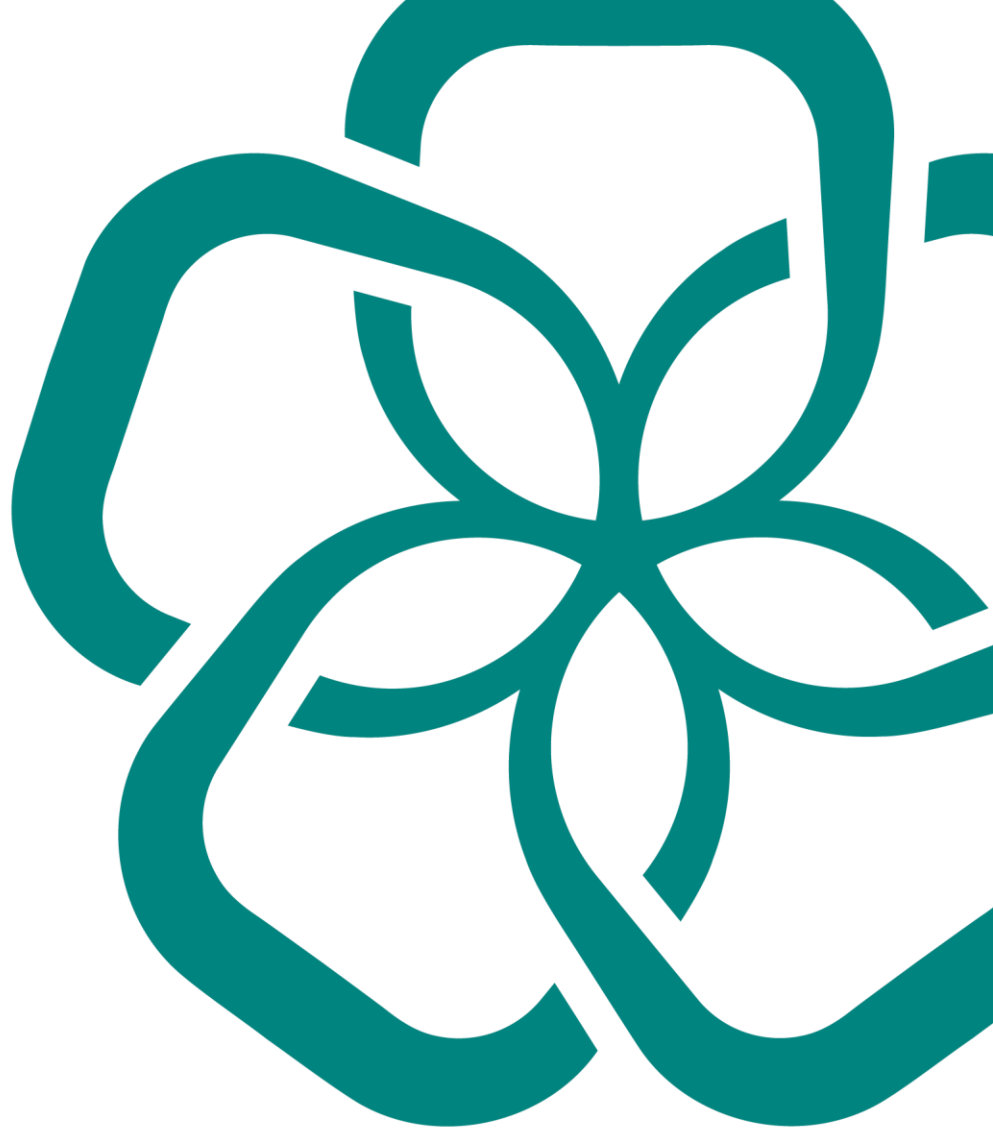




West
Yorkshire
Combined
Authority

Tracy
Brabin
Mayor of
West Yorkshire



Assurance Report 23/24

West Yorkshire Combined Authority

January 2025

The following terminology will be used throughout this report

Terminology	Description
Adult Education Budget (AEB)	Total allocation including Community Learning
Community Learning (CL)	Community Learning
Formula Funded	Adult Skills (AS)
Free Courses for Jobs (FCfJ)	Free Courses for Jobs

Although from 1st August 2024 Adult Education Budget (AEB) is known as Adult Skills Fund (ASF) and Community Learning (CL) is Tailored Learning (TL), as this report is referring to 2023/24 delivery the term AEB and CL will be used throughout.

Strategy and Priorities for Adult Skills

This document provides a comprehensive overview of how adult skills funding, namely the Adult Education Budget (AEB) and Free Course for Jobs (FCfJ) funding, is being used to meet both local and national priorities in West Yorkshire.

Further detail regarding AEB-funded delivery in West Yorkshire will be available in Spring 2025 in our AEB Annual Report 2023/24.

Policies for Adult Education

Devolution of the annual AEB was included as part of the March 2020 devolution deal agreed between West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) and Government.

Devolution of AEB includes taking control of the annual £66 million budget for West Yorkshire residents and direct management of the training providers in West Yorkshire who deliver the funding provision. It also allows the region to set its own priorities for funding and allows WYCA to align spending on skills to the opportunities and needs in the local economy.

As part of preparation for devolution, the WYCA developed and consulted upon the West Yorkshire AEB Strategy to determine the priorities and principles for the devolved fund.

The 5 priorities for funding are:

- Support the unemployed to gain and sustain employment
- Unlock progression opportunities and career adaptability through skills, particularly for those on low wages and with insecure work
- Make learning more inclusive to support disadvantaged residents
- Increase the supply of skills to support key sectors in West Yorkshire
- Improve West Yorkshire's resilience by identifying and delivering the skills needed for the future

The ambition for devolution is to:

- Make the skills system more responsive and accessible through stronger local influence with all training providers
- Focus on our 'place', and ensure the right training and support offers are made to fill the skills gaps which are most prevalent locally
- Deliver a more efficient system by focussing on quality of provision and the impact it has on learners
- Make sure learning opportunities are joined up to local progression opportunities in life and work
- Work closely in partnership with providers to bring together planning of the wider skills and post-16 education system

To deliver this, the following key values and behaviours were agreed for both the MCA and providers to uphold:



To enable West Yorkshire to respond to local needs as they arise, an allocation of AEB is available each year to be utilised with the following activities:

Commissioning responsive activity based on economic and sector intelligence.

This is likely to include (but not limited to):

- Targeting underrepresentation in local authority areas, e.g. 'cold spots' where participation is low in deprived areas
- Responding to the needs of the Digital Skills Plan
- Skilled sector ('good jobs') with vacancies
- Supporting ex-offenders
- Supporting care leavers
- Emerging economic needs.

The following table outlines the skills strategy and priorities for devolved adult skills (ASF and FCfJ) for the reporting year

Key Priorities	Evidence of impact
The key skills needs in your area that you sought to address including, but not limited to:	WYCA continued to deliver <i>Routes to Success</i> to address the regional shortages of bus drivers. Co designed with the Confederation of Passenger Transport, with endorsement from the sector, a two-stage skills programme was launched to support individuals to gain roles as bus drivers. The model has subsequently been adopted across other MCAs and to date it has trained more than 166 drivers in West Yorkshire. Delivery continued with specialist providers to engage and deliver telecoms, digital infrastructure and rail engineering skills with established relationships to employers with vacancies. On L2 and L3 Telecoms and Digital Infrastructure 63% of unemployed learners progressed into employment and on Rail Engineering, 55% progressed. These progressions were achieved without including outcome payments within the commissioning structure. Targets are included to increase engagement with underrepresented individuals in these sectors. Although females engaging with telecoms and rail is still low (8% were female), providers are actively promoting and recruiting provision that is designed around caring responsibilities as well as working with employers to offer working conditions that are more flexible. A female only telecoms course took place with positive response from the learners. FCfJ delivery in Early Years and Adult Social Care has provided skills, knowledge, and leadership capabilities to address the critical demands of these sectors. These qualifications have supported career progression for aspiring and current practitioners while addressing a pressing workforce need in these sectors. 49% positively progressed into employment, further learning or volunteering. This provision ensures a pipeline of skilled professionals who can care for more children and adults, comply with regulatory requirements, and maintain the high standards expected in early years education and health and social care.
Getting learners into work or better paid jobs and your priority sectors	In response to increased employer demand highlighted by DWP, in 23/24 WYCA procured bespoke training packages which include the licence to practice certificate that individuals require to gain employment in some key employment sectors. Previously these were not available for AEB funding in WY. This provision is roll-on-roll-off and includes sector specific employability skills as well as the opportunity to achieve an SIA badge (Security), CSCS card (Construction) or Forklift truck certificate (Warehousing) with guaranteed links to recruiting employers. Delivery took place in the final five months of 23/24 with 42% of learners across the three sectors gaining employment, the highest of which, 58%, in the security sector. This programme is continuing into 2024/25. The latest destination data for 2023/24, generated by the ILR, shows a comprehensive improvement in performance across all headline indicators, with an increase in the number of positive outcomes and a higher rate of positive progression (see section below). Partnerships with providers and NHS Trusts across WY deliver provision to support individuals to gain employment and to progress in the NHS. E.g. Maths and English qualifications are delivered to NHS

	staff and Trusts which supported 110 individuals to gain promotions and progress onto apprenticeships across a wide range of NHS roles. To support increased monitoring of impact, a DAM code has been introduced in 23/24 to identify Targeted Employment Programmes, with a further DAM code used when a learner gains employment. This is for all provision which is employer linked with a guaranteed interview.
Support for social justice and disadvantaged groups (including use of CL, ESOL)	Extensive Partnership work with Police and Crime and Prison Service has been undertaken to support clear skills referral routes from probation including those soon to be released from prison. A pilot is currently taking place in partnership with the West Yorkshire Police to create Out of Court Pathways for women to divert them from the Criminal Justice System. Using CL funding, a bespoke programme has been developed, delivered to women by women in a trusted location that includes employability, utilising role models, job matching, confidence and self-esteem support. The cohorts are small but early indications show 100% positive progressions. A framework for assessing the broader impact of the pilot is being developed. WYCA are represented on ESOL partnership groups across WY which engage with VCSEs delivering informal ESOL in the heart of communities. Providers are working to support progression from this engagement to funded progression courses where appropriate. The vast majority of the CL delivered by our LAs is either directly delivered by VCSEs or working alongside them to support individuals in their community. Providers work closely to meet the needs of disadvantaged groups, for example providers visit recovery services and work with Housing Associations to take learning into trusted locations to hand-hold them to progression opportunities. More information below on CL. Spend on ESOL aims has more than doubled between 2020/21 and 23/24 with further growth in 24/25. ESOL aims accounted for 24% of total Adult Skills spend in 2023/24. This level of investment is being reviewed to ensure an appropriate balance with other priorities. See section on spend by provision type. (page 15)
Strategy for driving up participation in the statutory entitlements	Statutory entitlements are key strategic priorities interwoven throughout WYCA AEB practices. Monthly provider performance management provides monthly data which includes detail on not only the numbers engaging on statutory entitlements but the breakdown of demographic information to understand who is engaging and where to identify gaps. WYCA has expanded the age of entitlement for a 'first full level 2' from 19-23 to 19+ and expanded the digital entitlement to ensure digital skills for all. It was identified that adults aged 19-23 face restrictions on the courses they can take due to rules about eligibility for a 'first full Level 2' qualification. This is a result of the Combined Authority ambition to provide adults with a substantial GCSE equivalent qualification - but can disadvantage those who would benefit from shorter interventions. A pilot was introduced in 2022/23 to increase the number of courses 19-23s are entitled to, this means those without a full level 2 qualification can access any level 2 qualification to support their progression. This flexibility remains in place. The pilot opportunity for providers to design Bridging Programmes continued into 2023/24. As a delegated fund, there is little ability to shape and design FCfJ, but AEB can be used flexibly to support

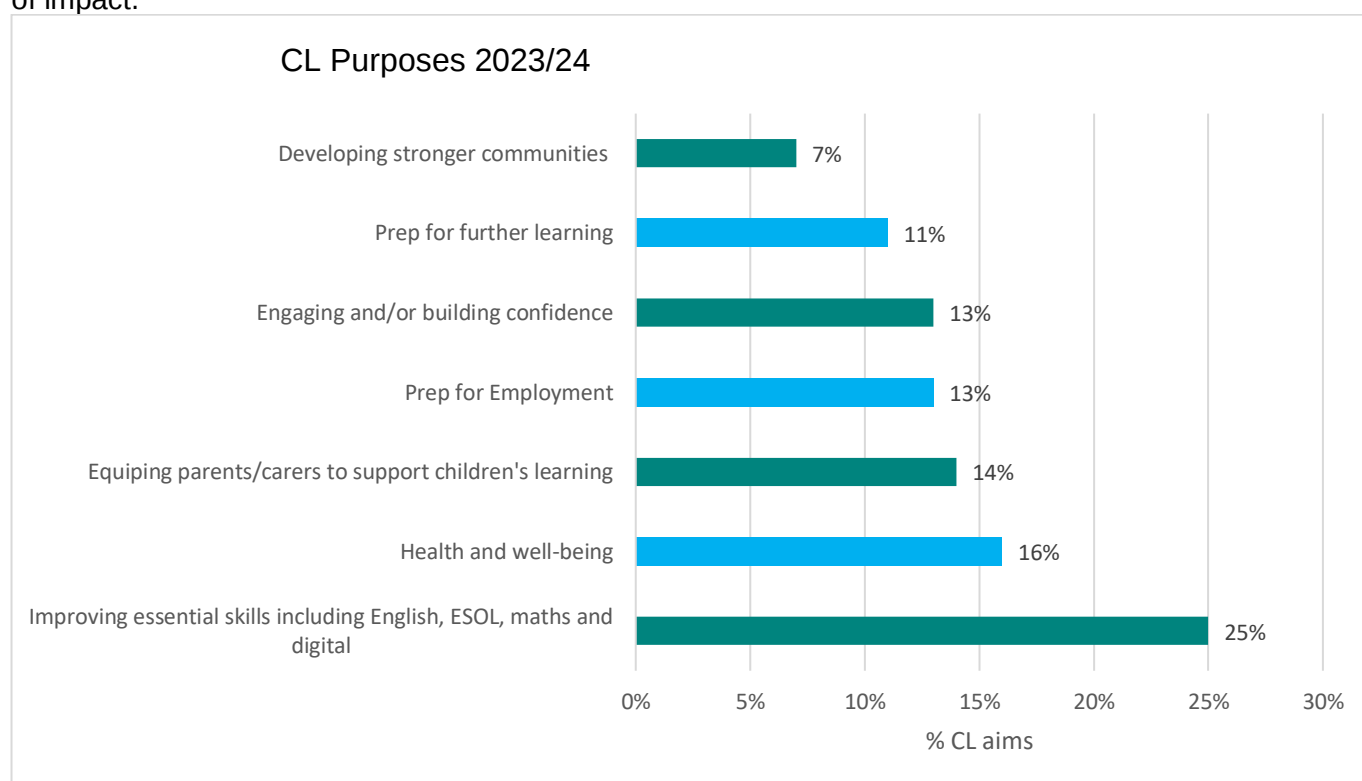
	adults in progressing and taking up this opportunity. This pilot aimed to bridge the 'jump' between level 2 and level 3, particularly when an adult has been out of education for a while. Working with providers who have funding from FCfJ to create short bridging programmes. These programs act as a steppingstone to longer Level 3 courses. They could include modules at Level 2 or Level 3, serving as a taster or a refresher, or even a package focusing on self-study or research skills etc. (Details on the impact of these flexibilities is on page 18.)
Strategy for tackling place-based disparities	Utilising data and LA intelligence, areas of under engagement have been identified. This has led to two procured opportunities in Kirklees and Bradford with specified targeted delivery with under-represented groups and geographical areas. The impact of these will be evaluated in 2024/25. Use of VCSEs across CL, whether as sub-contracted delivery or through robust partnerships, engages in communities and with individuals who traditionally would not engage with mainstream learning. Leeds City Council, who manage the largest CL allocation in WY, received Outstanding Ofsted inspection in December 2023. The use of sub-contractors (predominately VCSEs) was praised in the report, <i>'Subcontractors deliver highly effective, bespoke programmes to support the most vulnerable learners to access education.'</i> More detail on CL is on page 9. A large proportion of residents in the most deprived communities lack English language skills. In 2023/24, 55% of learners on ESOL provision were from IMD decile 1 neighbourhoods, compared with 42% of learners overall.
Strategy and priorities for local flexibilities introduced outside the statutory entitlements	In 22/23 a 10% uplift was provided to L2 and below aims in recognition of increases in delivery costs. When modelling the impact the Funding Rate reforms could have on delivery, especially on maths, English and employability aims, it was agreed WYCA would ensure that existing aims are funded at a minimum of their current 2023/24 uplifted rate. For 2024/2025 WYCA did not follow the national rules to remove Prior Attainment as eligibility for full funding. The rules on prior attainment were maintained to support: • Learners aged 19-23 to receive full funding for Entry Level and Level 1 qualifications, facilitating their progression towards attaining their first Level 2 qualification • Learners aged 24 and above to receive full funding for their first Level 3 qualification. This maintains WYCA's ongoing support for individuals lacking formal qualifications, thereby promoting progression opportunities for West Yorkshire residents in line with stated objectives and targeted groups. A range of other local flexibilities were maintained for 23/24, as noted in the sections above – aligned to their rationale.

Community Learning

A review of CL took place in 22/23 which demonstrated there is a clear rationale underpinning curriculum planning. Most of the funding is spent on targeted provision in disadvantaged communities, supporting individuals with the most complex and challenging lives: deciding to 'go where no one else goes'. This is reflected in the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) table below.

Indices of Multiple Deprivation	1 - 3	4 -6	7-10
% Learners accessing Provision	66%	18%	16%

The chart below shows the CL Purposes demonstrating how CL is being used in WY with a strong focus on improving essential skills. Progression from CL to accredited provision is a priority. In 2023/24, 22% of learners who enrolled for a CL course subsequently enrolled on an Adult Skills course; this is equivalent to 2,600 learners in absolute terms. The wider outcomes collected in 2024/25 will provide further measures of impact.



Following the CL Review Employment and Skills Committee recommended in July 2023 to move towards a needs-based methodology for allocating CL funding at local authority level, this is to address the historic under investment in Kirklees and Bradford as highlighted in the CL review.

In November 2023, Adult Skills colleagues from all 5 LAs attended a workshop to deep-data-dive into existing provision, geographical and demographic reach and potential cold spots. Mapped to the CL objectives, there was a discussion around which indicators should be considered to identify need. These indicators included population, deprivation, rurality, those with no or low qualifications, unemployed/economically inactive and those limited by long term health conditions. Population was weighted at 50% with a focus also on those from deprived neighbourhoods, with low level qualifications and not in work.

The data highlighted significant under-investment in Kirklees and Bradford, with low or no engagement on CL provision across several wards despite high levels of deprivation and low skills attainment.

Targeted growth funding was allocated to address “cold spots” in provision through the AEB Responsiveness pot which will be used to address this issue, working with all CL providers across these areas to address the needs.

In Bradford the data showed four IMD 1 wards with no engagement on CL. In collaboration with the Local Authority and consulting with local voluntary sector organisations, a pilot opportunity was designed to engage individuals only from these wards utilising the strong links the VCSE organisations have with many of these individuals. This unique programme must deliver the following:

- Engagement only from the four wards of Keighley West, Little Horton, Manningham, and Tong
- Fully Funded Learners
- Individuals with low or no qualifications who have not engaged in formal learning for over 6 months
- Outputs: minimum of 80% of learners with one or more of the following positive progressions
 - Volunteering
 - Formal learning
 - Employment

Included in the pilot are contracted outputs and payment for sustained progression at month 2 and month 6, this is the first time AEB at WYCA has paid for an outcome of sustained progression which includes the ongoing support and tracking following the end of the interventions.

There will be a number of learnings from this pilot, predominately the aim is to review which methods of engaging reluctant learners have been successful in achieving a sustained progression, which could be used to influence future CL delivery, justification and utilisation.

The following section sets out key messages relating to delivery of devolved AEB in West Yorkshire in 2023/24 academic year to demonstrate the scale and nature of the impact of the programme.

In the table below evidence of impact is mapped against the key outcomes / priorities presented in the Combined Authority's AEB Strategy. Fundamental to the achievement are established working relationships nurtured with strategic partners including LA colleagues, colleges, Yorkshire Learning Providers (YLP), DWP, Maximus, WY Police, TUC, Voluntary & Community Sector Enterprises together with robust provider management.

Examples include:

- DWP/Maximus: Regular strategic and operational meetings encourage a collaborative, cohesive offer to WY benefit claimants. Appreciation and understanding of emerging priorities support two-way communication which ensures the required skills are available through current providers or through procurement opportunities if required.
- WY Police: Out of Course Pathways pilot, SWAP to support recruitment of PCSOs and contact centre staff from underrepresented communities.
- TUC: WYCA recognises the value of Union Learning Representatives (ULR) within West Yorkshire employers to promote skills opportunities. An agreement between WYCA and TUC supports a TUC Project Officer who recruits and supports ULR and champions to raise awareness of adult learning. For 2024/25 measurable outputs will quantify the impact of this relationship offering adult skills support, with a minimum of 400 individuals receiving signposting and 140 progressing into courses from trusted colleagues within organisations.
- Grant providers and YLP: Consultation on key national policy changes e.g. funding rate increases to explore data, impact and options which encourages buy-in from the sector.
- Working closely with SPF People and Skills Community Grants programme which engaged the most reluctant individuals to move towards employment, volunteering and/or skills. These 96 VCSE organisations across WY received information to increase awareness on local opportunities to facilitate signposting participants to learning and employment support.

Key Outcomes	Evidence of Impact
Support the unemployed to gain and sustain employment	• Jobless learners accounted for nearly three-quarters (73%) of starts on Adult Education and FCfJ provision during 2023/24 – more than 39,000 starts in total. • The proportion of starts accounted for by jobless learners was higher than in both 2021/22 (69%) and 2022/23 (71%). • 54% of starts in 2023/24 were for learners who were out of work but actively seeking and available for a job. • 19% of starts were for learners not looking for work and/or not available to start work (economically inactive). The programme plays a key role in moving inactive learners closer to the labour market.
Unlock progression opportunities and career adaptability through skills, particularly for those on low wages and with insecure work	The devolved AEB programme makes special provision for learners in employment who are paid below the Real Living Wage: • 6,100 Adult Skills starts were supported through the low wage pilot during the academic year. • A further 620 starts were supported through the low wage offer for FCfJ (level 3) learners.
Make learning more inclusive to support disadvantaged residents	• The proportion of learners with a learning difficulty and/or disability and/or health problem increased from 17% in 2022/23 to 18% in 2023/24. • There is recognition across providers that this number is not a true reflection as learners do not always disclose whether they have a learning difficulty or disability. Within Adult Skills/FCfJ 7% of learners did not declare a learning difficulty, disability or health problem but received learning support, raising the proportion to 25% of total learners with a support need (when added to the 18% of Adult Skills/FCfJ learners with a declared learning difficulty and/or disability and/or health problem). • The proportion of learners residing in the most acutely deprived neighbourhoods (IMD decile 1) was 42%, a slight increase on the 41% recorded for 2022/23. This represents intensive targeting since 22% of the region's population live in neighbourhoods falling within IMD decile 1.
Increase the supply of skills to support key sectors in West Yorkshire	• Telecoms and Rail Engineer skills training delivery with industry links and high levels of progression into jobs. • Collaboration with DWP has led to bespoke skills training in construction, logistics and security with progression targets into employment.
Improve West Yorkshire's resilience by identifying and delivering the skills needed for the future	• Digital skills are increasingly essential in the modern workplace. • Starts on Essential Digital Skills courses, which target the fundamental skills needed for work and life, grew by 62% compared with the previous year, rising to around 2,100. This follows net growth of more than 80% in the previous year. • The broader digital (ICT) subject area (which excludes Essential Digital Skills aims) saw nearly 3,000 starts across the programme during 2023/24.

Employer Engagement

Over the past 12 months the CA's skills team have had regular strategic engagement and structured collaboration with regional employers to influence skills priorities.

This includes:

- **Economy Committee and Business Board:** Provide updates and consult to inform and receive input on annual performance and strategic development. Membership across these includes employers, LAs, Chamber of Commerce, local education/training providers including HEI, DWP, TUC and Voluntary Sector.
- **Regional employer panels:** Employer voice is fed in through our Mayor's Council board (made up of the region's largest employers including Morrisons, Sky, Haribo and Asda) and the West Yorkshire Business Board where employer representatives from key industries discuss what their skills needs are and to ensure their perspectives directly influence priority-setting and feedback on new initiatives such as Graduate West Yorkshire.
- **Sector-specific and themed roundtables:** In the past twelve months the Combined Authority has organised several forums for specific industries to share skills challenges and opportunities, particularly in vital sectors and themed challenges to the local economy. This includes developing employer voice to shape the soft skills gaps businesses face to shape our West Yorkshire Promise, convening employers and providers to understand the challenges in tutor shortages and technical pathways for key sectors, and more specific industry roundtables such as in Health Tech and Manufacturing.
- **Surveys and consultations:** Consultation with businesses on skills via targeted surveys to gather data on current and future skills gaps directly from employers particularly around barriers to employers taking on someone with health conditions and around leadership and management.
- **Collaboration with industry associations:** Leverage existing organisations that represent employers, such as FSB, CBI and other sector-specific associations including the Manufacturing Alliance and CITB. Specific collaboration and partnership work with the regional Chambers of Commerce on the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), ensuring the priorities identified align with existing and planned adult skills activity.
- **Supply chain engagement:** Collaboration with colleagues working on large scale regional regeneration opportunities including Mass Transit and Retrofit to reach out to both large employers and their suppliers to get a broad perspective on emerging skills needs and challenges to ensure it is achievable.
- **Responding to government changes:** Discussions have taken place with employers to understand the effects of the recent budget changes (such as changes to NI) to factor in new challenges or barriers employers may face which could influence their recruitment and skills decisions. Local employers have been suggested to feed into national government discussions held with Skills England, including the development of the new Growth and Skills Levy.
- **Ongoing communication:** A team of business engagement officers maintain regular contact with employers through long standing relationships, newsletters, focus groups, and one-on-one meetings to keep the dialogue open and capture acute skills challenges businesses face in the region.

Future priorities including emerging or growing sectors where skills provision will be targeted in the next reporting year.

West Yorkshire (WY) has been awarded funding through both the NHS Health and Growth Accelerator and Economic Inactivity Trailblazer programmes, positioning it as one of only three regions in the UK to receive such support. In addition, the region will benefit from the Connect to Work programme funding, which collectively represents a substantial investment aimed at tackling economic inactivity driven by ill

health. This aligns with the government's *Get Britain Working* mission to enhance both economic prosperity and population health.

Adult Skills in West Yorkshire is working closely with the Work and Health (W&H) colleagues to ensure seamless integration of services. This includes a focus on first steps provision, such as CL opportunities, which in 2023/24 supported 30% of economically inactive individuals and delivered over 3,100 courses with the primary purpose to improve health and wellbeing. These efforts will complement and enhance W&H initiatives, particularly in alignment with the region's first Work, Health & Skills Plan. This comprehensive approach ensures that both work and health opportunities are fully aligned with the Adult Skills provision, maximising impact for the local population and contributing to broader regional goals of tackling economic inactivity and improving health outcomes.

West Yorkshire was the first region to publish its Local Growth Plan, setting out the region's priorities for growth. The Local Growth Plan is a Mayoral Manifesto commitment developed and refined during academic year 2023-2024, in partnership with local authorities, businesses, the voluntary and community sector, and education institutions. This ten-year plan incorporates five priorities and a series of short, medium and long-term actions, with skills as one of three key enablers, alongside investment and connectivity. The plan will deliver sustainable change as part of long-term, integrated investment for the region. The key headline growth sectors for West Yorkshire are Advanced Manufacturing, Green Economy and Emerging Technology, with a number of sub-sectors within this, fitting with wider regional ambitions, such as construction and retrofit, and health tech.

In the next reporting year, there will be a focus on aligning sector-focussed training in key areas, across the AEB, FCfJ, and Skills Bootcamps offer, to ensure the appropriate funding is being used in order to meet the skills needs at entry level, through to technical and higher-level skills. There will also be a focus on early years training, with the development of a West Yorkshire Early Years Workforce Plan, exploring the routes into and through the sector and bolstering provision to ensure the quality and number of early years educators and leaders is sufficient to meet the increasing demand for early years places.

In line with the planned cycle, the initial AEB Strategy for West Yorkshire, developed ahead of devolution, will be evaluated this year. This will consider the impact of AEB (and wider delegated adult skills funds) and how well commissioned provision has aligned to the priorities. The evaluation will inform consultation on Adult Skills priorities over summer, after which the strategy will be refreshed, with a focus on meeting the ambitions of the Local Growth Plan and delivering Skills services under an integrated settlement.

Spend from the AEB & Free Courses for Jobs

Please outline:

- Amount spent on skills programmes vs allocation
- Funding by provision type; amount spent on statutory entitlements
- Amount spent on administrative/operational costs associated with managing devolved ASF.
- How you are prioritising and ensuring quality of spend
- If any significant underspend or overspend has occurred during the reporting period, please provide details and explain any planned corrective actions or reallocations.

WYCA received an AEB funding allocation of £66,421,247 and an allocation of £4,722,184 for Free Courses for Jobs for the 2023/24 academic year. The following section provides details of expenditure for the academic year.

Table: AEB expenditure in West Yorkshire by component, 2023/24

Element	Expenditure
Programme Funding (AEB)	£46,826,073
Community Learning	£8,246,874
Learning Support	£3,248,707
Princes' Trust	£40,424
Excess Learning Support	£585,231
Exceptional Learning Support	0.00
Learner Support (19+ Hardship Funding)	£3,246,375
Learner Support (20+ Childcare Funding)	£1,114,391
Learner Support (Residential Access)	0.00
Learner Support (Administration Expenditure)	£190,846
Management	£1,178,057
	£64,676,978

Just over £6.8 million was carried forward to 24/25. This includes:

- Planned 'responsiveness' funding
- Underspend in WYCA management fee
- Over £1.9 million from provider end of year under-delivery/clawback.

It was a strategic decision to retain underspend for 2024/25 recognising the potential need for growth at R04, contingent on the level of impact from the funding rate increases.

Table 2: Free Courses for Jobs Expenditure

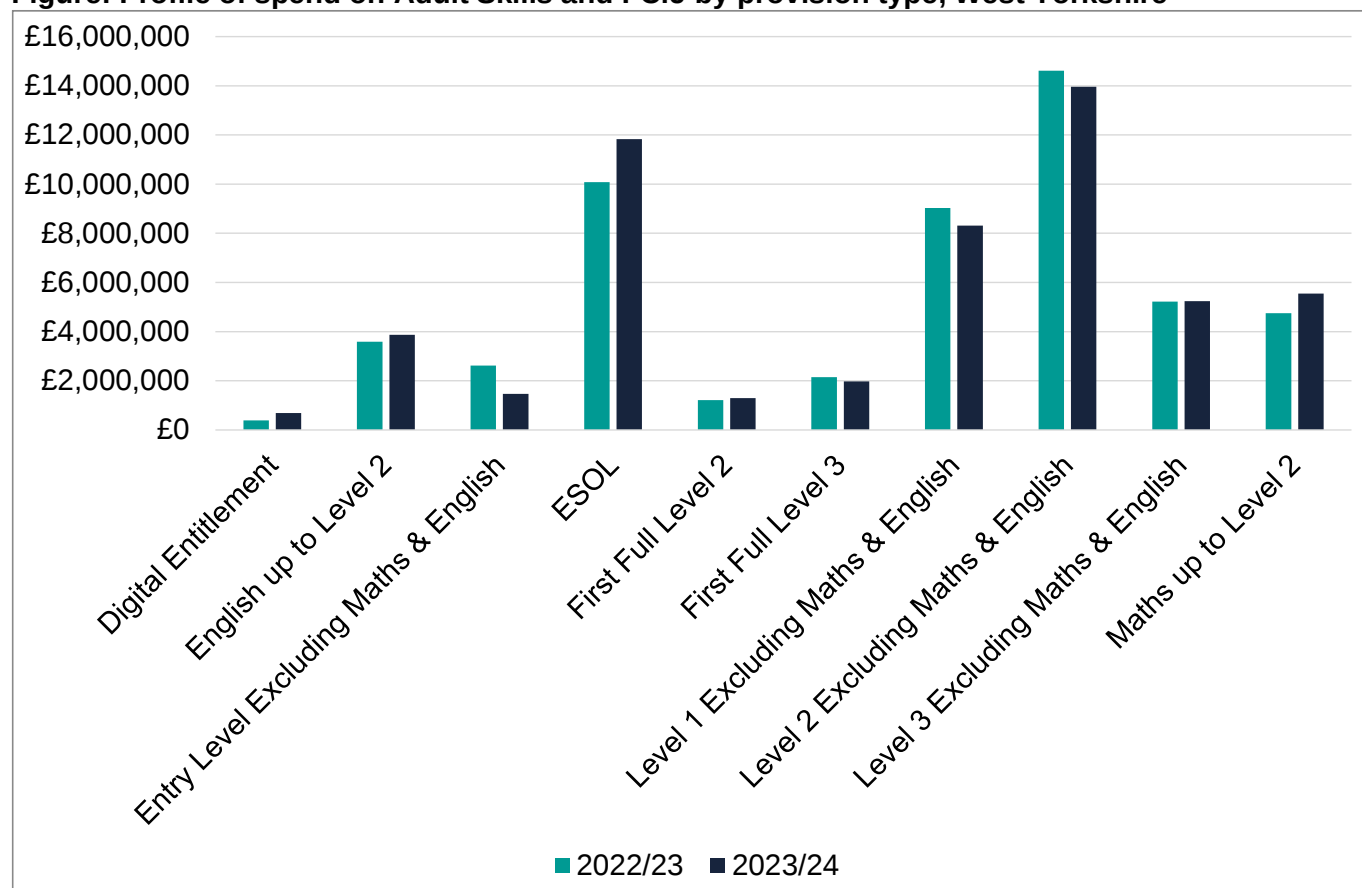
Element	Expenditure
Programme Funding (FCfJ)	£4,072,338
Learner Support	£55,775
Management	£47,222
Total Delivery	£4,175,335

Underspend for FCfJ is returned to DfE.

The commissioning of FCfJ funding was delegated to the Combined Authority in the same year that the AEB was devolved. As with any new scheme, the provider base needed time to develop and market its offer and enrol learners. The relatively short notice period meant that FCfJ funding was not embedded in curriculum planning for 2021/22. By contrast, enrolment has increased considerably in recent years, from 20% in 2021/22 to 87% in 2023/24.

Current 2024/25 data show a number of grant providers have exceeded their allocation evidencing increased demand partly through clear progression pathways from level 2 to level 3 which have been embedded into the local offer.

Figure: Profile of spend on Adult Skills and FCfJ by provision type, West Yorkshire



The largest areas of spend by provision type in 2023/24 were Level 2 Excluding Maths & English (accounting for 26% of total earned cash) and ESOL (22%).

Broadly speaking, the proportion of spend dedicated to vocational provision fell in 2023/24, with reduced expenditure for such provision at Levels 1 and 2. This was combined with net increases in spend on English, Maths and particularly ESOL provision.

Spend on legal entitlements increased by £1.1m or 13% between 2022/23 and 2023/24. This was primarily driven by a net increase of more than £1m for the English and Maths entitlement and more than £300,000 for the digital entitlement, but with decreases in spend elsewhere. More details are provided below in the section on entitlements.

Prioritising provision and quality of spend

All providers submit delivery plans which are reviewed by MCA and LA colleagues to consider breadth of provision in each area to meet local priorities. Where there has been an increase in demand, ESOL for example, the team works with providers to ensure the demand is met within existing contracts or through additional procurement if required.

Desk-top and full provider audits are undertaken by the internal audit team. In 2021/22, audits undertaken found common practice where qualifications are delivered less than 50% of the recommended GLH. The audit identified a systematic reduction, and not adjustment based on the learner's assessed needs and starting point. To address this a provider roundtable took place to gain a clearer picture in relate to the data and understand the sector challenges, specifically the programme design rationales for Sector Based Work Academies and Distance Learning.

The following actions were agreed for 23/24:

- Planned guided learning hours to be entered onto the ILR

- Introduction of a traffic light tracking system where approval is required for delivery below 70% of GLH and reduction of funding when planned hours is below 50% of GLH (implemented in January 2024).
- Introduction of specific Sector Based Work Academy approved codes with set funding value piloted in 23/24.
- Pure Distance Learning is exempt from the traffic light tracking system. A review will take place in 24/25 to understand engagement, demographic reach, curriculum, and impact.
- Increased monitoring developed in 23/24 utilising DAM codes for 100% pure DL and Targeted Employment Programmes will provide information on impact and utilisation of funds.

Local Impact Analysis of delivery

Please outline the impact devolved skills funding has had in the MCA's locality, as well as against national priorities.

Please include:

- Analysis of delivery in your area (this should draw on published data from DfE (including new Metrics when developed) and can use other data where necessary)
- The impact of the ASF & FCfJ local flexibilities you introduced including use of the 'FCfJs MCA flexibility' and impact of innovative practice introduced
- Impact on participation, achievement/completions and outcomes - including trends over time (where appropriate)
- Alignment with Local Skills Improvement Plan; alignment against DfE's 'national priorities'

The following points provide a further summary of AEB delivery in West Yorkshire in 23/24.

- The devolved AEB programme supported 44,000 learners during the 2023/24 academic year, a decline of 8% on the previous year.
- Substantial numbers of learners achieved qualifications during 2023/24 academic year:
 - 8,000 West Yorkshire residents attained their first ever qualification
 - 4,800 learners achieved their first qualification at Level 2.
 - 1,200 learners achieved their first level 3 qualification.
- West Yorkshire's learner profile was more diverse than nationally, based on figures published by the Department for Education. 55% CL participation in West Yorkshire was by learners from ethnic minority groups (including people from white minorities) compared with the national average of 41%. Meanwhile, 63% of participation in adult Education and Training provision (of which Adult Skills is the major part) was for learners from ethnic minority groups (including White minorities), compared with a national average of 47%¹.
- The Combined Authority's own data that specifically relates to the Adult Education Budget shows that West Yorkshire's learner profile in 2023/24 was more diverse compared with the previous year: the proportion of learners from ethnic minority groups increased from 57% to 61% of the total year-on-year.
- The proportion of learners with a learning difficulty / disability /health problem increased by one percentage point to 18%.
- The biggest areas of growth in terms of starts were Business, Administration and Law, which saw a net year-on-year increase in Adult Skills and FCfJ starts of 650 or 22% and Arts, Media and Publishing, which grew by 480 or 61%.

¹ Figures published by Department for Education are not directly comparable with the Combined Authority's figures. The Department does not publish data specifically relating to AEB at a subnational level. The majority of adult education and training provision consists of AEB but also includes non-devolved provision.

- There was a strong focus on disadvantage:
 - 6,100 Adult Skills starts were supported through the low wage pilot during the academic year, equivalent to 8% of all starts in that strand. A further 599 starts were supported through the low wage offer for FCfJ (level 3) learners.
 - The proportion of Adult Skills and FCfJ starts for learners who were out of work increased from 71% to 73%.
 - The proportion of learners from the most acutely deprived neighbourhoods (decile 1 of the Index of Multiple Deprivation) was 42% (compared with 37% immediately pre-devo in 2020/21), increasing to 55% in Bradford and 52% in Leeds.
- There was strong targeting of people with no qualifications or existing skills and qualifications at the lowest level and a focus on promoting progression:
 - Basic skills starts increased their share of total Adult Skills starts from 40% in 2022/23 to 46% in 2023/24.
 - The proportion of Adult Skills/FCfJ starts for learners with no qualifications or qualified at Entry level or Level 1 only was 61%.
 - For 44% of Adult Skills/FCfJ starts the course offered progression i.e. the learner undertook a course with a level higher than their prior attainment.
- 22% of CL learners (a total of 2,600 learners) progressed to an Adult Skills course during the academic year.
- The overall success rate for the Adult Skills strand in 2023/24 was 88%, a small increase on the 87% recorded in 2022/23, following a similar increase in the previous year.

Overall participation in AEB-funded provision

The following table sets out an analysis of participation and enrolments, comparing 2022/23 academic year with the latest year of 2023/24. These measures reflect those used by the Department for Education in their official statistics.

West Yorkshire had total participation of around 44,000 in 2023/24, a reduction of 8% on the previous year. This was driven by a decrease of 13% in Adult Skills participation and growth of 2% in FCfJ participation. Participation on CL fell by 6%.

Table: Summary of participation and enrolments undertaken through devolved programme in West Yorkshire

	Strand	2022/23	2023/24	Change	% change
Participation	CL	13,600	11,900	-1,900	-6%
	Adult Skills	34,900	33,000	-1,700	-13%
	FCfJ 24+	1,600	1,700	-	2%
	Total	47,300	43,700	-3,600	-8%
Enrolments	CL	22,100	19,200	-2,800	-13%
	Adult Skills	62,300	55,200	-7,100	-11%
	FCfJ 24+	1,700	1,700	-	0%
	Total	86,100	76,100	-10,000	-12%

Note: Continuing learners not included in data for 2021/22. All values are rounded to nearest 100 and may not appear to sum correctly; percentage change figures may not appear to be consistent with values due to rounding

Source: ILR

Enrolments figures are based on the number of learning aims that were active at any point during a given academic year i.e. starts plus carry-in. There was an overall decrease of 6% in enrolments. CL enrolments fell by 13%, Adult Skills by 11% and FCfJ enrolments remained static.

The fall in participation and enrolments seen in 2023/24 was partly due to a reduction in funding: total spending fell by approximately 4%. It was also partly due to a shift in the profile of provision, away from lower-level vocational provision which has a relatively low average funding rate to provision with higher rates, including ESOL and aims at level 3.

In its management of the devolved programme the Combined Authority has actively pursued a strategy to reduce the number of aims undertaken per learner to maximise the impact of each aim and increase value for money. Since the start of the devolved programme the number of starts has fallen, whilst the number of new learners has increased. The number of starts recorded in 2023/24 was 2% lower than in 2020/21 (the year before devolution) but the number of new learners was up by 3% for the same period.

Local flexibilities

The local flexibilities implemented to enhance devolved provision in West Yorkshire are described in the policy section, above. The level of take-up achieved under these flexibilities is examined in the following table. When considering volumes of take-up it should be noted that this is primarily pilot activity.

Flexibility	Take-up
Increasing the low wage threshold	6,100 Adult Skills starts supported through the low wage pilot during the academic year - A further 620 starts were supported through the low wage offer for FCfJ (level 3) learners
Expanding the age of entitlement for a 'first full level 2' from 19-23 to 19+	70 starts under this flexibility during 2023/24 26% of starts were for unemployed learners and 44% for learners in employment
Expanding the 'Digital Entitlement' to ensure digital skills for all	300 starts during 2023/24 academic year 83% of starts were for unemployed learners
Test Pilot: Bridging programmes that support progression to Level 3	- Around 60 starts during academic year - Among learners who undertook a Bridging programme 32 have progressed onto a Level 3 aim so far
Test Pilot: Increasing the number of Level 2 courses 19-23s are entitled to	330 starts during 2023/24 academic year 83% of starts for unemployed learners
Providing full funding for eligible asylum seekers	2,450 starts during 2023/24 academic year, for 1,370 new learners

Some of the flexibilities introduced during 2022/23 enabled large numbers of starts and therefore widened participation in the programme during 2023/24. This was particularly the case for full funding for asylum seekers, access to full funding for people in low wage employment and for the flexibility in Level 2 courses for 19-23 year olds. The value and impact of all the flexibilities piloted in 2022/23 is currently being reviewed.

Local flexibilities were also utilised for FCfJ provision. MCAs were provided with the facility to nominate learning aims to meet local needs, in addition to qualifications in the national FCfJ offer. In total, there were around 390 starts funded through this flexibility, accounting for 29% of total starts on FCfJ.

Legal Entitlements

The AEB programme includes support for 4 legal entitlements to full funding for eligible adult learners. These entitlements apply nationwide and devolved areas are required to honour them.

These entitlements enable eligible learners to be fully funded for the following qualifications:

- English and Maths, up to and including Level 2, for individuals aged 19 and over, who have not previously attained a GCSE grade 4 (C), or higher, and/or
- first full qualification at Level 2 for individuals aged 19 to 23, and/or
- first full qualification at Level 3 for individuals aged 19 to 23

- essential digital skills qualifications, up to and including Level 1, for individuals aged 19 and over, who have digital skills assessed at below Level 1.

The following section examines the take-up of each entitlement in terms of enrolments during the 2023/24 academic year (starts) and highlights any changes with the previous year.

English and Maths, up to and including Level 2, for individuals aged 19 and over, who have not previously attained a GCSE grade 4 (C), or higher

There were 6,500 starts under this entitlement in West Yorkshire in 2023/24, with around 4,700 learners taking up the entitlement. 44% of starts were for literacy and 56% for numeracy.

There was an increase in starts under this entitlement of 7%, or around 430, between 2022/23 and 2023/24.

Total spend (total earned cash) on this entitlement during 2023/24 was £7.2m, including the Combined Authority's funding uplift of 10%, an increase of 17% on the previous year.

First full qualification at Level 2 for individuals aged 19 to 23

This is one of two entitlements for learners aged 19-23. These entitlements are important for West Yorkshire because the proportions of young people in the region achieving a qualification at Level 2 and Level 3 by the age of 19 is below the national average.

There were around 160 starts (undertaken by 130 learners) under this entitlement during 2023/24, less than 1% of total starts on the Adult Skills programme. These figures were largely unchanged on those recorded for the previous year.

As a supplement to the national entitlement the Combined Authority has brought in a flexibility which allows learners aged 19-23 who lack a full Level 2 to undertake a qualification at Level 2 that is not classed as full. This is not permitted under the national funding rules. There were 330 starts under this flexibility during the academic year, with four-fifths of them being associated with unemployed learners.

Total spend (total earned cash) on this entitlement during 2023/24 was £479,000, including the Combined Authority's funding uplift.

First full qualification at Level 3 for individuals aged 19 to 23

There were approximately 430 starts under this entitlement during the 2023/24 academic year, relating to 400 learners. This makes it another small element of total Adult Skills provision, accounting for less than 1% of total starts. The number of starts fell by 14% for this entitlement compared with the 2022/23 academic year.

Total spend (total earned cash) on this entitlement during 2022/23 was £1.7m.

Essential Digital Skills qualifications, up to and including Level 1, for individuals aged 19 and over, who have digital skills assessed at below Level 1

During 2023/24 there were 2,100 starts under the Essential Digital Skills entitlement. This represents a net increase of more than 60% on starts recorded in the previous academic year. The national entitlement was supplemented by 300 starts delivered under a local flexibility that provides access to additional digital aims.

Total spend (total earned cash) on this entitlement during 2023/24 was £750,000, including the Combined Authority's funding uplift.

Completion and achievement rates

The extent to which enrolments on courses linked to formal qualifications result in achievement of those qualifications is a key measure of the added value of the Adult Skills programme. Official qualification achievement rates for providers showing their performance at a local level are not available. The following analysis is based on calculations undertaken by the Combined Authority.

The method used to calculate success rates for Adult Skills is detailed in the box below.

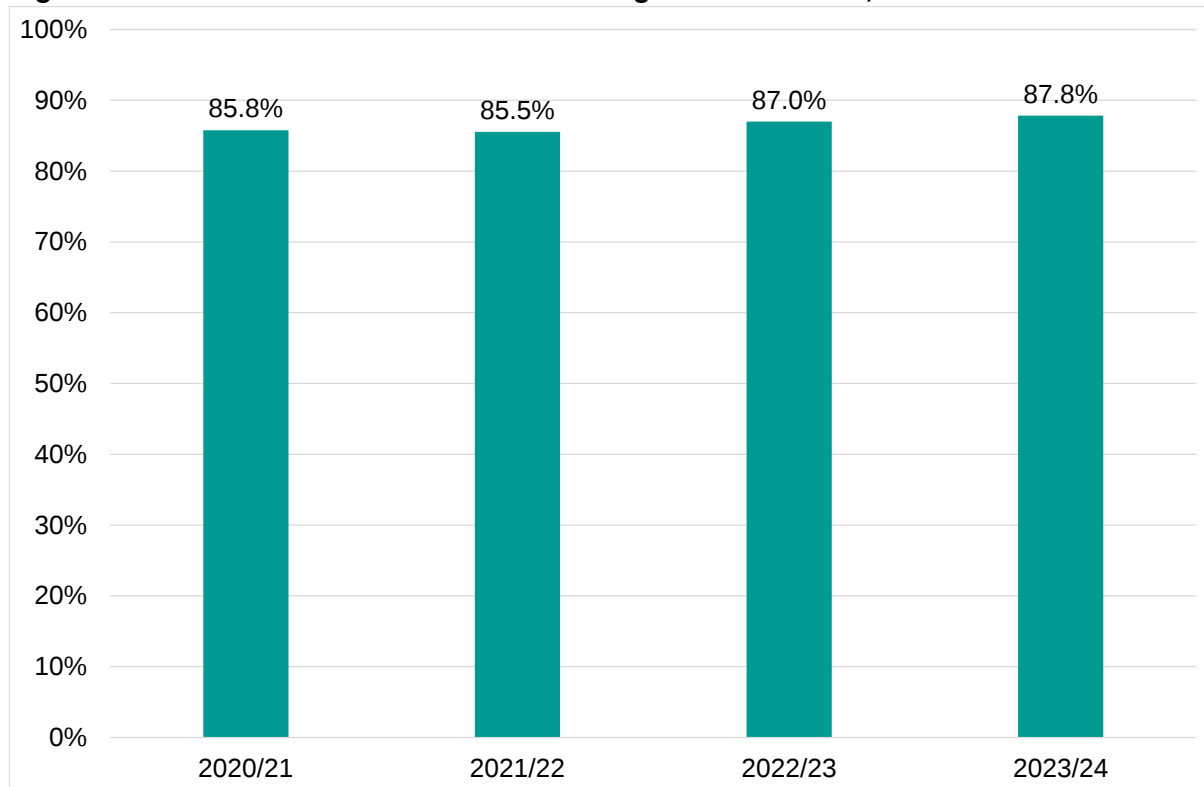
Calculation method for success rate

1. Success Rate = Leavers x Retention x Achievement
2. Retention = Completion status of 2: The learner has completed the learning activities leading to the learning aim (expressed as % of total leavers)
3. Achievement = Achievement Status of 1: Achieved (expressed as % of retained).

The overall success rate for the Adult Skills programme for 2023/24 academic year was 88%. This means that for 92% of starts on a learning aim the learner was retained; of these retained starts, 95% of learning aims were achieved. When multiplied together these two figures give the overall success rate of 88%.

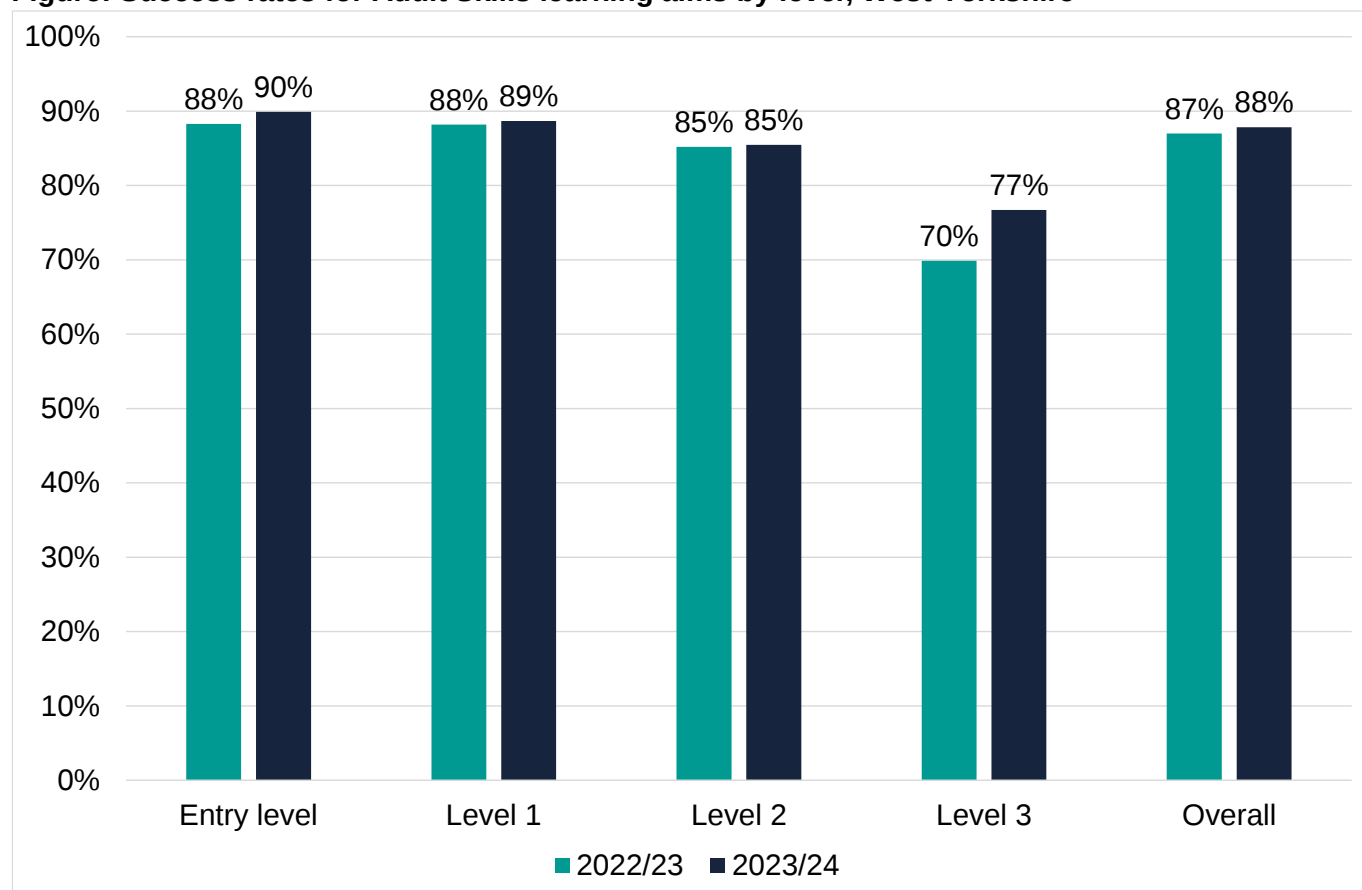
The success rates for the devolved Adult Skills programme have improved over time, increasing by 2 percentage points from 86% to 88% between 2020/21 (immediately before devo) and 2023/24.

Figure: Success rates for Adult Skills learning aims over time, West Yorkshire



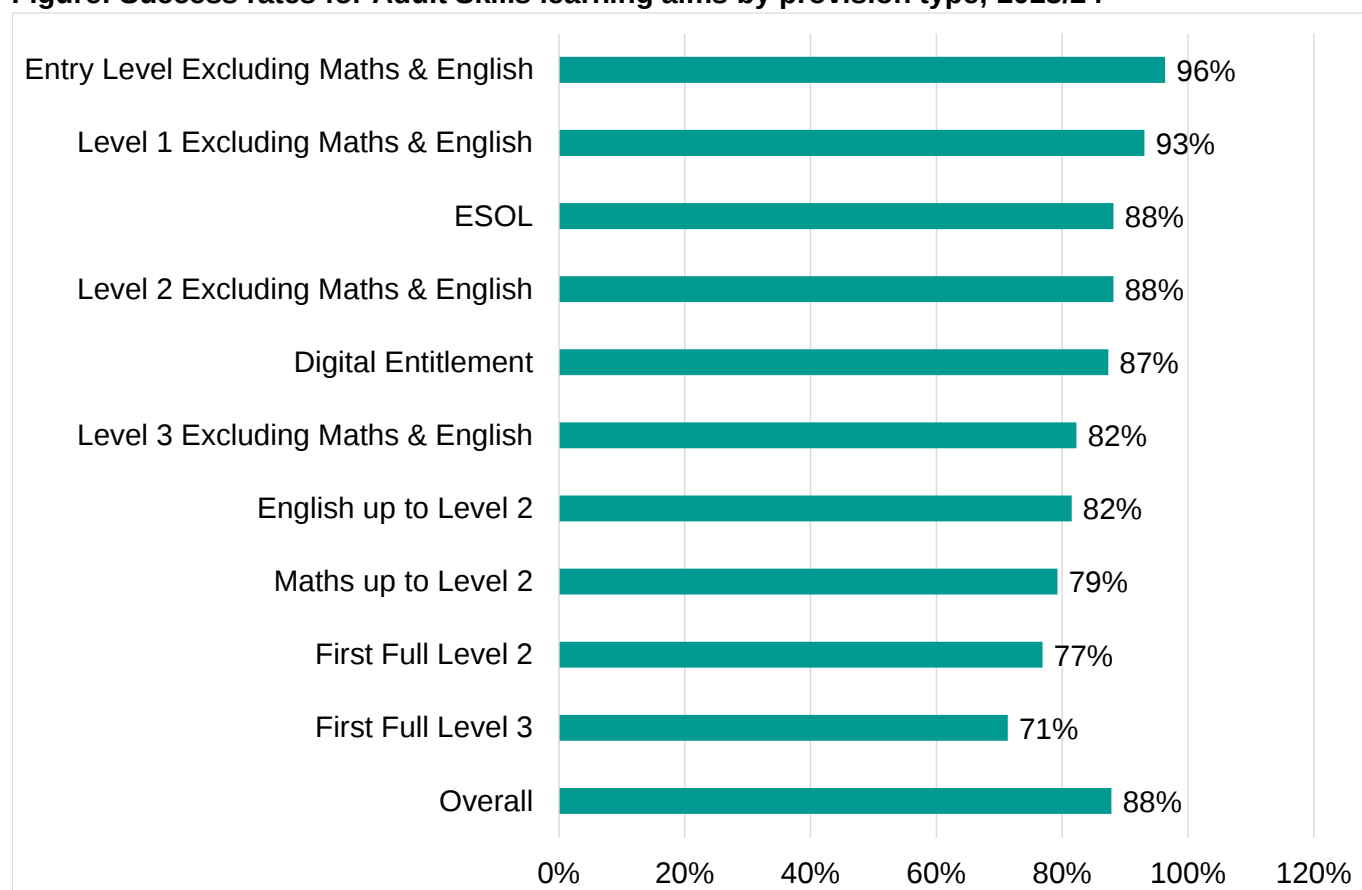
Success rates differ by the notional level of the learning aim. Entry Level and Level 1 aims have the highest success rate and Level 3 courses have the lowest. This is to be expected since Level 3 courses are generally longer and more demanding on the learner. However, it is notable that the success rate for Level 3 aims increased from 64% in 2021/22 and 70% in 2022/23 to 77% in 2023/24.

Figure: Success rates for Adult Skills learning aims by level, West Yorkshire



As the figure (below) shows, vocational aims at Level 1 and Entry Level had the highest success rates followed by ESOL provision. Success rates for full qualifications at levels 2 and 3 were the lowest of any of the categories but still equal to or above 70%.

Figure: Success rates for Adult Skills learning aims by provision type, 2023/24



Success rates are fairly consistent across other dimensions, including residence of learner (at Local Authority level) but vary by sector subject area and this is explained in detail in our end of year report. National figures are available for Education and Training provision for learners aged 19 and above for 2022/23 – they are not yet available for 2023/24. The scope of this provision is wider than the AEB and therefore the national figures are not directly comparable with our local figures. However, they do show, on an indicative basis, that West Yorkshire's performance was similar to the national average during the period, including for the various qualification levels. Key figures are as follows:

- The national retention rate was 92% in 2022/23 (excluding Level 4 aims).
- The national achievement rate (referred to as pass rate in national reporting) was 94%.
- The national success rate, based on our definition was 87%, slight below the West Yorkshire figure of 88%.

The pattern of success rates by qualification level is broadly similar at national level to the West Yorkshire position in that the lower qualification levels have better rates than higher level qualifications.

Fit with Local Skills Improvement Plan

As the following table shows, in most cases LSIP priority sectors for West Yorkshire have good coverage in terms of provision across programme strands, with the potential for occupational progression. In particular, ICT provision is extensive at all levels and accounts for more than a third of starts in the FCfJ strand. Health and social care is similarly strong with regard to Adult Skills and FCfJ provision. Other subjects that provide solid/proportionate coverage at the different levels include *Construction, Planning and the Built Environment, Accounting and finance, Transport operations and maintenance and Business Management*. The proportion of totals starts for aims in the *Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies* subject area is arguably low relative to the scale of employment in related disciplines in West Yorkshire. In the case of *Warehousing and distribution* (which aligns with the LSIP priority of Transport and Logistics) there is significant provision at the foundation level through the Adult Skills strand, which is the predominant level at which demand resides for this occupational area (warehouse operatives).

Table: Profile of starts by LSIP subject priorities and programme strand, 2023/24 academic year

Sector Subject Area	Adult Skills starts	FCfJ starts	Adult Skills % of total starts	FCfJ % of total starts
Health and Social Care	7,310	470	13.9%	34.5%
Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies	2,020	30	3.8%	2.3%
<i>Of which: Transport operations and maintenance</i>	1,070	10	2.0%	2.9%
Construction, Planning and the Built Environment	1,740	40	3.3%	3.0%
Information and Communication Technology	2,450	460	4.7%	34.0%
Arts, Media and Publishing	1,270	10	2.4%	0.4%
Accounting and Finance	340	50	0.6%	3.7%
Business Management	670	40	1.3%	2.9%
Warehousing and distribution	510	-	1.0%	0.0%

Destinations and progression

The following analysis is based on data available from the Individualised Learner Record, as presented in the Destinations and Progression data report. It is acknowledged that this does not provide a full picture of destinations and progression – this information deficit will be addressed through our plans for future evaluation outlined below.

The data for 2023/24 show an improvement in performance across all the main measures compared with the previous academic year.

Overall, 21,000 learners, or 46% of total learners, were recorded as having a positive destination of employment, voluntary work or education during 2023/24, a significant increase on the 33% recorded in 2022/23. However, many learners do not have a destination recorded: the percentage increases to 74% when the denominator is limited to learners with a known destination. This is also an improvement on the 68% figure for 2022/23.

In addition, many learners are in employment, education or voluntary work when they commence their study. To take account of this we have developed a measure of positive progression which shows when a learner moves from unemployment or inactivity to a positive destination. Overall, 12,700 learners achieved positive progression in 2023/24; this is equivalent to 28% of all learners and 45% of learners with a known destination; this compares with equivalent figures for 2022/23 of 17% and 34%.

The majority of positive progressions relate to entry into education (81% of learners), followed by employment (18%) and voluntary work (3%)².

Table: Summary of learner destinations and progression

All learners			Learners with known destination		
<i>All learners</i>	<i>Positive outcome</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>All learners</i>	<i>Positive outcome</i>	<i>%</i>
46,018	20,965	46%	28,205	20,965	74%
<i>All learners</i>	<i>Positive progression</i>		<i>All learners</i>	<i>Positive progression</i>	<i>%</i>
46,018	12,662	28%	28,205	12,662	45%
<i>Unemployed on start</i>	<i>Positive progression</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Unemployed on start</i>	<i>Positive progression</i>	<i>%</i>
30,677	12,662	41%	19,653	12,662	64%

² Since learners can have multiple destinations these percentages sum to more than 100%.

We can also focus on learners who were unemployed and actively seeking and available for work at the start of their course. Among this group, 41% of all learners experienced positive progression, rising to 64% of unemployed learners with a known destination. Again, this represents an improvement on the respective figures of 29% and 53% recorded in 2022/23.

Monitoring and Evaluation

A provider survey is undertaken annually to gather feedback on progress made and understand where to focus improvements for future years.

Providers were overall positive regarding the experience of devolution and impact made:

- 89% of providers found Key Account Manager relationship positive. ("Excellent. The relationship is very open and leads to better delivery and curriculum decision making)
- 72% of providers reported that they had already seen an impact of the funding rule flexibilities on their ability to engage WY residents
- 74% of providers said they had already seen an impact in their ability to support eligible asylum seekers from the recent funding flexibility ('This has been a huge benefit. We've been able to engage with so many learners that had previously been unable to access any funding at all, and therefore had no access to critical learning such as ESOL)
- 89% of providers have found Partnership meetings/conference extremely or very helpful which is an increase of 19% since year 1, there is still more we can do ('Would like to see more sharing of best practice'))
- Providers were largely positive about the impact that devolution has made on residents. ('Whilst still early to see fuller impacts, the flexibilities, determination to target those with greatest need and make up of providers is an excellent platform for impact.')
- 80% of providers have expressed positivity regarding communication methods, such as review meetings, data packs, newsletters, exception reporting, and webinars. ('Excellent use of management information to support discussion and actions

Use of DAM codes for Monitoring and Measuring Impact

Increased monitoring developed in 23/24 utilising DAM codes for 100% pure Distance Learning (DL) and Targeted Employment Programmes (TEPs) will provide information on impact and utilisation of funds.

A review took place of 100% pure DL which showed there was no way to identify which provision was delivered without any taught delivery. For 24/25 all providers must identify this provision defined as x, y, z. This will enable us to understand the demographics and prior attainment of the learners and progression.

Similarly for SWAPS and TEPs the ILR data did not identify which courses had an employer link and from this how many progressed into employment. Two DAM codes were introduced, one to identify the SWAP/TEP and the other to be used when a learner progresses. The data will be reviewed at R06 onwards to measure the impact of the employer focussed provision.

Adult Skills Conference

In 2023/24, the scope of the AEB Conference was expanded to include all providers involved in Adult Skills across West Yorkshire. This included those delivering programs such as Multiply, Skills Bootcamps, AEB, and FCfJ, with the goal of unifying discussions and focusing on the impact of adult learning rather than the complexities of individual funding streams. The Mayor, the Combined Authority's CEO, and WYCA's Inclusivity Champion presented on the region's strategic vision for adult skills, highlighting the importance of inclusivity and skills development. The conference featured a diverse range of workshops led by experts from Ofsted, the Department for Education (DfE), Local Authorities, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and internal colleagues, all aimed at supporting providers in enhancing their delivery and ensuring the success of adult learners across the region.

Adult Skills Awards and Region of Learning Ambassadors

In June 2024, the inaugural West Yorkshire Adult Learner Awards were held to celebrate the outstanding achievements of individuals involved in adult learning. The event was a great success, with over 150 nominations and 12 adult learners recognised for their dedication to learning and personal development, often overcoming significant challenges. The nominees represented a diverse range of backgrounds, including refugees, individuals who had learned English as a second language, and those returning to education after difficult childhood experiences. Some of the learners applied their new skills to support their communities, helping others overcome addiction, while others made remarkable progress, such as advancing from having no GCSEs to nearly completing a law degree while raising three young children.

The 2025 awards will continue to celebrate the efforts and successes of adult learners, as well as the dedicated educators who contribute to learning delivery across the region.

Building on the enthusiasm generated by the 2024 awards, nominated individuals were invited to become Region of Learning Ambassadors, a role launched by the Mayor in October 2024. These ambassadors will play a key part in supporting the Mayor's vision for West Yorkshire as a Region of Learning, sharing their personal experiences with adult skills development and promoting future learning opportunities.

Evaluation Future Plans

A review of the AEB Strategy for West Yorkshire has been procured for 2025 with a set of focussed-sample, in-depth impact evaluations planned to inform this. This will include how well we are aligning funds to achieve the impact required for adult skills.

The AEB affords provision that is designed to engage adults in learning to provide them with the skills needed for employment, or other employment focussed outcome. The data submitted through the Individualised Learner Records (ILR) demonstrates a limited measure of impact. In considering options for evaluating this provision, WYCA are looking to concentrate on a few areas of AEB provision and to test different innovative methods of destination data enhancement.

These may include:

1. A retrospective consideration of all West Yorkshire ILR returns against earnings two years hence provided through the ONS to consider demographic and EDI characteristics against outcome.
2. Agreement on a standard measure and collection methodology for CL across West Yorkshire with enhanced outcome, destination and intent data collected by a third party.
3. Enhanced follow-up of learners who have completed sector-specific training with a distinct employer focus to provide both quantitative and qualitative data on outcomes in both direct and indirect beneficiaries.
4. Enhanced follow-up of destination and outcome in learners who experienced 'pilot provision or provision in marginal extension of standard provision with comparisons to standard provision.

Some of these investigations will be carried out on historic returns and others built into provision planned for next academic year leading to impact reports being made over the next 2 years.

WYCA are aware of the evaluation work being considered by DfE and DHLUC for AEB and have been working closely with the What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth to inform their evaluation framework.

Case Studies

[Adult Skills funding Aim2Learn Telecoms Training course visit](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrBUVtZYQgs)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrBUVtZYQgs>
[From learning to employment - maths support in Leeds](#)
[\(2502\) Adult Education Budget Railsafe Case Study - YouTube](#)

"To now have more than 100 people in employment with bus operators from Route to Success and helping local residents move around West Yorkshire is a major milestone and we look forward to adding to those numbers in the months to come."



Find out more
westyorks-ca.gov.uk

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All information correct at time of writing



**West
Yorkshire
Combined
Authority**

**Tracy
Brabin
Mayor of
West Yorkshire**