

Help us shape the future of adult skills by taking part in our consultation on Adult Education Budget

Control of £63m annual funding for adult skills

**West
Yorkshire**
Combined
Authority



Analysis of West Yorkshire Combined Authority's *Adult Education Budget Strategy* consultation

Report from The Campaign Company

July 2020

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In March 2020, West Yorkshire council leaders agreed an ambitious devolution deal with the Government, which will see the region have a directly-elected Mayor from May 2021. The agreement unlocks more than £1.8 billion in investment to drive up living standards through better transport, improved skills and stronger businesses, while tackling the climate emergency. This means that the West Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority will take on control of the £63m annual Adult Education Budget (AEB) for the area thus enabling decision-makers to closer align spending on skills with the opportunities and needs in the local economy.

The main purpose of the AEB is to engage adults and provide them with the skills needed for entering and sustaining employment, an apprenticeship, traineeship, or other further learning. The funding pays specifically for learning programmes (predominantly qualifications) and provides an element of learner support funding for those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

The draft AEB Strategy has been developed in order to ensure that West Yorkshire is ready to deliver the Adult Education Budget from 1 August 2021. The timescales set out by the Government mean that it is necessary to develop the plan prior to the election of the West Yorkshire Mayor on 6 May 2021. The plan builds on existing strategies and the needs of the area and has been developed with strategic input from the Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership's (LEP) Employment and Skills Panel, which includes representatives from employers, training providers and councils.

To ensure that the AEB Strategy is shaped to meet the needs of learners, employers and other key stakeholders, a public consultation on the draft AEB strategy was launched on 25 May 2020 and closed on 12 July 2020. This report is an independent analysis of the feedback received during this period.

1.2 The engagement approach

The public and interested stakeholders had the opportunity to have their say in a number of ways including:

- **A survey** – available [online](#) and in other formats where requested
- **Targeted conversations with learners and employers** – learners and employers with knowledge or experience of the AEB were invited to have their say through online focus groups (four planned with learners and two planned with employers) and telephone interviews if they were unable to attend the groups. [NB: It should be noted that the focus on digital and telephonic means of engagement was due to the fact that the consultation was taking place during the COVID-19 pandemic]
- **Consultative meetings** with key stakeholders – this included colleges, local authorities, training providers and Jobcentre Plus representatives

- **Other response channels** including via e-mail (to a dedicated e-mail), by phone to a dedicated consultation number; by Freepost; through West Yorkshire Combined Authority’s online Q&A tool.

West Yorkshire Combined Authority carried out a range of activities to promote the consultation and to encourage people to have their say through the survey and in the targeted conversations. These included:

- Dedicated pages on West Yorkshire Combined Authority’s consultation hub *Your Voice* which also contained a copy of the draft Strategy, a link to the survey and FAQs.
- Promotion to all relevant specialist media and a feature in the [Yorkshire Post](#).
- Regular communications to a stakeholder list of over 1000 contacts including all providers delivering AEB within West Yorkshire and stakeholders who work within the skills system (i.e. Careers services, Jobcentre Plus and Universities, etc).
- Promotion on West Yorkshire Combined Authority social media (including LinkedIn and Twitter).
- Attendance at networks and established stakeholder meetings being held during the consultation period (including Bradford Employment and Skills Board and Go Higher West Yorkshire Skills Group) to brief participants and encourage them to take part and promote the consultation.
- Promoted at Skills Network Conference (WY based skills providers) in introduction session by Nav Chohan (ESP members and Skills Network chair).
- Promoted in West Yorkshire Learning Providers network via email to members.
- Inclusion in the LEP Skills newsletter
- AEB messages were also included in wider devolution media activity to ensure that people outside specialist media and stakeholder lists were also informed of the opportunity to have their say.

Pre-engagement to inform the development of the strategy had also taken place with:

- the Employment and Skills Panel
- Local Authority Employment and Skills Officers
- Mayoral Combined Authorities with devolved AEB to understand the learnings and challenges they had faced.

1.3 Feedback received

151 people and organisations took part in the engagement process. The number of responses received from different channels is shown in

Table 1.

Table 1: Responses to the AEB strategy consultation by channel

Method	Total number of responses / participants
Survey form	76
Learner conversations	23
Employer conversations	8
8 Consultative meetings with stakeholders	33
Other responses	3

Clarification questions were also raised on the *Your Voice* consultation hub which West Yorkshire Combined Authority responded to throughout the process.

1.4 Understanding the responses

The Campaign Company was commissioned to carry out the targeted conversations with learners and employers and to analyse the feedback received for the overall consultation. This report sets out the findings from this analysis.

It is worth noting that responses are self-selecting: only people who chose to give their views have had them recorded. Typically, in public consultations, responses tend to come from those who are more likely to be impacted by any proposals and more motivated to express their views. The responses must therefore be seen as representative of those who wanted their views heard rather than representative of the population as a whole.

Closed survey responses have been analysed using Q Research data analysis software. Survey results are presented as percentages. Where figures in this report do not add up to 100%, this is the result of computer rounding or multiple responses.

Open survey questions and submissions that were free text responses were analysed using a qualitative data analysis approach. Text comments have been coded thematically to organise the data for systematic analysis.

It is important to note that where open text comments have been analysed using qualitative methods, these aim to accurately capture and assess the range of points put forward rather than to quantify the number of times specific themes or comments were mentioned. Where appropriate, we have described the strength of feeling expressed for certain points, stating whether a view was expressed by, for example, a large or small number of responses. However, these do not indicate a specific number of responses that could be analysed quantitatively.

The analysis has been presented thematically based on the method through which the responses were received. Any differences in attitudes between different groups of people eg people living in a certain area or of a certain ethnic background, are also highlighted in the report if they exist.

The findings from this feedback will be used by West Yorkshire Combined Authority to make appropriate changes to the AEB strategy before it is finalised and ratified. Feedback on the consultation will be available on the Combined Authority website.

2 Analysis of consultation survey responses

2.1 Introduction

76 people fed back on the proposals via an online survey. This could be accessed through West Yorkshire Combined Authority's *Your Voice* consultation hub on the authority's website.

Throughout the course of the survey respondents were referred back to sections of the Adult Education Budget Strategy, which they were encouraged to read before beginning the survey. A copy of the Strategy can be accessed here: www.yourvoice.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/aeb

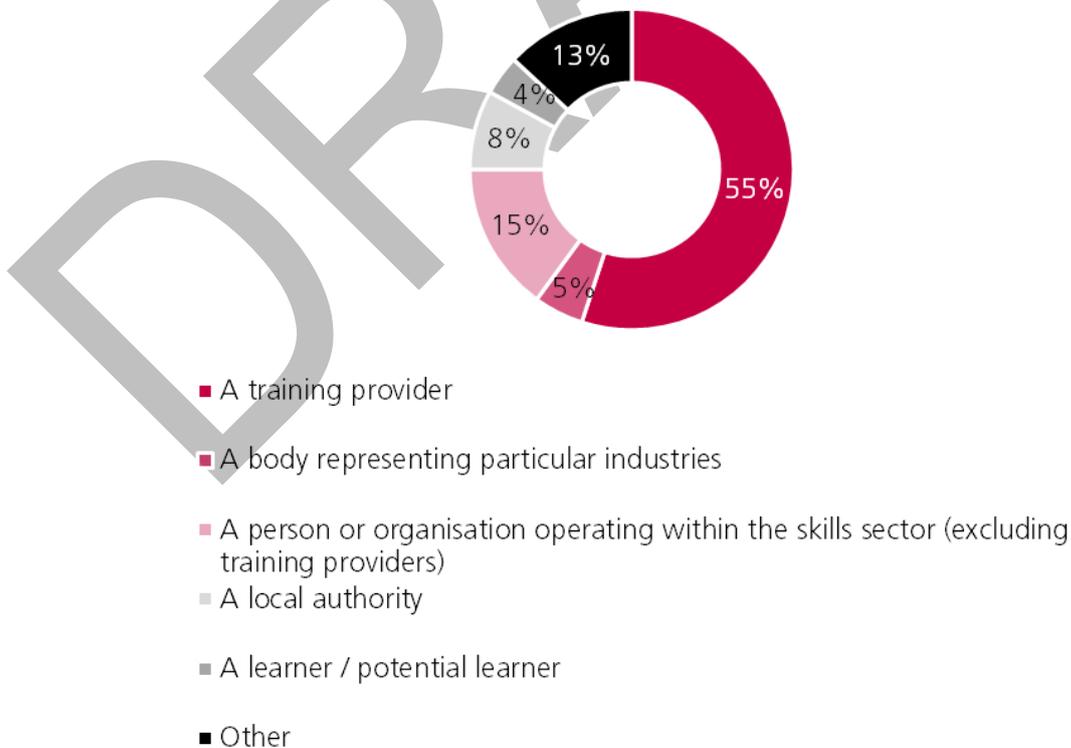
The survey contained a combination of quantitative and qualitative questions. Where the questions produced quantitative data, we have provided charts and tables breaking down the results (a complete tabular breakdown of results is attached as an appendix). For qualitative questions, we provide a written summary of the content following our coding and analysis of responses.

In analysing, the quantitative data, we have run cross-tabulations of various questions to derive greater insight from the data.

2.2 Profile of participants

The initial survey questions focused on who was responding to the survey, with questions focusing on what type of respondent they were, their locality and their relationship to adult education.

Capacity in which completing survey



Training providers were by far the largest group of respondents, constituting 55% of overall participants. By contrast, learners were the smallest group, comprising only 4% of respondents.

'Other' respondents included residents and educational professionals.

Out of the 75 responses, participants indicated that they worked for 53 different businesses or organisations.

When asked their role in the business or organisation, the majority of responses came from CEOs, directors, principals/vice principals, and business managers. The word cloud below represents the range of job titles given by participants with the size of each word based upon its frequency amongst responses.



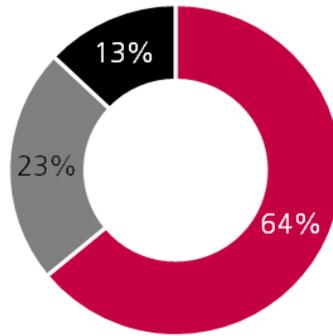
About local authorities

Half of those completing the survey as 'A local authority' were based at Wakefield, with the other responses originating from Bradford, Leeds and Camden. Two-thirds of responses from local authorities originated from those occupying positions in senior management.

[NB: The Employment and Skills teams of all five Local Authorities within the West Yorkshire region had also taken part in consultative meetings (see 5.2)].

About training providers

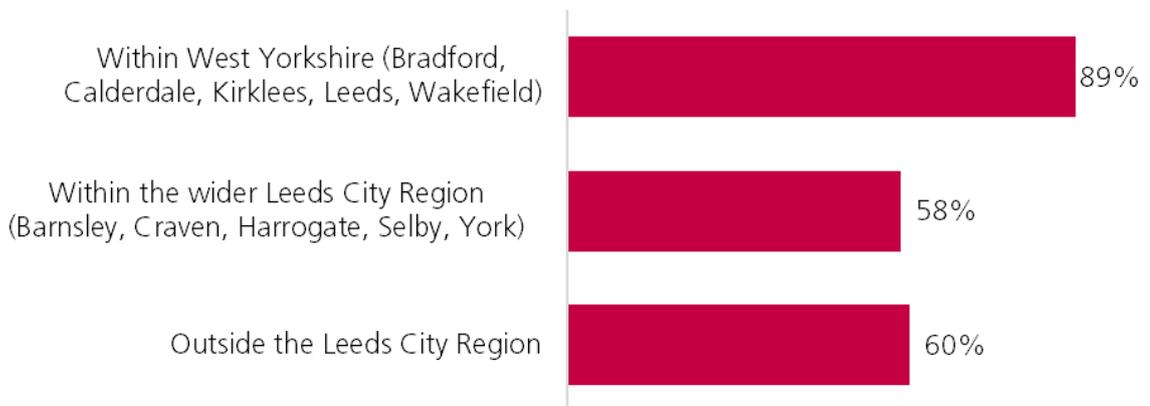
Training providers were asked whether they were in receipt of AEB funds. The figure below shows that almost two-thirds of respondents indicated that their organisation was already in receipt of a direct Adult Education budget contract or grant agreement, with only 13% indicating that they were not currently involved in delivering for the Adult Education Budget.



- My organisation already has a direct AEB contract or grant agreement
- My organisation is an AEB subcontractor
- My organisation is not currently delivering AEB

About businesses and organisations

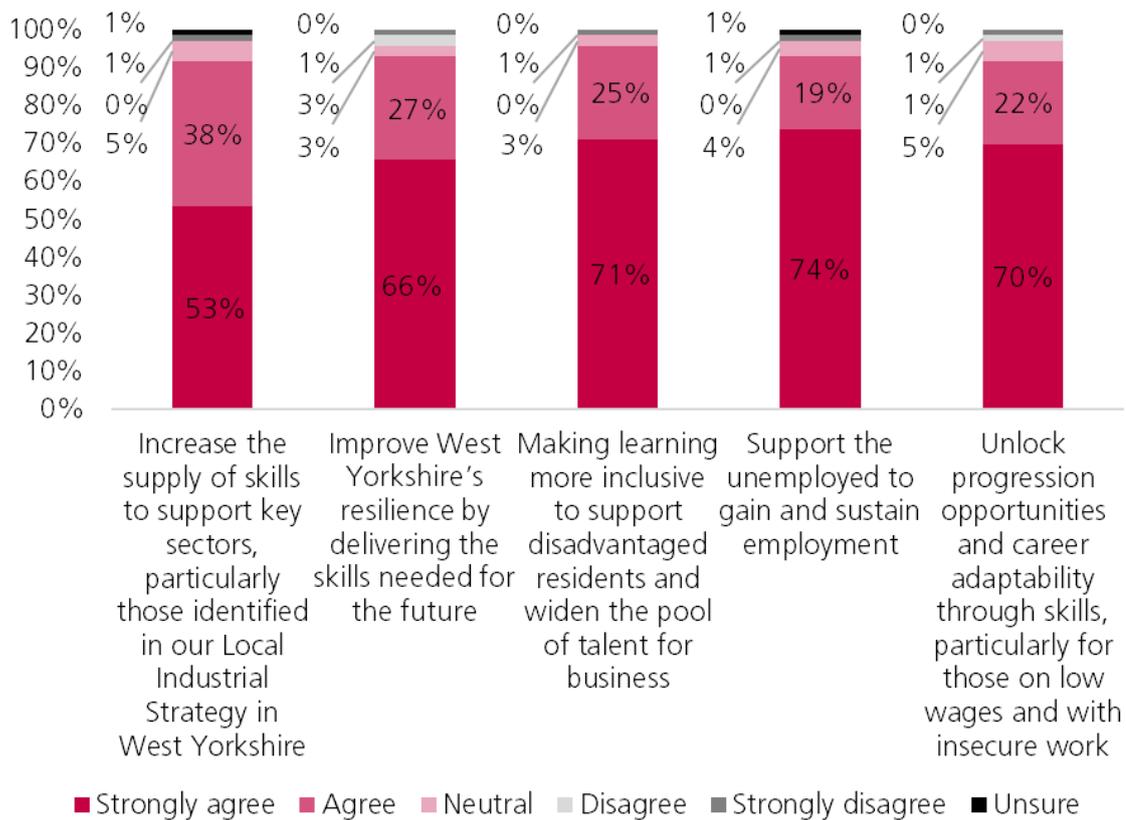
Businesses and organisations were asked about the geographic reach of their operations. The figure below shows that almost nine in every ten businesses or organisations worked within West Yorkshire (defined in the survey as Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield). In addition, 58% of participants indicated that they worked within the wider Leeds City Region (defined in the survey as including Barnsley, Craven, Harrogate, Selby and York), and 60% also operated outside of the Leeds City Region.



2.3 Priorities

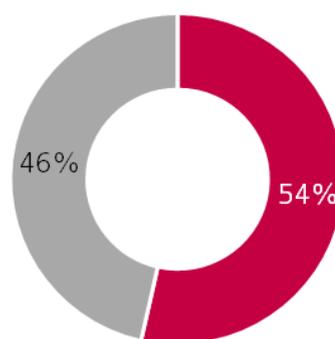
The first substantive questions related to what the priorities for adult education funding should be for the West Yorkshire Combined Authority.

2.3.1 To what extent do you agree/disagree with each of the priorities for Adult Education Budget funding?



Respondents indicated strong support for all of the suggested priorities. While, 'Support the unemployed to gain and sustain employment', received the greatest proportion of those indicating strong agreement (74%), the most popular response overall was 'Making learning more inclusive to support disadvantaged residents and widen the pool of talent for business', with 96% indicating that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the priority.

2.3.2 Are there any other priorities that you feel should be included?



The majority of respondents indicated that there were other priorities which should also be included in the Adult Education Budget Strategy for West Yorkshire.

Opinion on this appears to depend heavily upon who a respondent was representing in the survey. Those belonging to 'A body representing particular industries', 'A person or organisation operating within the skills sector (excluding training providers)', 'A learner / potential learner', and 'Other' were more likely to say 'Yes' in response to the question. Whereas, those representing 'A training provider', or 'A local authority' were more likely to say 'No'.

In terms of organisations, where people indicated 'My organisation is not currently delivering AEB' respondents were more likely to say 'Yes, those stating 'My organisation is an AEB subcontractor' were evenly split, and those specifying 'My organisation already has a direct AEB contract or grant agreement' were most likely to say 'No'.

This would appear to indicate that those currently making use of the Adult Education Budget to provide services are more likely to be satisfied with the priorities set out in the Strategy.

2.3.3 Please describe and explain why you feel they should be paid for from within the Adult Education Budget

As the first substantive open-ended question, this question received both the greatest number of responses and the most comprehensive answers, the content of which was repeated in part across the remaining open-ended questions. The various themes raised in these responses have been broken down into sub-headings below.

COVID-19

By far, the greatest proportion of responses focused on COVID-19, what it meant for adult education and local employment, and the central role it should play in determining the strategy. This included ensuring that those who had lost jobs were able to retrain for new employment quickly, with health and social care, e-retailing, and food and drink all highlighted as areas which had shown resilience through the crisis but would need further support going forward. Others suggested that the skills system would need to be more agile and provide different types of training, from teaching people how to revive their businesses to providing training aimed at enhancing community resilience.

Community learning

Many responses focused on the role of community learning for connecting with hard-to-reach groups and enabling them to undertake learning around their other commitments. In addition, it was suggested there would be economic benefits for funding a greater range of smaller community-based providers, rather than larger educational establishments.

Quality of life

A number of respondents were keen to emphasise that learning should be possible as an end goal in its own right and not simply tied to an economic goal, that it is the learner who should be at the centre of the plan, and that the economic focus would potentially alienate learners. It was believed that doing so would help to address loneliness, mental health, community engagement issues, and ultimately boost the economy.

Equalities

Participants raised the role education could play in addressing inequalities by teaching people about implicit bias, helping disadvantaged groups to gain confidence, supporting people with Special Educational Needs, and enabling people to break glass ceilings.

Qualifications

Submissions suggested that the focus on level 1 and 2 qualifications was unlikely to improve employment outcomes, there needed to be opportunities for those looking to take their education further, that meaningful qualifications required a greater focus, that the priority should be fundamental skills (Maths, English, and ICT), and that industries needed the priority to be on engineering and higher level skills.

English as a second language (ESOL)

Several participants raised the importance of English as a second language training as a fundamental skill in enabling those who cannot speak the language to undertake Further Education, access better work, and participate fully in the local community.

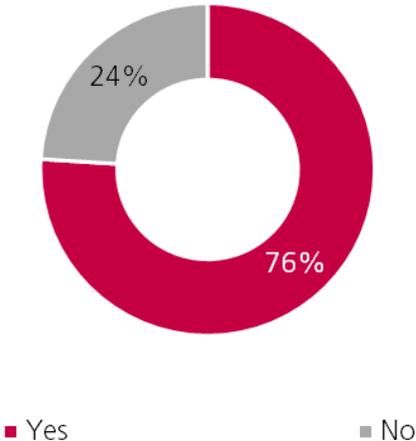
New approaches

Other respondents sought to move away from more conventional skills training, focusing on the importance of life-long digital skills training, careers training, helping people to shift to self-employment, and the importance of green skills in converting to a zero-carbon economy.

2.4 Challenges

The next set of questions focused on the challenges facing the Combined Authority as it tries to improve the impact of adult education ahead in West Yorkshire. To answer these questions participants were required to refer back to the Adult Education Budget Strategy section on Needs and Opportunities.

2.4.1 We have identified some challenges in the Needs and Opportunities section and want to check if anything is missing. Do you feel we have captured the key challenges?



Over three quarters of respondents felt that the strategy had captured the key challenges facing adult education in West Yorkshire.

When results are broken down by types of respondents, training providers were significantly more likely to say 'Yes' to this question than other respondents.

2.4.2 Please describe any challenges that you feel are missing and provide evidence to support your view

The answers to this section involved considerable repetition from the previous open-ended question. While the majority of responses touched on COVID-19 in some way, their particular impacts are broken down in under the headings below.

General impact of COVID-19

Several responses raised concerns that it would not be possible to create an effective strategy until the impact of COVID was fully known and that the pandemic would severely impact the data upon which decisions were now being made. However, there was also a view that there was a need to respond quickly to the problems being created by the pandemic. Given rising demand there was also a question as to how different goals should be prioritised when there was likely to be an increasing demand for resources.

Skills

Various issues were raised around skills, from the skills shortage which the loss of migrant workers would create and the decline in adult education participation after a decade of cuts to the need for more funding in communities which had the greatest numbers without skills. Particular emphasis was given to the need to upskill the workforce particularly with regard to apprenticeships, digital and communications skills, higher level skills, and the changing technological demands of industries. The evidence base for the claim that 'there are significant challenges around productivity and low wages linked to a range of factors including a deficit of high level skills and innovation' was also questioned.

Tackling social disadvantages

Some suggested that focusing on getting people into work was insufficient, that labour market discrimination had a role to play in limiting opportunities beyond skills, that education could help individuals to gain confidence and that empowering communities through learning would be more impactful. Others suggested that learning had a role to play in addressing health inequalities, particularly mental health. Equalities issues were also raised, with the impact of a lack of childcare and reduction in community learning limiting women's opportunities for accessing adult education. It was also highlighted that focus needed to be brought on supporting young people, disadvantaged adults with poor employment prospects, those with special educational needs, the full range of ethnic groupings, those with disabilities, and those for whom English is a second language. In addition, the negative educational experiences some groups had experienced in the past needed to be taken into account in considering how to get them to take up educational opportunities in the future.

Opportunities

Several responses chose to focus on the new opportunities for adult education. These ranged from focusing on the skills which would be needed in delivering a zero-carbon economy to providing those who had lost their job with the skills they would need to become self-employed/entrepreneurs. It was also suggested that there were opportunities for employment in health and social care or in roles requiring greater analytical skills.

2.5 Principles for commissioning

The Adult Education Budget Strategy set out nine core principles for commissioning, feedback on which was sought in this section.

2.5.1 To what extent do you support each of the principles for commissioning?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
Seek to align Adult Education Budget expenditure with the residents and places that are most in need, and/or that will see the greatest impact from investment in skills	64%	28%	6%	0%	0%	3%
Focus on learner outcomes and their opportunities for progression as the key 'intent' for all delivery	56%	36%	5%	3%	0%	0%
Balance the need for the funds to unlock inclusive growth while improving productivity across the West Yorkshire Districts	53%	33%	12%	1%	0%	0%
Throughout the initial years of implementation, support the core readiness conditions of the AEB devolution deal and provide stability within the system	57%	26%	13%	0%	0%	4%
Increase the effectiveness of fund management, by developing a localised strategic partnership approach across the delivery network and wider skills system	58%	28%	7%	3%	3%	1%
Engage with training providers to understand their offer, and their potential to improve skills delivery across West Yorkshire	75%	23%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Ensure contracting processes are transparent and fair, facilitating the involvement of the broadest range of suppliers, including subcontracting and consortia building, where appropriate	65%	24%	7%	3%	0%	1%

Minimise levels of bureaucracy that would impact on learner choice and provider delivery by considering efficiency and practical approaches to commissioning, partnership management and cross-border agreements	77%	19%	3%	0%	0%	1%
Incorporate learning from the existing evidence base, alongside consultation with stakeholders, employers, providers and learners to highlight areas where funds could be better invested to benefit all	69%	26%	3%	1%	0%	0%

While there was strong agreement for each of the principles for procurement, by a slight margin the strongest agreement was for ‘Engage with training providers to understand their offer, and their potential to improve skills delivery across West Yorkshire’ with 98% either indicating agreement or strong agreement. Whereas the weakest agreement was for ‘Throughout the initial years of implementation, support the core readiness conditions of the AEB devolution deal and provide stability within the system’ which received only 83% agreement and strong agreement.

2.5.2 For any of the above principles that you do not support, please explain why

Many of those answering this question did in fact express general agreement with the principles, but highlighted areas where they did have concerns or where they believed potential improvements could be made.

General suggestions

Several submissions suggested learning from programmes already at work elsewhere, including in other devolved areas, to identify approaches which were working there and then optimising them for the Combined Authority.

Provider requirements

A number of respondents questioned the requirement that a training provider needed to have a headquarters based within the combined authority, emphasising that the local track record of providers was a better measure for assessment.

Range of suppliers

Contrasting views were presented on the benefits of procuring from the ‘broadest range of suppliers.’ On the one hand some held the view that using a broad range of suppliers should not be a goal in itself, and that the commissioning should be based upon the ‘best or most appropriate’ suppliers. Whereas, others were concerned that the proposals seemed to prioritise the majority of funding for a small number of large organisations. This was seen to prevent effective competition, which would be better enabled through allowing funding to be determined by the choices of learners. There were also concerns that the involvement of independent training

providers appeared to be limited and that the differences between adult education needed to be taken into account, such as between their different business models.

Learner outcomes

A number of respondents were keen to stress the importance of learner outcomes, independent of economic outcomes. Although, one response said that by focusing on learner outcomes there was a risk of ignoring those for whom economic participation was hardest, potentially disenfranchising them further. To help to facilitate the greater involvement from those in marginalised groups, it was proposed that a more flexible approach was needed, acknowledging the different circumstances of learners from these places and giving them greater leeway around requirements, such as attendance. However, by focusing on those with the greatest need, it was said there was a risk of leaving out other pockets of need, so 'need' needed to be carefully defined.

Wider training

Instead of focusing on labour market progression, it was suggested that learners would also need support more wellbeing-focused support, such as helping them to build confidence and be more mental health aware.

Stakeholder involvement

Several submissions stressed the importance of stakeholder involvement in decision-making. It was considered important that the strategy was developed alongside learners, employers and existing training providers. There were suggestions that there should be a greater marrying up of local economic skills needs identified by employers with those being delivered by local training providers, rather than more conventional goals such as delivering level 1 and 2 maths and English qualifications. Others raised concerns over the potential conflicts of interest of existing providers being involved in the decision-making process and that by involving too many stakeholders there was a risk of losing a strategic approach. It was also asked how other stakeholders, such as employers, would seek to address the issues raised in the strategy.

Subcontracting

In discussing subcontracting, there were concerns that it led to a 'race to the bottom', prioritising financial considerations and was driven more by arbitrary targets than eventual outcomes. Instead partnership working and collaboration between providers and other stakeholders would enable learners and employers to make their own choices.

Connectivity

A few responses raised issues of connectivity in adult education, emphasising the importance that the system needs to be easily navigated by learners. This was seen to involve building up partnerships across the whole of the skills system to enable providers to clearly articulate their offer and for learners to progress seamlessly into ongoing education or employment.

2.6 Expectation of provider values and behaviour

The West Yorkshire Combined Authority has set out six possible values and behaviours to be expected in the provision of adult education, which were discussed in this section.

2.6.1 To what extent do you agree / disagree with each of the expected values and behaviours?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
To develop a place-based curriculum offer and wrap-around support with a clear focus on learner progression	60%	25%	11%	3%	0%	1%
Strive to deliver outstanding provision that puts the needs of learners and employers at the centre of delivery	75%	22%	1%	0%	1%	0%
Work with partners and stakeholders in a positive and effective way, sharing best practice and improving the impact of skills system across West Yorkshire	73%	22%	4%	0%	0%	1%
Communicate openly and transparently with stakeholders, learners and partners	76%	23%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Develop approaches and partnerships which support adults to progress and prosper within their communities and employment	73%	23%	1%	0%	1%	1%
Subcontract with integrity and ensuring that positive outcomes for learners and employers is at the heart of all arrangements	68%	22%	5%	1%	3%	0%

99% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the 'Communicate openly and transparently with stakeholders, learners and partners' values/behaviour, the strongest level of support. In contrast, the weakest level of support was for 'To develop a place-based curriculum offer and wrap-around support with a clear focus on learner progression', which received only 85% support.

2.6.2 For any of the above values and behaviours that you do not agree with, please explain why

While there was general support for the values and behaviours, there were a few issues raised, including that it is not the proposals but the implementation which typically trips organisations up.

Place

The largest number of respondents focused on the issue of place. Several submissions expressed confusion as to what the value actually meant, but supported a focus on learner progression.

Others viewed 'place' as playing a crucial role in recognising the needs and opportunities open to learners and potential learners. Some felt that it presented a stronger case for smaller providers who could focus on particular communities, including targeted online provision, while others said that people should be supported to access opportunities further afield if it better met their needs and wants.

Learner

There was a strong emphasis amongst some responses that the learner should be central to the Adult Education Budget, even to the point of removing employers as a consideration. It was felt important that learning continued to meet people's changing needs over the course of their lives. Concerns were raised that past negative outcomes could prevent people from seeking to access training and that it was important to enable grassroots training providers to access funding in order to help encourage these groups into adult education. The importance of including Additional Learner Support as part of the Adult Education Budget Strategy was also raised.

Subcontracting

Several participants expressed concerns around subcontracting: some were against it in principle believing that positive outcomes could be delivered in-house while others thought that funding should be more mobile to allow the learner to decide where best to study.

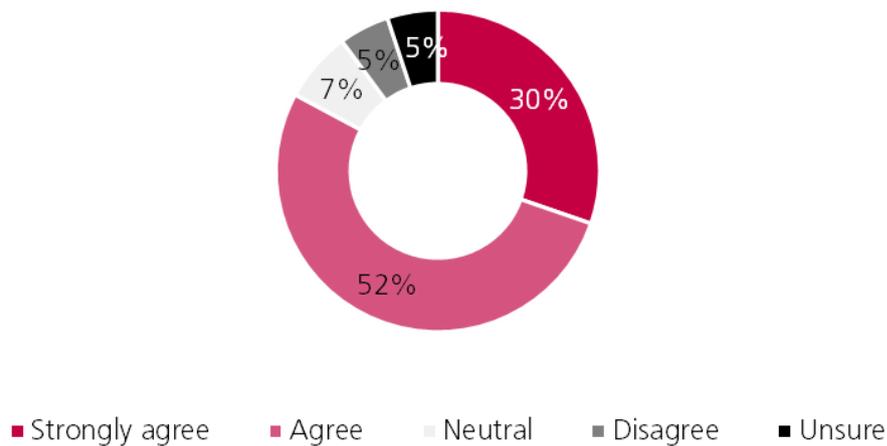
Commissioning

A few submissions focused on issues related to commissioning. It was suggested that the changing needs of the labour market meant that commissioning would lack the flexibility necessary to respond and a competitive marketplace would do better in delivering the right skills. Another raised concerns over using 2017/18 as a baseline for funding, due to the significant changes which had taken place over the period since and what that would mean in terms of cuts some organisations would have to make while others received a surplus. The importance of flexibility in funding to enable over delivery and the ability to responsively move funds from one pot to another was also raised.

2.7 Proposed approach

The next set of questions referred to the *Proposed Approach* section of the AEB strategy.

2.7.1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the overall Proposed Approach?



Only 5% of respondents disagreed with the overall proposed approach, with 82% expressing agreement.

2.7.2 Please use the space below to tell us more about your answer

Of all the open-ended questions, this one received the fewest responses, nonetheless various reasons for their earlier answer were provided by respondents.

General issues

Some felt that the strategy was too 'idealistic' where it should have been 'pragmatic'. Others raised concerns that the strategy was too prescribed and focused too much on top-down procurement, rather than enabling a more co-productive approach with independent training providers to help identify new career pathways.

Funding

Concerns were raised that basing budgets on what they were in 2017/18 ignored the level of growth/scaling back providers had undergone in the period since and would result in some having to reduce their provision while others had more funding than needed. Significant reduction in funding could reduce stability within the sector as well as reduce learning offers. It was important that funding followed learners, enabling them to select training providers based upon their needs rather than being pushed towards preferred providers or those with the in-house skills to more effectively complete for tenders. It was also suggested that the delivery capacity of providers should be based upon their actual performance/over-performance against assigned budget and/or the value of any subcontracted budget regardless of where it came from in 2019/2020.

Subcontracting

Subcontracting was viewed as being important, but that the positives and negatives needed to be balanced out, such as through limiting the amount of a provider's funding which could be subcontracted out and the size of contracts which could be offered to subcontractors.

Approach

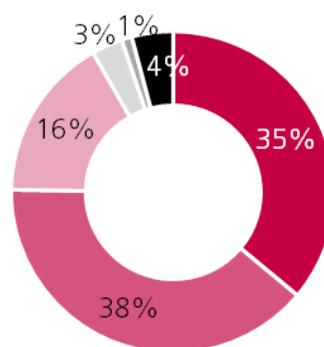
Some respondents also commented on the general approach, feeling that the model needed a more inclusive approach to engagement and upskilling workers, that it had to be flexible in order to enable growth in response to demand, and that it had an excessive focus on employment at the cost of other types of progression.

Other considerations

It was suggested that the strategy would have benefited from dealing with 19 year olds who fall out of funding on two year programmes and the duties of employers with regard to training.

One existing grant provider noted that that their lack of inclusion within 'Route 1 or 2' of the approach would result in significant a reduction of Community Learning provision across West Yorkshire.

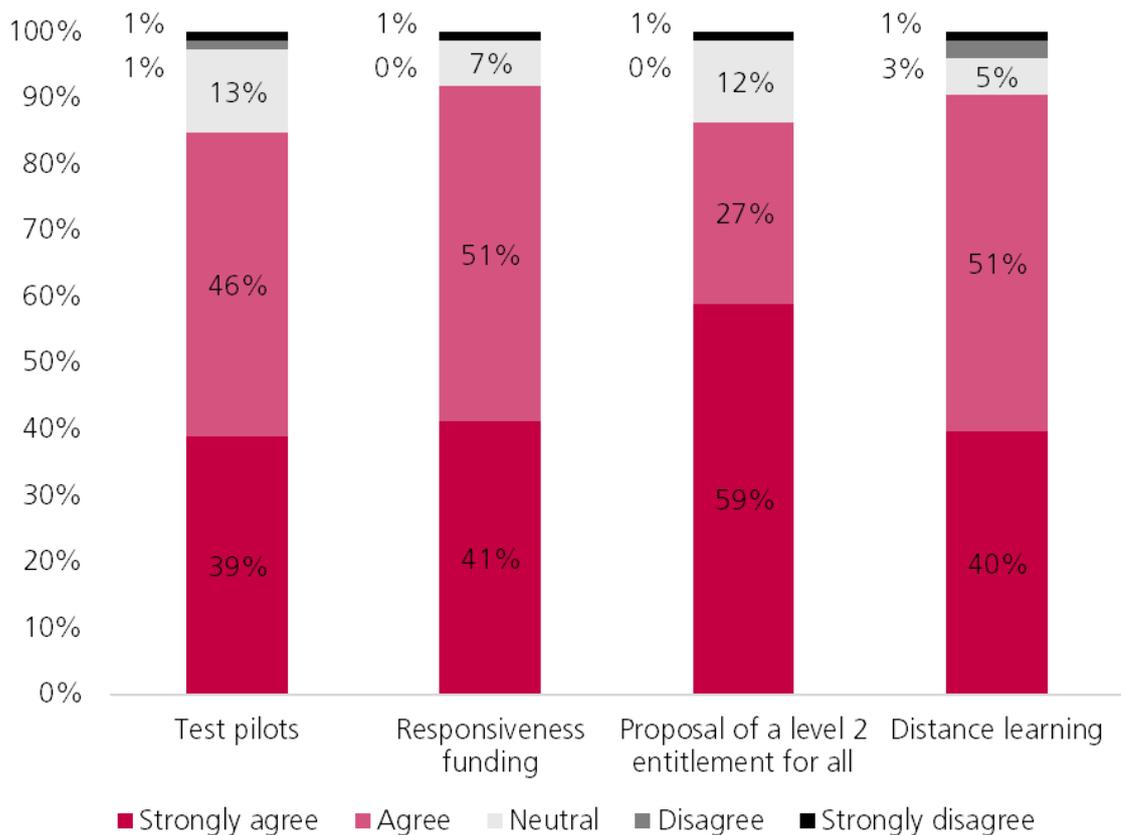
2.7.3 Under the Proposed Approach, the Adult Education Budget and particularly the Responsiveness Funding could be used as match funding towards forthcoming government grants, such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. To what extent do you agree/disagree with this proposal?



■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree ■ Unsure

72% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the principle of the Adult Education Budget being used as match funding. While this clearly indicates overwhelming support amongst participants, it is by a noticeably smaller margin than for the support indicated for the approach as a whole.

2.7.4 Under the Proposed Approach we have outlined how we anticipate using AEB funding. To what extent do you agree / disagree with the proposals for the following?



Respondents indicated strong overall agreement for all four of the proposals. While the ‘Proposal of a level 2 entitlement for all’ was the only option to receive ‘Strongly agree’ responses from over half of participants, ‘Responsiveness funding’ was the most popular option overall with 92% indicating that they agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal.

2.7.5 Please use the space below to tell us more about your answer, or to tell us about any other specific approaches you think we should be considering

In answering this question, respondents for the most part focused on only one of the four approaches which had been set out in the previous question: test pilots, responsiveness funding, proposal of a level 2 entitlement for all, and distance learning.

Test pilots

Comments on test pilots were positive on the whole. It was felt that they provided a great way of exploring new delivery methods, that they could secure better input from employers, that they would make provision more dynamic with approaches genuinely crafted to local needs. However, this came with caveats, such as that the pilots needed to generate new approaches rather than form substitute provision, that expenditure on test pilots should not come at a cost to effective delivery at scale or other priorities, and that the proposed low wage threshold was too low to cover many in low pay industries. In addition, the importance of providing enough time for the outcomes of pilots to be properly evaluated, with both hard and more holistic measures considered, before any attempt to roll them out further.

Proposal of a level 2 entitlement for all

Of all the proposals, the level 2 entitlement for all proposal received the greatest number of comments, with respondents expressing views ranging from the qualifications being a vital first step in securing basic skills and increasing productivity to seeing them as far too basic to be of any use. It was suggested that focusing on level 2 was outdated and that it no longer aligned with the needs of learners and employers. Arguments were made both in favour of funding more basic skills training before people moved on to level 2 and higher level skills training, with level 3 cited several times. In addition, it was suggested that support should be targeted, with efforts made to ensure level 2 qualifications were relevant and that learners had access to all the equipment and support they needed, including fully funded English as a second language provision. However there were concerns about the financial impact that the proposal would have on providers, things would have to be cut to pay for the goal to be met and that providers would lose money in fees if all level 2 courses were funded.

Distance learning

The distance learning proposal was broadly supported, although not without concerns with some expressing the view that it wasn't an effective way for delivering employment-related qualifications, that it wasn't usually implemented well, and that there were a need for solid definitions as to exactly what constitutes 'distance learning'. However, it was felt that experiences from the COVID-19 epidemic had shown that it could be made to work effectively and that it would become increasingly important over time. Distance learning was seen to provide a more inclusive approach to learning, particularly those in low paid work due to the flexibility it enabled around their existing commitments, and that it could enable greater input from employers. However, it was highlighted that there remained substantial barriers to digital participation, and that training and the possibility of loaned equipment would be important in facilitating the widest possible access to digital learning. Blended learning was also suggested as a possible alternative which by integrating with occasional face-to-face contact and support, help to address some of the weaker elements of distance learning.

Responsiveness funding

Of the four proposals, this one attracted the least comment with submissions simply emphasising that flexibility would be necessary for adapting to external conditions and to enable the development and delivery of the most appropriate offer, but that the costs and benefits in the way this flexibility was used would need to be carefully thought through.

Other

In addition to comments on the actual proposals, some general points were made, including that the options provided a good range of support for supporting learning in the region, and that short courses were needed to provide the basic skills which would enable clients to undertake further learning or seek employment.

2.8 Priorities and outcomes

The next set of questions referred to the *Priorities and Outcomes Matrix* section of the AEB strategy.

2.8.1 To what extent do you agree / disagree with the actions, outcomes and measures identified for each of the priorities for Adult Education Budget funding?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
Increase the supply of skills to support key sectors, particularly those identified in our Local Industrial Strategy in West Yorkshire	51%	41%	7%	0%	1%	0%
Improve West Yorkshire's resilience by delivering the skills needed for the future	58%	37%	3%	1%	1%	0%
Making learning more inclusive to support disadvantaged residents and widen the pool of talent for business	70%	27%	1%	0%	1%	0%
Support the unemployed to gain and sustain employment	73%	22%	4%	1%	0%	0%
Unlock progression opportunities and career adaptability through skills, particularly for those on low wages and with insecure work	67%	27%	3%	0%	1%	1%

All five options received strong support. While 'Making learning more inclusive to support disadvantaged residents and widen the pool of talent for business' was technically the most popular option, the least popular option 'Increase the supply of skills to support key sectors, particularly those identified in our Local Industrial Strategy in West Yorkshire', only received 5% less support.

One notable difference between respondents was that local authority participants were less likely to express support for 'Support the unemployed to gain and sustain employment' than the other types of respondents, with a third stating they were 'Neutral' on the outcome.

2.8.2 Do you have any comments relating to the priorities and outcomes matrix?

Comments in response to this question were largely positive, with respondents building upon the priorities and outcomes rather than direct opposition.

General Comments

Many of the responses focussed on points previously raised in the “Priorities for funding” section of the survey. Support for the priorities and outcomes was broadly expressed across responses, although some did feel that the priorities and outcomes were too focused on economic outcomes, at the cost to personal and social goals, and ignoring the potentially long timeline involved in supporting people into better employment, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The importance of upskilling workers in industries falling outside the key strategies and providing sufficient funding for training providers to work in hard-to-reach areas was expressed. It was also suggested that providers needed flexibility to provide niche areas of training free from the overarching priorities. It was suggested that progression to Higher Education should be used as another measure of performance.

Increase the supply of skills to support key sectors, particularly those identified in our Local Industrial Strategy in West Yorkshire.

It was suggested that building the Adult Education Budget Strategy around the Local Industrial Strategy would help to deliver a more inclusive economy and ensure qualifications met local needs. Some respondents expressed fears that the key sectors outlined in the Local Industrial Strategy were not the same as those where there was the greatest risk to employment or greatest opportunity for skills growth. Others said that they could not comment on this priority until after the publication of the revised Employment and Skills Plan. One submission was concerned that while this approach would be the fastest route for helping the disadvantaged into employment after COVID, the outbreak might result in businesses trying to take advantage of cheaper labour.

Improve West Yorkshire’s resilience by delivering the skills needed for the future

While this was viewed positively, several submissions did question how the skills needs of the future could be predicted, with suggestions that the priority should be focusing on delivering adult education to meet current needs. The importance of helping people to develop strong digital skills, not only in the context of employment but day-to-day life was raised as one set of skills for the future, particularly in the context of COVID-19. The skills involved in helping to decarbonising the economy were also considered to be skills of the future.

Making learning more inclusive to support disadvantaged residents and widen the pool of talent for business

In response to this priority one respondent asked why more inclusive learning couldn’t be an end goal in its own right, while another raised that by helping businesses to fill their skills gaps, the positive impact upon their productivity was likely to create further employment opportunities for the future.

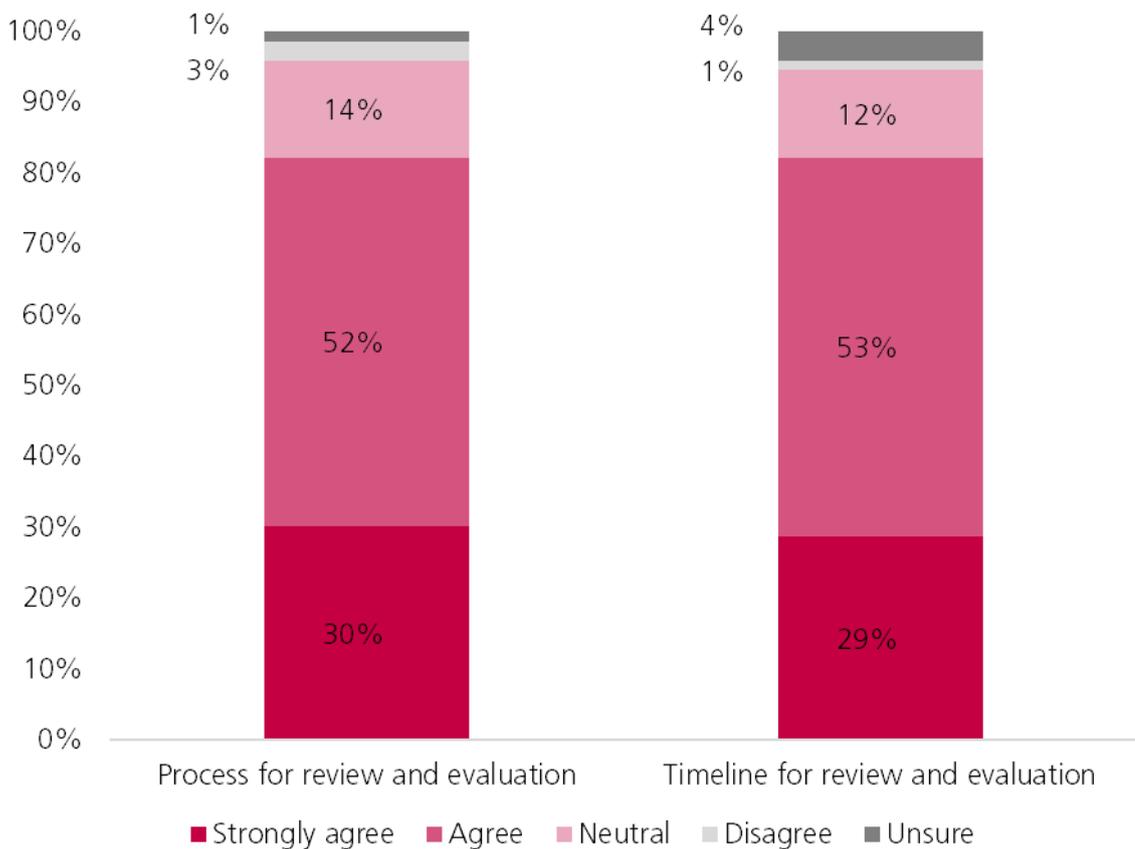
Unlock progression opportunities and career adaptability through skills, particularly for those on low wages and with insecure work.

It was suggested that a better priority would be to improve skills for the low paid in insecure work, as part of an agenda to improve the quality of work available through an inclusive economic strategy.

2.9 Review and evaluation

The next set of questions referred to the *Review and evaluation* section of the AEB strategy.

2.9.1 To what extent do you agree / disagree with the following?



There is strong support for both the process and timeline outlined for review and evaluation with over 80% of respondents agreeing with both.

2.9.2 If you disagree with either the process or the timeline for review and evaluation, please explain why

As the final survey question, several participants used the opportunity to reinforce general comments which had been made earlier in the consultation. However, the majority of responses did address the substantive question.

Timescales

There was a mixture of opinions over the timescales, with some suggesting that 2021 was very early for a review and that any changes should not be implemented until later in order to aid stability and enable further consultation. Others felt that reviews were needed more regularly than three years and that the impact of COVID-19 was likely to mean the need for an earlier review.

Methods

Discussion around the methods any review should take focused on the importance of limiting the impact in terms of bureaucracy or stability for providers. It was suggested that improvement should be iterative, focusing on performance measurement rather than waiting for major reviews. There was also a view that in assessing the holistic impact it was important for evaluation to be done over a longer timescale, rather than creating an environment in which training providers focus on proscribed outcomes at the cost of all else.

Process

Several respondents raised questions about the review process itself, such as who would be on the panel and what would happen in the event that the priorities of the Mayor differed from those set out in the strategy. Others commented on the consultation process, stressing that it was important that all stakeholders had the ability to participate despite the pandemic and that those who stood to directly or indirectly benefit from Adult Education Budget funding were not able to sway the decision.

3 Analysis of Learner conversations

3.1 Introduction

To ensure that the voice of adult learners was represented in the consultation, targeted engagement was carried out with adult learners who had recently participated in a AEB funded programme.

As well as being invited to submit survey responses, adult learners were also invited to attend one of four online focus groups or have phone conversations if they were unable to attend the scheduled groups.

The opportunity to participate in these groups was promoted through key learning providers including Independent Training providers (through the West Yorkshire Learning Providers network); Employment and Skills teams of Local Authorities; and through Colleges.

Through this process, 23 conversations were held with adult learners who had experienced AEB funded learning.

A topic guide was designed to steer conversations and to gather insight about the following issues:

- awareness of and access to AEB funded opportunities
- experiences of AEB funded learning including motivations for learning
- priorities for West Yorkshire's AEB in the future

3.2 Profile of participants

The demographic profile of participants who took part in these conversations is shown below. [NB: Not all participants consented to provide this information nor did everyone complete every category so the demographics are only representative of those where information was completed].

		% of responses given	Number of responses
What is your age? (22 responses)	19-24	23%	5
	25-34	18%	4
	35-44	27%	6
	45-54	23%	5
	55-64	9%	2
What is your gender? (23 responses)	Male	26%	6
	Female	74%	17

		% of responses given	Number of responses
What is your ethnic group? (22 responses)	White / White British	41%	9
	Black / Black British	9%	2
	Asian/Asian British	41%	9
	Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	9%	2
Which area do you live in? (19 responses)	Bradford	10.5%	2
	Calderdale	10.5%	2
	Kirklees	37%	7
	Leeds	26%	5
	Wakefield	16%	3

3.3 Motivations and experiences of AEB funded learning

Of the adult learners who took part in the engagement, most had undertaken courses to improve functional skills that would help their career prospects (eg English, maths, healthcare, hairdressing, etc) but around a third of participants had also taken courses to support hobbies or because they wanted to learn a new self-improvement skill (eg crafts related courses).

Many of the female learners, particularly from Asian backgrounds or who were newcomers to the country or area, also saw their learning experience as an opportunity to make new friends, become integrated in the community and gain confidence as well as learning skills that may support career development. Some also felt that the space for learning also improved their mental health and well-being.

The fact that courses were free was a key motivator for undertaking AEB funded courses – it gave some people, particularly people living in more deprived communities or from cultures where women do not have financial independence - the opportunity to access learning that they would not be able to usually afford. There were a small number of people though who also felt that ‘free’ courses were not always valued as much as courses that people would have to financially contribute to and this may lead to higher drop-out rates.

Convenience was another key factor in choosing courses – many people ended up learning in colleges that were closest to them (with safety and affordable travel being cited as factors that meant they would prefer to study closer to home) or with training providers that they were familiar with and trusted (eg a community-based provider).

Many people were not particularly concerned about the standard or quality of teaching either because they had no recent experiences to compare with or because the course was free so they did not expect ‘extra service’.

3.4 Awareness of and access to AEB funded opportunities

Many of the learners felt it had been difficult to find out about what learning opportunities existed particularly for adults. Many had found out about the courses they had undertaken through 'word of mouth' or by being sent information from community groups that they were members of. One person (who is now training to be a healthcare professional) described her experience as: "I literally stumbled upon an open day at a College during my lunch-break and it was life-changing for me."

Many of those who had searched online as their initial port of call to find out about a specific course also felt that navigating the 'system' to find the right course and the right place to study it was quite challenging.

Some of the barriers that people felt existed for adult learners were:

- time to study – particularly if you are having to juggle work and family / caring duties
- courses not being available during the evening
- travel – including the cost of travelling
- lack of confidence in digital skills – a suggestion that was made repeatedly was having a "technical induction" as part of any course
- lack of self-confidence
- being 'the oldest person in the room'

3.5 Current gaps and priorities for West Yorkshire's AEB in the future

It was widely agreed that more could be done to promote the AEB opportunities that existed. It was felt that because there were different providers involved, that there was not one "place" that people could find information about what existed and where. Some also felt that not enough information about learning opportunities was shared within the workplace – particularly for those who wanted to get better paid employment.

Some people also felt that having access to a 'skills counsellor' to both reassure and talk through options with adults would be useful.

There was also agreement that a current gap in provision was access to free digital skills courses (and learners were pleased to hear that this would be available from August 2020).

In terms of the priorities outlined in the strategy, there was broad agreement with these with the following receiving most support:

- the need to unlock progression opportunities through skills particularly those on low wages and with insecure work
- supporting the unemployed to gain and sustain employment
- making learning more inclusive to support disadvantaged residents

There was consensus that the best way to address the last point – making learning more inclusive - would be to provide access to free learning and to provide more community-based learning.

The importance of AEB funding to build the resilience of families as well as communities was also mentioned as a priority.

4 Analysis of Employer conversations

4.1 Introduction

To ensure that the voice of employers was represented in the consultation, targeted engagement was carried out with employers who had recent experience of engaging with the Adult Education Budget.

Employers were invited to submit survey responses and were also invited to attend one of two online focus groups or have phone conversations if they were unable to attend the scheduled groups.

The opportunity to participate in these groups was promoted through key learning providers including Independent Training providers (through the West Yorkshire Learning Providers network); Employment and Skills teams of Local Authorities; and through Colleges.

Through this process, 8 conversations were held with employers representing a range of businesses across the region including SMEs, housing associations, healthcare providers and global companies with a local footprint.

A topic guide was designed to steer conversations and to gather insight about the following issues:

- awareness of and access to AEB funded opportunities
- experiences of AEB funded learning
- priorities for West Yorkshire's AEB in the future

4.2 Experiences of AEB funded learning

Most of the employers represented had used AEB funded courses to support the development of their workforce. Most of the courses they had accessed were functional including customer service, hospitality, cleaning principles, maintenance and English courses for employees for whom English was not their first language.

For many, their motivations for accessing AEB funding was to retain staff and to ensure career progression. SMEs in particular valued the opportunity to access free courses which they may not otherwise be able to afford to provide.

Some had found the process for applying for funding to be onerous and unclear – the multi-national company had spent significant time going through the application process only to realise after several stages that they were not eligible to access AEB funded courses.

Many felt that their experiences worked well if they had good relationships with a local training provider. Some – particularly those involved in the care sector – were able to work with the training provider to tailor the courses to meet their specific needs.

There was a recognition that some of the 'softer skills' that would help their employees progress (eg those relating to people management or influencing skills) were not available through the AEB route and they felt this was currently a gap in service provision.

Other gaps identified included access to digital skills courses and access to learning for people with learning disabilities.

Many of the employers had used the Apprenticeship Levy to support apprentices.

4.3 Awareness of and access to AEB funded opportunities

Many of the employers had learned about AEB funded courses through their own sector-specific communications or through networking events. They felt more could be done to promote this to employers – especially SMEs.

Some also felt that being able to provide learning opportunities in the workplace would increase the likelihood of their employees to undertake these courses because some of them would not have the time to study outside work hours.

Some said that they had been aware that funds existed for AEB funding that were ‘stuck in the system’ and would be lost. They felt that if there was more promotion of AEB funds to businesses then valuable money to improve skills would not be ‘wasted’.

There was also agreement that more could be done to support learning across local authority borders (since many worked across local authority boundaries and felt that provision – and access to provision – was not consistent).

4.4 Priorities for West Yorkshire’s AEB in the future

It was widely agreed that more could be done to promote the AEB opportunities that existed. There was also recognition – particularly among those working in the voluntary and community sector - that businesses themselves often had access to service users who could benefit from AEB funding so they themselves could be equipped to promote AEB funded courses to these often marginalised groups of people.

In terms of the priorities outlined in the strategy, there was broad agreement with these with the following receiving most support:

- the need to unlock progression opportunities through skills particularly those on low wages and with insecure work
- improving West Yorkshire’s resilience by identifying and delivering the skills needed for the future

For the last point, skills such as health and social care skills and practical skills to support a green economy were mentioned.

5 Analysis of other submissions

5.1 Introduction

In addition to taking part in the consultation via the survey or through targeted conversations, a number of organisations and individuals contributed to the consultation in the following ways:

- taking part in a consultative stakeholder meeting (8 meetings took place and 33 people took part in these)
- 2 written submissions by businesses (Interserve and Laver Regeneration)
- 1 written submission by Leeds City Council

As these submissions do not follow the structured format of the survey or the conversations, the key points made are summarised below.

The full transcripts of each of these have been ready by the West Yorkshire Combined Authority so the detail will be taken into account by the decision-making bodies.

5.2 Summary of issues raised at consultative meetings

8 meetings were held with the following stakeholders:

- City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council's Employment and Skills team
- Calderdale Council's Employment and Skills team
- Kirklees Council's Employment and Skills team
- Leeds City Council's Employment and Skills team
- Wakefield Council's Employment and Skills team
- West Yorkshire Jobcentre Plus and DWP representatives
- West Yorkshire College Principals and representatives from the WY Consortium of Colleges
- Training Providers from West Yorkshire Learning Partnership

Each followed a similar format: a presentation by West Yorkshire Combined Authority officers on the draft AEB Strategy; opportunity to raise issues about the approach and principles underpinning the draft Strategy; and an ask to stakeholders to formally submit their views via the survey and to encourage others to do so.

Most of the meetings consisted of clarification questions and most stakeholders have formally contributed to the survey. Additional points raised that relate directly to views about the Strategy are summarised below.

Some of the general comments and issues raised relating to all stakeholders included:

- Broad support and agreement for the approach (including priorities and outcomes) outlined in the draft AEB Strategy.
- The need to get the balance between academic skills and vocational skills right and broadening the focus of the vocational skills covered by AEB.
- Recognising the importance of skills that help people progress in their careers and not just get people closer to work.

- Making sure the impact of COVID-19 was reflected when realising some of the proposals going forward.
- The importance of having full data from the West Yorkshire Combined Authority about learners and skills needs going forward to support stakeholders in their strategic skills planning.

Some of the key issues raised from a Local Authority perspective included:

- The need for flexibility in allocating funds given the changed landscape that COVID-19 was showing. This included flexibility around specific learning channels eg Community Learning; specific skills needs (eg digital skills) or even geographic needs.
- Making sure that governance arrangements for both managing procurement and performance were streamlined.
- A concern that using the 2017/18 allocation values would not be sufficient to maintain current provision levels.
- Being clear to other stakeholders what the role of Local Authorities would be in procurement processes and recognising their multiple roles (strategic decision-maker; commissioner, provider, etc). This also extends to clear communications with elected representatives to support their roles and responsibilities.

Some of the key issues raised from a Colleges perspective included:

- The continued flexibility for Colleges to support skills development for 'niche' industries.
- A concern that using the 17/18 allocation values would not be sufficient to maintain current provision levels and would cause instability within the sector.
- A desire to be able to use the flexibilities described in the 'route 3' procurement pathway.
- Clarification as to whether they could also bid in procurement rounds for additional delivery.

Some of the key issues raised from a Training Provider perspective included:

- Concern that there will be over-subscription for access to contracts and they may lose out, particularly if grant providers also compete in the procurement process
- Also some concerns at losing out if Colleges who sub-contract to them under-perform and have some of their funding clawed back
- The importance of procuring adult learning provision directly within the West Yorkshire area rather than West Yorkshire providers being sub-contracted to deliver AEB contracts from organisations located outside the area.

Some of the key issues raised from a Jobcentre Plus perspective included:

- The impact of COVID-19 on unemployment particularly on people who may be unemployed when the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme finishes and making sure that there is flexibility to support people who may need to re-train / learn new vocational skills.
- The need for programmes that continue to support customers once they have found employment, helping them sustain work and progress.

6 Conclusions

The intent and approach set out in the draft AEB Strategy has received broad support from all key groups of stakeholders – learners, training providers, employment and skills teams from Local Authorities, businesses and others. People also felt that the devolution of the AEB presented the West Yorkshire Combined Authority to provide a truly responsive approach to meeting the skills required to support the region’s economic growth.

A common issue raised across all channels was the impact of COVID-19 on future skills. People felt that the AEB Strategy should have the flexibility to accommodate this changing situation.

Strategic priorities

In terms of the priorities set out in the AEB Strategy, there was strong support for all of the priorities with ‘Making learning more inclusive to support disadvantaged residents and widen the pool of talent for business’ receiving the highest levels of support (96% indicating that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the priority).

In targeted conversations and more open feedback, many – including learners and Local Authorities – felt that investment in skills to unlock progression opportunities was as important as getting people into work.

Challenges in meeting needs

In terms of the challenges in meeting needs set out in the AEB Strategy, the majority of people felt that all the key challenges were captured but that these may have to be revisited once the impact of COVID-19 on the demand for labour and skills was fully known. Another challenge identified was the need to support the socially disadvantaged by providing them with access to the key skills to get them into work.

Principles for commissioning

There was strong support for all the principles of commissioning set out in the AEB strategy, with ‘Engage with training providers to understand their offer, and their potential to improve skills delivery across West Yorkshire’ being cited as the most important in most discussions – both from a commissioning and provider perspective.

The need to have transparent, fair and streamlined approaches to procurement was also regularly raised in conversations with both providers and Local Authorities.

Expectation of provider values and behaviour

There was strong support for each of the expected provider values and behaviours. 99% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the need for providers to ‘Communicate openly and transparently with stakeholders, learners and partners’.

Proposed approach

There was strong support (85% levels of agreement) for the approach to delivering skills across West Yorkshire set out in the document. People particularly valued the importance of Community Learning, but there were also concerns regularly raised about sub-contracting (both in principle

and practice), and the impact that using the 2017/18 allocation values could have on sector and provider stability.

Priorities and outcomes

There was strong support for the actions, outcomes and measures identified for each priority set out in the AEB Strategy with most support being expressed for the actions and outcomes supporting 'making learning more inclusive'. There was a strong view among learners that the provision of 'free' courses was key in making sure that people from socially disadvantaged groups could access learning opportunities that they would not normally be able to afford or justify.

Review and Evaluation

There was strong support for both the process and timeline outlined for review and evaluation with over 80% of respondents agreeing with both. It was recognised that external factors such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic might necessitate the need for earlier reviews.