



Evaluation of the GLA Skills for Londoners Innovation Fund

Final report

21 December 2021

Contents

Executive Summary	i
Key findings.....	i
Recommendations	iii
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Background and context	1
1.2 Aims of the evaluation.....	2
1.3 Methodology	2
1.4 Structure of the report	4
2 Overview of the projects	5
2.1 Provider motivations for delivering the programme	5
2.2 Coverage of the projects.....	5
2.3 What providers perceived to be innovative.....	6
2.4 Performance against plan	8
2.5 Learner demographics	12
3 Delivery of programme activities	16
3.1 Recruitment of learners.....	16
3.2 Delivery of the training	18
3.3 Perceptions of project activities.....	22
4 Programme outcomes.....	27
4.1 Knowledge and behaviour change	27
4.2 Short- to medium-term outcomes.....	31
4.3 Longer-term outcomes and impacts.....	32
4.4 Sustainability of the programme activities	33
4.5 Scalability	33
5 Conclusions and recommendations	35
5.1 Conclusions	35
5.2 Recommendations	38
ANNEXES	39
Annex 1 Programme Theory of Change.....	40

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from an external evaluation of the Skills for Londoners (SfL) Innovation Fund programme delivered by the Greater London Authority between March 2020 and August 2021. The programme funded innovative adult skills initiatives that addressed London's skills priorities. In total, 27 projects by 25 providers successfully bid for funding of between £100,000 and £500,000

The evaluation draws out examples of effective practice in delivering adult skills provision that can be used more widely across London. It therefore examined the effectiveness of projects delivery, the scalability of the projects and their impact.

The evaluation employed a mixed methods approach. This included case studies with 16 projects where we interviewed delivery staff, learners and partners (45 in total, at an average of 7.5 per case study). This was complemented with analysis of the ILR R14 data return. The R14 data return contains information on learners that have been enrolled on the SfL Innovation Fund projects by the end of the 2021 academic year.

Key findings

Overview of the projects

- Most projects provided basic skills/ESOL or employability courses, primarily short courses below Level 2. These were targeted at hard-to-reach groups, including the unemployed, individuals with basic skills needs, new arrivals and those with learning difficulties and disabilities. A few also targeted low skilled adults in employment. Only two of the projects had originally planned to deliver provision online, with around a third planning to deliver provision in community venues.
- For most case study projects, the innovative aspect of the programme was engaging hard-to-reach learners through using new outreach methods and in making provision more accessible by delivering provision in community settings. Some providers reported that these practices were not wholly new, but rather had been built on good practice that was identified from previous projects or existing activities. A few projects also reported that the innovative practice related to their partnership working with employers or in the innovative use of new technologies, which came about largely because they needed to develop online learning models that were a new element to usual delivery models.
- The programme providers claimed 61% of the total funding allocated for the projects, (£4,402,105 was claimed against a total programme budget of £7,219,523). The underspend was largely due to a delayed start caused by the initial pandemic lockdown in March 2020 and then delays due to having to transfer provision online. In the first year of the programme (from March to August 2020) the projects collectively achieved 31% of their forecast spend for the academic year (£1,224,749 against a forecast of £3,894,297). Provision in the second academic year of the programme (2020/21) was far closer to profile at 92% (£3,166,043 against a forecast of £3,425,226).
- Overall, 21 of the 25 SfL Innovation Fund providers delivered project activities. Of these, three providers achieved and exceeded their targets (Camden LBC, Ealing LBC and Wandsworth LBC) and a further six providers achieved over 75% of their targets (Kingston Adult Education, Westminster City Council, WEA, City Lit, Harrow LBC and South Thames Colleges Group).
- A high proportion of the programme learners were from disadvantaged groups. Across all the projects, 62% of learners had a prior attainment of Level 2 or below and most (41%) had a prior attainment of below Level 1. The programme has also engaged a higher

proportion (61%) of ethnic minority learners than those that enrolled on AEB grant funded programmes in 2019/20 and 2020/21 and a similar proportion of learners with learning difficulties or disabilities (14%).

Delivery of project activities

- In the case studies there were a range of different approaches employed to recruit learners. The most common were using outreach partners (including community groups, jobcentres and youth organisations), basing staff in community centres and in utilising family learning. Some projects also expanded their usual methods of recruitment. The use of outreach partners was generally believed to be effective. However, the number of referrals provided by different partners varied considerably. Organisations that gained a higher proportion of their learners through referrals, such as WEA, and Harrow LBC were generally able to build on strong pre-existing relationships with community organisations, especially the local Children's Centre, to disseminate information and gain referrals.
- Programmes that engaged employees generally recruited the employers or agencies and asked them to promote the training to their employees. This was felt to be effective as employers were in a good position to promote the value of the training to their staff. It was particularly common in the Health and Social Care sector.
- All the case study projects made changes to their projects as a result of the pandemic. The most notable change was the widespread shift to online and remote teaching and learning. For some this was a substantial change in their delivery model. However, a few case study projects extended their training offer to reflect the evolving needs of their community. Most notably Croydon Adult Education and Redbridge LBC introduced a digital skills strand to their offer because they felt that because of increased online activities during the lockdown, there was a pressing need to provide training on this subject.
- Learners generally felt the training delivered by the programme was well delivered and valuable. For some it provided a valuable social activity during the lockdowns. The online learning was not generally considered difficult to access, with many learners reporting that they were comfortable with using Zoom or Teams. Some also felt it provided benefits by reducing travel and childcare costs and making it easier to fit the training around their day.
- Another key strength of the projects was in the provision of holistic support providing employability, basic skills and vocational learning. In particular, the provision of extensive pastoral support for learners was a key part of their offer. Project staff in these providers believed this was essential to build learners' confidence and emotional resilience in order for them to complete the courses. It was felt to be particularly valuable for long-term unemployed people and ESOL learners, as well as those that had been outside education for a long time.

Programme outcomes

- In all the case study projects, most learners said that the project had improved their personal development. The most common reported changes were improved self-efficacy and confidence (reported by learners on most case study projects); and improved skills and ability to manage and improve health and wellbeing (reported in three projects). The programme also had a substantial impact on developing individuals' basic and ESOL skills. It has had less of an impact on developing vocational skills, as few projects delivered this provision.
- In the case study projects, the most common progression outcome for learners was going into further education or training. In some projects, and particularly those providing first-

steps learning, this was part of the design of their project. In some cases, learners progressed to a course at a higher level. However, it was relatively common for learners to progress from shorter courses to longer courses, and from non-qualification bearing courses to accredited programmes.

- In the case study interviews there were relatively few examples of learners progressing into employment. This was attributed by project staff to many learners on their project remaining a substantial distance from entering the labour market, and because there have been limited job opportunities available during the last year as a result of the lockdowns. It was also affected by project activities being delayed and therefore backloaded, which meant most learners had only recently completed their training by the time of the case studies.
- Around half of the case study projects planned to continue to deliver some or all of the elements of their SfL Innovation Fund project in 2021/22 through their AEB budget. Other projects wanted to continue some of the projects but did not have the funding to do so. Other projects were exploring the feasibility of delivering some new programmes through the Mayor's new Sectoral Academies Programme.
- Most of the case study projects reported that they had the ability to scale up their provision. Some programmes were however less scalable than others. The City Lit project for deaf learners for example required specialist teachers that were difficult to recruit. Similarly, the Camden LBC project required a very tailored programme of support and therefore would be difficult to provide to a larger group.

Recommendations

The study identified the following recommendations

1. GLA to consider mechanisms that support the provision of non-accredited training to provide entry routes for those furthest from the labour market. This includes taster programmes on basic skills/ESOL and employability skills, as well as some first steps recreational learning programmes and personal development topics such as self-efficacy.
2. The GLA to incentivise the delivery of basic skills programmes targeted at low skilled workers in key London sectors in future commissioning programmes or through increasing the funding rate. This could include functional skills courses contextualised for particular sectors, which has been shown to be effective for engaging learners in sectors such as construction and health and social care.
3. Providers to expand the delivery of online programmes of first steps/basic skills programmes as well as potentially other subjects such as health and safety qualifications and food safety.
4. The GLA to explore the possibility of developing and rolling out new learning programmes that bring together basic skills/ESOL provision, employability skills and vocational learning, linked to industry experience.
5. Providers to continue to engage and develop links with third sector organisations in order to create referrals and progression pathways for those furthest from the labour market.
6. The GLA to continue to run small scale competitions to encourage innovation, but this should include different Lots with fixed budgets to encourage a more diverse range of projects.

1 Introduction

This report presents the findings from an external evaluation of the Skills for Londoners (SfL) Innovation Fund programme delivered by the Greater London Authority (GLA) between March 2020 and August 2021. The programme funded innovative adult skills initiatives that addressed London's skills priorities.

The evaluation was conducted by ICF Consulting Services Ltd. It draws on in depth case studies with 16 of the 27 projects funded through the programme and analysis of data from the R14 Individualised Learner Record (ILR) return for the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years.

1.1 Background and context

The SfL Innovation Fund programme was developed by the GLA to identify and test innovative approaches to delivering adult skills provision that could inform their on-going delivery of the Adult Education Budget (AEB). It invited AEB providers to submit proposals for projects that provided tangible outcomes, were innovative and met one or more of the Mayor's priorities for skills and training, which included:

- Widening participation for disabled Londoners
- Preventing future violence
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
- Addressing sectoral priorities in London's economy
- Support for those affected by jobs displacement and redundancies
- Improving participation in digital skills training
- English and maths

Providers submitted bids in December 2019 for projects to commence by March 2020. The programme funded projects of between £100,000 and £500,000. Providers were able to submit multiple bids. In total, 27 projects were approved for funding across 25 providers.

Delivery of the projects was due to commence from March 2020. However, the Covid-19 restrictions that were implemented shortly afterwards have had a significant impact on provider's training provision. Providers were unable to deliver on site training during two lockdowns, and additionally they have had to develop systems for online learning and, more recently, mass testing learners. This influenced the delivery of the projects.

The projects funded through the innovation fund were diverse. There were however four broad types of projects. These were:

- **Personal development programmes.** This targeted activities such as violence reduction and substance misuse. There were 3 projects in this category.
- **In work training.** This provided flexible learning that allowed individuals to access training around their employment. There were 4 projects in this category.
- **Vocational training.** This provided career entry vocational training in priority programme subject areas. There were 3 projects that fell within this category.
- **Employability and first steps basic skills provision.** This provided targeted support to help individuals overcome barriers to employment. There were 16 projects in this category.

A theory of change setting out the activities delivered in the programme and their expected outcomes and impact is presented in Annex 1.

1.2 Aims of the evaluation

The evaluation draws out examples of effective practice in delivering adult skills provision that can be used more widely across London. It therefore examined:

- **The effectiveness of the projects** in achieving their specific objectives. This included examining 'success factors' for engaging specific groups of learners and employers, good practice in delivering provision (including lessons learnt from online delivery during the two national lockdowns) and effective approaches in measuring outcomes.
- **The scalability of the projects** to identify whether they can be expanded to cover a larger area of London and whether there are any limitations with this approach.
- **The impact and added value of projects** and the programme overall on learners, employers and the London area, including how the programme addressed gaps in existing provision.

An interim report presenting the findings from the first set of seven case studies and the F06 ILR data was produced in March 2021. This was in order to set out early lessons to inform the roll out of the AEB in 2021/22. This final report presents the findings from the evaluation overall.

1.3 Methodology

We used a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the SfL Innovation Fund programme. The key research tasks are described below.

1.3.1 Case studies

We conducted case studies with 16 projects. The case study projects were selected by the GLA at the start of the evaluation to cover a diverse mix of projects, including those that had what was perceived to be particularly innovative or could inform GLA policy on ESOL or sectoral approaches and how outcomes can be measured. However, two projects from the original selection were subsequently replaced as these projects were not able to deliver some of the key project activities due to the disruption caused to the sector by the pandemic.

The aim of each case study was to be able to triangulate the views of different actors to examine how provision was delivered, what worked well and less well, and the benefits the programmes provided learners. 93 interviews were carried out (an average of 5.8 per case study) with project managers, support staff, tutors and learners.

The details of the projects and the interviews conducted are presented in the table below.

Table 1.1 Case studies undertaken

Provider name	Provision delivered	Type of project	Interviews conducted
Barnet and Southgate College	Free, accessible ESOL embedded in nursery care, and in accessible community venues	First steps/basic skills	6 interviews - interview with the project manager, 1 tutor, 2 support staff and 2 learners

Provider name	Provision delivered	Type of project	Interviews conducted
Croydon LBC (Croydon Adult Education)	ESOL and occupational skills development programmes, followed by job brokerage and social prescribing targeting the most disadvantaged people	Employability provision	8 interviews - interview with the project manager, 3 tutors, 1 support staff, 1 stakeholder and 2 learners
Lambeth College	Upskilling through delivering the Higher Development Award for Health Care Support staff (who gain practical and general functional skills, aiding retention and career progression)	In work training	7 interviews - interview with the project manager, 2 tutors and 4 learners
Kingston Adult Education	Employability and basic skills training to support the long term unemployed, ESOL learners, those with mild to moderate mental health problems, social and emotional needs plus BAME learners to get back into employment.	Employability provision	8 interviews - interview with the project manager, 1 tutor, 2 support staff, 1 stakeholder and 3 learners
The City Literary Institute (City Lit)	Free vocationally orientated courses in digital, visual arts, counselling and massage for low-income people; provision for hard-to-engage and disadvantaged learners with employability skills - for deaf, survivors of human trafficking, ESOL, stammerers, homeless	First steps / basic skills provision	8 interviews - joint interview with the two project managers, 3 tutors and 4 learners
Waltham Forest College	Blended learning model, based in the workplace, using a bespoke virtual learning environment delivering functional skills to those in low-level, low-skilled jobs in the health and social care sector with the aim of work progression/employability	In work training	8 interviews - interview with the project manager, 3 tutors, 2 stakeholders and 2 learners
Harrow London Borough Council (LBC)	English or ESOL with embedded maths, ICT, employability and British values aspect. Focusing on independent living for disabled people and SEND/Social Integration and outcomes	First step / basic skills provision	7 interviews - interview with the project manager, 3 tutors, 1 support staff and 2 learners
Camden LBC	Mentoring and holistic support to victims and/or perpetrators of violent crime, by creating bespoke pathways into employment and/or further learning	Personal development	5 interviews - interview with the project manager, 1 support staff, 1 stakeholder and 2 learners
Common Council of the City of London (City of London)	Setup of community digital hubs across 12 housing estates for unemployed and ESOL, with aim to develop digital skills interviews	Employability skills	1 interview in total, comprising an interview with the project manager
Harrow College and Uxbridge College (HCUC)	Supporting staff to help SEND learners maximise their opportunities in education and employment/progression	First steps/ basic skills	9 interviews in total, comprising of interviews with 2 project managers, 3 tutors, 1 support staff and 3 learners
Newham College of Further Education	English and Maths skills assessment training for NHS health workers	In work training	3 interviews in total, comprising an interview with the project manager and two tutors
Redbridge LBC	Vocational courses for BAME women for employability training in childcare work and ESOL	Vocational training	6 interviews - one project manager, 2 tutors, 1 support staff and 2 learners

Provider name	Provision delivered	Type of project	Interviews conducted
Sutton LBC	Drama-based ESOL provision; courses to meet skills gaps in creative/cultural sector and business start-up; emotional resilience award	First steps/ basic skills	5 interviews - interview with the project manager, 1 tutor, 1 support staff and 2 learners
Capital City College Group	Flexible and supported L3 qualifications to target groups to overcome learning barriers and meet skills gaps in target sectors	Vocational training	4 interviews - interview with the project manager, 1 tutor, and 2 learners
United Colleges Group	Vocational courses in construction	Vocational training	3 interviews - interview with the project manager and 2 support staff
Workers' Education Association (WEA)	Engagement of people into non-accredited ESOL using book clubs, community and citizenship courses, to build confidence and progress to formal ESOL provision	First-steps/ basic skills	5 interviews - interview with the project manager, 1 tutor, 1 support staff, 1 stakeholder and 1 learner

Six of the case studies were done in February/March 2021 to feed into the interim report and a further case study was conducted in April 2021. These were case studies that had already made significant progress in delivering their SfL Innovation Fund project (achieving at least 20% of total outputs). The remaining nine case studies were conducted in June/July 2021.

1.3.2 Data analysis

This report also draws on analysis of the end-of-year ILR R14 data returns for the academic years 2019/20 and 2020/21. This contained information on learners that have been enrolled on the SfL Innovation Fund projects. It allowed us to analyse:

- The number of learners undertaking project courses by training provider
- The characteristics of learners, including age, ethnicity, disability status, domicile
- The course details (level, sector subject area, length), when linking the course code to the details on the Register of Regulated Qualifications

1.4 Structure of the report

This report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 examines the projects funded through the programme and the learners supported;
- Chapter 3 explores the delivery of the programme activities, from learner recruitment through to the delivery of training and pastoral support;
- Chapter 4 presents the early outcomes of the projects on increasing learner knowledge and confidence and in improving progression to further learning and employment. In this chapter we also explore the sustainability and scalability of the programme; and
- Chapter 5 presents the conclusions and recommendations from the study.

2 Overview of the projects

This chapter presents the design of the projects and their performance against plan. It specifically examines the performance of the 27 SfL Innovation Fund projects against plan, how participants were recruited and the characteristics of learners.

2.1 Provider motivations for delivering the programme

In the case studies, the most common reason that organisations gave for bidding to deliver Innovation Fund projects was to increase provision where providers were aware of unmet demand. Most providers reported that they understood there was a demonstrable need for the project before bidding for Innovation Fund funding. In some cases, this was because they had waiting lists for particular courses that they were unable to support because they did not have sufficient AEB funding. This was particularly common for first steps/basic skills programmes, including ESOL, where parts of London with high ethnic minority populations commonly reported that they had more demand for training than they had places.

A few projects had developed plans based on identifying demand from employers for particular training. This was the case for in-work training projects that aimed to upskill employees in the health and social care sector and vocational training projects that had identified specific skills gaps in sector or occupations, such as childcare, construction, and personal services. In most cases, this was identified from discussions with employers that the providers already worked with.

2.2 Coverage of the projects

2.2.1 Provision delivered through the projects

Many projects planned to provide basic skills or ESOL courses. This was a core element in six of the 16 projects. Eight projects were originally expected to be delivered in community venues.

Most provision was also targeted at programmes below Level 2. Only two projects had planned to deliver programmes at Level 3 and above, which were primarily in specific vocational subjects, and notably Capital City College Group supported Level 3 qualifications to target groups to overcome learning barriers and meet skills gaps in target sectors.

Most projects also planned to deliver short courses. This is most likely to be because basic skills/ESOL and employability courses are most commonly delivered as shorter bite-sized programmes. Some projects planned to deliver courses that lasted over six months, but in most cases this was because the courses were delivered on a flexible basis and learners were able to take extra time if needed.

Only two projects had originally intended to deliver online provision. One project targeted employees in health and social care where online learning could increase the accessibility of training, and another offered an online wellbeing course. For hard-to-reach groups requiring basic skills or employability programmes, the orthodoxy was that these learners required face-to-face sessions where they could access more 1-2-1 support.

2.2.2 Target groups and sectors

Most of the projects targeted hard-to-reach groups. The most common groups targeted were unemployed people. These groups were a key target for employability programmes and first steps provision as it was assumed that many needed to develop new skills to gain employment. In the case studies we found there was variation by project, with Kingston Adult Education focused on the long-term unemployed, while other projects focused on specific groups of unemployed people such as those with ESOL needs (Barnet and Southgate College, Croydon Adult Education, WEA, Harrow LBC) and BAME communities (Redbridge LBC). United Colleges Group targeted unemployed young people who needed pre-entry vocational training.

Low-skilled workers were also the main target group for providers that aimed to support individuals in employment. Low-skilled workers in the health and social care sector were a significant target group across projects (Waltham Forest College, Lambeth College, City of London, Barnet and Southgate College). Capital City College Group targeted low-income learners who wanted to progress to Level 3 qualifications.

A few projects also targeted learners with special needs. Projects recognised that this was a group that had been underrepresented in past delivery. City Lit targeted deaf learners, and adults with learning difficulties for some of their programmes. HCUC targeted SEND learners at Level 2 but through upskilling their tutors on vocational courses so that the teaching was more responsive and sensitive to the specific needs of SEND learners. Croydon Adult Education also targeted people with learning difficulties and disabilities. Sutton LBC, Croydon Adult Education and Kingston Adult Education all recruited people with mental health needs for their courses to help them manage their conditions.

Health and social care was the main sector targeted by projects supporting individuals in employment. Some providers reported they focused on this sector as they felt there was known demand given the sector has many workers with English as a second language, and that as a public sector employer they would be keen to provide training opportunities to their workforce. Recruiting employers was also felt to be more straightforward as the provider only needed to engage one employer to ensure sufficient learners on training for the course to make it cost effective.

Other projects targeted childcare, creative businesses, and construction. These sectors were targeted where providers were aware from the employers they work with of demand for training, or where there were job opportunities.

2.3 What providers perceived to be innovative

For most case study projects, the innovative aspect of the programme was largely around the engagement of learners. Most reported targeting using new outreach methods to engage hard to reach groups, or in making provision more accessible by delivering provision in community settings.

Some providers reported that these practices were not wholly new, but rather had been built on good practice that was identified from previous projects or existing activities. For some, activities delivered through the programme were like activities delivered through previous ESF-funded projects.

A few projects reported that the innovative practice related to their engagement and partnership working with employers. This was the case for projects targeting employees in health and social care. A notable example was also Camden LBC that

engaged employers through a dedicated staff member to take on vulnerable and at-risk young people for industry placements.

Several projects reported the innovative use of new technologies, which came about largely because they needed to develop online learning models that were a new element to usual delivery models. A few projects implemented innovative online learning platforms and/or designed interactive methods of online learning.

Provider: Waltham Forest College

Project description: The Flex-e-learn project aimed to deliver online Entry Level, Level 1 and Level 2 Functional Skills and Health and Social Care contextualised learning, for 625 disadvantaged learners. It specifically targeted individuals in low-skilled jobs in the health and social care sector with the aim of providing underpinning skills to help them progress in their work. It did this through working with learning and development staff within NHS Trusts.

How the provider delivered the project online

Waltham Forest was one of the few projects that had intended to deliver using online methods from the outset. The project benefitted from a bespoke virtual learning environment. The project wanted to use this to switch from traditional paper and pen approaches to create resources that are interactive for the learners (quizzes, multiple choice questions, matching exercises, videos, webinars), and learners can access these anytime. The platform also enabled tutors to give real time feedback. Moreover, the learners were in communication with each other inside and outside of the college. Speaking and listening assessments were conducted via Zoom.

Some projects also implemented innovative models for delivering basic skills and first steps learning programmes. Most notably:

- Some projects reported implementing a holistic learner-centred learning programme. Harrow LBC planned to offer learners multiple courses at once, amalgamating various employability and lifestyle skills with their core ESOL, cultural understanding and integration provision. Kingston Adult Education similarly planned to deliver three complementary courses which focused on developing employability skills alongside digital and IT skills, online job search, online meetings and word processing.
- A few aimed to contextualise basic skills and ESOL programmes. Lambeth College, Waltham Forest College and City of London planned to deliver ESOL, Maths, English and digital skills embedded within the context of health and social care jobs. The learning was often directly related to job tasks that learners undertake on a day-to-day basis. Barnet and Southgate College's ESOL provision focused on communicating and navigating day-to-day life in London (pre-entry ESOL).
- One also aimed to provide broader personal development support in addition to their core learning programme. Sutton LBC ran online wellbeing courses looking at emotional resilience, balanced diet and healthy eating, and sleeping for a healthy lifestyle. This was alongside training on entrepreneurship in the creative sector.

City Lit felt the innovative part of their programme for deaf learners is that they used tutors that were both literacy/numeracy specialists and also experienced sign-language users. They felt this provided substantial value to learners as a teacher that can sign was better able to communicate English in a way that is understandable for deaf learners.

2.4 Performance against plan

2.4.1 Financial spend against funding allocation

Overall, the programme providers claimed 61% of the total funding allocated for the projects. Over the two years of the programme, £4,402,105 was claimed against a total programme budget of £7,219,523. Just over half (59%) of the funding was spent on formula-funded programmes¹, which are mostly qualification-bearing programmes.

The underspend against profile was largely due to a delayed start. In the first year of the programme (from March to August 2020) the projects collectively achieved 31% of their forecast spend for the academic year (£1,224,749 against a forecast of £3,894,297). Provision in the second academic year of the programme (2020/21) was closer to profile at 92% (£3,166,043 against a forecast of £3,425,226).

This was corroborated in the case studies. Most project leads reported that the delayed start was due to the pandemic restrictions that first came into force in March 2020. This prevented providers from initially recruiting learners onto programmes. When they realised that restrictions would likely persist in the long term, many then needed time to adapt to deliver learning online, which further delayed the start. However, some case study projects (such as Harrow LBC and Croydon Adult Education) compensated for this by extending the project delivery over the summer, which increased delivery in 2020/21.

Some case study providers also reported that there was slightly lower demand for online learning than face-to-face learning. This was attributed to a range of factors. A few stated it was more difficult to recruit to online programmes as their usual communication channels (their website and social media accounts) were not accessed by hard-to-reach groups. Some also reported that some people had difficulty accessing the training due to childcare commitments following lockdowns or self-isolation and a lack of technology.

Additionally, most providers reported that some learners were reluctant to undertake courses that were delivered online, especially learners that had been disengaged from learning for some time or that had limited digital skills. Some tutors also had limited experience of delivering online learning and therefore could not deliver online learning as effectively as their established face-to-face models.

The relatively high performance against target in the second year of the programme indicates however that the projects overall had managed successfully to deliver provision despite the uncertain circumstances. This was despite these barriers that providers experienced in delivering their projects, which were outside their control.

¹ Formula-funded activity is defined as that recorded under Funding Model 35 ('Adult skills') in the ILR. Earnings for this provision are calculated based on the national funding formula. The list of activities eligible for Adult Skills funding can be found on the government's Find a Learning Aim service. Eligible aims consist mostly of regulated provision, but can include some non-regulated activity

Table 2.1 SfL Innovation fund project spend against allocation

Name of Provider	Funding allocation	Spend on Formula-funded provision ²	Spend on Non-formula funded provision ³	Total Funding claimed	% of allocation claimed
Barking and Dagenham College	£306,960	-	£11,465	£11,465	4%
Barnet and Southgate College	£260,000	£151,382	-	£151,382	58%
Camden LBC	£118,000	-	£118,000	£118,000	100%
City Lit	£500,000	£434,396	-	£434,396	87%
City of London	£100,000	-	£100,000	£100,000	100%
Croydon College	£335,006	£161,043	-	£161,043	48%
Croydon Adult Education	£390,000	£57,988	-	£57,988	15%
Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College	£270,000	£1,495	-	£1,495	1%
Ealing LBC	£100,000	£19,382	£11,465	£30,847	31%
Harrow LBC	£100,000	£100,587	-	£100,587	101%
HCUC	£165,000	-	£160,510	£160,510	97%
Morley College	£317,305	£75,906	£247,546	£323,452	102%
Newham College of Further Education	£500,000	£180,293	-	£180,293	36%
Redbridge LBC	£223,904	-	-	-	0%
Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames (Kingston Adult Education)	£100,000	£36,251	£41,902	£78,153	78%
South Bank Colleges (Lambeth College)	£500,000	£189,168	-	£189,168	38%
South Thames College Group	£500,000	£149,978	£303,304	£453,282	91%
Sutton LBC	£190,046	£51,483	-	£51,483	27%
The WKCIC Group (Capital City College Group)	£500,000	-	£242,360	£242,360	48%
Tower Hamlets LBC	£235,000	£102,032	£117,400	£219,432	93%
United College Group	£250,000	£14,888	-	£14,888	6%
Waltham Forest College	£500,000	£605,759	-	£605,759	121%
Wandsworth LBC	£150,000	£84,553	£55,000	£139,553	93%
Westminster City Council	£500,000	£167,670	£332,330	£500,000	100%
Workers' Educational Association (WEA)	£108,302	-	£76,569	£76,569	71%
TOTAL	£7,219,523	£2,584,254	£1,817,851	£4,402,105	61%

Source: ILR R14 data (n=7,929)

² This figure is calculated based on the R14 ILR return submitted by SfL Innovation Fund providers

³ This figure is calculated based on the funding claims submitted by SfL Innovation Fund providers. Non formula-funded provision cannot be calculated from the R14 ILR data

2.4.2 Learners on SfL Innovation Fund programmes

Table 2.1 shows the number of learners that project providers both formula-funded and non formula-funded learning aims, and how this compared to their target. It shows that that 21 of the 25 SfL Innovation Fund providers delivered project activities across the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years. Of these, three providers achieved or exceeded their targets (Camden London Borough Council (LBC), Ealing LBC and Wandsworth LBC). A further six providers achieved over 75% of their targets (Kingston Adult Education, Westminster City Council, WEA, City Lit, Harrow LBC and South Thames Colleges Group).

The four providers that did not recruit any learners on formula-funded learning aims for their SfL Innovation Fund project were City of London, Redbridge LBC, HCUC and Barking and Dagenham College. However, City of London, Barking and Dagenham College and HCUC did deliver some non-formula funded programmes.

Providers that performed better against target included two of the four projects targeted at health and social care workers. Some reported that this was because the sector continued to operate throughout the various lockdowns. Over half of the projects that achieved most of their target were providers targeting hard-to-reach groups, suggesting that it was still possible to engage this target group during the pandemic.

The projects that performed less well against their targets were most commonly those delivering vocational learning programmes. All four providers delivering these programmes (Capital City College Group, United Colleges Group, Morley College and City Lit) did not achieve their target, with two achieving less than 25%. It was corroborated in the case study interviews that providers felt these were difficult programmes to deliver during the pandemic, due to difficulties in arranging work-based and practical learning due to social distancing restrictions. However, at the same time it is perhaps surprising that more learners did not undertake upskilling training given a high proportion were on furlough or in at-risk occupations.

Table 2.2 The number of learning aims and learners enrolled by SfL Innovation Fund project providers, compared to target, 2019/20 and 2020/21

Name of Provider	Learner enrolment target	No of learners on formula-funded programmes	No of learners on non-formula-funded programmes	Total programme learners	% of target achieved
Barnet & Southgate College	210	110	-	110	52%
Camden LBC	10-15	-	15	15	150%
City Lit	1,446	1,281	-	1,281	89%
Croydon College	632	185	-	185	29%
Croydon Adult Education	1,085	216	7	223	20%
Ealing LBC	100	142	-	142	142%
Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College	300	26	-	26	9%
Harrow LBC	163	132	-	132	81%
Morley College Limited	578	39	84	123	21%
Newham College of Further Education	200	130	-	130	65%

Name of Provider	Learner enrolment target	No of learners on formula-funded programmes	No of learners on non-formula-funded programmes	Total programme learners	% of target achieved
Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames (Kingston Adult Education)	75	68	43	111	95%
South Bank Colleges (Lambeth College)	216	135	-	135	63%
South Thames Colleges Group	600	469	-	469	78%
Sutton LBC	365	265	-	265	73%
The WKCIC Group (Capital City College Group)	550	-	393	393	71%
Tower Hamlets LBC	400	75	76	151	23%
United Colleges Group	100	22	-	22	22%
Waltham Forest College	500	323	-	323	65%
Wandsworth LBC	200	157	125	282	136%
Westminster City Council	340	196	124	320	94%
Workers' Educational Association (WEA)	264	-	240	240	91%
TOTAL	8,334	3,971	1,107	4,968	60%

Source: ILR R14 data (n=4,968)

2.4.3 Learner enrolments to date

By the end of the 2020/21 academic year, 4,968 unique learners were enrolled on 7,929 learning aims funded through the SfL Innovation Fund. Table 2.2 showing that most learning aims were on the City Lit, Waltham Forest College, Capital City College Group and South Thames Colleges Group projects. Collectively, these four providers delivered 50% of all the programme learning aims.

Over half (4,522 or 57%) of learning aims were in Preparatory for Life and Work subjects (basic skills). This is unsurprising given most projects delivered basic skills or first steps learning programmes.

A substantial proportion of learning aims (19%) were non-formula funded. These are typically non-accredited programmes. This was corroborated in the qualitative interviews with many providers reported that they used the SfL Innovation Fund to deliver first-steps short courses that could not be funded through their mainstream funding. They reported that this gave them more flexibility to provide bespoke learning programmes.

Table 2.3 Learner aims enrolments reported by each SfL Innovation Fund project in 2019/20 and 2020/21

Name of Provider	Total no of enrolled learning aims	Formula-funded enrolments	Non formula-funded enrolments
Barnet & Southgate College	110	110	-
Camden LBC	15	-	15

Name of Provider	Total no of enrolled learning aims	Formula-funded enrolments	Non formula-funded enrolments
City Lit	2,404	2,404	-
Croydon College	246	246	-
Croydon Adult Education	285	278	7
Ealing LBC	301	301	-
Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College	26	26	-
Harrow LBC	349	349	-
Morley College Limited	123	39	84
Newham College of Further Education	251	251	-
Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames (Kingston Adult Education)	251	205	46
South Bank Colleges (Lambeth College)	302	302	-
South Thames Colleges Group	470	470	-
Sutton LBC	359	359	-
The WKCIC Group (Capital City College Group)	530	-	530
Tower Hamlets LBC	293	125	168
United Colleges Group	22	22	-
Waltham Forest College	576	576	-
Wandsworth LBC	334	179	155
Westminster City Council	344	214	130
Workers' Educational Association (WEA)	338	-	338
TOTAL	7,929	6,456	1,473

Source: ILR R14 data (n=7,929)

2.5 Learner demographics

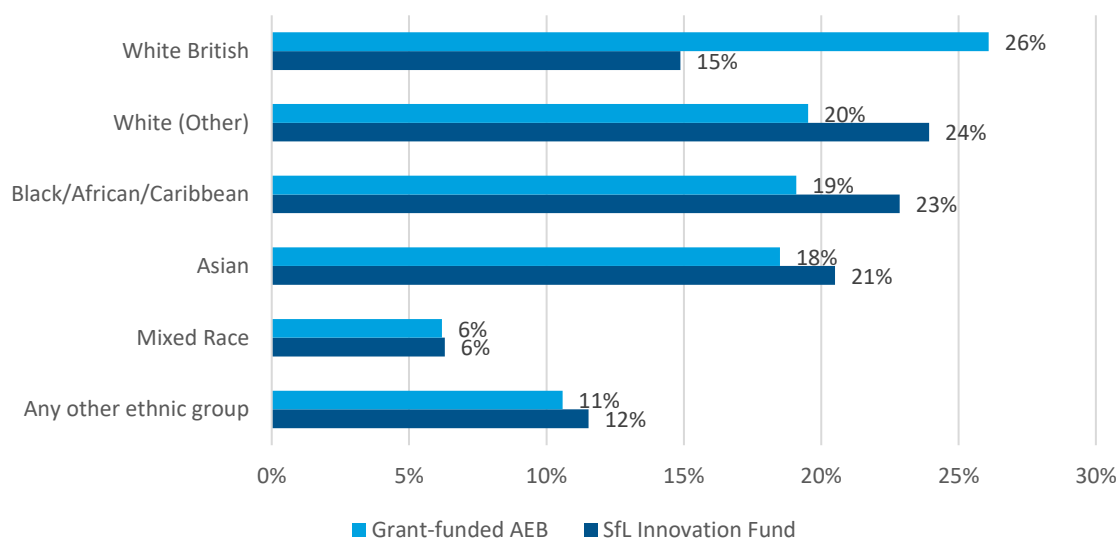
2.5.1 Sex, ethnicity and disability status

The proportion of females engaged in SfL Innovation Fund programmes was in line with the proportion of women on AEB programmes in London. Across all the projects, 3,478 of the 4,968 learners (70%) were female, which is broadly the same as the proportion of females across all AEB grant-funded provision (71%). This split was broadly consistent across all the projects, with only two providers recruited more male learners than female learners (Camden LBC and United Colleges Group).

The programme has also engaged a high proportion of ethnic minority learners. In total, 61% of the learners on SfL Innovation Fund projects were from Black and

Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities (see Figure 2.1). This is substantially higher than the proportion of ethnic minorities in London (40%)⁴ and the number of ethnic minorities on grant funded AEB programmes in 2019/20 and 2020/21 (54%). It likely reflects that many projects were delivering ESOL courses, and English language needs are more common among BAME communities.

Figure 2.1 Ethnicity of Learners



Source: ILR R14 data (n=4,873)

The projects engaged a reasonable proportion of learners with learning difficulties or disabilities. In total, 14% of programme learners considered themselves to have a learning difficulty and/or disability and/or health problem. This is around the proportion of adults in London that are stated to have a disability and the same as the proportion of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities on grant funded AEB programmes in 2019/20 and 2020/21 (14%).

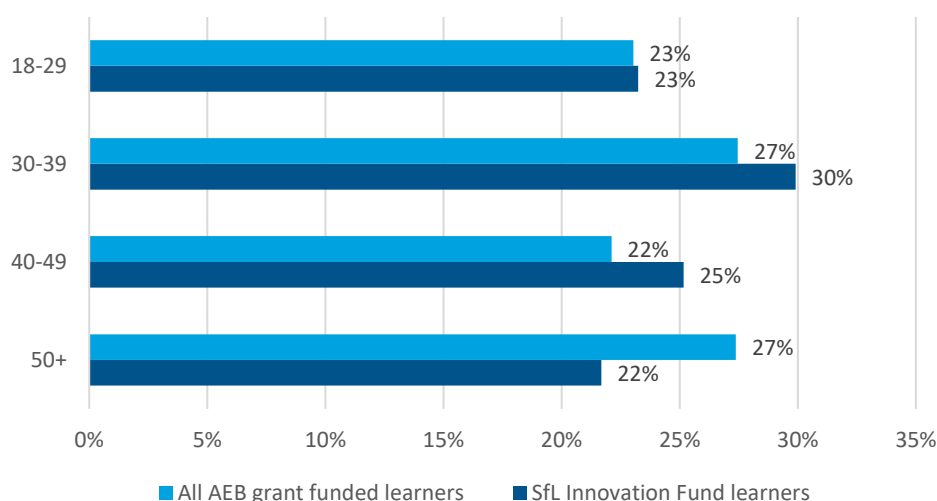
2.5.2 Learner age

The programme has engaged learners across a mix of ages. As shown in Figure 2.2, 23% of participants were 18-29, around a third (30%) were 30-39 and a further 25% were 40-49. This is broadly in line with expectations since most projects were targeting hard-to-reach and low skills adults, rather than targeting particular age groups.

The age profile of learners that participated in the SfL Innovation Fund is similar to that of all AEB grant funded learners. However, a slightly higher proportion of SfL Innovation Fund learners are under 50 (78% compared to 73%).

⁴ Data from the 2011 Census. Summarised on the UK Government website at <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/regional-ethnic-diversity/latest>

Figure 2.2 Age of Learners

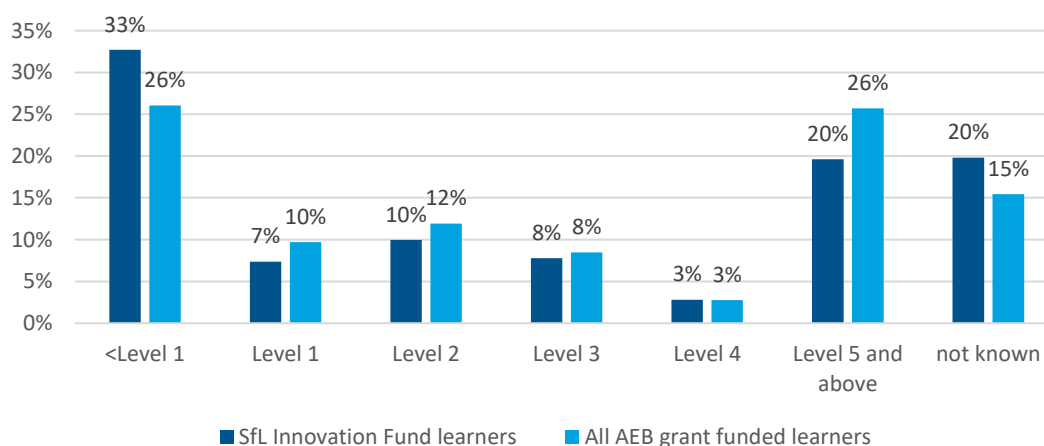


Source: ILR R14 data (n=4,968)

2.5.3 Prior attainment

The programme has successfully targeted those that had lower prior attainment levels. Overall, 62% of learners had a prior attainment of Level 2 or below, of which most (41%) had a prior attainment of below Level 1. The programme had been particularly successful in targeting learners that have a highest attainment level of below Level 1. These learners comprise around a third (33%) of SfL Innovation Fund learners, whereas for all AEB grant funded programmes in 2019/20 and 2020/21 they only account for 26% of learners. This is however unsurprising given that over half of the projects were aiming to support hard-to-reach groups.

Figure 2.3 Learner prior attainment



Source: ILR R14 data (n=4,707)

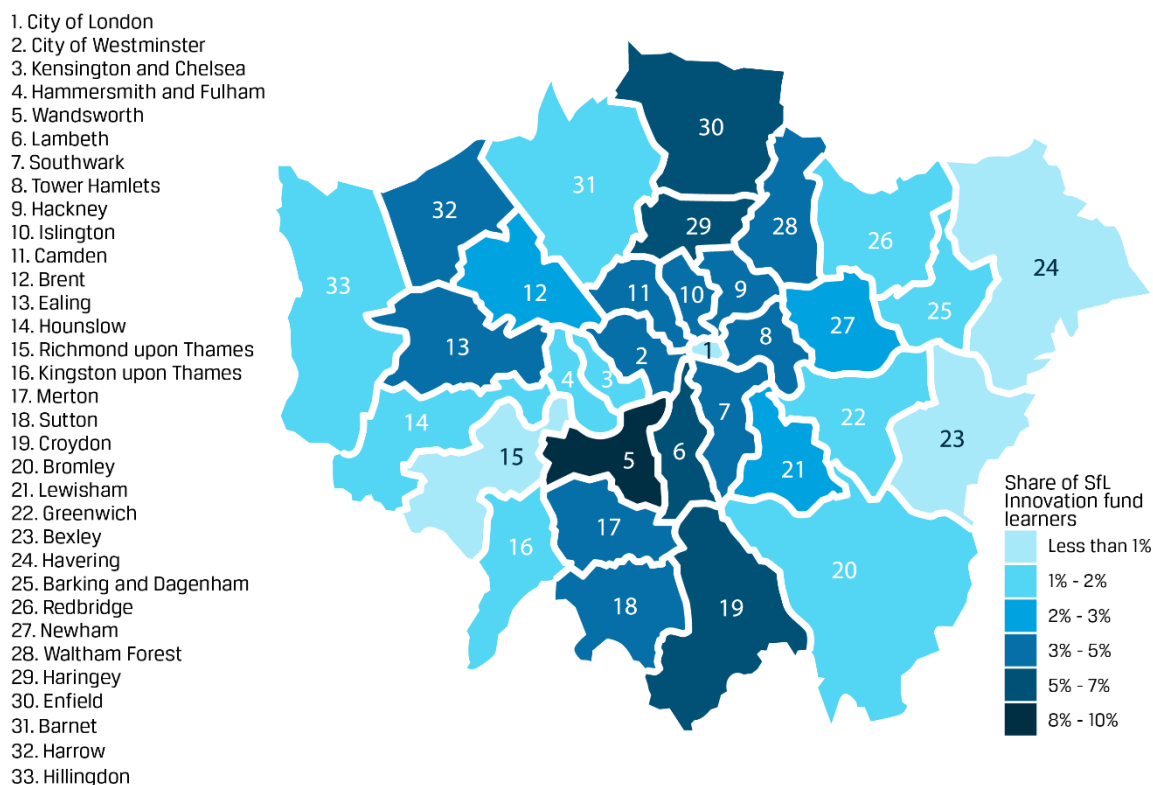
2.5.4 Learner domicile

There was a reasonably good spread of learners across London. Learners from no specific area made up more than 10% of all programme learners. There was also a reasonable mix between inner and outer London areas, with 2,800 (56%) coming from outer London compared to 2,164 (44%) from inner London areas.

The highest proportion of programme learners were from Wandsworth (10% of all learners), Croydon Adult Education (8%) and Haringey (6%). This largely reflects the base of the providers that are enrolling learners onto their projects.

The highest proportion of learners engaged in the programme were from South London boroughs (29%), followed by West London (22%) and East London (21%). Fewer learners were engaged from Central and North London areas (15% and 13% respectively). The high proportion of learners from South London is unsurprising given that a third (seven) of the 21 providers delivering SfL Innovation Fund activities are based in South London⁵.

Figure 2.4 Learner domicile



Source: ILR R14 data (n=4,876)

⁵ Four of the 25 Innovation Fund providers did not deliver any formula-funded activity from which learner domicile could be identified.

3 Delivery of programme activities

This chapter presents the activities have been delivered through the programme to date and learner reflections of the quality and relevance of their learning.

3.1 Recruitment of learners

3.1.1 Recruitment approaches

In the case studies there were a range of different approaches employed to recruit learners. The most common were:

- **Using outreach partners.** This approach was used in seven of the 16 projects that targeted hard-to-reach groups. One project (Croydon Adult Education) used a Vocational Outreach Coordinator responsible for making connections with partners. The most used referral partners were:
 - Community groups for engaging hard-to-reach groups. These groups were felt to be valuable because they provide a location for focusing the distribution of information and visits from project staff. This may include community centres, schools, local charities, and children's centres. One provider (United Colleges Group) reported that they made nearly 100 connections with community groups.
 - Jobcentres were used by Kingston Adult Education. The project distributed an information leaflet to jobcentre work coaches. Additionally, before the lockdown, a project worker went to the jobcentre every week to have a one-to-one chat with customers who were looking for courses. Work Coaches were asked to consider referring job seekers to the employability courses.
 - Youth organisations were used specifically for the Camden LBC project which supported young people to reduce drug misuse and violence. The project took referrals from caseworkers that had long-term relationships with young people. The target group was clearly specified through the prior work of the Youth Safety Taskforce. One of the referral organisations, Project 10/10 carries out assertive outreach with young people first identified by police and council.
- **Basing staff in community centres.** Barnet and Southgate College based a tutor in a community centre café and offered information and advice on a drop-in basis. This approach was felt to be effective as community organisations could act as a 'trusted intermediaries' for adults that might not be confident enough to visit a college. Following the pandemic, project staff spoke to the adults over the phone, so it continued to be a source of referrals to the project.
- **Family learning.** This was used by Redbridge LBC to target women involved with family learning in schools. Prior to lockdown they used a hard copy prospectus and leaflet distributed to schools, children's centres, and libraries. After lockdown they switched to social media.

Some projects simply expanded their usual methods of recruitment. Capital City College Group tried to attract learners onto their free Level 3 modules by contacting existing Level 2 learners at the college, and by using their website, social media, a mail shot, and links with schools and local employers. Sutton LBC recruited participants onto their online wellbeing courses through their website and did not do any extra promotions. City Lit and Newham College were also able to tap into existing waiting lists to fill course vacancies.

All providers felt the pandemic had a substantial impact on recruitment. The various lockdowns meant that providers had to pause face-to-face communication channels (such as working in community venues). Additionally, projects that relied on employer involvement, such as for industry placements or training, also experienced challenges because businesses shut down or had no vacancies. This deterred some learners. For example, United Colleges Group struggled to recruit people onto their scaffolding and roofing course which they explained was due to the upheavals in the labour market caused by the pandemic and many people preferring to take casual and flexible work in the service industry.

3.1.2 Effectiveness of different recruitment approaches

The use of outreach partners was generally believed to be effective. However, the number of referrals provided by different partners varied considerably. Organisations that gained a higher proportion of their learners through referrals, such as WEA, and Harrow LBC were generally able to build on strong pre-existing relationships with community organisations, especially the local Children's Centre, to disseminate information and gain referrals.

Provider: Camden LBC

Project description: This project offered holistic support to 10-15 victims and/or perpetrators of violent crime, by creating bespoke pathways into employment and/or further learning. This was delivered through 1-to-1 teaching focusing on a mixture of soft and hard skills, combined with paid internships and work experiences. The teachers were part of a multi-disciplinary team providing wrap-around support on topics such as trauma-informed practice and mindfulness.

How the project recruited learners

The Camden LBC project did well with recruitment primarily because of very strong relationships with referral partners (social services case workers) that were built over time. Referrers had a good understanding of the project and had been involved in co-design of some aspects. They saw a good degree of added value in what was being delivered and were therefore highly motivated to refer. Some had well established and effective 'assertive outreach' processes and this meant that some of the most vulnerable and marginalised young people were engaged. The caseworkers (social worker, youth worker, psychologist etc.) also had an in-depth understanding of the histories and circumstances of their clients and could provide that background knowledge to the project team.

3.1.3 Engagement of employers

Programmes that engaged employees generally recruited the employers or agencies and asked if they promoted the training to their employees. This was felt to be effective as employers were in a good position to promote the value of the training to their staff. It was particularly common in the Health and Social Care sector, where:

- Lambeth College recruited learners working in the NHS. The project promoted the course by sending promotional material to NHS CPD managers and holding meetings with them. They targeted the local and pan-London hospitals.
- Waltham Forest College recruited learners working for the NHS and care worker agencies. They held an event and employer forums to discuss the project and what it could offer. They also had one-to-one conversations with managers.

- Barnet and Southgate College targeted a care worker agency to recruit learners. The agency was keen to be involved because they had identified a need for their staff to improve their written English and their communication skills.

The projects that engaged employers in the health and social care sector generally performed well against their targets. This was attributed to there being high demand amongst employees as they wanted to progress in their job roles. However, a few reported that recruitment was slightly lower than expected, as sector workers were 'exhausted' and 'drained' because of their intense and challenging work during the pandemic. The emotional impact was also felt to have slightly reduced retention and attendance.

However, providers that targeted other sectors generally experienced difficulties in engaging (only one achieved over 10% of their target). This was particularly an issue when the project was organising industry placements. The slow recruitment was largely attributed to the Covid-19 lockdowns and working from home mandate reducing access to workplaces. Additionally, providers reported that for some sectors such as construction there was also substantial upheavals in the labour market afterwards, with many people preferring to take casual and flexible work in the service industry.

The exception was the Camden LBC project which performed well against its employer engagement targets, even though this was delayed. The project recruited employers through sending out promotional material to hundreds of local SMEs. The material emphasised the benefit of an industry placement and the offer to cover salary for six-months. 35 businesses responded, including hotels and catering, construction, charity shops, law firms. The Coordinator works closely with the employer and acts as an intermediary between them and the participant. Again, this has been effective perhaps because there is a clear benefit for the employer in obtaining an additional staff member at no extra cost.

3.2 Delivery of the training

3.2.1 Changes made as a result of the pandemic

All the case study projects had made changes to their projects as a result of the pandemic. This was generally necessitated by the social distancing restrictions which meant face-to-face delivery was either not possible (due to lockdowns) or discouraged. The main changes are described below.

3.2.1.1 Shifting to online learning

The most notable change was the widespread shift to online and remote teaching and learning. Nearly all the providers had originally planned to deliver face-to-face learning, but instead had to deliver provision online. The exceptions were Waltham Forest College and Sutton LBC, which had originally planned to deliver all or part of their content online.

For some of the case studies, the shift to online learning was a substantial change in their delivery model. Croydon Adult Education, Barnet and Southgate College and Redbridge LBC had originally planned to deliver some of their training courses in community venues, as they felt this would make the training more accessible for hard-to-reach groups.

In the case studies, the only exception was United Colleges Group, which continued to offer their roofing and scaffolding course face-to-face as planned, although they

did need to delay the start until April 2021. This was a practical course and could not be delivered or assessed online.

There are indications that some other projects delivering vocational training were relatively successful. Looking at non-case study projects it is interesting to note that Tower Hamlets LBC, which delivered ESOL for employment in health and social care achieved 69% of its learning aims. Also, Wandsworth LBC, which delivered functional skills to meet employer demand in key sectors, achieved 57% of its learning aims. Morley College on the other hand, which delivered short courses for progression in key sectors, only achieved 15%.

Providers found it challenging to transfer content online unexpectedly at the start of the pandemic, but by September 2020 providers were generally more confident and familiar with delivering learning online.

3.2.1.2 Ceasing to deliver particular activities

Nearly a third of the case study projects had to drop some project activities directly or indirectly as a result of the pandemic. In particular:

- **Barnet and Southgate College** dropped the family learning component, where mothers would learn English language in children's centres with their children in a learn through play format.
- **Croydon Adult Education** dropped the occupational skills development and Job Brokerage scheme with employers in the hospitality and retail sector. This was partly because Croydon Works (a key project partner) ceased to operate. However, they delivered other programmes instead. The planned family learning sessions in schools has not been delivered but at the time of the case study the provider felt this may go ahead in Summer 2021. The project also could not go ahead with the social prescribing element because GP surgeries were only open for limited periods.
- **Sutton LBC** had planned to run a combination of ESOL and drama aimed at higher ESOL learners who needed to improve their writing and speaking. As this was due to be delivered in community venues and could not be replicated online it did not go ahead.
- **Kingston Adult Education and Redbridge LBC** had planned to include in their Back to Employment course supported industry placements. However, this was not possible due to office and business closures during the lockdowns. Instead, the project is looking at community volunteering opportunities.

Most case study providers also reported that there were challenges in allocating staff resources to the SfL Innovation Fund projects during the pandemic. This was due to competing priorities, as colleges had to deal with staff absences caused by Covid-19 and self-isolation requirements, as well as provision changes during lockdown. This had a subsequent impact of delaying some activities or forcing activities to be cancelled.

3.2.1.3 Delivering new activities to respond to emerging demand.

A few case study projects made **additions to the training offer to reflect the evolving needs of their community**. Most notably Croydon Adult Education introduced a digital skills strand to their offer because they felt that because of increased online activities during the lockdown there was a pressing need to provide training on this subject. Redbridge LBC also recognised that their learners had low-

level digital skills and as part of their delivery they sought to address this so that learners could effectively engage in the online learning.

In these instances, the delivery of digital skills was seen as critical to the success of the project. Learners were felt to need these basic skills in order to access the training, but many did not have them. As a result, these learners would have been excluded from the project activities had the provision not been included.

A few projects also had to make changes to their delivery due to being unable to deliver certain activities (see box below).

Provider: Croydon Adult Education

Project description: This project originally planned to provide ESOL and occupational skills development programmes, followed by job brokerage and social prescribing. This was to be targeting the most disadvantaged people. However, due to access to GP surgeries (for social prescribing) and schools (for ESOL family learning) being very restricted, the project adapted its provision to reflect emerging demands.

How the project responded to emerging demand due to the pandemic

The project developed the following stands:

- Employability courses, including a Barista course delivered to patients of NHS mental health service, and a horticultural course for vulnerable learners. These occupational areas were chosen because facilities and equipment were available on partner sites and because the tasks suited the client group. The aim was to provide useful employment-focused activities as well as offering potential for future work. As access to sites was restricted the project took a train-the-trainer approach whereby staff in partner organisations were equipped to deliver the training on site.
- Blended/online ESOL learning rather than face-to-face. This involved finding different referral routes (some community groups/voluntary partners were no longer active through lockdown). The ESOL training was embedded into Customer Service or Retail qualifications or along Driving Theory.
- Delivering “Intro to Digital Skills” sessions to MIND clients. The project also delivered digital skills to older people who were shielding in sheltered housing accommodation. Arranged through their housing association.

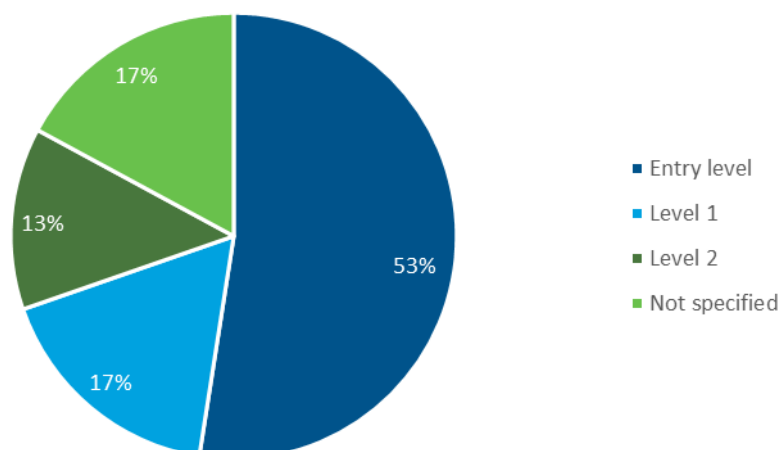
Two of the case study projects made changes to their delivery model where it was unrelated to the pandemic. Lambeth College planned to offer Maths and English (Level 2), ICT Functional Skills (Level 2), and a Level 2/3 Certificate in Team Leading. However, they found that learners required significant support to achieve Level 3 in Team Leading so changed this to an entry level and Level 2 programme. Also, the Level 2 in Functional Skills was too high level for most learners so a Level 1 programme was added focusing on confidence, building resilience, stress management, emotional intelligence, and time management. Camden LBC decided that they would drop the planned role of a role model/mentor. When the project began delivery, it was evident that young people had strong pre-existing relationships with their caseworkers of the referral agency and that another layer of support was not needed and would be too confusing for the participants.

3.2.2 The type of provision delivered through the programme

The majority (57%) of courses undertaken by learners enrolled on the Sfl Innovation Fund projects were in the Preparation for Life and Work sector subject area. This is unsurprising, given that 12 of the 27 projects focused on basic skills and first steps learning, and others provided some provision in this area.

As shown in Figure 3.1, around half (53%) of the programme learners were on entry level courses. A further 17% were on Level 1 courses and 13% of Level 2 courses. However, surprisingly none of the programme learners were on Level 3 or above courses (although for 17% of courses a level was not stated). This is despite Level 3 courses most commonly providing entry to many technical occupations.

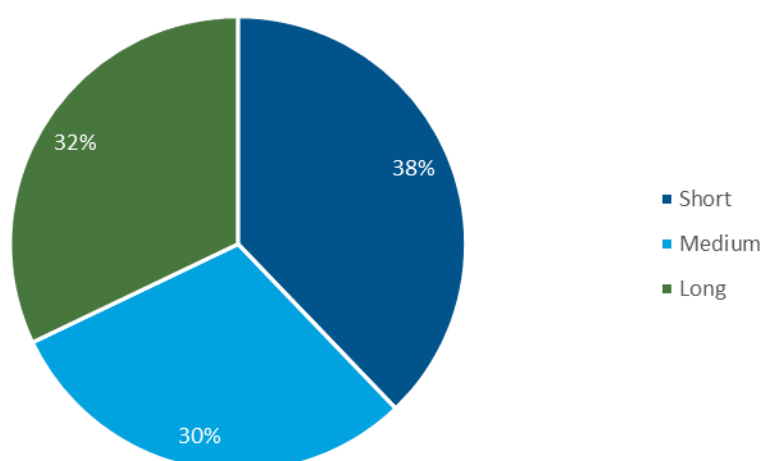
Figure 3.1 Level of Course Provision



Source: ILR R14 data (n=7,929)

The ILR data showed that learners were enrolled on a mix of short, medium, and long courses. Of the 7,929 learning aims, 38% were short courses (up to 6 weeks), 30% were medium-length courses (up to 3 months) 32% were long courses (over 3 months – up to 16 months). However, in the case studies we found that most learners were enrolled on shorter courses. Some case study providers reported that they delivered the courses over a longer period than necessary to give learners the flexibility to fit their study around their other commitments.

Figure 3.2 Length of courses



Source: ILR R14 data (n=7,929)

3.3 Perceptions of project activities

3.3.1 Accessibility of the training

The projects were generally considered by learners to be easy to access. In the case study research, we found this had not been substantially affected by the shift to online learning. While project managers did feel that some learners may not have been accessing the online learning due to a lack of digital skills or equipment, most reported that the attendance on the programmes was reasonable and not far from expectation.

The learners were also generally positive about the accessibility of the training. Some reported that the online element made it easier to access the training, as they did not need to pay for transport and it made it easier to fit the training around other commitments such as picking up children from school. Some learners with low confidence also appreciated that they did not have to go to unfamiliar surroundings.

A lack of digital skills did not appear to be a major barrier to accessing the training. Most learners reported that they had become relatively familiar with online meeting tools such as Teams or Zoom during the lockdown. Some used these tools to communicate with friends and family and/or had helped their children use the tools for online lessons. The tools were felt to be relatively intuitive to use.

Some of the tutors and learners reported that online learning can make programmes more accessible to people that lack the confidence. One learner in the Sutton LBC project said that *“I liked the ease of doing it in my own time, at my own pace. I struggle with people so I am not sure I would have got that much if it was a group in a classroom room.”* Some tutors felt these learners were more likely to contribute to online discussions, as they found it easier to provide comments in chat boxes rather than having to speak.

Some case study providers did however report barriers in engaging learners in online learning. This included Barnet and Southgate College, which reported a general reluctance among some learners to engage with online learning due to lack of familiarity or resistance to extra ‘screen-time’. As a consequence, they paused delivery and will re-start it once face-to-face sessions are possible.

The only problem that some learners experienced was in undertaking training during the school closures in March to June 2020 and in January to March 2021. In these times, a few learners reported difficulties in accessing equipment since laptops/PCs and tablet computers were being used by children to undertake their online lessons. Additionally, some reported that they needed to help their children with their online schoolwork.

Some projects included additional flexibility which were felt by learners to make the courses more accessible. For example, in the Kingston Adult Education project, the courses could be started at different times of year rather than a rigid September start. This meant that learners could fit the course into their life patterns and circumstances and not be limited to one start time. Another project (Capital Colleges) used roll-on roll-off modules that could be undertaken at different times and Croydon Adult Education delivered out of term time. Learners were very positive about the possibility of fitting learning into their own schedules as it meant that they could manage the workload according to their needs.

3.3.2 Structure of the learning programmes

Some projects used a modular approach to learning. This was particularly common in projects providing a mix of employability, basic skills and first steps programmes, where for some providers the strength of their programme was being able to mix elements together on different topics to make a bespoke learning programme.

Most delivery partners believed the modular approach improved the accessibility of the programme. This was felt to enable target groups to access learning in a way that fits around their personal circumstances, including their working lives. Building up modules over time also makes the course more affordable. As one delivery partner stated: *“in hair and beauty, it can be expensive to complete whole courses, whereas doing specific modules can provide skills to offer a specific treatment - for example massage, tattoo removal, Botox or laser treatment. This means they can earn money just from one module”*.

Learners generally felt the modular learning was easier to do. As one stated: *“it was in bitesize chunks it lessened the stress, so that pace did help... the way I study, a too bigger break doesn't suit me – it doesn't help with consistency and momentum – it was nice it was flowing but not overwhelming”*. Tutors and learners felt the modular approach to delivery made the learning less daunting. Tutors reported that for many learners, this may be their first experience of learning for many years and some will have had negative experience of studying at school. Consequently, many arrive already nervous about participating and would be unwilling to commit to a full year course.

The delivery models did need to adapt to the pandemic and social distancing regulations, and this meant that most group work, face-to-face teaching, and industry placements could not go ahead. This was significant for some activities, for example, in the City Lit programme it was reported that in drama and music classes it was not possible to do group work so learners could only work individually or in pairs.

Learners accepted that these changes were unavoidable, and in most cases providers were able to incorporate some group work online. However, it was generally felt to have reduced the social aspect of the learning. For many first steps learners this was a major reason why they chose to undertake the training, and therefore some felt they were ‘missing out’. Learners were generally more positive about learning programmes which included substantial group work as it was felt to be closer to the quality of training they would have accessed if the learning had been delivered face-to-face.

It was reported by tutors and learners that programmes aiming to provide direct access to employment (such as vocational programmes) should be accredited. This gives learners more confidence that their learning will be recognised and valued by employers, which in turn increases their motivation for undertaking the training.

3.3.3 Relevance of the provision

Learners generally felt the training was relevant to their job role or applicable to their job search or daily life routines. They were particularly complimentary of the basic skills provision being combined with employability skills or vocational skills, especially where learning is linked to specific work tasks. This was felt to make the learning far more applicable to their daily life than if it had been delivered on its own. Additionally, it also meant they placed more importance on the learning and could see how they would use it.

Tutors similarly felt learners valued this approach but reported that it required them to invest substantial time in designing the programme. This included time to find the right resources, assess their validity for their learners and then to tweak them based on their learners' ability. In the WEA ESOL course, learners valued how tutors had based learning on themes relevant to everyday lives, such as reading for pleasure, communicating with community organisations, and accessing local services such as GPs.

For employability skills, learners particularly valued the practical work, for example, going in depth about how to write a cover letter, how to search for jobs, researching a job to inform the application, preparing for an interview, and doing mock interviews. ESOL learners also valued how the training was focused on teaching them how they can use English in practical situations, such as for work or cooking. This was felt to make it easier for them to apply what they learnt. In Redbridge LBC, three recruitment agencies helped to design the employability workshops, which ensured their relevance. They had planned to take on learners after the course, but this was curtailed due to the pandemic.

Some projects such as Redbridge LBC emphasised getting people into work slowly, without causing anxiety. The project offered light-touch employability support through informal workshops. The idea was to begin painting a picture of what their world will look like once their children are at school. For some, the project represented a valuable option for upskilling and progression because it was at a low-level that didn't intimidate them, and they valued the way staff ensured that they were not asked to do activities that they were not ready for.

3.3.4 Delivery of the online learning

The online delivery of the sessions was generally felt to have worked well. Most learners were particularly complimentary about the online teaching strategies and techniques. Most reported that the training used a range of different approaches, which include video-link tutorials, Zoom chats, distribution of documents via email, and slides. Other projects used bespoke online learning platforms, videos, interactive forums, and space for reflective practice. This was felt to make the training more varied and engaging.

Learners were particularly positive about the online learning delivered by the WEA project. This delivered online courses through a virtual learning environment (Canvas), which provided good scope for developing interactive content. Project staff re-designed the course for online delivery and focused on interactive content, new resources suitable for online mediums. They used drag-and drop matching activities, audio recording learners, and informal discussions amongst learners. The process was helped by WEA committing early to online learning in the context of lockdown, investing in new technology, and training staff to be able to deliver Zoom and Canvas.

Most learners found that the difficulty of the course and the pace of the course was about right. However, there was a mix of experiences with some feeling pushed to the edge of their ability and some finding some aspects quite easy and getting bored. This was partly related to an individual's time availability and their specific circumstances. More advanced learners valued having extra tasks to complete to keep them motivated.

Some programmes also built in time for post-lesson reflection and consolidation of learning outcomes. This was also particularly valued by learners. In ESOL, it worked well as it gave learners the opportunity to put their spoken English into practice with course-mates. For tutors, post-lesson assessments help to gauge learning progression and planning of future lessons. In addition to social interaction, learners

valued interactive styles involving games and discussion, or where ESOL was concerned, a 'conversation club'.

Nearly all the case study project leads and tutors reported challenges in delivering learning programmes online. Some of the key issues encountered were:

- It was difficult for project staff to move content online that was originally designed for face-to-face teaching. The main issues were that in the online environment only one person can speak, and it requires a different way of teaching. The teaching became more about facilitating what people needed. Tutors were also less able to offer the level of support to learners that would usually be the case in face-to-face teaching. This impacted on those learners that had significant needs and challenges.
- Tutors in some projects were inexperienced and not adept at developing online resources and teaching online. This was especially the case where specific online platforms were used such as Google Classroom.
- Some summative assessments were not appropriate to do online, and so arrangements needed to be made for this to be done in a classroom setting, which was challenging in the context of the pandemic. Where online assessments were undertaken, for example in the case of ESOL, low-skilled learners struggled to complete it without the necessary tutor support on-hand. This affected the achievement rate compared to usual provision. Redbridge LBC learners taking the level 2 and 3 diplomas were not able to do an industry placement which meant that the learners could not put their skills into practice and tutors could not gather evidence on their performance. They were able to work around this by observing the learners home schooling their children.

To address these issues some projects had a dedicated IT technician on their courses to help learners overcome any problems with IT equipment or accessing platforms and resources. One project also provided IT equipment to learners through grant funding distributed from central government to local authorities, and another provider sourced laptops from their organisation's 'laptop bank'. Some projects also provided learners with extra training and induction sessions.

Some projects invested in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for their tutors to ensure they were equipped to delivery online teaching. For example, Redbridge LBC staff had relatively little experience of delivering teaching online, so managers needed to invest time and resources in bespoke CPD for this, particularly on developing online resources and how to engage learners remotely.

3.3.5 Quality of pastoral support

For most projects, and particularly those targeting hard-to-reach learners, the provision of extensive pastoral support for learners was a key part of their offer. Project staff in these providers believed this was essential to build learners' confidence and emotional resilience in order for them to complete the courses. It was felt to be particularly valuable for long-term unemployed people and ESOL learners, as well as those that had been outside education for a long time. These learners, were felt to benefit from having time built in for reflection where they could discuss their motivations, reflect on their emotional intelligence, their personality type, and how they approach study.

Learners cited the support and encouragement of their tutors as one of the most important factors for successful progression in their training. Most stated they valued their tutors for their patience, understanding of circumstances, support, encouragement, and respect. As one learner stated: *"I think our tutor knows us now*

as we have been together for over a year. She knows now what support each person needs so she now gives us personalised tasks to do to practice where we need to improve. So, she pushed each of us to ensure that we learn.”.

Some projects offered mentors or key workers to ensure that vulnerable learners are sufficiently supported.

The use of mentors also worked well for learners with barriers to learning. The Camden LBC project worked well because it utilised pre-existing case workers at referral agencies who continued to work with participants throughout the project. This meant that the participants benefitted from continuity and depth of support with the addition of industry placements provided by the project. The project also took a trauma-informed psychological approach, which emphasised building trusted relationships and working on an understanding of the psychological barriers the client group face in accessing services and employment. For example, rather than acting out confrontationally or exiting a situation or industry placement when it was not going well, young people were encouraged to ‘own up’ to the problems they were experiencing. Project staff have reinforced the idea that failure is okay and that this is a process that enables participants to repair and grow.

Participants were also given support to undertake interviews with industry placement employers. Tutors reported that this worked well when conducted in an informal manner. This was because most of their learners were initially lacking the confidence to approach employers or attend job interviews. Additionally, many experienced mental health challenges and lacked communication skills.

3.3.6 Delivery of industry placements

Few industry placements took place due to social distancing restrictions. Many of the learners interviewed were disappointed with this, as it was one of the key reasons they enrolled on the programme because they felt it helped to build their work experience and CV. Some tutors reported that this also meant some learners dropped out of their programme.

One project replaced the work experience with short-term volunteering opportunities, or by investing more time in work-related learning framed around employer needs and more training on employability skills.

Some case study projects did continue with industry placements, most notably the Camden LBC project. A key feature of the industry placements is that it was linked to the opportunity to have permanent jobs or apprenticeships. They felt this encouraged young people to commit to the placement and to plan for their future. It was noted, however, that this was largely possible because Camden were only recruiting a small number of learners (15) and could house some of these opportunities in other departments in the council. It would be more difficult to recruit industry placement opportunities linked to specific vacancies at scale.

One project also reported that they found that young people did not always have a good sense of appropriate workplace behaviour, which caused some problems with the employers. One of the lessons they learnt from the project was to invest more time and resources into preparatory activities with young people before they began their placement would have been helpful.

4 Programme outcomes

This chapter presents some of the outcomes achieved by learners that accessed the programme. It specifically examines what learners learnt from the programme, the benefits this brought to their personal and professional lives, and longer-term impacts on their employability and participation in society.

Evidence of outcomes was however limited given that many learners were still on their learning programme or had only recently completed by the time the interviews were conducted.

4.1 Knowledge and behaviour change

4.1.1 Personal development

In all the case study projects, most learners said that the project had improved their personal development. The most common reported changes were:

Improved self-efficacy and confidence

The projects generally had a substantial impact on learner self-efficacy and confidence. Project staff and learners frequently reported improvements in these areas because of project activities. This was the case for some of the most marginalised and vulnerable groups of learners. For example, learners reported they had gained the confidence to interact and communicate with colleagues and customers. A learner on in the Redbridge LBC project said that *“It’s made me very confident. Before this course I wasn’t confident to talk to others such as my children’s teachers, even talking on the phone to or talking to my doctor I would get my husband to do it. I am very proud of myself”*. Lambeth College collected self-reported learner data on self-efficacy and saw most learners had increased their self-efficacy, most notably through increased confidence to speak in groups.

In the Camden LBC project, a major impact of the programme on their target group of young people at risk of violent crime was having the confidence to talk with different people. This included being able to adapt language and presentation to different people, especially as young people affected by trauma can be very shy and closed-off. The learners interviewed similarly reported that they were more confident in speaking to people, and particularly in a professional environment.

Another important change was that learners developed confidence and motivation to explore new opportunities in work and education. This was a common benefit across all projects. In particular, learners in the Lambeth College project reported they had more belief in their own ability to successfully learn and had more belief in themselves and the prospect of them getting a job. Camden LBC participants similarly stated they had become more open-minded to new possibilities in life, and had become more mature by learning to respond to problems and challenges in different ways.

One of the key outcomes for learners on the Redbridge LBC project was increased ambition to progress into childcare or other work. One member of the project team said *“I think the impact is that those learners now have had the time to think about what they want to do. and it may or may not be childcare but, we’ve given the learners the opportunity to have a lot of thinking time whereas they may not have that otherwise. People have busy lives and don’t have a chance to reflect, especially when they have a family. Moreover, we have evidence of impact”*.

Other learners reported that as a result of the programme they now found learning ‘less daunting’, and therefore were more willing to undertake further learning. In some projects nearly all the learners reported that they planned to or had already enrolled on further learning programmes once they completed their course. A few learners reported that they were particularly keen to continue working online as they could then fit it around their home and work commitments.

Some learners reported that the training had given them a greater sense of purpose and direction with their next steps. For example, in the Kingston Adult Education project, learners were reported to be more reflective about their current situation and to have a different attitude towards finding work.

Improved skills and ability to manage and improve health and wellbeing

Improving skills to improve health and well-being was a specific output for three of the case study projects (Kingston Adult Education, Sutton LBC and Harrow LBC). However, all seemed to deliver some positive benefits. One learner on the Kingston project talked about how the project had taught them to be resilient and how to look after themselves. Learners from the Harrow LBC project spoke of their improved understanding of a healthy diet and lifestyle and how they could share their knowledge with friends and family. Meanwhile, learners in the Sutton LBC project reported having better emotional resilience, were sleeping better, and eating better.

A key benefit reported by learners across all three projects was being better able to communicate their feelings and to challenge themselves where they felt shy. One learner said *“the emotional resilience course definitely made me think about things. About the impact of the thoughts you have on your daily life and how to get beyond that. I was doing these courses in lockdown and it is really easy to lose all your motivation and just let yourself go. Especially if you have depression and anxiety like I do. The courses gave me a target, something to keep me going”*.

Even in other projects the access to training was felt to have improved learner well-being. In the City Lit project some learners with hearing impairments spoke about the benefits of having a regular opportunity to interact with other people during their course. Others who were on music programmes reported the benefits of being able to do something constructive during the lockdown. The routine opportunity to interact and learn with others was described as a *“lifeline”* by one of the tutors at Harrow Borough Council.

Indeed, the availability of meaningful training could be one of the most significant impacts of the programme in supporting London inhabitants during the pandemic. For many adults that were on furlough, shielding or working from home, the training was felt to provide a valuable opportunity to engage with other adults. As a consequence, most valued the social aspect of the learning as much as the subject.

Participation in cultural activities and the community

Many of the learners on ESOL and basic skills programmes reported that they felt the programme helped them to participate more in the local communities, because they stated that their language barriers had previously meant they had difficulty in communicating. After conducting the training participants felt far better equipped to communicate with shopkeepers, read letters and use local services (e.g. Post Offices, medical services and banks).

Learners reported specific examples of participating more in their community as a result of the programme. In the Barnet and Southgate College ESOL project one learner reported that they were now able to successfully complete personal tasks at

a bank or at a GP surgery and felt more confident on the phone and helping their children with their homework. In the Croydon Adult Education project one learner said that they were much more confident in communicating with local people *“I can speak more easily, more fluently. The lessons have helped me with my vocabulary. Especially the customer service course is good for this – to help you speak”*.

4.1.2 Development of basic skills

Many projects targeted low-skilled learners, especially those out of work. A substantial proportion of these learners were felt to be at too early a stage to enter employment immediately. This included workers with low levels of English skills or with learning difficulties. However, they felt that through engaging with the programmes these learners would then be able to progress to mainstream learning programmes to develop vocational skills that would enable them to enter and/or stay in employment.

Learners gained functional skills certifications but also a range of skills and competences that would help them in their day-to-day life. One ESOL learner enrolled at City Lit for example stated that they could now read letters addressed to them. Many learners and tutors reported that learners had gained IT and digital skills such as becoming more familiar with using video conferencing technology and the Internet. This helped them to maintain wider social connections during the pandemic and to access goods and services. Learners similarly reported that because of using Teams and the Internet for learning, they found it easier to conduct online shopping, complete online forms, join online video calls and contact service providers. As one learner stated: *“I realise now I can use a computer and shouldn’t be scared of it”*. Some learners also reported that they had started using social media.

Learners in the Redbridge LBC project gained new digital skills through the online learning, including using email, WhatsApp, searching the internet, and communicating via Meet. Some learners are now able to use mobile banking and know how to book an NHS appointment. In addition, they know how to stay safe online. They have also gained competencies in problem solving, team building, listening, and doing presentations. Learners also reported being more confident with supporting their children with their learning. They spent more time reading with their children after attending the course and were better able to manage their children’s behaviours. Most learners in this project wanted to further their skills to better support their children. One learner said *“it has improved my ability to look after children, raise them and be patient with children and listen to them. When you listen to a child you are able to solve a problem and the gap between you and the child disappears. Definitely I built my confidence. I [also] use techniques [that] I have learnt [from the training] on my own kids”*.

Learners in the WEA project were more confident speaking to people of different backgrounds, and speaking to the children’s schools, which was important to them because for many of them their first step was to integrate into the community. They also learnt about ‘British values’ and culture to help them in a future job.

4.1.3 Employability

Several projects aimed to increase the employability skills of participants, especially those most distant from the labour market.

Learners on the Kingston Adult Education project reported significant improvements in employability skills and work readiness. This included being better prepared for interviews, knowing how to present oneself (for example by giving training in doing

online interviews) and how to effectively search for jobs. As a result, these learners reported that they were more motivated to find work and more competent in effectively completing applications. For example, one learner reported that as a result of the project she had undertaken her first ever interviews for receptionist roles at a window fitter and at a dental surgery.

Other project activities, such as the Croydon Adult Education barista courses, and Barnet and Southgate College's employability programmes were found to have provided a specific skill and certification that will build their CV and help them to access jobs. However, most of the learners had not gained a job since completing their programme, partly as a result of the closure of some hospitality businesses and partly because our fieldwork took place before they had completed their course.

4.1.4 Work-related knowledge and skills

Several case study projects targeted low-skilled workers in the health and social care sector. These learners gained functional skills certifications as well as practical skills to help them in their job roles. In the Barnet and Southgate College project, data collected by the project team found that ESOL learners who were in work experienced performance and satisfaction increases at work given their improved English language communication skills. Additionally, the Waltham Forest College project team reported that the focus on writing skills resulted in participating healthcare workers being better able to update patient care plans and daily logs. They were better able to write elaborately and clearly, with better spelling, punctuation and grammar. Additionally, learners on the Lambeth College Leadership and Management course reported that it enabled them to be better able to delegate and manage workloads.

Some project participants also developed skills for undertaking new occupations. Most notably, participants on the United Colleges Group scaffolding and roofing course gained practical trade skills as well as health and safety and the basics of labouring. Central to this were the work placements, which participants and tutors felt were critical in teaching appropriate workplace behaviours such as punctuality and learning from others. Almost all learners that completed their course gained a qualification by the time of the interview and this enabled them to get a Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card.

Additionally, participants on the Camden LBC project reported developing new vocational skills such as visual merchandising, sales, digital marketing, first aid, traffic marshalling, data input and data protection, and using Excel. One of the learners had a placement working on a market stall, where he had learned how to greet people and negotiate prices, whilst also developing his management skills, and ability to work on his own. He feels that these will be of value for his CV.

Tutors taking the HCUC qualification in Teaching SEND Learners found they developed new skills for working with SEND learners. The tutors can understand certain behaviours and traits and put in place strategies so that the SEND learners can get the most out of learning activities, for example by breaking down instructions and the use of body language. One tutor described how a module on Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder improved his empathy and as a result he offered a learner more one-to-one time and the opportunity to ask questions. The tutor also provided more help with sequencing of tasks and was more aware of time management challenges. Another tutor said that the course has helped her to think about how she provides support to learners and has improved her patience. She is now able to see that what she previously thought was challenging behaviour could

be due to the difficulties the learner is encountering. *“I have learnt not to make snap judgements early on. I am more tolerant and understanding of their needs”.*

Some of the tutors on the HCUC programme also reported that they had subsequently supported and trained other tutors. As a consequence, the impact of the training could go beyond just those that participated in the training.

4.2 Short- to medium-term outcomes

4.2.1 Progression into further learning

In the case study projects, the most common progression outcome for learners was going into further education or training. In some projects, and particularly those providing first-steps learning, this was part of the design of their project. WEA for example delivered non-accredited ESOL learning with the aim of integrating low-level learners into mainstream ESOL afterwards. City Lit also aimed to subsequently integrate learners into mainstream learning programmes in their organisation, and Kingston Adult Education has three different courses that learners were encouraged to progress to after they completed their course.

In some cases, learners progressed to a course at a higher level. However, it was relatively common for learners to progress from shorter courses to longer courses, and from non-qualification bearing courses to accredited programmes. Here, the Sfl Innovation Fund projects were seen as ‘stepping stones’ that enable learners to progress onto mainstream AEB programmes. In part, this was about increasing learner motivation and confidence to undertake further learning. This was illustrated by one learner stating: *“No matter how confident I am, this course helps me to improve my life and it’s not just about confidence it’s about knowledge in lots of topics which I can help my children with. So, I want to carry this on as well.”*

Some learners did progress onto higher level technical courses as a result of the programme. In the Lambeth College project, the team reported that some learners have progressed onto nursing degrees or other higher-level qualifications. Similarly, in the Waltham Forest College and Newham College projects staff reported that some learners progressed to management courses after completing their training.

4.2.2 Progression into employment

In the case study interviews there were relatively few examples of learners progressing into employment as a result of completing their programme. This was despite all but one of the case study projects stating in their application forms that they expected to achieve learner progression to employment or further learning.

The small number of learners progressing to employment was attributed by project staff to many learners on their project remaining a substantial distance from entering the labour market, and because there have been limited job opportunities available during the last year as a result of the lockdowns. It was also reported to have been affected by project activities being delayed and therefore backloaded in the academic year, which meant learners had limited time to find employment after completing their course.

There were however a few projects that achieved good outcomes in terms of getting learners into employment. These were mostly programmes that provided vocational learning. In the United Colleges Group project, around 15 of its participants had been offered work in roofing and scaffolding. Data provided by the Redbridge LBC project showed that about 40% of their learners had progressed in the childcare

sector since completing the training. This was illustrated in the learner interviews, where one said: *“I am so glad I did the childcare course, it helped me a lot. I got a job as a practitioner in a nursery which has built my confidence. Also, I put my CV on CV Library. Now that I have the level 2, I get calls every week with offers. I was surprised how much demand there was.”*

The industry placements too provided positive outcomes. The Camden LBC project staff reported that a few industry placement learners had been taken on by their employer, and one was offered an apprenticeship with the firm when he finishes the placement

There were also examples of in-work progression from projects that trained employed learners. On the Lambeth College project, some learners reported they gained opportunities to progress into higher paid work, particularly into nursing or Level 5 apprenticeships. Additionally, two learners on the Waltham Forest College project have moved into better-paid jobs by progressing from care assistant to senior care assistant. In the Waltham Forest College and Lambeth College projects, some learners also gained more responsibilities in their jobs, because of the improved communication skills, writing skills and digital skills they developed on the programme.

4.3 Longer-term outcomes and impacts

It was too early in the research to identify longer term outcomes and impact, as most case study projects had not completed their learning programmes. However, based on the short-to-medium term outcomes that have been achieved so far; we would expect the most substantial long-term impacts to be on:

- Progression in education and employment for ESOL learners.
- Improved functional skills attainment for previously disengaged learners, and increased opportunities for further education and training.
- Upskilling and staff retention in the health and social care sector.
- Increased work readiness of disadvantaged groups, especially the long-term unemployed and economically inactive.

The programme has also had a substantial impact on ESOL provision in London, given that around a third of the projects provided ESOL training. As stated previously in this chapter, there is evidence that this had enabled learners to better participate in their local communities and to better perform day-to-day tasks in their local area.

The programme has had some impact on preventing future violence, but this is largely limited as only one project targeted learners who were at risk of being perpetrators or victims of violence (Camden LBC), and this project only engaged a few participants. Most of these learners did however report positive outcomes from participating in the training.

Similarly, the case study projects have had some impact on widening participation among disabled learners, particularly as a result of the City Lit and HCUC projects. For some, the programme has provided a valuable lifeline during the lockdown, as it gave them the opportunity to meet with different people and to undertake a meaningful activity.

4.4 Sustainability of the programme activities

Around half of the case study projects planned to continue to deliver some or all of the elements of their SfL Innovation Fund project in 2021/22 through their AEB budget. In particular:

- Harrow LBC expanded their offer to incorporate many of the programmes delivered through the SfL Innovation Fund. They felt the programme helped them to understand what learners wanted and so have used this to guide them. They are also trying to get funding to offer childcare, business and social care courses.
- City of London felt their health and social care courses were a great success and have therefore included it in the catalogue for courses to be offered from September 2021. The new courses differ from their usual provision because they are more vocational.
- Croydon Adult Education are planning to extend the train-the-trainer barista qualification model. The provider trained occupational therapists to deliver the barista programme at an onsite café at a hospital. The provider and the hospital are now looking to replicate the model in retail (delivering customer service / stock taking qualifications) as there is a second-hand clothes shop on the hospital site. They are also planning to continue to offer some employability courses and are delivering some community projects that build on what they learnt from the programme.
- RB of Kingston and HCUC also reported that they planned to continue to deliver the same projects through drawing on their existing AEB budgets. Similarly, Redbridge LBC reported that they would continue some aspects of the project, most notably the family learning.

Other projects wanted to continue some of the projects but did not have the funding to do so. The Newham College and City Lit projects for example were both developed in order to meet demand where the provider did not have enough funding to deliver the programmes. This problem remains after the conclusion of the projects. A few projects were, however, exploring alternative sources of funding. Lambeth College for example wanted to use the National Skills Fund to offer the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM)_Level 3 diploma. Other projects were exploring the feasibility of delivering some new programmes through the Mayor's new Sectoral Academies Programme that was launched in the summer of 2021.

A few case study providers also reported that they planned to continue to deliver some programmes through an online or blended approach. Waltham Forest College reported that they planned to continue to use the materials and platform to continue to provide training for the Health and Social Care sector. Redbridge LBC and WEA also planned to continue some online learning, with WEA also keen to roll out the Canvas platform to other programmes, HCUC and United Colleges Group were also exploring the feasibility of continuing some of the online learning.

4.5 Scalability

Most of the case study projects reported that they had the ability to scale up their provision. Specifically:

- Providers working with Health and Social Care providers reported that there was scope to work with new hospitals across London to expand their offer. For some such as Newham College it would be feasible to be able to double or triple their

service offer simply by working with more local hospitals, such as North Middlesex Hospital.

- Some providers that delivered new vocational programmes, such as the scaffolding qualifications, barista course and childcare entry to employment courses similarly felt that these programmes could be scaled up to cover the whole of London. They reported that they are all in high demand occupations across all of London. They felt however that they would be able to attract more learners by providing local opportunities, rather than expect learners to travel across London.
- The WEA reported that there was most scope to expand their offer, and particularly the use of the canvas platform, to programmes at other levels and report the learning to their local offices in other regions.

Some programmes were however less scalable than others. The City Lit project for deaf learners for example required specialist teachers that were difficult to recruit. Indeed, the provider reported that they already had some vacancies that they were unable to fill. Similarly, the Camden LBC project required a very tailored programme of support and therefore they felt it would be difficult to provide such extensive 1-2-1 support to a larger group of learners without substantially increasing the size of the project team.

Similarly, projects that relied on industry placements reported that it was difficult to arrange sufficient placements to expand the offer. This in part was due to the pandemic, as there were far fewer workplaces open. However, they also noted that there were various new FE programmes that required employer contributions, such as T Levels, Apprenticeships, traineeships and the kickstart programme, which made it more difficult to arrange industry placements.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations from the study.

5.1 Conclusions

5.1.1 Nature of the projects

The SfL Innovation Fund funded projects that covered a range of different thematic areas, with some supporting professional development, some providing vocational learning and a few providing in-work training. However, the vast majority focused on basic skills, ESOL and employability learning. This is reflected in the data, which found around half of learners undertaking Entry level programmes and no learners undertaking programmes at Level 3 or above.

For most projects there was a strong rationale for delivering basic skills, ESOL and employability courses. Most projects aimed to support those that were furthest from the labour market including those that had recently arrived from overseas. For some providers a key strength of the SfL Innovation Fund is that it has enabled the delivery of unaccredited entry level programmes that cannot be funded through AEB budgets. Providers felt this was valuable as it gave them the flexibility to deliver taster sessions for hard-to-reach groups that may not be willing to develop portfolios or complete tests, and also deliver more soft skills training to improve areas such as self-efficacy.

In terms of innovation, many of the projects delivering basic skills/ESOL and first steps learning largely built on effective practice from ESF projects. This included utilising referral bodies, and particularly third sector organisations to recruit learners, and to deliver provision in accessible community-based provision. The latter had to be changed however because of the pandemic.

Three of the most innovative projects were those that delivered a holistic programme of support that brought together training on personal development, basic skills, employability skills and vocational training that helped overcome barriers to employment. This holistic approach was most likely to lead to positive employment outcomes, as could be observed from the United Colleges Group programme for scaffolding, the Redbridge LBC programme linked to childcare and the Croydon Adult Education project with barista training. Similarly, City Lit experienced success in having trained literacy and numeracy teachers that were also British Sign Language (BSL) fluent to deliver basic skills provision to deaf individuals.

Programmes that aimed to deliver basic skills to learners in employment through engagement with the employer and by delivering learning contextualised for particular sectors were also found to be effective. The projects supporting the Health and Social Care sector were particularly effective in engaging learners. These sectors however benefit from having to engage a small number of large employers to achieve their targets.

There was also some innovation in the use of online learning to deliver basic skills provision. This went against the accepted wisdom that these courses are better delivered face-to-face. While some learners were unable to access the training due to a combination of pandemic-related factors, a lack of digital literacy and lack of equipment, the programme still managed to engage a high volume of low-skilled adults on entry level programmes. This suggests that online learning could be an effective future vehicle for delivering basic skills and ESOL learning, complemented by face-to-face learning.

5.1.2 Effectiveness of the projects

The delivery of nearly all the projects was severely inhibited by the pandemic. This led to a delayed start for most projects, and substantial alterations to most projects. The most substantial change was in shifting to online learning, but most providers were also unable to provide industry placements and some also had to change their recruitment methods and consequently had to rely more on online marketing.

Considering this, the projects have performed reasonably against expectations. By the end of May the projects had collectively achieved 51% of their targets, and we understand some providers that delivered SfL Innovation Fund projects had not yet included their learner data on the ILR. Additionally, some projects were also planning to continue delivery through the summer holidays.

Learners were generally positive about their learning experience. Most felt the course was relevant to their needs and career aspirations, and particularly valued the pastoral support available on some projects. The online learning was also felt to be effective, despite some learners feeling they were missing out on some group activities and some of the social aspects of learning. Indeed, some valued the opportunity to study online as it reduced travel time and enabled learners to fit the learning around their other responsibilities.

5.1.3 Good practice and lessons learnt

There was a range of good practice that was identified in the research, which is presented in the table below. These are lessons that can be used by providers to improve the delivery of AEB provision.

Table 5.1 Good practice identified by the projects

Learning cycle	Good practice
Recruitment	<p>Utilising community based organisations for referrals and building strong mutually beneficial relationships with these organisations in order to achieve a high volume of referrals.</p> <p>Where projects aim to recruit employees for in-work training, they should build strong links with the supervisors/managers of the target employees. This helps to ensure that the employer promotes the course and supports recruitment.</p>
Structure and content of learning	<p>There is a substantial benefit in incorporating basic skills alongside employability, vocational training or personal development/daily life activities. This is especially the case with ESOL. It helps to ensure that basic skills training is relevant to learners and keeps them engaged. It also means that what they learn is transferable to other contexts and is useable and practical.</p> <p>Projects should consider a modular structure of learning. Learners respond well to this because it is less intimidating than talking on a full course in one go, and more manageable in terms of the demand of their life circumstance</p> <p>In-work functional skills training should be well linked and highly relevant to the practical tasks of the job role. This can aid learning, helps to maintain engagement, and gives the potential for enhanced work performance. To ensure that employees can maintain the training, it should also be flexible around work schedules and workload so as not to over burden the learners.</p> <p>Learners are generally very positive about the prospect of work experience or a work placement. Where possible, industry placements should also include options for progression to a permanent job or apprenticeship</p>

Learning cycle	Good practice
Online learning	<p>There is substantial scope to provide online or blended learning options for basic skills and ESOL training. This brings the benefits of online learning, such as being flexible and offering an alternative to learners that are anxious about going into a classroom.</p> <p>Projects should allocate staff and resources to preparing and developing online learning. This could involve purchasing new equipment, providing equipment to learners, training tutors to use online learning tools and online learning pedagogy.</p> <p>Alongside online provision, providers should also make arrangements for providing digital skills training for the learners that need it. Otherwise, some learners are left behind/do not participate or staff need to spend too much time on supporting them.</p>
Pastoral support	<p>Many learners that are furthest from the labour market will require extra support to engage in learning. This can be done through a mentor or through the engagement of a learner's key worker if they have one. At a minimum it needs to include 1-2-1 tutorials and support, especially if provision is delivered online.</p>

5.1.4 Impact of the projects

Most of the projects have had their greatest impact on learner confidence and well-being, which is unsurprising given that most of the projects have targeted hard-to-reach groups. There were also examples of learners applying what they had learned in their local environment which implies they are more capable to deal with their affairs and participate more in their local community.

The projects have resulted in many learners progressing to further learning. This is often with the same provider. In a few cases this is to higher level courses, but in most instances, it is to longer or accredited courses. Both signify good progression for hard-to-reach learners.

The programmes that have incorporated employability support alongside vocational learning, such as Croydon Adult Education, Redbridge LBC and United Colleges Group have been relatively successful in supporting individuals into employment. This is despite the economic uncertainty created by the pandemic.

There was also some evidence of employment progression as a result of learners undertaking basic skills programmes in their workplace. However, the evidence of this is largely anecdotal. It is difficult to measure the longer-term outcomes of the programmes as most projects started relatively late in the academic year and most finished only shortly before the end of the summer term.

5.1.5 Scalability of the projects

Most of the projects were generally scalable to cover a wider area of London. The projects that were most easy to scale up were those working with large Health and Social Care sector employers. Here the scale of the project could grow significantly simply by engaging an additional hospital.

The main barriers to scalability are capacity issues. This includes limited ability to engage new employers for programmes that provide work placements since they are already in high demand for supporting other learning programmes. Additionally, some programmes that provide high-intensity support (such as Camden LBC) or require specialist tutors (such as City Lit in the BSL-fluent literacy and numeracy specialists) have more challenges to overcome in order to grow.

5.2 Recommendations

The study identified the following recommendations for the GLA to consider:

1. **GLA to consider mechanisms that support the provision of non-accredited training to provide entry routes for those furthest from the labour market.** This includes taster programmes on basic skills/ESOL and employability skills, as well as some first steps recreational learning programmes and personal development topics such as self-efficacy. As shown in the SfL Innovation Fund, this provides an effective entry point for individuals that lack the confidence or motivation to attend programmes in an FE provider, and is particularly valuable for learners that have barriers to learning such as a learning difficulties or disabilities. In the projects most of the learners that start on these programmes progress to further accredited learning.
2. **The GLA to incentivise the delivery of basic skills programmes targeted at low skilled workers in key London sectors in future commissioning programmes or through increasing the funding rate.** This could include functional skills courses contextualised for particular sectors, which has been shown to be effective for engaging learners in sectors such as construction and health and social care. The training enables these learners to break from a cycle of low-paid/low-skilled roles. Organising the training with learning and development managers in large companies can also encourage take up to the programmes.
3. **Providers to expand the delivery of online programmes of first steps/basic skills programmes** as well as potentially other subjects such as health and safety qualifications and food safety.. The take-up of similar programmes delivered during the pandemic have had relatively good take-up. Some learners also find these programmes more accessible than face-to-face learning as it reduces barriers such as to childcare and travel costs.
4. **The GLA to explore the possibility of developing and rolling out new learning programmes that bring together basic skills/ESOL provision, employability skills and vocational learning, linked to industry experience.** Bringing these different strands together in a coherent programme of support has been shown in some projects to break down barriers to employment and also to equip learners with vocational skills in demand by industry.
5. **Providers to continue to engage and develop links with third sector organisations in order to create referrals and progression pathways for those furthest from the labour market.** This has shown to be effective in the SfL Innovation Fund projects providing the relationships are built on mutual trust and are mutually beneficial.
6. **The GLA to continue to run small scale competitions to encourage innovation, but this should include different Lots with fixed budgets to encourage a more diverse range of projects.** This could include lots linked to GLA priorities (such as ESOL) as well as areas where there is less widespread provision and therefore more scope for innovation (such as in supporting individuals at risk of violence, on in-work training, and on support for disabled learners).

ANNEXES

Annex 1 Programme Theory of Change

