

# Adult Education Budget Evaluation 2021-22: Overview of Findings and GLA Response

The Mayor welcomes the key findings from the 2021-22 Adult Education Budget (AEB) Evaluation report which marks another year of successful AEB delivery to Londoners following delegation of this budget to City Hall. A series of AEB flexibilities introduced by the Mayor improved accessibility further and allowed more Londoners to benefit from various training courses and progress into further studies or work. In addition to the quantitative analysis of AEB Individualised Learner Record (ILR) data since the 2018-19 academic year, the report includes insights from in-depth interviews with 20 AEB-funded providers, and five stakeholders. The evaluation outlines several key successes and areas for attention for the GLA which are summarised below.

## Key Findings

### Learners and Enrolments

**London has performed well compared with the non-devolved areas and other Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs).** In London between the 2020-21 and 2021-22 academic years there was a 10 per cent increase in Education and Training enrolments (majority adult skills), this is substantially above non-devolved regions (+2 per cent). London recorded a slightly smaller increase in enrolments in Community Learning (+6 per cent) between the 2020-21 and 2021-22 academic years which is below the growth in Education and Training and the Community Learning national average (+17 per cent). London Boroughs are leading on the delivery of Community learning provision in the capital and GLA works closely with them on utilising the AEB budget.

**The Free Courses for Jobs Fund (previously National Skills Fund (NSF)) has resulted in an increased number of learners taking high level qualifications.** Between April 2021 and the end of July 2022, there have been a total 5,710 enrolments in Free Courses for Jobs Level 3 courses. This is equivalent to 6.5 enrolments for every 10,000 people in London, higher than any other region in England. London learners enrolled in 3,380 NSF learning aims in the 2021-22 academic year, with the highest proportion of these (43 per cent) being in Health, Public Services and Care. Two-thirds (66 per cent) of learners starting NSF courses were from an ethnic minority background.

**Improvements have not been limited to number of enrolments, as the GLA has improved the accessibility of learning.** The changes introduced by the Mayor since 2019 have broadened the eligibility rules to enable learning opportunities for disadvantaged Londoners, improved access to Level 2 and Level 3 provision and supported more learners in need to access funded AEB provision.

**The AEB continues to reach Londoners from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic backgrounds.** The proportion of AEB-funded learners from ethnic minority backgrounds (56 per cent) surpasses the proportion of these population groups in London as a whole (45 per cent).

**Providers expect to increase enrolments for the 2022-23 academic year.** Providers interviewed as part of the evaluation reported very strong demand late in the 2021-22 academic year, which may translate to a larger increase in 2022-23 academic year delivery than they had anticipated in their plans. In this context, providers welcomed the reintroduction of payments for delivery above the funding year contract value (to 103 per cent), and many asked for this threshold to be increased.

## Funding Rules and Flexibilities

**The Level 3 Flexibility introduced by the Mayor has supported unemployed and low-paid Londoners gain new skills.** In the 2021-22 academic year, there was a large increase in learners starting aims funded by the Mayor's Level 3 flexibility (aimed at unemployed learners or those in work earning below the London Living Wage (LLW)) rising from 930 to 2,310 – an increase of 248 per cent. These account for a quarter (24 per cent) of all Level 3 aims. Learners starting Level 3 Flexibility aims in the 2021-22 academic year were more likely to identify as being from an ethnic minority background (68 per cent) compared with those starting Adult Skills aims overall (63 per cent).

**The number of Adult Skills learning aims using the non-formula funding flexibility more than doubled.** In the 2021-22 academic year the number of aims benefitting from the non-formula funded flexibility grew to 8,440. Just over half of these learners were unemployed prior to the course (53 per cent) and around half the courses (48 per cent) were shorter than six weeks, with a third being seven to 12 weeks.

## AEB programme management

**Providers welcomed the improvement in engagement with the GLA via webinars and forums.** Providers continue to be satisfied with how the AEB is managed and value the support provided by the GLA. Providers are keen to take part in more forums and webinars relating the AEB, and the GLA has launched a series of AEB policy webinars to support providers' awareness and understanding of changes to the AEB.

## **Areas for Attention**

- 1. Increase accessibility of training and engagement with disadvantaged Londoners and groups newly able to access AEB funded learning.** Funding changes introduced by the Mayor to fully fund asylum seekers and Afghan and Ukrainian refugees introduced part-way through the 2021-22 academic year have been welcomed by providers as they helped remove funding barriers to learning for very vulnerable learners. As a result, providers reported that it has improved access to learning for these groups without generating extra administrative burden on providers.

**GLA Response** Improving accessibility of provision to disadvantaged groups such as learners from ethnic minorities or learners with a disability has been one of the key priorities for the GLA since delegation of the AEB. GLA delivery managers have been in regular contact with all training providers around barriers to entry for certain groups of Londoners and providing further guidance on what additional support such as Learning and Learner Support could be used with those learners. The full funding of asylum seekers and the 3-year residency exemption for Afghan and Ukrainian refugees have helped to remove some of the above barriers. Removing barriers to entry, facilitating funding and engagement of disadvantaged Londoners is an area for further consideration by the GLA going forward.

- 2. Support for providers who have difficulties delivering Level 3 courses due to a lack of capacity or capabilities.** Providers highlighted that they lacked the in-house capabilities or curriculum to deliver more Level 3 courses or had encountered difficulties recruiting tutors who could deliver courses at that level. Looking forward, some providers that are not currently geared towards delivering Level 3 courses are making investments to expand their curricula and increase Level 3 provision to address higher level skills needs.

**GLA Response** This is potentially an area where the GLA could provide more support across the provider base. GLA delivery managers are in regular discussions with providers about barriers to

delivering Level 3 courses. The Free Courses for Jobs Fund provides further financial incentives by paying uplifts for certain Level 3 qualifications.

- 3. Consider the simplification or consolidation of policies and flexibilities.** While most individual policies and flexibilities were well-received, some providers considered that there were too many flexibilities and policies which is leading to complexity. A period of consolidation and/or simplification would be welcomed by providers. This would have the added benefit of allowing time for the existing flexibilities to realise their impacts.

**GLA Response** The GLA has run a series of webinars to provide further clarity around introduced flexibilities and interpretation of the Funding Rules. In addition, the GLA has published clarifications around complex subjects such as the residency eligibility and the technical guidance note of claiming funding. The GLA continues to lobby Government to relax ringfenced budgets and simplify the delivery guidance of the AEB.

- 4. Impact of increasing costs of delivery on providers.** Providers welcomed the London Factor uplift, which covered 327,713 aims in the 2021-22 academic year (excluding Good Work for All Fund learning). The uplift was introduced to recognise the additional costs of supporting lower attainment Londoners to progress into further learning or employment outcomes, and to improve quality of provision. Providers who took part in the qualitative research were strongly in favour of retaining this uplift, although they remained concerned about the ongoing impact of inflation.

**GLA Response** As a result of the concerns raised by providers, the Mayor increased the London Factor uplift by 3.5 per cent to 13.5 per cent for the 2022-23 academic year which resulted in additional £10m being utilised by providers.