academic year 2023/24. In 2024/25, the adult skills fund (ASF) has replaced the adult education budget (AEB).

Changes to the AEB in London: developments since delegation of the AEB

- 2.4 The GLA committed to maintaining stability for the sector during the transition to the delegated AEB, with reforms being introduced incrementally. The Mayor set out his priorities for skills and education in the Skills for Londoners Strategy and outlined how he plans to achieve his ambitions through the Skills for Londoners Framework.
- 2.5 In the first two years of delegation, the GLA prioritised ensuring continuity of provision during the COVID-19 pandemic, while making learning opportunities more accessible, supporting more disadvantaged adult Londoners to achieve basic skills qualifications and English language skills, and getting a better understanding of local skills needs and priorities.
- 2.6 Following widespread consultation with the sector, the GLA set out its [Skills Roadmap](#) in 2022. From 2021/22 onwards, the immediate need to maintain continuity of provision during COVID-19 receded and the priorities in the Skills Roadmap became even more important: ensuring more locally relevant skills; helping Londoners to lead happier and healthier lives; improving the accessibility of adult education and skills provision; and measuring the social and economic impacts of adult education and skills. Together with the Skills Roadmap, the employer-led [London Local Skills Improvement Plan](#) (LSIP) sets out plans for better matching training provision to employer demand.
- 2.7 The Theory of Change (ToC) for AEB delegation (see Appendix 1 to this report) reflects the priorities in the Skills Roadmap. Short-term outcomes include that Londoners are more easily

able to access training at Level 2, Level 3 and Level 4 focussed on sectors key to London's recovery; Londoners in need are more able to access funded AEB provision; and the overall quality of training delivered is improved and quality marked.

- 2.8 This evaluation sits alongside a wider programme of research and evaluation on the AEB and specific funding streams.

Methodology

- 2.9 This report brings together data from several published sources and internal GLA analysis, covering the academic years from 2019/20 to 2023/24. These summarise trends in AEB delivery in London, over time, linked to the priorities underpinning reforms to the AEB. This is supplemented by data from the Employer Skills Survey (ESS) and the London Learner Survey (LLS), where relevant, covering changes in employer skills needs and adult learning outcomes.
- 2.10 The quantitative analysis is accompanied by qualitative data based on depth interviews with 20 AEB-funded providers, conducted in August to September 2024. The qualitative interviews explored: providers' views of the impacts of AEB delegation to date, focusing on the 2023/24 academic year; future plans for delivery of AEB-funded provision; and their views of the GLA's management of the AEB. The provider interviews were evenly split between FE colleges, Independent Training Providers (ITPs), and local authorities, and between core grant recipients and procured providers. They included a subset of providers delivering the Jobs and Skills for Londoners programme.
- 2.11 There were also three interviews with provider representative bodies: the Association of Colleges (AoC), HOLEX representing adult and community learning providers, and the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) representing ITPs. These are referred to as stakeholders in the report. The provider and stakeholder research was complemented by a discussion with a small group of GLA officers, to better understand the policies implemented, and their intended purposes.
- 2.12 Between November 2024 and February 2025, eight AEB-funded learners took part in qualitative interviews about their learning journey, their experience of the course they had done, and subsequent outcomes related to employment, further learning, or wellbeing. These learners were purposively sampled based on their responses to the 2023/24 LLS follow-up survey. A learner focus group was also conducted.
- 2.13 In addition, in April-May 2025, interviews were conducted with 3 employers, who had either worked with London AEB providers or who had not done so but were open to this in future.

The structure of this report

- 2.14 This report is structured as follows:
- Chapter 3 summarises trends in AEB-funded provision and participation in AEB-funded learning, between 2019/20 and 2023/24, looking at whether any changes are in line with the GLA's priorities. It concludes by looking at overall economic and social outcomes reported in the London Learner Survey, a large-scale representative survey of AEB-funded learners across London.

- Chapter 4 explores the impacts of key policy flexibilities introduced by the GLA since 2019/20, drawing on ILR analysis as well as provider views from the qualitative interviews, and learner experience.
- Chapter 5 focuses on the Jobs and Skills for Londoners (JSfL) programme, drawing on the ILR, funding data, and a small number of qualitative interviews with JSfL providers and learners.
- Chapter 6 sets out conclusions and areas for attention.

2.15 Throughout the report, short vignettes developed from the qualitative interviews with learners and employers provide illustrative examples of outcomes from AEB-funded learning, and employer interactions with adult learning provision. All names have been changed to preserve anonymity.

3 Participation in AEB-funded learning

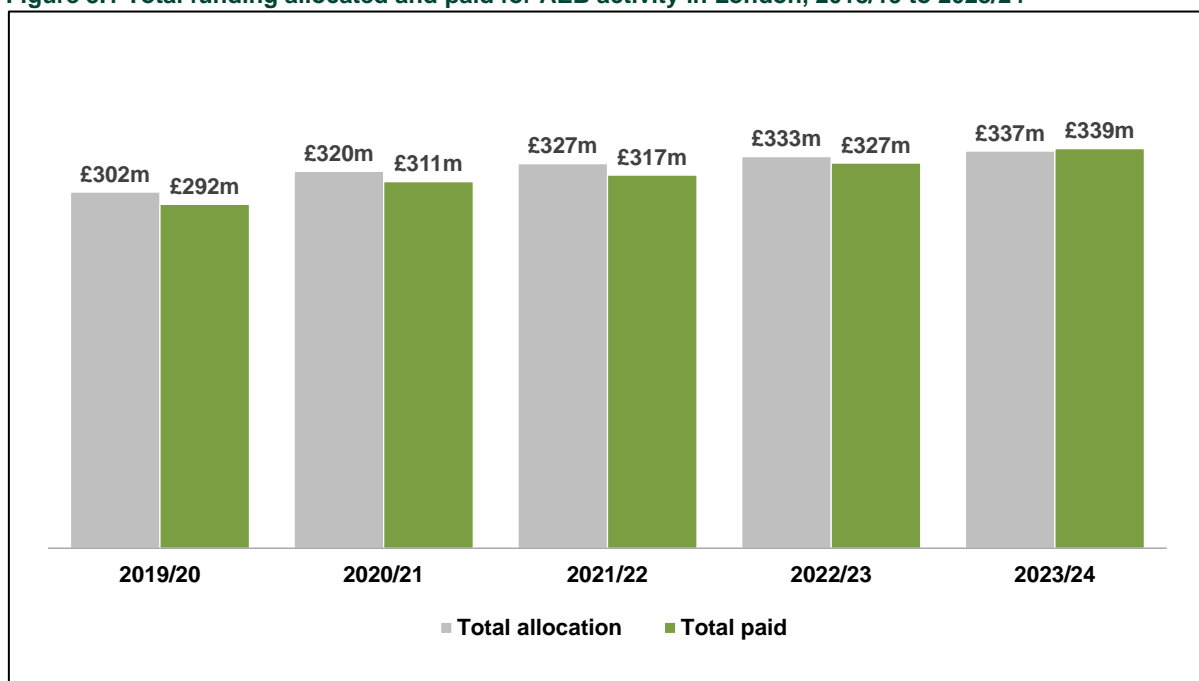
3.1 This chapter provides an overview of AEB-funded provision, looking at funding allocation compared with spend, enrolment and individual learner numbers, provider participation and learner characteristics. Specifically, the chapter focuses on key changes to participation across the last five years to determine the extent to which the AEB is achieving its aims to improve access to learning for disadvantaged Londoners.

Funding

3.2 For the first time since the AEB budget was delegated to the GLA in 2019/20, the total paid to providers exceeded the total funding allocation (Figure 3.1).

3.3 In 2023/24 £339m was paid to providers compared with £337m allocated, an overspend of £2m. This is reflective of the COVID-19 recovery that the GLA has supported, which means providers are now able to deliver at higher levels, with underspend and under-delivery in previous years largely due to the impact of the pandemic (e.g., more online teaching and new infrastructure, and lower participation). Another element of this overspend is that the funding received from government has not increased in line with inflation. While this recovery is positive, it is not sustainable for the GLA to support continuing over-delivery, without an increase in funding.

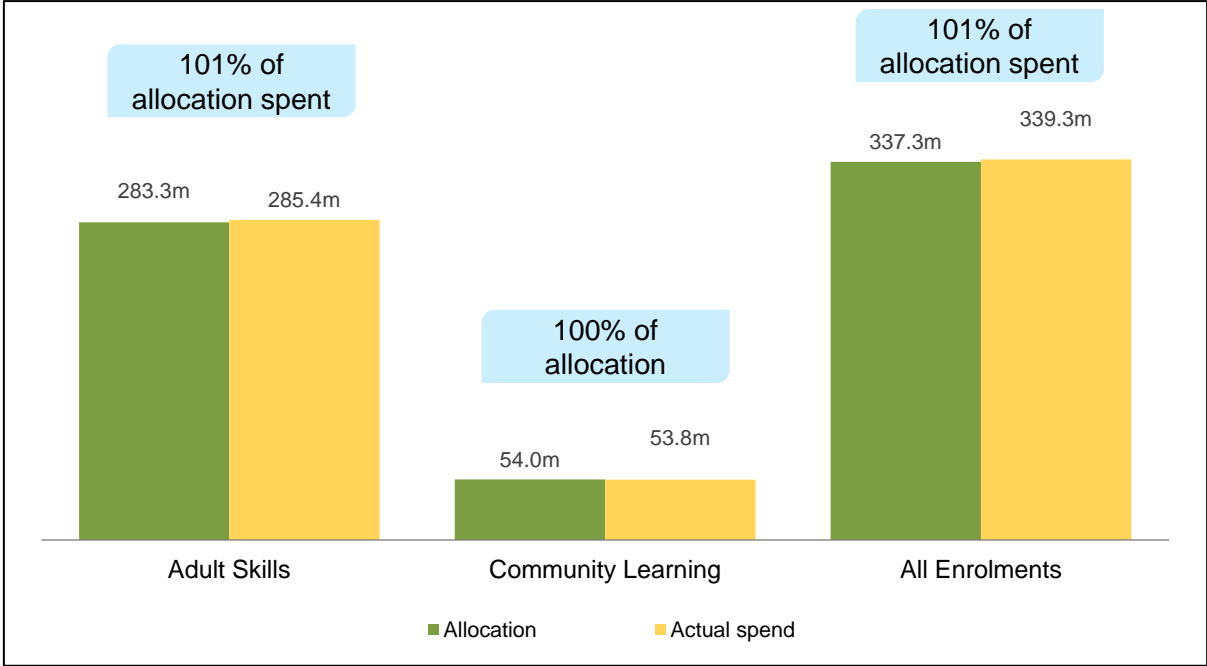
Figure 3.1 Total funding allocated and paid for AEB activity in London, 2018/19 to 2023/24



Sources: 2019/20 and 2020/21: GLA AEB allocation and payments data. 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24 - GLA AEB reconciled financial data. Figures have been rounded to the nearest £1million. Figures are true at time of publishing.

3.4 As shown in **Figure 3.2**, total over-delivery in 2023/24 was driven by over-delivery of Adult Skills funding by around £2m, delivering £285.4m of training provision compared with the £283.3m allocation (101% of the allocation). Community Learning provision delivered 100% of its allocation, delivering £54.0m worth of training against the £53.8m allocation.

Figure 3.2 Total funding allocated vs. total spend, split by adult skills and community learning, 2023/24



Source: 2023/24 - GLA AEB reconciled financial data. Figure have been rounded to the nearest £1million.

Participation

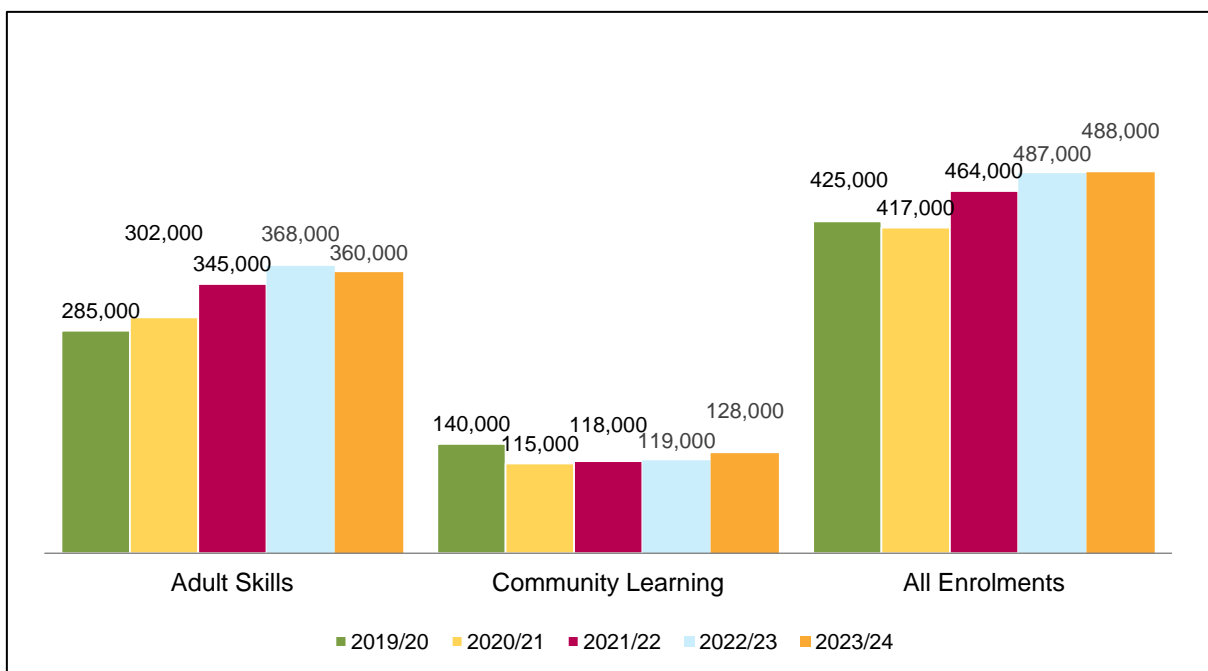
Turning to look at enrolment numbers, we see that in 2023/24 they were at the highest level they have been since the AEB budget was delegated to GLA in 2019/20, standing at 488,000 in total (

3.5 **Figure 3.3).** This represents a 15% increase in enrolments since 2019/20, showing the AEB is delivering strongly against aims by providing an ever-increasing amount of provision for adults in London, despite no change in real terms funding. The introduction of FCfJ provision in April 2021, which delivered 21,780 enrolments between then and July 2024, has played an important role in this.

As shown in

- 3.6 **Figure 3.3**, this increase is driven by Adult Skills enrolments, which have risen by 26%, between 2019/20 and 2023/24, although they have fallen slightly compared with the last academic year (368,000).
- 3.7 While Community Learning enrolments have fallen slightly over the same period (from 140,000 to 128,000), in 2023/24 they were the highest they had been since 2020/21.

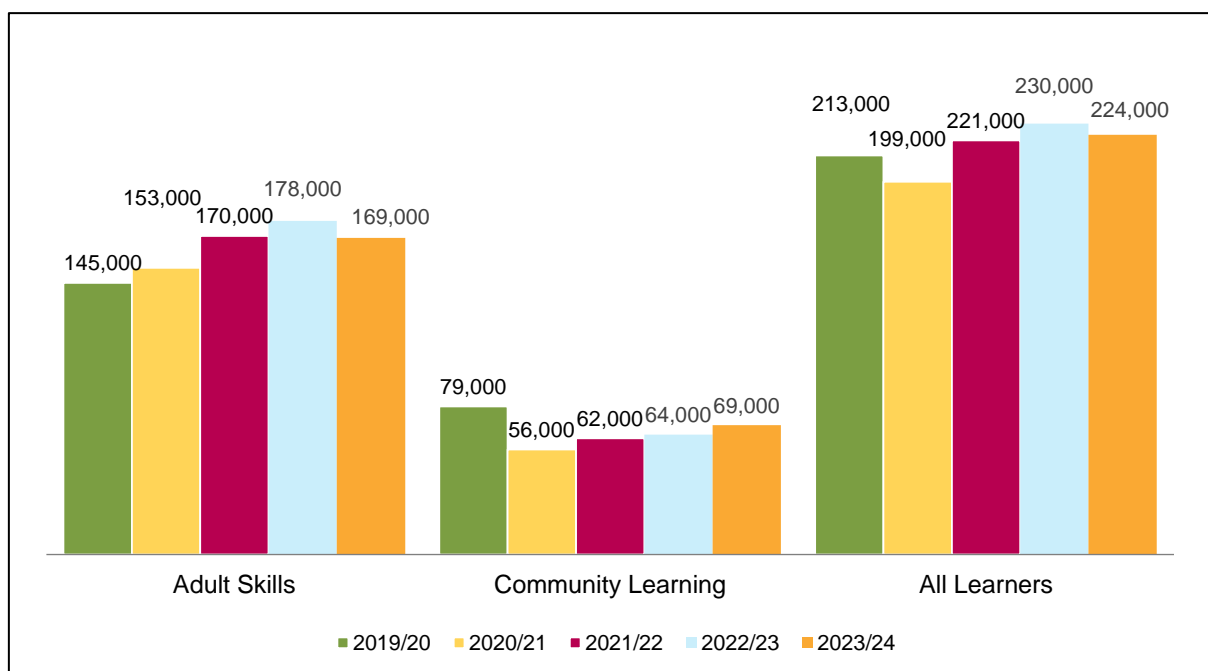
Figure 3.3 Number of enrolments on AEB-funded learning aims, 2019/20 to 2023/24



Source: ILR 2019/20 R14, 2020/21 R14, 2021/22 R14, 2022/23 R14, 2023/24 R14. Data has been rounded to the nearest 1,000 enrolments.

- 3.8 The picture is similar when looking at number of individual learners starting on AEB-funded learning aims, with a 5% increase between 2019/20 and 2023/24, driven by a 17% increase in Adult Skills learners (**Figure 3.4**). The number of learners on Community Learning aims, however, has fallen from 79,000 to 69,000 over the same period, although it has been increasing steadily from the low point of 56,000 in 2020/21 (a year that was affected by the COVID-19 lockdowns). Overall learner numbers were slightly lower in 2023/24 (224,000) than in the previous academic year (230,000).
- 3.9 Between 2019/20 and 2023/24 there was a 15% increase in the proportion of enrolments and a 5% increase in the proportion of learners, indicating that more learners are doing multiple courses. Indeed, in 2023/24 on average each learner enrolled on 2.2 learning aims in 2023/24, compared with 2.0 in 2019/20. This is the highest average number of learning aims per learner over the last 5 years.

Figure 3.4 Number of learners starting on AEB-funded learning aims, 2019/20 to 2023/24



Source: ILR 2019/20 R14, 2020/21 R14, 2021/22 R14, 2022/23 R14, 2023/24 R14. Enrolment data is not available for 2018/19. Data has been rounded to the nearest 1,000 learners.

3.10 There has been a slight increase in the proportion of enrolments in higher level learning aims over time. As shown in **Table 3.1**, the proportion of AEB enrolments at Level 3 has risen from 1% to 3% between 2019/20 and 2023/24. The increase in Level 3 enrolments can be linked to the GLA's Level 3 London Recovery Flexibility, which delivered 7,930 enrolments between 2021/22 and 2023/24, and also the Sector Based Work Academy programmes. Across the same period, there has also been an increase in Entry Level enrolments, rising from 34% to 38% of total enrolments.

Table 3.1 Enrolments by level, 2019/20 to 2023/24

Level	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24
Entry Level	34%	30%	35%	35%	38%
Level 1	17%	20%	19%	18%	17%
Level 2	18%	22%	19%	18%	17%
Level 3	1%	1%	2%	3%	3%
Level 4	<0.5%	0%	0%	<0.5%	<0.5%
Other Level	30%	26%	25%	26%	25%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: ILR 2019/20 R14, 2020/21 R14, 2021/22 R14, 2022/23 R14, 2023/24 R14.

3.11 When looking at how enrolments by sector have changed between 19/20 and 23/24 there are some indications that the qualifications being taken are shifting towards those more closely aligned with GLA's priority sectors. For example, in that time period Adult Skills enrolments have increased in the following sector subject areas:

- Health, Public Services and Care, from 8.2% to 9.7% (although this has reduced from its peak of 10.4% in 2020/21, likely to be linked with higher demand during COVID-19)
- Construction, Planning and the Built Environment, from 2.8% to 3.7%
- Information and Communication Technology (ICT), from 3.9% to 6.0%
- Arts, Media and Publishing, from 3.1% to 4.5%

Providers

3.12 There has been a slight increase in larger providers delivering AEB-funded learning aims, and a decrease in medium-sized providers, over the last 5 years, with the proportion of providers delivering 10,000 or more enrolments per year increasing from 7% to 11% between 2019/20 and 2023/24 (**Table 3.2**).¹

Table 3.2 Number of providers by number of enrolments delivered, 2019/20 to 2023/24

¹ Number of enrolments delivered is used as a proxy for provider size in this analysis as typically smaller providers will deliver fewer enrolments and larger providers will deliver more.

Enrolments		19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24
Providers delivering fewer than 100 enrolments	# of providers	7	13	10	8	8
	% of all providers	5%	10%	8%	7%	7%
Providers delivering 100 to 999 enrolments	# of providers	53	45	40	41	44
	% of all providers	39%	34%	32%	34%	37%
Providers delivering 1,000 to 9,999 enrolments	# of providers	61	66	65	60	53
	% of all providers	45%	50%	52%	49%	45%
Providers delivering 10,000 or more enrolments	# of providers	9	8	11	13	13
	% of all providers	7%	6%	9%	11%	11%
Total number of providers	# of providers	130	132	126	122	118
	% of all providers	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: ILR 2019/20 R14, 2020/21 R14, 2021/22 R14, 2022/23 R14, 2023/24 R14.

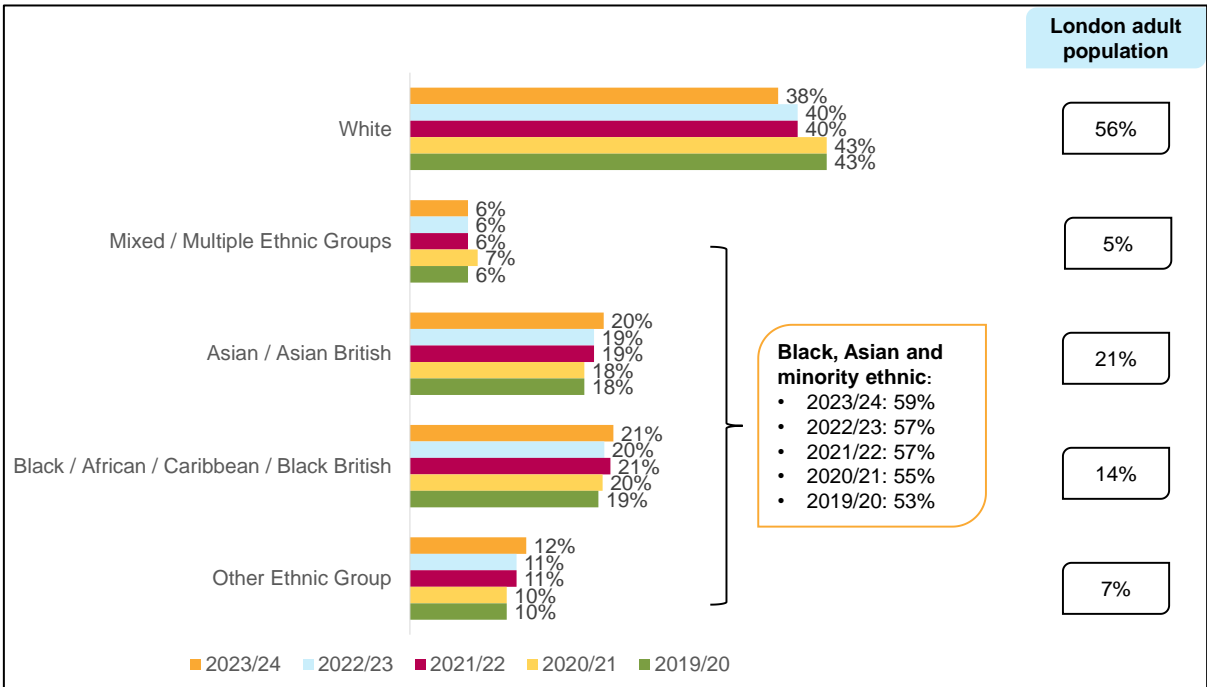
3.13 The profile by provider type has remained relatively consistent across the past five years. In 2023/24 general FE colleges delivered 45% of AEB enrolments, with other publicly-funded providers (including LAs and HE) delivering 31% of enrolments and specialist colleges delivering 17%. Of the remainder, Private Sector Public Funded provision delivered 7% and Sixth Form Colleges delivered <0.5%.

Learner characteristics

3.14 Looking at participation in AEB-funded learning over the last five years by learner characteristics we see some trends that point to the success of the AEB in supporting the Mayor of London's [Skills Roadmap](#), which aims to provide education and employment opportunities to those groups most affected by the pandemic and who have subsequently been further disadvantaged by its impacts.

3.15 It is therefore positive to see a growing proportion of AEB learners in recent years in one of these groups: Black, Asian and minority ethnic Londoners. As shown in [Figure 3.5](#), the proportion of these learners has grown each year since 2019/20 (53%), reaching 59% in 2023/24. Black, Asian and minority ethnic learners were also over-represented when compared to the ethnic profile of London's adult population (59% vs. 47%) in 2023/24.

Figure 3.5 AEB learner participation by ethnicity, 2019/20 to 2023/24



Source: ILR 2019/20 R14, 2020/21 R14, 2021/22 R14, 2022/23 R14, 2023/24 R14. Excludes respondent who selected 'Prefer not to say' when asked about Ethnicity.

Similarly, there has been an increasing proportion of learners amongst those aged 50+, another target group for the Skills Roadmap for London. In 2023/24 29% of enrolments came from these learners, the third consecutive year this has increased since the low of 24% in 2020/21 (

3.16 **Figure 3.6).**

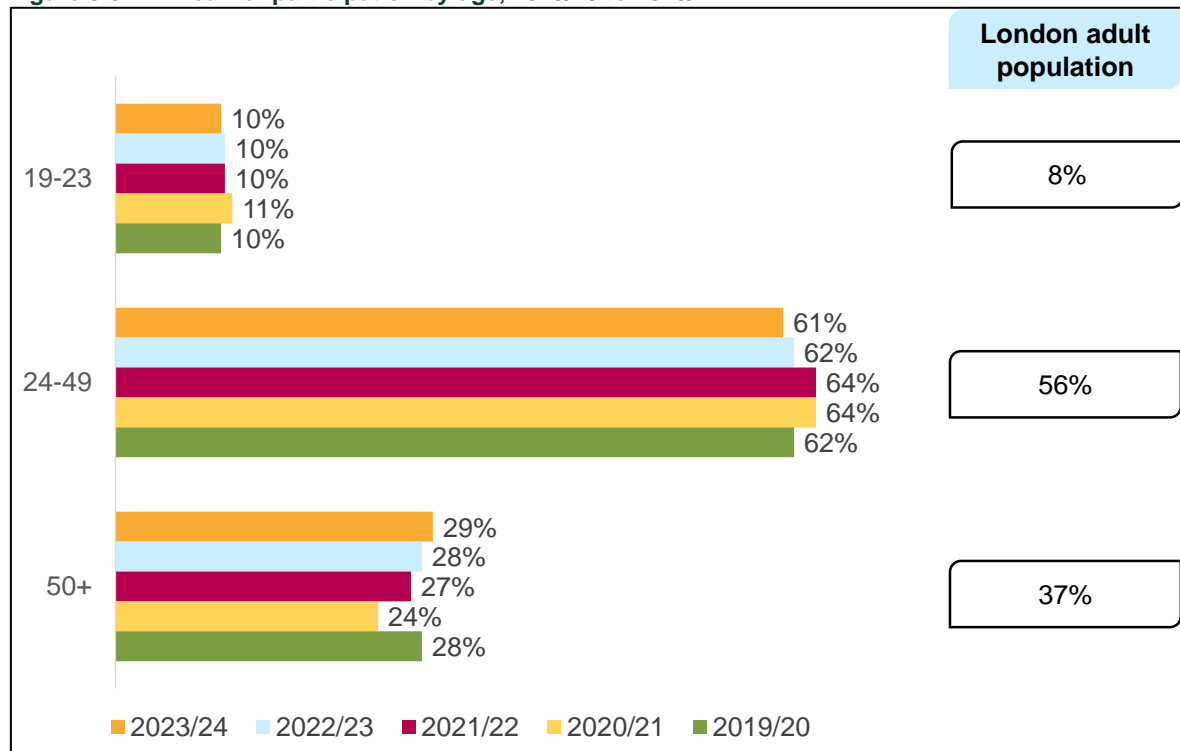
3.17 As also shown in

3.18

3.19

3.20 **Figure 3.6** below, in 2023/24 AEB learners aged between 19-23 (10% of all enrolments) were slightly overrepresented when compared to the adult population of London as a whole (8%), as are learners aged 24-49 (61% vs. 56%). Conversely, those aged 50 or older are underrepresented amongst AEB learners (29% vs. 37%).

Figure 3.6 AEB learner participation by age, 2019/20 to 2023/24



Source: ILR 2019/20 R14, 2020/21 R14, 2021/22 R14, 2022/23 R14, 2023/24 R14.

Learner outcomes

3.21 The London Learner Survey (LLS) has been running since the 2020/21 academic year, becoming fully operational from 2021/22. The most recent published data is from the 2022/23 academic year. The LLS consists of two linked surveys of people participating in GLA-funded AEB learning: a baseline survey administered when the learner starts their course, and a follow-up survey approximately five to eight months after the end of the course.

3.22 The aim of the LLS is to measure learner outcomes linked to the GLA's objectives for AEB-funded learning, as set out in the Skills Roadmap. These are:

- economic outcomes, in terms of improving e.g. entry to employment, progression in employment through improved earnings, permanent contracts and increased hours, and progression to further learning; and
- social outcomes, encompassing health and wellbeing, confidence, volunteering and social integration.

- 3.23 Overarching results from the 2022/23 London Learner Survey show that following their course, 81% of learners were in employment or had started / were about to start further learning.
- 3.24 The majority (94%) of learners experienced **positive social outcomes**.² This includes:
- 80% who experienced an increase in their general wellbeing due to their course
 - 87% who felt more confident due to their course
 - 77% who met new and different people due to their course.
- 3.25 Just under half (46%) of learners experienced positive economic outcomes five to eight months after completing their course, this means they experience a positive change in their employment status, pay, job security or progression. This includes:
- 24% of learners who were out of employment when the course started, who had moved into a job
 - 20% of employed learners who had an increase in earnings
 - 65% of learners who progressed onto further learning.
- 3.26 Evidence from the [GLA's report](#) on the 2022/23 LLS also shows some key patterns by learner and learning characteristics.
- 3.27 In terms of economic outcomes, learners who had taken Adult Skills courses were more likely to report positive employment-related outcomes, while those who had taken Community Learning courses were more likely to report progression into further study. Learners taking Level 3 courses were especially likely to report a positive economic outcome (51%, compared with 46% of learners overall), while learners who did Entry or Level 1 courses were the most likely to report progression to further learning. This shows the foundational nature of those courses as a stepping stone into other learning or training.
- 3.28 By demographic characteristics, learners aged 19-23 and Black learners were the most likely to report positive economic outcomes. Economic outcomes were less positive for learners with long-term health conditions or disabilities, pointing to the broader challenges these learners face in the employment market and highlighting the need for additional targeting of support.
- 3.29 In terms of social outcomes, there was little variation between Adult Skills (94%) and Community Learning (95%), or by course level. This speaks to the positive impacts of engaging in learning, in general. Older learners aged 50+ were the most likely group to report a positive impact on their wellbeing, and to be engaged in volunteering. Notably, unlike for economic outcomes, there was only a marginal difference between learners with a health condition or disability, and those without, in reporting at least one positive social outcome (93% compared with 94%).

² [Definition of positive social outcomes](#) as defined by the London Learner Survey (LLS)

Learner case study: Isabel*

"It refreshed and reinforced my skills, and it really helped when I had to go in for interviews. It helped me to understand how NGOs work and how to answer interview questions."

Isabel is in her late 30s and was unemployed for a short period after leaving her role as a PA in the private sector. Her Job Centre coach recommended she apply for a course at a local college.

The course was a six-month online Level 2 Business Administration course. Isabel would have preferred it to be in person, but felt the tutors were attentive and answered any email queries quickly. She also had a phone call with her tutor once a week to talk through her coursework. She felt the length of course was about right for a level 2 course, and the content was excellent. She particularly enjoyed the interactive elements, such as role play and real-life scenarios they covered.

Isabel is now an Executive Assistant to the CEO of a charity. As well as achieving positive employment outcomes, she feels her mental health and wellbeing has been impacted positively by the course and she wants to undertake a higher-level course in the future.

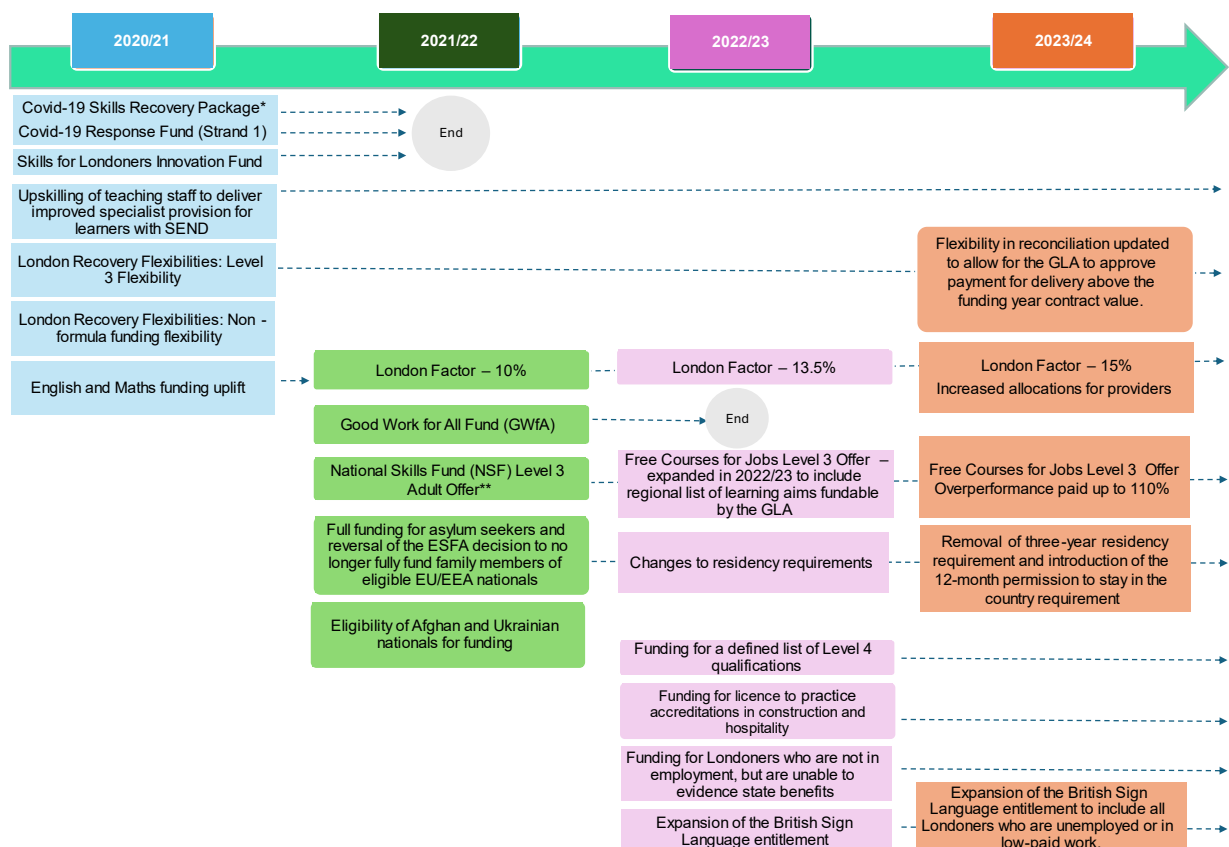
"I would definitely recommend it [the course] because they will learn something out of it because they will have the support to reach the goal which is to get that certificate."

*Name has been changed

4 AEB policy flexibilities

- 4.1 Over time, AEB policy flexibilities have been introduced with the aim of supporting more adult Londoners, particularly those under-represented in learning and work, to be equipped with the necessary skills to participate in society, realise their goals and progress in education and work. In addition, the flexibilities seek to unlock wider individual and societal benefits such as increased social integration and wellbeing. The timeline of the AEB-related changes and policy flexibilities discussed in this chapter can be seen in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 Timeline of AEB-related changes and flexibilities



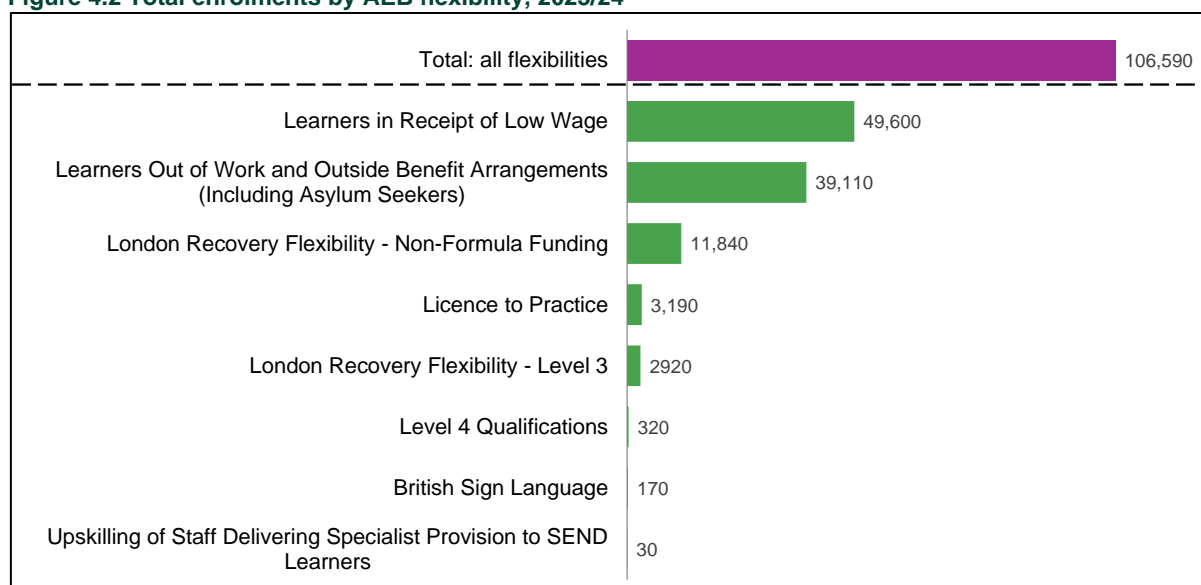
- 4.2 This chapter assesses the scale and impact of these flexibilities in the 2023/24 academic year, compared with previous years, combining analysis of ILR data with findings from qualitative interviews with learners and providers.
- 4.3 Overall, in 2023/24 there were 106,590 enrolments on courses funded through AEB flexibilities. As shown in **Table 4.1**, this has grown significantly each year since 2020/21.
- 4.4 This rapid increase means that the proportion of total AEB enrolments that were delivered through a flexibility has increased significantly too, from 10% in 2020/21 to 22% in 2023/24. This data suggests that AEB flexibilities are becoming increasingly instrumental in providing training and skills for Londoners and points to the success of the AEB in targeting learners who would most benefit from funded learning.

Table 4.1 Enrolments delivered via AEB flexibilities, 2020/21 to 2023/24

Academic year	Enrolments delivered via AEB flexibility	Total AEB enrolments	% of total enrolments delivered via a flexibility
2020/21	42,380	416,910	10%
2021/22	54,830	463,660	12%
2022/23	82,980	487,100	17%
2023/24	106,590	487,700	22%

Source: ILR 2019/20 R14, 2020/21 R14, 2021/22 R14, 2022/23 R14, 2023/24 R14. Data has been rounded to the nearest 10 enrolments.

- 4.5 By some distance the most provision delivered through an AEB flexibility in 2023/24 was learners in receipt of a low wage, which accounted for 49,600 enrolments, 47% of all enrolments delivered via a flexibility (**Figure 4.2**). After this, one-third (37%) of all enrolments delivered through a flexibility were among learners out of work and outside benefit arrangements (including Asylum Seekers), who saw 39,910 enrolments in 2023/24.

Figure 4.2 Total enrolments by AEB flexibility, 2023/24

Source: ILR 2023/24 R14. Data has been rounded to the nearest 10 enrolments.

- 4.6 The rest of this section focuses on specific flexibilities of particular interest in the 2023/24 academic year.

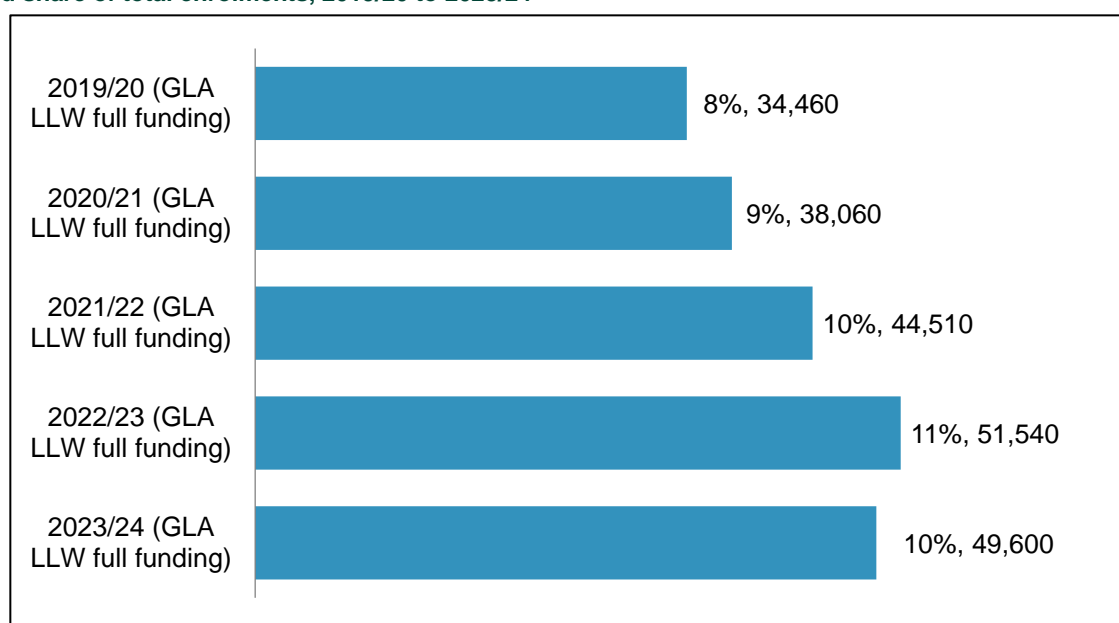
Learners in receipt of low wage

- 4.7 This flexibility was introduced in 2018/19 a year before the Adult Education Budget was delegated to the GLA. It funds qualifications for learners who are employed or self-employed for Adult Skills learning aims up to and including Level 2.
- 4.8 This is a key flexibility for the AEB, not only because it delivers the most enrolments compared to other flexibilities (see **Figure 4.2** above) but also because it tends to produce positive outcomes compared with other Adult Skills enrolments. This was most recently demonstrated through the 2022/23 London Learners survey, which shows that 39% of AEB learners using this flexibility reported progressing in work and 64% reported some kind of further learning.

Additionally, 95% of learners on this flexibility reported a positive social outcome, slightly higher than the 94% across all Adults Skills enrolments, 80% an increase in wellbeing (vs. 77% of all Adult Skills enrolments) and 89% feeling more confident (vs. 87% of all Adult Skills enrolments).

- 4.9 Over the five years that this flexibility has been used, enrolments have grown 44%, from 34,460 to 49,600 between 2019/20 and 2023/24, expanding the opportunity for learners earning a low income to achieve a positive economic or social outcome (**Figure 4.3**). Across the same period, enrolments using this flexibility as a proportion of total AEB-funded enrolments increased from 8% to 10%, meaning the use of this flexibility has increased at a greater pace than overall AEB-funded enrolments.
- 4.10 Although in 2023/24 enrolments were slightly lower than the previous academic year (51,540), this was only a slight decrease (4%) and overall enrolment numbers through this flexibility remained relatively high.

Figure 4.3 Number of fully funded enrolments through the London Living Wage full funding entitlement and share of total enrolments, 2019/20 to 2023/24



Source: ILR 2018/19 R14, 2019/20 R14, 2020/21 R14, 2021/22 R14, 2022/23 R14, 2023/24 R14. Data has been rounded to the nearest 10 enrolments.

Free Courses for Jobs Level 3 Offer

- 4.11 The Level 3 Free Courses for Jobs (FCfJ) flexibility was launched in April 2021³, as part of the previous Government's Lifetime Skills Guarantee and Plan for Jobs and was aimed at providing adults with access to free, high-quality training and education that helps them secure employment in sectors with high demand for skilled workers. While this was a nationwide government initiative, prior to this (since the start of the 2020/21 academic year), the GLA had introduced the Level 3 Flexibility, which fully funded Londoners to undertake a Level 3 qualification in addition to the legal entitlement if they were in unemployment or in receipt of a low wage.⁴

³ Prior to this, these courses were funded through the National Skills Fund.

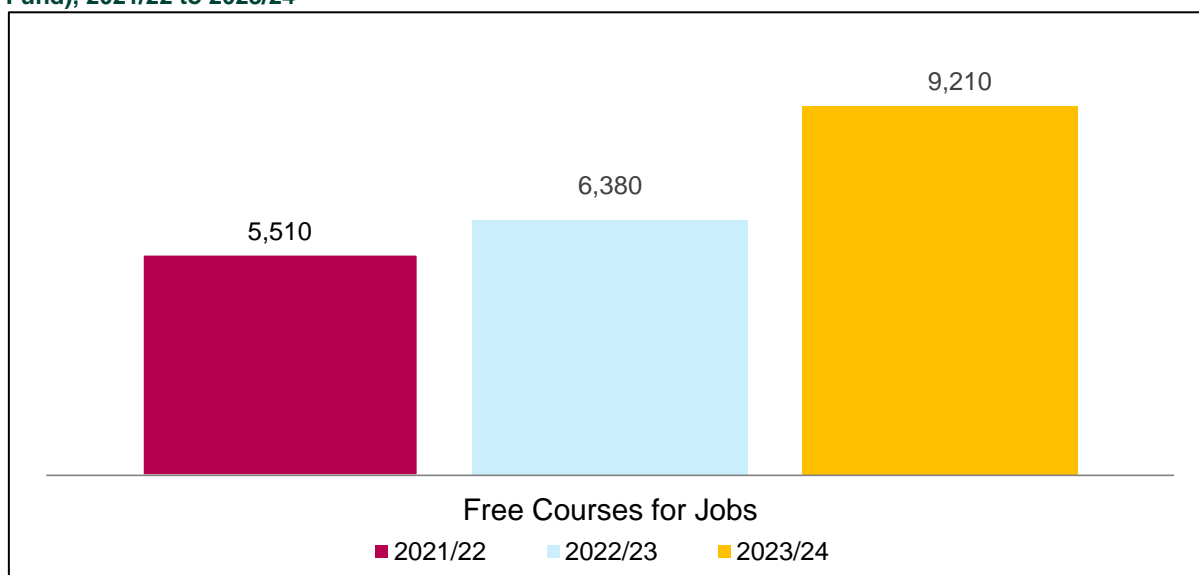
⁴ The definition for this flexibility is limited to delivery of AEB formula-funded L3 qualifications.

4.12 In London, FCfJ aims to help adults develop the skills they need for specific job opportunities in priority sectors such as health, social care, construction, digital technology, and green energy. From 2023/24 providers were able to use up to 50% of their FCfJ allocation from the GLA's regional qualification list (up from 20% in 2022/23), which meant that courses provided through this flexibility could be tailored to align with London's labour needs.

4.13 **Figure 4.4** shows a significant increase in enrolments using FCfJ funding in 2023/24 compared to the previous academic year, increasing from 6,380 to 9,210 (an increase of 44%). Looking further back, when funding through this flexibility was through the National Skills Fund, enrolments are 67% higher in 2023/24 than in 2021/22 (5,510).

4.14 In the latest iteration of the London Learner Survey (2022/23) learners using this flexibility reported more positive economic and social outcomes across almost all measures than the average of all learners on an Adult Skills learning aim. This points to the value of learning funded through FCfJ.

Figure 4.4 Number of enrolments funded through Free Courses for Jobs (or previously National Skills Fund), 2021/22 to 2023/24



Source: ILR 2021/22 R14, 2022/23 R14, 2023/24 R14. Data has been rounded to the nearest 10 enrolments.

4.15 Of the providers who took part in qualitative interviews, around half had provided courses through the Free Courses for Jobs entitlement in 2023/24. Views on the flexibility were mixed, with some meeting their full allocation, and others facing barriers to delivery.

4.16 Some of these providers spoke positively about changes made between 2022/23 and 2023/24 which had enabled them to increase their FCfJ provision. In terms of changes made to the qualifications list, a few commented that widening the choice of courses they were able to offer made it easier for them to recruit learners, with a few comments that the choice of courses had been somewhat limited previously. Specifically, one provider mentioned the inclusion of the Access to HE Diploma as a positive step enabling opportunities for learners to progress into higher level qualifications.

4.17 There was also a sense from a few providers that they were now finding the courses which were most appropriate to the learners in their area. One provider noted that they had a slow start to the year with their FCfJ allocation, but had a strong second half of the year after

focusing on subjects where they already offered entry and Level 2 provision, which meant they had an in-house pathway for learners wanting to progress to Level 3.

4.18 The ability to offer Level 3 courses through FCfJ meant that one provider was building a reputation in their local area for their Level 3 provision, meaning increasing demand from learners.

4.19 In line with the aim for providers and provision to be more responsive to the local labour market, providers were working hard to ensure they were offering qualifications that were meeting the skills needs in their local area. For example, one provider discussed the increased demand for early years provision that would come with the government's expanded childcare entitlement programme, while another mentioned that they were working to identify gaps linked to local employment needs. Indeed, one provider who had struggled to meet their allocation in 2023/24 mentioned that going forward they will work to align their offer more closely to the training needs of the local community. This is promising as it shows that providers are using the funding for this policy for precisely what it was intended.

"So, for childcare, there's a workforce need now. So, we're working with the Council Team to try and coordinate a cohort for them..."

Local authority

4.20 While some providers were able to meet their full FCfJ allocation in 2023/24, a couple of those interviewed in the qualitative research mentioned that they then had to stop offering places as they feared if they went beyond their allocation they would not receive more funding. They were concerned about the negative impact turning away willing learners could have on the perception of their provision, and the learners themselves.

"So there is that issue of limiting the courses because of the allocation which has a negative impact on the number of courses we can offer. So that would be the key point I think."

FE College

4.21 Another challenge providers found with the allocation was hitting it quite precisely, so as not to have the contract reduced if they under-delivered, but not to exceed the funding limit if they had over-delivered. For a few providers this led to challenges balancing their recruitment efforts with the risk of having to stop running courses or turn learners away. One mentioned the reconciliation approach of up to 103% was a useful cushion, although without the guarantee of this going forward they could not plan this into their provision.

4.22 Where some providers had submitted a business case for overpayments one provider mentioned needing clearer guidance on the value that they could expect. They compared this to the London Skills Bootcamp bidding process which very clearly set a maximum value for each bid, and suggested similar could be done for FCfJ applications.

"It might have been helpful to set realistic expectations at the beginning because there was no guidance about how much or so, for example, where the Bootcamp bids came out at Easter, it was very clear that London organisations could only bid for maximum amount each. So we knew the maximum we were going for and we did our bid accordingly."

FE College

- 4.23 Another issue encountered by a couple of providers in terms of filling their allocation was recruiting the right staff to deliver Level 3 qualifications, particularly for digital qualifications. This had delayed them to start with as it took a while to get these staff in place, but they were now delivering the Level 3 courses they had planned.

"So actually getting qualified, competent staff to deliver on it [Level 3 Digital] has been the biggest challenge, but actually the demand is significantly there."

ITP

- 4.24 A few providers commented that it had been easier to find experienced, qualified tutors before Brexit and COVID-19, particularly in the construction, engineering and science sectors. While this issue was raised with particular reference to delivery of qualifications at Level 3+, FE workforce data more broadly shows that teaching vacancies are higher in London than average (at 5.6 vacancies per 100 full-time equivalent staff, compared with 4.7 across England overall)⁵.

"We claim for it, every element of funding is helpful. The difficulty is trying to recruit staff."

FE College

License to Practice accreditations

- 4.25 From August 2022, GLA-funded providers have had the flexibility to fund licence to practice accreditations for eligible learners completing and achieving a licence-linked Adult Skills funded qualification. This flexibility applies to two specific sectors, construction and hospitality, and is available for learners who are unemployed, out of work and outside benefit arrangements or are low waged.
- 4.26 In the construction sector, eligible learners can be funded for the costs of the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) Green Card and, where required, the test fee for the associated CITB Health, Safety and Environment qualification. In hospitality, eligible learners can be funded for the SIA Licence (Door Supervisor) and, if required, the associated First Aid at Work qualification. One of the main aims of this flexibility is to help adults in London access jobs in key sectors, where licence fees may be a barrier to entry.
- 4.27 As with other flexibilities, the 2023/24 academic year saw a significant increase in the number of enrolments using this flexibility, increasing from 2,070 in 2022/23 to 3,190 the following year. This 54% increase, when the overall number of enrolments remained consistent, shows that 2023/24 was a strong year in providing licences and qualifications to Londoners in these key sectors.
- 4.28 Awareness of this policy was high amongst providers interviewed in the qualitative research. One provider who was not aware of it, said it was definitely something they would be interested in. Several providers described this policy as an important area of growth for them in terms of new provision. One provider indicated that demand for this has been much higher than anticipated and this is an area where they over-delivered in 2023/24.

⁵ [Further education workforce, Academic year 2022/23 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#) (data for 2023/24 was not published at the time of reporting). It is not possible to disaggregate this data by level of provision taught.

"The demand was just phenomenal. We just, you know never anticipated it because we hadn't delivered that [before], so... we over delivered in the first year."

ITP

4.29 One of the grant-funded providers reported that they have developed new provision to access this funding. They have developed six new courses for 2024/25 in partnership with experts in the employment sector, including the CSCS and SIA door supervision courses, which they are hoping will attract more learners in 2024/25.

"So knowing that they'll be accredited and receive that licence free of charge, it attracts more students to our courses as well as employers because those courses are delivered in partnership with experts in the area, like our rail engineering courses. Those courses have actually really developed, we've had six new courses last year... With the CSCS course, that's something we're developing for this year [2024/25] ... So, they've really, really helped."

FE College

4.30 A few providers welcomed this policy but had found it difficult to make the most of it, due to difficulties in recruiting accredited tutors, which delayed their provision.

"It's a fantastic offer and it's been great, but we struggle massively... We had significant difficulties in trying to find an accredited tutor that could actually deliver the SIA internally... it meant that we had to deliver more qualifications and, in less time, than probably some other providers do."

ITP

4.31 A few others had not taken advantage of this funding, as they utilised other funding sources instead, which funded the same qualifications.

'No, we as an adult service, we don't offer either of those. And it's probably partly the reason why we don't is that a colleagues who work in the Council for the Employment and Skills Team, they are able to offer learning that leads to CSCS through a funding stream that comes from developers.'

Local authority

4.32 Some providers suggested they would like **more freedom to adjust their provision in response to local demand**, under this flexibility. They felt frustrated that bids go out in December, outcomes are available in June, and delivery begins in August, but between December and June the labour market landscape can change, and they are restricted in how they can respond. One provider mentioned that local Jobcentres currently need people with Security Industry Authority (SIA) qualifications, but the provider cannot apply to deliver this in response, as it was not part of the bid they submitted earlier. This suggests that allowing a degree of flexibility in what is delivered (as long as it meets the requirement to be a License to Practice) could support providers to respond better to emerging local demands.

Learner case study: Dan*

"It was difficult to find any employment...when my coach told me about the SIA course, I jumped on it right away and I said, yeah, that's the course for me, please sign me up!"

Dan is in his mid-40s. He moved to the UK from the Czech Republic fourteen years ago and had a permanent full-time role in the hospitality sector. However, London was hit hard by the pandemic, and he was one of 250 staff members who were made redundant by his company. He has worked in temporary roles in various industries since then but was unable to find a permanent job, due to his lack of qualifications. So, after a four-month period on Universal Credit, Dan was told about the Level 2 Employability course, which included gaining a Security Industry Authority (SIA) licence. His Job Centre Plus coach thought this would be suitable for him, as it guaranteed employment at the end, on successful completion of the course.

The course was located at an FE College in commuting distance to where he lived. It was an intensive five-week in-person course, which included functional skills in English, Multiply, fire safety, CV writing and digital skills, health and safety and first aid, and the SIA licence. He received a certificate for each element of the course. He had to pass all elements of the course to gain his SIA licence.

Dan is currently working as a door supervisor. Since completing the course, he has gained a further qualification in CCTV operations and hopes to complete a 'Closed Protection' course, but funding is not offered for this course at present.

"I'm very happy that I finished the course obviously successfully and got a licence. It has opened the door for me within the security industry here."

*Name has been changed

Removal of the three-year residency requirement for Londoners on certain immigration schemes and introducing the 12-month permission to stay in the country requirement

- 4.33 There was high awareness of this policy amongst providers. Generally, providers indicated that they found the removal of the three-year residency requirement very useful, as this enabled them to take on a lot more learners.

"As a comparison to what we do outside of London where we don't have that flexibility, we are able to take a lot more learners within the London contract compared to where we've got the three-year residency restrictions. So that has helped significantly."

ITP

- 4.34 Providers with a lot of migrants in their local area were especially positive, as this meant that they could offer courses to more people in their local community, who just want to get a foot on the career ladder, rather than turning people away who did not meet the three-year residency requirement.

"There's quite a lot of support around the employability that we're able to do with them [migrants] to actually get them UK job ready."

ITP

Employer case study: hospitality and catering

"We've got a massive chefs shortage here in the UK and if we're stopping hard, working talented students from progressing because they can't get the funding, and that's a problem."

The director of a food marketing agency the hospitality sector supports a local FE college by supplying a chef to deliver weekly workshops there. Many learners who have successfully completed the course have gone on to find employment in the industry, including with the chef who delivers the training.

The interviewee described how the relaxing of the residency requirements will directly impact one learner, who had previously been told by the college that he was ineligible for the funding because he had not been living in the country for long enough, but would now be able to enrol on the course. However, she is frustrated that many learners, who successfully complete the training, do not then progress into employment because the conditions of their visas prevent them from working for more than a certain number of hours a week. She also described how an asylum seeker who was very committed and had completed Level 1 and Level 2 courses wanted to progress but the course was not funded at Level 3, and they were unable to afford to pay for it.

In terms of future industry skills needs, she believes that a course about carbon sustainability would be very useful, as catering managers and chefs must reduce their carbon emissions and craft sustainable menus going forward. She has also observed young chefs are unable to operate the new technology in kitchens, so learning about the automation of kitchens would also be welcome too.

"They've [colleges] got the facility, they've got great big training kitchens, great big restaurants that we can use as a classroom with all the smart board on it and all the rest of it. It's just about triangulating."

- 4.35 In terms of barriers, one provider felt that more could be done to target eligible learners through advertising, as take up was slow initially due to lack of awareness among learners. A potential way to do this could be through links with community groups.

"It's been fantastically significant. It was amazing to see how many individuals had not been in the country for three years. So, when it changed to 12 months, we thought it would have a huge impact initially, but learners didn't know about it, and even now they don't, so we have to do a lot of advertising on the website and lots of work with community groups, like the Afghan and Romanian centres."

FE College

- 4.36 A few providers highlighted that there is latent demand among this group, and that reducing the 12 months' permission requirement would enable them to access even more learners.

Learner case study: Alex*

"I'm really happy that I've done the course [...] it helped me a lot with finding this job and also my previous one."

Alex is in his early 20s and moved to the UK from Ukraine a couple of years ago. He was recommended the course (Functional Skills Qualification in English) by a family member as he wanted to improve his English skills, expand his vocabulary and has ambitions to attend university. The course was located at a local authority-funded adult education centre in his local area. He did the course for a year with a mix of in-person and online learning.

He had a lot of praise for his teacher, who gave him a lot of confidence. He disliked the online learning element of his course, saying it made him feel less motivated. But overall, he felt the course gave him more confidence when socialising and he got on well with the other learners. He said the course put a lot of attention on learners' wellbeing and included tips on how to get support if needed.

Alex is currently in work and hopes to go on to study Computer Science at university. To do his university course he needs to pass an English exam, and he feels confident his Functional Skills Qualification in English will allow him to do so.

"I learned how to write [...] how to communicate with people, read and get information. I also upgraded my listening skills [...] so it's the whole picture."

*Name has been changed

London Factor uplift

- 4.37 The 'London Factor' is an uplift or increase in the funding paid for AEB-fundable qualifications, up to and including Level 2. A 13.5% uplift was in place for 2022/23 to support providers to reach out to potential learners at a time of high unemployment, to get people engaged with skills and to support progression into and within work. The uplift increased to 15% in 2023/24. This additional investment at lower levels of learning will support providers to offer more holistic and targeted support for learners. This support could include greater pastoral care, additional tailored support, employment coaching, and other delivery that 'wraps' around learning and addresses the challenges many learners with lower level skills face in progressing in education and training. This funding uplift also recognises the rising costs of delivery for skills training incurred by providers in London.⁶ Referring back to the Theory of Change, this policy meets the intended outcomes for providers to be incentivised to focus more on the impact of their work, and the GLA being able to target funding towards the most impactful approaches.
- 4.38 All providers interviewed for the qualitative research were aware of this uplift and most reported that this was beneficial, and they were pleased to have it. For some, this has enabled them to provide additional support to disadvantaged learners such as wraparound support, 1 to 1 support, employability support and pastoral care, to help them engage in learning and achieve positive outcomes.

⁶ [GLA AEB Grant Funding and Performance Management Rules 2023-24 v1 0 \(1\).pdf](#)

"The uplift has enabled us to fund the staff to be able to provide that wraparound support for the learners because a lot of the learners that we're engaging are very low-level disadvantaged learners being out of learning for a long time. So, whilst the longer-term aim is to get them into work, actually sometimes the hardest work is getting them into learning and getting them engaging initially...So this enables us to provide the added value beyond just the qualification that they walk through the door for."

ITP

4.39 Related to this, some providers hoped that using the uplift in this way would encourage more learners to enrol in future, partly through word of mouth about the support that was available.

"I would like to think it will increase our provision, as the quality of support that they would get with our centre would be enhanced and therefore through word of mouth, more learners would likely come to us."

ITP

4.40 A few providers indicated that although their priority has been to increase support, as much as half of the funding has been used to cover increased costs in 2023/24, in particular staff costs arising from cost of living increases. This was a particular pressure given the challenges discussed earlier in this chapter, in recruiting and retaining teaching staff.

4.41 In terms of the impact on 2024/25 learning provision, some providers were concerned about funding challenges. They expect to have the same or less funding, but they will be undertaking the same sorts of activities and aiming to engage similar volumes of learners, expecting this to be difficult.

"There's no funded over delivery this year [2024/25], so I think providers will or maybe not manage to reach the same volume of learners."

FE College

4.42 In line with the aim to develop a more employer-led system, several providers were using the uplift to revisit their curriculum for 2024/25 and ensure that it meets the skills demands in their area, by working more directly with employers.

"I've been really looking at our curriculum ensuring it's demands lead, looking at what the needs are of the area, the Londoners, job opportunities, working much more with employers having, you know, employer breakfasts and that has been my focus this year."

FE College

Employer case study: large retail and distribution company

“We’re committed to community development...it felt like the right thing to do.”

The Support Manager at a large retail company regularly employs warehouse operators, largely through the company’s internal HR and training development team. She has found this more difficult due to Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic, as many staff left to move back home. She was approached by a local Independent Training Provider (ITP) around two years ago to work with them in designing a course to get unemployed adult learners back into work. The company is committed to investing in community development, and so she was keen to get involved.

The 2-week Level 1 Certificate in Occupational Workplace Studies (Warehousing and Storage) (SWAP) course was designed by the ITP, in partnership with the employer who was able to provide example interview questions and tailor the learning to suit the employer’s needs. The learner is guaranteed an interview with the employer following successful completion of the course and many learners have gone on to find employment via this route.

In her view, people employed via the provider are more motivated than those employed via the Jobcentre or through an agency. She noted that employees who are trained via the provider generally are there because they want to work in a warehouse and are keen to do the training to get the necessary skills. One employee who came via the provider has just been promoted to a managerial position.

She would have liked to work more with the provider, but the funding was limited and the course stopped. However, she already has plans in place to work with this provider again in the future.

“Employees who come via the provider are more motivated to succeed, as they have undergone the necessary training to equip them with the necessary skills required.”

Other flexibilities

4.43 This section provides a brief overview of the performance of other AEB flexibilities in 2023/24.

Learners Out of Work and Outside Benefit Arrangements (Including Asylum Seekers)

4.44 Learners who are out of work and not in receipt of benefits may be fully funded by a provider if they are wanting to be employed and/or seeking exceptional support with social integration (including those with no recourse to public funds).

4.45 Enrolments using this flexibility increased significantly, from 15,740 in 2022/23 to 39,910 in 2023/24 (a 154% increase).

London Recovery Flexibility - Non-Formula Funding

4.46 This London Recovery Flexibility enables Grant funded providers to use up to 10% of their AEB formula funded allocation for delivery of non-formula funded provision which supports London recovery in respect of the COVID-19 pandemic. Learning programmes should be designed to respond to local skills needs, such as short courses to enable Londoners to progress into work.

- 4.47 The 11,840 enrolments in 2023/24 was the highest number since the introduction of this flexibility in 2020/21 (3,340). Enrolments using this flexibility have increased 254% during this time.

London Recovery Flexibility - Level 3

- 4.48 The London Recovery Flexibility for Level 3 was introduced to support London recovery in respect of the COVID-19 pandemic. The flexibility enables providers to fully fund Adult Skills fundable Level 3 vocational qualifications beyond the legal entitlements, on learning programmes of less than 12 months duration which are designed to provide progression into work.
- 4.49 Enrolments using this flexibility were again at their highest in the 2023/24 academic year, standing at 2,920. This is higher than the 2,650 in 2022/23, 2,360 in 2021/22 and 940 in 2020/21 (the year the flexibility was introduced).
- 4.50 Over the last three academic years, enrolments using this flexibility have remained consistent as a proportion of total AEB enrolments, standing at between 0.5-0.6% . This is likely to have been impacted by the introduction of FCfJ, which also supports Level 3 qualifications.

Level 4 Qualifications

- 4.51 Since August 2022 GLA grant-funded providers have had the flexibility to fund eligible learners for approved non-prescribed vocational and technical qualifications at Level 4 which are of regional importance to London.
- 4.52 While making up only a small proportion of total enrolments (320 in 2023/24), enrolments using this flexibility grew by over 1000% compared to 2022/23 (30).

British Sign Language

- 4.53 Since 2019/20, full funding has been available for any learner aged 19 or over whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language (BSL), or who cannot access spoken language because of their deafness and would benefit from BSL, to study for a first qualification in BSL up to and including Level 2. The aim of this flexibility was to increase the number and diversity of people gaining the skills they need to progress through training and into higher skilled work.⁷ From 2022/23 the eligibility criteria for this entitlement was expanded to fully funded learners who are unemployed or receiving low wage of out of work and outside state benefits.⁸
- 4.54 Again, only making up only a small proportion of enrolments, the 170 enrolments through the BSL flexibility in 2023/24 was the highest seen yet, slightly higher than the 160 in 2022/23 and much higher than the 20 and 40 in the two years prior to that respectively.

⁷ Mayor of London (2019). *MD2462: Financial Management of the 2019/20 Adult Education Budget*. April 2019.

⁸ Mayor of London (2022). *MD3016: GLA AEB Grant Funding and Performance Management Rules 2022-23*. July 2022

Upskilling of Staff Delivering Specialist Provision to SEND Learners

- 4.55 The SEND funding flexibility enables providers to apply to the GLA for permission to fully fund delivery of learning that upskills teaching and learning support staff to deliver improved specialist provision for adult learners with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).
- 4.56 The least-utilised flexibility, enrolments stood at 30 in 2023/24, lower than the 70 in the previous year.

5 Jobs and Skills for Londoners

- 5.1 This chapter explores the first full year of the GLA's new Jobs and Skills for Londoners (JSfL) scheme, which was launched in January 2022 to support the mayor's Skills Map for London by awarding grants to London-based providers for the delivery of GLA-funded AEB and FCfJ training provision. Programme delivery itself began in early 2024.
- 5.2 Against the backdrop of continuing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the rising cost of living and the ambition for London to be net zero by 2030, the aim of the scheme is to provide training provision for Londoners who are out of work or in low-paid jobs to access training needed for positive economic and social outcomes. To ensure the scheme is best serving London's economy, the funding has a particular focus on courses related to sectors most important to London's economic recovery and development: the digital, green, hospitality, health and social care and creative industries.
- 5.3 Data from the Employer Skills Survey (ESS) 2022 indicated that the proportion of employers in London with skills gaps in the information and communications sector increased in 2022 compared with 2019 (11% vs. 5%). In the health and social work sector, the proportion with skills gaps increased between 2017 and 2022 (8% in 2017 and 14% in 2022). The proportion with skills gaps in the construction sector remained consistent (7% 2017, 2019 and 2022), though there is likely to be increased demand for skilled workers in this sector in the coming years.⁹ This data indicates that there is an increasing need within London's economy for Londoners with relevant qualifications and skills in these sectors.¹⁰
- 5.4 While the training is available to all Londoners aged 19+ who are unemployed or in low-paid work, and with no existing higher qualification in the subject they wish to study, there is a specific focus on older age groups (50 and above), Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, disabled Londoners, Londoners with English-language needs, those seeking asylum and those with experience of the criminal justice system.
- 5.5 In total, £114m of funding has been committed to the scheme across the 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26 academic years (£38m in each year), with the majority of funding from the GLA's AEB grant, and the remainder from Free Courses for Jobs funding. The funding allocation is distributed amongst 48 training providers.

As shown in

- 5.6 **Table 5.1**, training providers delivered the vast majority of their allocations in 2023/24. Taking into account shortfalls and over-delivery, overall, 90% of allocated funding was delivered in 2023/24.
- 5.7 This picture varies significantly when looking at AEB funding and FCfJ separately, with 94% of AEB funding delivered compared with only 76% of FCfJ funding delivered. Although a higher proportion of JSfL enrolments were at Level 3 compared with overall provision, this indicates that there is still scope for JSfL to provide more Level 3 provision going forward.

⁹ [Government unleashes next generation of construction workers to build 1.5m homes - GOV.UK](#)

¹⁰ Data related to the green energy sector is not available in the ESS 2022 data.

Table 5.1 Jobs and Skills for Londoners budget spend vs. allocation 23/24, split by AEB and FCfJ

JSfL 2023/24	AEB	FCfJ	Total
Total allocation	£29.6m	£8.3m	£37.9m
<i>Actual delivery</i>	<i>£28.7m</i>	<i>£6.3m</i>	<i>£35.0m</i>
<i>% delivered</i>	<i>96.8%</i>	<i>73.0%</i>	<i>92.3%</i>
Total shortfall	£2.6m	£2.3m	£4.9m
Total over delivery	£1.6m	£0.4m	£2.0m
Final position	£27.8m	£6.3m	£34.0m
<i>Difference vs. allocation (£)</i>	<i>-£1.9m</i>	<i>-£2.0m</i>	<i>-£3.9m</i>
<i>Difference vs. allocation (%)</i>	<i>93.9%</i>	<i>75.9%</i>	<i>89.7%</i>
2024/25 allocation	£30.1m	£8.1m	£38.1m

Source: AEB reconciled financial data 2023/24. Figures have been rounded to the nearest £0.1m

5.8 In total in 2023/24, JSfL funding delivered 34,390 enrolments by 23,590 different learners. This amounts to 7% of the total AEB enrolments in London 2023/24. The vast majority of this provision was delivered by private training providers (92%), with the remainder general FE colleges (incl. tertiary) (3%) and other public funded providers (5%). While general FE colleges (incl. tertiary) only provided 3% of overall enrolments, 98% of their provision was in priority sectors, suggesting boosting provision through these sectors could be an important way to help ensure the AEB is providing skills in the right sectors.

5.9 **Figure 5.1** below shows how JSfL enrolment breaks down by sector. As shown, exactly half (50%) of enrolments were in the five JSfL priority sectors, with the highest proportion of enrolments in the healthcare sector (23%). This aligns with one of the GLA's key aims of providing training in the priority sectors where jobs are most needed. In 2021, Skills for Care estimated that due to an aging population in London (and the UK), between 2022 and 2025, 17,000 additional jobs would be required in adult social care, rising to 69,000 by 2035.¹¹ Additionally, data from ESS 2022 showed that 4% of employees in this sector had a skills gap (up from 2.1% in 2017). ESS 2022 data also shows that the proportion of employers in the sector with at least one skill-shortage vacancy (SSV) had increased from 6% in 2017 and 8% in 2019 to 15% in 2022. The AEB enrolment data therefore indicates the JSfL programme is likely to make a positive contribution towards addressing skills shortages in this sector.

5.10 It is also positive that the sector with the second most enrolments was the digital sector (16%), given that previous research estimated the vast majority (87%) of roles advertised in London required digital skills.¹² Data from ESS 2022 showed that among employers in London with SSVs, 29% reported that they found it difficult to find applicants with the required basic IT skills (vs. 23% across the UK as a whole), while 27% reported they found it difficult to find applicants with the required advanced or specialist IT skills (vs. 21% across the UK). For both measures, this was the highest proportion reported by employers when compared with all other English

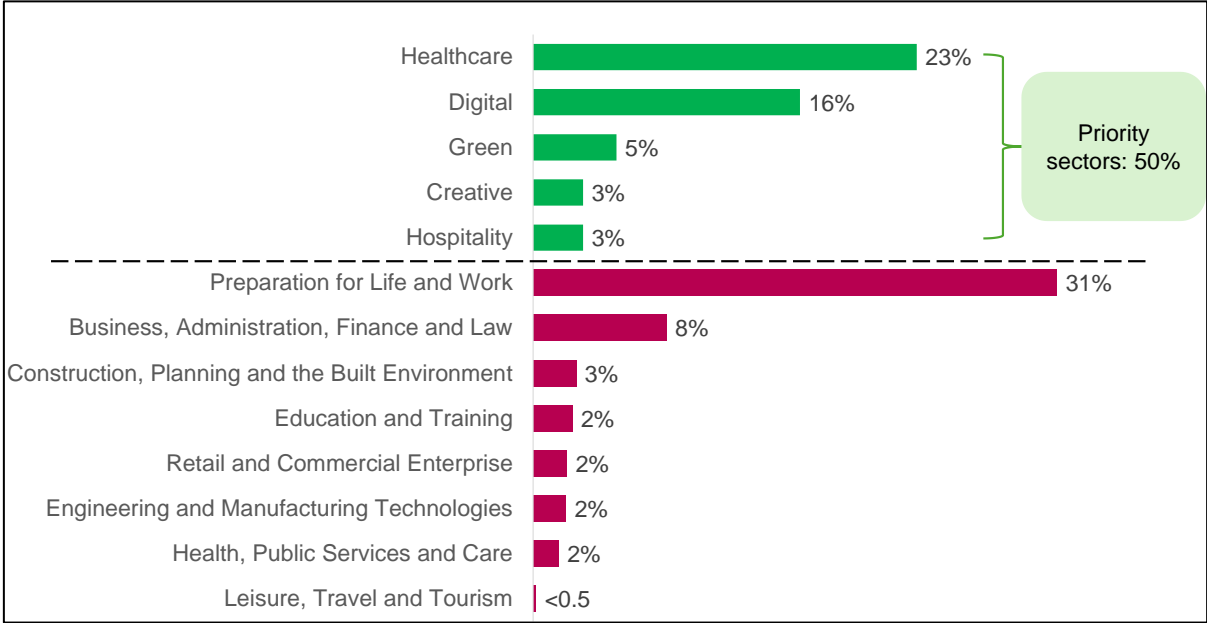
¹¹ Skills for Care, The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England, 2021: [Jobs and Skills for Londoners Prospectus.pdf](#)

¹² Burning Glass Technologies, No Longer Optional: Employer Demand for Digital Skills, June 2019: [Jobs and Skills for Londoners Prospectus.pdf](#)

Government Office Regions, suggesting that digital skills are particularly lacking among job applicants in London.¹³

5.11 The 50% of enrolments in other sectors were dominated by preparation for life and work (31%) courses. The next most common was business, administration, finance and law (8%).

Figure 5.1 JSfL enrolments by sector, 2023/24



Source: ILR R14 2023/24

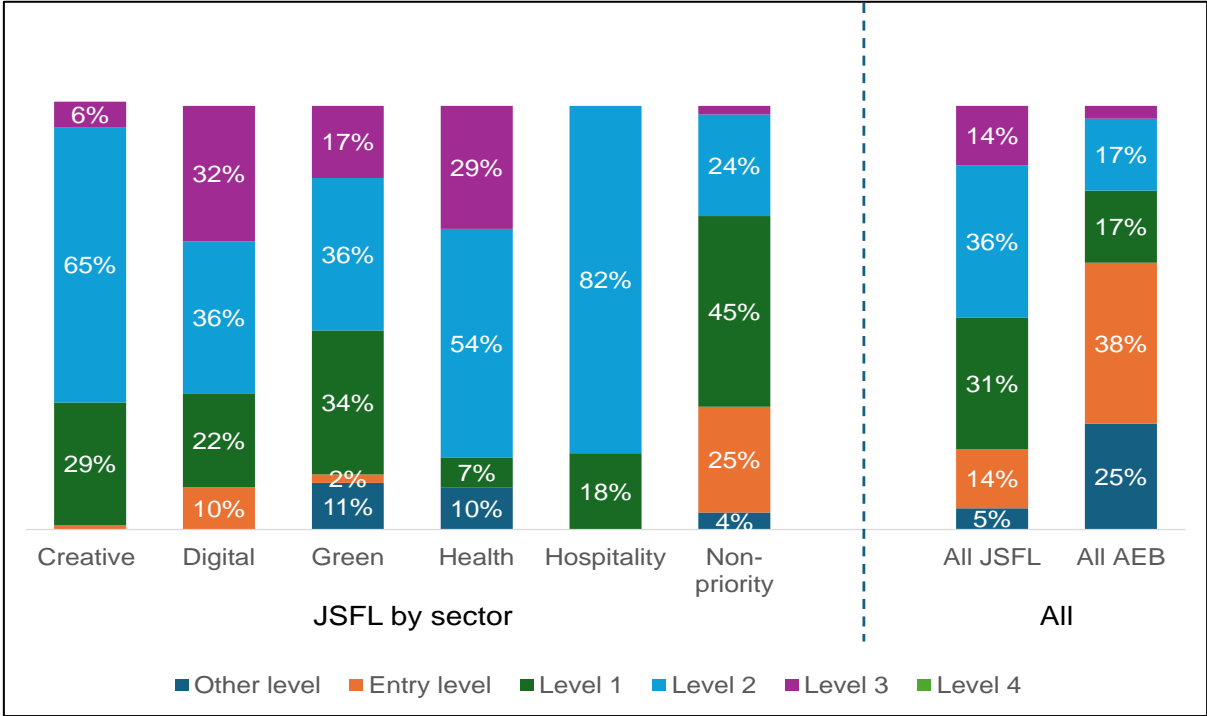
Looking at the profile of JSfL enrolments by level (

5.12 **Figure 5.2)** we can see that a higher proportion of JSfL enrolments were in Level 3 and Level 2 courses in 2024/25 compared with the average levels of all AEB-funded courses. For example, 14% of JSfL courses were in Level 3 and 36% in Level 2, compared with 2% and 17% of all AEB courses respectively. This indicates that JSfL is providing courses which are likely to more directly lead to a positive economic outcome (i.e. good job) and contribute more quickly towards London’s recovery than other courses.

5.13 Sectors delivering the highest proportion of JSfL course at Level 3 were Digital (32% at Level 3) and Health (29% at Level 3).

¹³ [Employer skills survey 2022: England results - GOV.UK](#)

Figure 5.2 JSfL enrolments by level and sector, 2023/24



Source: ILR R14 2023/24

5.14 As one of the aims of JSfL, as with the wider AEB, is to engage more disadvantaged learners, it is positive to see Black, Asian and minority ethnic and disabled learners overrepresented in the JSfL compared with the adult population of London.

As shown in

5.15 **Table 5.2**, Black / African / Caribbean and Black British learners represented 31% of total JSfL learners, compared with 14% in the adult London population overall. This mirrors the trend amongst all AEB learners of overrepresentation of these learners.

5.16 Disabled learners made up 16% of total JSfL learners, compared with 13% of the adult London population.

5.17 On the other hand, despite JSfL funding aiming to increase provision amongst Londoners aged 50 or above, they are underrepresented in JSfL participation (18% of learners are from this age group), compared with the overall adult population in London (37%). This could suggest that providers need more effective targeting and engagement strategies with this age group, or that those aged 50 or over may prefer other AEB-funded courses than those funded via JSfL, if they are less interested in work-related courses. Indeed, the overall AEB profile of learners has a higher proportion of those aged 50+ than JSfL (29% vs. 18%).

Table 5.2 JSfL learners 2023/24 by age, gender, ethnicity and disability, compared with overall adult London population

Demographics		JSfL learners	% of total learners	London adult population	PP change vs. London adult population
Age	19 – 23	3,420	14%	8%	6%
	24-49	16,650	68%	56%	12%
	50+	4,520	18%	37%	-19%
Gender	Female	14,740	60%	52%	8%
	Male	9,840	40%	48%	-8%
Ethnicity	Asian / Asian British	5,140	21%	21%	0%
	Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	7,500	31%	14%	17%
	Mixed / Multiple Ethnic Groups	1,740	7%	5%	2%
	Other Ethnic Group	1,720	7%	7%	0%
	White	7,840	32%	56%	-24%
Physical or mental health condition	No	20,170	82%	-	-
	Yes	3,890	16%	13%	3%
	Prefer not to say	520	2%	-	-
Total		24,590	100%	100%	-

Source: ILR R14 2023/24, Census 2021. Learner data has been rounded to the nearest 10 enrolments.

5.18 Providers who accessed this funding in 2023/24 were largely positive about the programme. To help support learners to achieve positive job outcomes, they were building referral routes with

employers, links with Jobcentre Plus and using in-house careers and employability advisors to help learners with interview skills, CV writing and making job applications.

"We have our own careers advisor internally that all the learners could book sessions with, supports with updating CV, mock interviews, those kinds of things and helping to apply for jobs."

ITP, JSfL

5.19 One provider had strong community links with the local NHS Trust and had created an 'Entry to the NHS' training route. They were looking to build links with security industry employers by working with their local Jobcentre to set up a job fayre where employers and learners could be matched. Another provider was co-located in the local Jobcentre every few weeks to generate referrals and ensure learners were receiving joined-up support.

5.20 Some providers had specific Employer Engagement teams whose role was to build employer partnerships so that learners could be offered a clear pathway into applying for work relevant to their training. This also meant that their training offer itself was kept up to date and responsive to employers' needs.

"We know if we don't have employers, a curriculum is never up to date and if a curriculum is not up to date, we're not teaching people the right skills, so they employers give us all that insight and it's so it's only good if you've got a lot of employers, you can't base your provision on (just) having two or three good relationships, it's about on the ground a lot of employer information constantly being fed into the into the teams".

ITP, JSfL

5.21 One of the employers interviewed highlighted that they would appreciate more information about courses. Because they were so busy, they welcomed the idea of providers reaching out to them and sending them information about relevant courses, rather than having to spend time seeking it out for themselves.

Employer case study: construction SME

"We'd love to work with them [adult learning providers] but I don't have time to spend looking for relevant courses. I want them to come to us... there needs to be better advertising of what's out there."

The Operations Director at a medium sized construction company reported that they take on several apprentices annually but have not employed any learners via AEB funded courses yet. She was unaware that there were courses funded by the GLA that would be suitable fit for her company. She is particularly keen to employ carpenters who also have a CSCS card, Health and Safety training, computer skills and on-site experience, and would be very willing to support providers with designing course materials.

She feels that adult education courses are not marketed enough and there needs to be a stronger awareness of what's out there. She recommends that providers send out quarterly newsletters to local employers highlighting courses that may be relevant to their business needs.

"The construction industry would find health and safety training useful... teaching people how to put risk assessments together properly, method statements, they are so important now."

- 5.22 Providers also highlighted the wider benefits of the programme for learners, related to confidence building and improved health and wellbeing. Often this in itself could support with positive employment outcomes because learners developed better resilience and self-confidence.

"It's a lot about building a bit of confidence, building relationships with people. When speaking with learners two months after the course we find they are in a job, not necessarily the job they trained for, but they felt more confident and tell us: "I use some of the techniques that you told us with the interview I got through the interview, and I've got the job." ITP, JSfL

Learner case study: Ian*

"I did like twenty applications and only one of them moved on to the next stage. You have to jump through so many hoops, and I literally just couldn't get my head around it!"

Ian is in his mid-20s, highly qualified with a Master's degree. He really wanted to work in the Civil Service, but he found the recruitment process very difficult and had been rejected numerous times. After receiving Universal Credit for around six weeks, his Job Centre coach recommended a course with a specific focus on getting a job in the Civil Service.

The course was run by an Independent Training Provider near where he lived. It was a full-time one-week online course, which included CV writing, digital skills and typical behaviour questions asked during the Civil Service recruitment process. He thought that the course had been designed through close working with the Civil Service.

Ian praised the course leader, who he felt was very patient with learners with language difficulties, and was able to keep the course going at a pace that didn't negatively impact the other learners. The course had a positive impact on his mental health and made him feel like he was making good progress. Ian now has a permanent job in the Civil Service and is looking to apply for a promotion soon.

"I'm really happy I did the course. it helped me understand the type of buzzwords and pointers that the assessors will be looking for in an application."

*Name has been changed

- 5.23 One challenge mentioned by some JSfL providers was being able to keep track of job outcomes and record these once the learner had completed their course. One had employed a Quality Director whose role was partly to improve how they monitored and evidenced job outcomes.

"And so when we have given them that support, you can see the difference it's making in people's lives as well. So we just need to better record than that."

ITP, JSfL

- 5.24 Another challenge for providers offering training in hospitality, health and social care, and creative industries was that they noted, while most of their learners have had positive job outcomes, they have been unable to claim job outcome payments for some of them because

they did not meet the GLA's 'Good Work' standard¹⁴. This is partly due to the nature of the work in these sectors, for example, in health and social care or hospitality, where zero hours contracts are more common.

"We've had quite a few more that have gone into jobs, but they don't qualify for the criteria that the GLA set, so we've had quite a lot of job outcomes, but we can only claim thirty of those under the good jobs outcome."

ITP

¹⁴ [Good Work Standard guidance and resources | London City Hall](#)

6 Conclusions and areas for attention

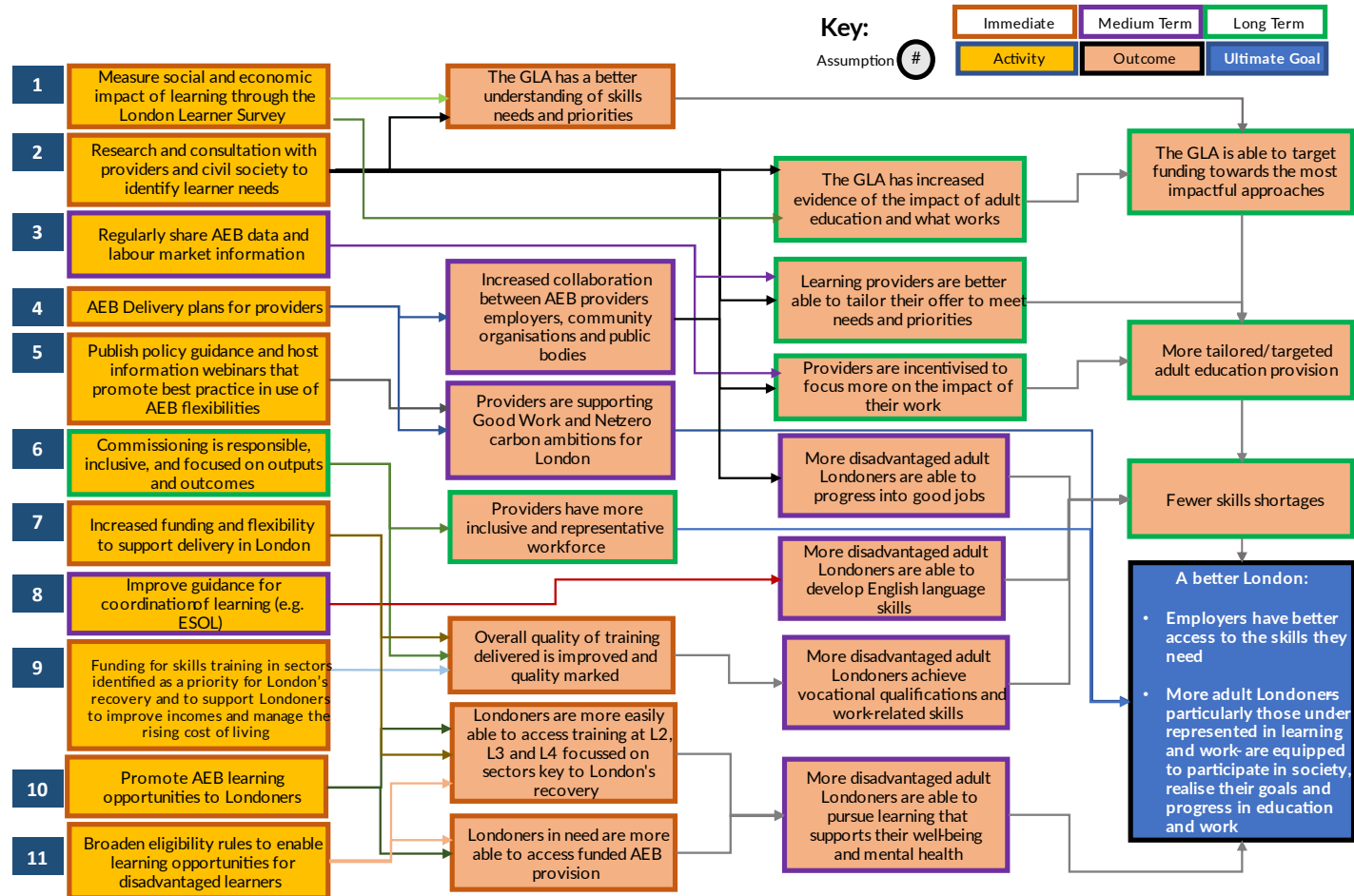
- 6.1 The Theory of Change (ToC) underlying the GLA's changes to the AEB is presented in the Appendix to this report. In the short-term, the GLA's goals are to ensure Londoners are more easily able to access training at Level 2, Level 3 and Level 4 focussed on priority sectors; Londoners in need are more able to access funded AEB provision; and the overall quality of training delivered is improved.
- 6.2 Evidence over time 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** and a **growing share of participation in these flexibilities**. Policies such as removal of the three-year residency requirement for Londoners on certain immigration schemes, and funded learning for learners who are out of work and outside of benefit arrangements, have seen large increases in learners funded during 2023/24. Providers have welcomed the flexibility that these policies offer, as it has enabled them to target more provision at disadvantaged learners as well as expanding their ESOL provision. Some providers reported that demand for ESOL was outstripping what they could offer and would appreciate more flexibility to over-deliver.
- 6.3 Where there are increases in participation, the data shows these are being successfully targeted at Londoners who are unemployed or earn below the LLW, **in line with strategic objectives to improve the accessibility of adult education and skills for more disadvantaged Londoners**.
- 6.4 Analysis of participation in AEB-funded learning also shows a continuing focus on **learners from Black, Asian and other minoritised groups** (who are more likely to be in the low-income, disadvantaged groups that the GLA is seeking to support). The proportion of AEB-funded learners from these groups continues to outstrip the proportion in London as a whole. London Learner Survey data also shows that Black learners report more positive economic outcomes from their learning.
- 6.5 One group where the GLA may want to focus more attention is learners with **long-term health conditions and disabilities**. Participation data over time has shown only small increases in participation among this group. Furthermore, they are less likely to report positive economic outcomes in the London Learner Survey, reflecting that additional support may be needed for those looking for work. Programmes with specific job outcome targets, like the Jobs and Skills for Londoners programme, could include specific targets for learners with long-term health conditions and disabilities which reflect the additional support they may need.
- 6.6 The additional flexibilities for funding specific 'licence to practice' courses and for additional Level 3 and Level 4 qualifications have been welcomed, in particular to support learners to get into jobs in construction, hospitality and health and social care (aligned with London's priority sectors), and to support more in-work progression for employed learners. Given that the London Learner Survey shows the most positive economic outcomes for Level 3 Adult Skills learning, the GLA should **consider expanding funding for those qualifications in priority sectors**. Funding for **licence to practice** courses in construction, and health and social care will become more important as these areas need more skilled workers in the coming years. Early years is another area where more recruits will be needed as the government's expanded childcare entitlements are rolled out.

6.7 Turning to medium-term objectives, these include:

- Increased collaboration between AEB providers, employers, community organisations and public bodies. The Jobs and Skills for Londoners programme is an example of where this is being achieved, as providers work with community organisations and Jobcentre Plus to identify referrals, and with employers to build progression pathways from learning into work.
- Providers supporting Good Work and Net Zero ambitions for London, including supporting more Londoners into good jobs. Evidence from the London Learner Survey shows positive employment progression, while the Jobs and Skills for Londoners programme builds good work into its job outcomes targets.
- Equipping more disadvantaged Londoners from migrant groups with English language skills, and more disadvantaged Londoners to achieve vocational qualifications and develop work-related skills. Increasing participation in learning through flexibilities like removing the three-year residency requirement, has resulted in wider access to learning for London's migrant groups and increased ESOL participation. Furthermore, the combination of flexibilities, alongside employment-focused programmes like Jobs and Skills for Londoners, is delivering skills and qualifications in priority growth sectors where Londoners are more likely to be able to find jobs.
- Supporting more Londoners to pursue learning that supports wellbeing and mental health. Evidence from the London Learner Survey shows that learners report positive social outcomes from their learning, across both Adult Skills and Community Learning. Importantly, this applied equally to learners with a learning difficulty or disability, and those without.

6.8 A key longer-term aim of reforms to the AEB is for the GLA to be able to target funding to the most impactful approaches. Results from the London Learner Survey demonstrate that learner outcomes vary by provision and demographics. As this evidence builds over time, the GLA can use it to help target AEB provision to ensure that the economic and social benefits of adult learning are optimised for disadvantaged Londoners.

Appendix 1: AEB Theory of Change



1 Data and research throughout will be used to inform policy approach

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