Adult Education Annual Assurance Report 2022/23

January 2024

West Midlands Combined Authority | Research and Insights

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Introduction

The 2022/23 academic year saw the West Midlands Combined Authority expand its delivery of adult education provision across the region. Last year, provision grew in terms of learners, enrolments and funding delivered, as our offer evolved to meet the changing needs of our residents, our businesses and the wider regional economy. The adult education sector in the region continued its recovery with participation at a post-pandemic high. However, we face continued economic challenges; the WMCA area exceeds the national average in both rates of unemployment and economic inactivity. Our adult education offer is designed to provide our residents with the skills to get them back into work, to provide all of those who need it with a good education up to Level 2, to support our communities through inclusive growth and to upskill to respond to the needs of the regional economy and the net zero challenge.

However, we also recognise that not all work is 'good work'. We want to ensure that residents are equipped with the skills they need to excel and progress in the workplace. We have worked extensively with employers and industry representatives to respond to skills gaps in the current market and to identify future need in key regional sectors.

The devolved funding model has allowed us to respond flexibly and proactively to the challenges and opportunities of our region and to build a strong provider ecosystem. Our plans for 2023/24, being implemented now, and in both the short- and long-term, will develop a stronger more capable and inclusive workforce capitalising on the uniqueness of the West Midlands economy and our residents.

During 2022/23, working with the sector, we undertook an evidence-based review of funding rates. As a result, we increased funding rates by 10% and introduced a new costing methodology for Into Work programmes. This has inevitably had an impact on overall learner numbers, although some has been offset by the growth in Free Courses for Jobs provision which has increased overall investment.

Policies for adult education

The WMCA Adult Education Budget Strategy 2022-2025 sets out the vision for a responsive and flexible adult skills offer which will support our people-centred approach to ensure that the skills needs of businesses are met and that everybody can benefit from economic growth. Our key priorities for this period are:

- Supporting our communities to be stronger and benefit from inclusive growth.
- Providing a good education up to Level 2 for those who need it.
- Getting people into employment.
- Upskilling and reskilling to respond to the regional economy and net zero.

In delivering priorities, we work closely with our Local Authority and college partners, to ensure that our investment tackles place-based disparities, as well as delivering benefits for the region. In the 2022/23 academic year, our work included:

Supporting our communities to be stronger and benefit from inclusive growth

- Safeguarding funding for community learning, using it to increase our reach into groups and localities where people experience the most significant disadvantage.
- Strengthening our work with the voluntary and community sector as a first point of engagement and support for adult learners.
- Ensuring that a greater proportion of this provision equips learners to develop the skills and competences needed for the workplace, as well as for wider life.
- Developing and implementing a new digital skills curriculum to help tackle digital exclusion across the region.
- Introducing our first WMCA Adult Learning Awards, which will now take place annually.

Providing a good education up to Level 2 for those who need it

- Continuing to deliver a strong offer of high quality, locally available opportunities to improve literacy and numeracy skills, including through statutory entitlements, with a focus on ensuring a more relevant and flexible offer for those who need to

study alongside work, caring responsibilities, or wider commitments. This has included using Multiply funding to strengthen our in-work adult numeracy offer.
- Commissioning a review of English language acquisition to evaluate how approaches to language learning, curriculum design and stakeholder partnerships can improve and accelerate outcomes for learners.
- Maintaining investment in Level 2 provision, while expanding the training offer to include a greater sectoral mix and more direct routes into employment.
- Implementing a full study programme approach to funding Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications for young adults aged 19-23.

Getting people into employment

- Increasing investment in into-employment provision.
- Introducing a new funding methodology for into-employment programmes designed to drive even better outcomes for unemployed learners in bespoke provision that moves them into employment.
- Expanding our Skills Bootcamp offer in line with our Plan for Growth clusters to include healthcare, green technology, advanced manufacturing and engineering, and logistics.
- Continuing to commission against sector training plans for Health & Care and Construction and co-developed a sector training plan for Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering, in order to better align provision to employer needs and skills gaps.
- Raising our low wage threshold to £30k, making learning more affordable and accessible for those on below average salaries.
- Working with DWP to develop an in-work skills offer for employed UC claimants to assist them in progressing out of low pay.
- Launching our 'Know How' campaign, designed to encourage residents to engage in training that will help them find work and progress their career.

Upskilling and reskilling to respond to the regional economy and net zero

- Significantly increasing investment in higher-level skills training, with a key focus on strengthening our Level 3 offer and improving Level 3 attainment.
- Publishing a consultation on improving the Level 3 skills offer for adults, setting out a range of proposals and seeking the sector's view.
- Developing towards a more flexible higher-level skills training offer, aligned with the regional jobs market, that has supported adults to upskill and reskill for higher level jobs.
- Committing to fully funding a range of professional development qualifications for those working in the sector, to support delivery capacity.
- Extending our work with universities to help meet future and higher skills needs aligned to innovation that will stimulate our economy to create more jobs.

In March 2023, WMCA agreed a 'trailblazer' deeper devolution deal with the UK government. Through it, we secured further influence over key policy areas including skills, careers, employment support, business support and digital inclusion that will give local decision-makers more freedom and flexibility to support people to develop new skills, to find good work, to progress in employment, and to improve their quality of life. From the next spending review, we also secured a departmental style 'single settlement', giving local leaders unparalleled control over spending on devolved areas including adult skills. In preparation for this single settlement, we are currently in the process of refreshing the AEB Strategy to become a broader Employment & Skills Strategy for 2024-2027.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The 2022/23 academic year was the most successful to-date, with higher volumes of learners, providers and more region-specific and sector-targeted programmes as the WMCA continues to evolve it's AEB policies, strategies and offer.

We work closely with providers and monitor Individual Learner Record (ILR) and programme-specific data on an ongoing basis. We hold Provider Monitoring Review (PMR) meetings with all providers through which we identify risks, mitigations and best practice.

Where underperformance is identified we work with providers to mitigate issues and to find solutions. We also have an internal Performance Panel which oversees programme performance across all of our AEB, DfE and other funded activity. The Panel provides oversight of individual programme delivery, but also ensures there is an overarching strategic function, through which higher-level benefits and risks can be monitored and addressed.

We are in the final year of a four-year externally commissioned evaluation of the Adult Education Budget, which includes analysis of ILR data, qualitative interviews with providers, employers and other stakeholders, and a learner survey/focus group. Evaluation of the 2022/23 academic year is still underway; however, the interim report reflects:

- A shared commitment to improving basic skills and to providing clear progression pathways beyond Level 2.
- The importance of strengthening the offer for adults in-work.
- The need to further accelerate efforts to increase Level 3 attainment.
- Provider interest, and request for support, in developing their 'green skills' offer.
- The importance of continuing to strengthen the region's 'into work' offer in order to improve employment outcomes from training.

An overarching evaluation of investment the 2022/23 academic year is not yet possible. Individual providers in the region conduct learner surveys between September (following the end of the academic year) and March (seven months after year end), meaning evaluation data is currently incomplete and is inconsistent across the provider base. To conduct an effective, timely and comprehensive evaluation we would require real-time learner data from the ESFA. Failure to achieve a data sharing agreement in this space impedes our ability to monitor programmes in a holistic and timely manner.

Single Assurance Framework

The authority has recently relaunched it's revised Single Assurance Framework (SAF) for the management of projects funded by devolved funds. The SAF incorporates the end-to-end steps for developing business cases and provides guidance for producing detailed project delivery plans, assurance review of business cases and outlines the approval route and performance arrangements when the project is in delivery. The SAF provides consistency and oversight and is key in the authority's ability to demonstrate compliance and value for money.

Working with Government

The authority has developed strong working relationships with officials across a number of government departments. In particular, the WMCA works closely with DWP and DfE to identify and undertake joint activity and to share intelligence. In 2022/23, we hosted a number of ministerial visits, and contributed to a wide range of national events, in order to showcase the impact of devolution.

Internal review of AEB in the West Midlands

In the last year, the WMCA also undertook a consultation and review process to understand the impact of the devolution of AEB on the delivery of local skills training within the region. The review captured the opinions and recommendation of respondents through a range of written and verbal evidence. Feedback indicated strong support for the changes already implemented as a result of devolution of AEB, which has had a positive impact on local skills training. The devolved AEB is considered a highly valued enabler in tackling labour market challenges across the region. Its success is tied to the valued partnership model adopted by the WMCA with constituent authorities, which has included opportunity for those authorities to inform the shape of funded provision and commissioned activity relevant to their localities or regional skills interests.

Addressing current and future labour market demand will necessitate a flexible skills and curriculum offer. There was clear consensus that traditional curriculum models cannot deliver at the pace and content needed to meet employer requirements, and it was accepted that the CA needs to work with education providers to help adapt and develop more flexible creative curriculum solutions. Feedback also indicated growing demand for employability or 'soft' skills, and there was strong agreement that continued AEB investment needed to integrate employability into wider programmes, alongside better wraparound support to help residents succeed and develop lifelong learning skills. Central to delivering this objective will be managing resident and employer expectations and creating wider understanding about the range of careers, sectors and jobs skills that are available both now and into the future. Many witnesses agreed this required an integrated all-age careers strategy, that included schools as key partners,

with other post-16 education providers, employers and regional partners (such as the DWP), to operate alongside a targeted AEB approach.

Showcasing good practice

In the 2022/23 academic year, we introduced our inaugural WMCA Adult Learning Awards, which seek to recognise and celebrate the achievements of adult learners, businesses, providers and wider partners across the WMCA area. Through these awards, we are looking to:

- Raise the profile of adult learning across the region.
- Engage more residents, businesses and stakeholders in adult learning.
- Capture and celebrate good practice in adult learning across the region.
- Showcase the full range of economic and social benefits of adult learning.
- Demonstrate the impact of skills devolution, enabling us to make the case for further devolution.

This Awards event, held in May 2023, brought together learners, providers, employers, and industry representatives from across the region to showcase the impact of WMCA-funded adult learning, skills, and training courses. There were ten award categories demonstrating the breadth of impact that WMCA-funded provision encompasses:

- Inspirational Adult Learner
- Learning for Work
- Step into Learning
- Inspirational Tutor of the Year
- Innovative Delivery
- Successful Partnership
- Engaging Adults in Learning
- Community Learning Provider of the Year
- Large Employer of the Year
- Small and Medium-Sized Employer of the Year

Details of all winners can be found on the WMCA website (Adult Learning Awards) and in Appendix V. Examples of some of the winners outlined here provide an indication of the strength and value of adult education in the WMCA area:

Geoff Carter (winner Learner for Work Award)

After falling on hard times with the loss of his wife to cancer, Geoff initially struggled to find work – but got back on his feet after coming across the RMF Training Academy. Through his strong work ethic and commitment to providing for his family, he was able to make a change in his life and become an inspiration to his six children by undertaking training which resulted in landing a role with HS2 Rail Project in the West Midlands.

The full case study can be found in Appendix V and here: Geoff Carter (wmca.org.uk)

Asha Kaur (Step into Learning award)

After working in the manufacturing industry for many years, Asha Kaur wanted to pursue her passion for HR and joined Coventry College's CIPD Level 3 Foundation in People Practice course to support her career change. Despite feeling nervous about stepping back into a formal education setting after three decades, Asha is living proof that is OK to step out of your comfort zone to achieve your career goals.

The full case study can be found in Appendix V and here: Asha Kaur (wmca.org.uk)

BritAsia Academy (winner Innovative Delivery Award)

As one of the UK's biggest broadcast channels, Birmingham-based BritAsia TV have used their 15 years of broadcasting experience to help train over 200 learners in film, content and social media. The broadcast channel runs several bootcamps that cater to young learners looking to enter the competitive creative industry and supports them to gain skills in video content creation, production,

greenscreen shooting, photography and cinematography essentials. Gaurav Raturi, Project Head of BritAsia's Digital Upskill Bootcamp said: "Currently Birmingham is being referred to as the next film hub after London, but there has been a shortage of film and video talent. BritAsia is ensuring the Midlands creates the talent pool to cater to the demand of the industry.

The full case study can be found in Appendix V and here: BritAsia Academy (wmca.org.uk)

RMF (Engaging Adults in Learning award)

RMF design training programmes which are simple and easy to access and offer guaranteed interviews for all learners. They have been successful in supporting ex-offenders and the long-term unemployed into jobs in the construction, rail and equine industries. They have seen a reduction in re-offending rates and an improvement in employment rate for this group, three times the national average. This innovative training provider has strong links with employers across the West Midlands, enabling learners to access jobs and valuable work experience on high profile projects such as HS2, Metro Link and community housing projects. The courses are employer-led, with recruiting employers providing each learner with a guaranteed interview. The programmes this provider offers place-based and deigned to meet the needs of the community and local businesses. The devolution of adult education funding allows the WMCA the flexibility to work with providers like RMF to fund adult skills provision that is tailored to meet the specific challenges and opportunities of our region.

The full case study can be found in Appendix V and here: RMF (wmca.org.uk)

2024 Adult Learning Awards

Nominations for the 2024 Adult Learning Awards are now open, with two new awards, for:

- Apprentices - funded through our Apprenticeship Levy Transfer Scheme
- Innovative Careers Intervention

This will provide further opportunity to showcase the impact of WMCA-funded adult learning undertaken in the 2022/23 academic year.

2022/23 Delivery Key Points

This section provides a summary of the 2022/23 academic year. More detailed data on the characteristics of learners and the distribution of spend among our seven constituent local authorities can be found in the sections that follow.

- In 2022/23, the number of learners participating in Adult Education (FM 35 and FM 10 combined) increased by 2% on the previous academic year – 74,136 learners in 2022/23 up from 68,099 last year and 60,453 in 2020/21. This is worth an additional £1.16m of Adult Skills funded delivery.
- The majority of funded provision was for learning aims up to and including Level 2, with Level 2 being the largest.
- The distribution of this funding across constituent local authorities was similar to previous years. More than half of adult skills funding was spent in Birmingham reflecting the authority's relative size and the distribution of need compared to the other six authorities in the WMCA area.
- 56% of adult skills learners were female, compared with 59% nationally. Since devolution, we have seen a shift towards a more equal balance of male and female learners.
- There has been a shift in the proportion of adult skills learners from ethnic minority backgrounds. Ethnic minority learners accounted for the majority of WMCA-funded learners in 2022/23 (62% compared to 47.6% in 2021/22 and 34% of the resident population aged 19+).
- There has been no change in the proportion of 24-to-49-year-olds undertaking Adult Skills, with 7 out of 10 learners being from this age group.
- There has been in increase in ICT enrolments, both in absolute terms (up 4,000 to 14,400) and as a proportion of total enrolments since the previous year (up two percentage points to 11%). There has also been an increase proportion of learners taking Health, Public Services and Care courses (up one percentage point to 11% while maintaining the total enrolments at a similar level). Both sectors have seen job growth and high vacancies.

- Over 56% of learners were enrolled onto an aim up to and including Level 2, a decrease of 19 percentage points on the previous year. This corresponds with the increase in enrolments with no level attached to the learning aim, mainly in Sector Gateway, Construction Gateway and SWAP provision, which WMCA has grown significantly in response to job opportunities, labour market conditions and in collaboration with DWP Job Centre Plus regionally.
- A quarter of enrolments onto adult skills programmes were by employed learners, a two-percentage-point increase on the previous year. Upskilling residents to help them secure good jobs and progress in work has been a key focus of our efforts. While 70% of working aged adults in the WMCA area are in employment, median salary for the region is below the national average and DWP data shows we have large volumes of in-work Universal Credit claimants in the region.

To ensure that WMCA investment has maximum impact in meeting the region's challenges, we have identified a set of key priorities focussing on specific resident groups in each of our constituent local authorities. For example, a key priority of our skills strategy is moving people into employment. To support this, we have continued to develop and incentivise the effective use of bespoke provision, such as the Construction Gateway programme that not only has delivered strong into-employment outcomes (50%), but that links residents to good, sustainable jobs in the construction and railway industries in the West Midlands. We have also applied flexibilities through specific funding uplifts to incentivise delivery in priority areas, such as Health & Social Care and Manufacturing.

Table: 2022/23 delivery overview

Funding Model	Learners*	Enrolments	Funding Delivered
35 (Adult Skills)	57,639	133,373	£105,550,872
10 (Community Learning)	16,497	32,461	£16,103,366
Total	74,136	165,834	£121,654,238

**Learners are counted once within each funding model but may be counted twice in the total if they have undertaken both Adult Skills and Community Learning programmes*

Funding Overview

Detailed funding and spend tables can be found in Appendices II & III. The following provides an overview of funding in the 2022/23 academic year:

- Total AEB allocation in 2022/23 was £132m with delivery across both Adult Skills and Community Learning at £122m (92%).
- Spend on administrative and operational costs for the academic year 2022/23 on Adult Education was £1,987,427 (1.5% of allocation).
- Organisations funded via Grant arrangements – FE Colleges and Local Authorities - delivered £101m of AEB provision, including £9.4m of DLSF and £16.1m for delivery of Community Learning provision. This equates to 99% of their grant allocation.
- In line with published performance management rules, no reconciliation was taken for providers who met the 97% tolerance, this applied to two providers at a value of £675,518.
- Six providers had an outturn between 90-97%.
- Reconciliation took place on ten grant providers who out-turned less than 97%, equating to a clawback of £2,492,750.
- Independent Training Providers delivered £18,392,860 of their funding which was a £5,602,469 underspend against their plans.
- In total the WMCA funded 85 providers. Of these, 26 were Colleges or Local Authorities funded via Grant and 59 were Independent Training Providers or Voluntary and Community Organisations funded under a contract for services.

Table: 2022/23 AEB funding overview (FM 35 & FM 10)

AEB	Grant	ITP	Value not contracted	Admin Cost	Total
AEB contract	£102,664,195	£23,995,329	£5,403,494		£132,063,017
R14 outturn	£101,457,536	£18,209,275	£0.00	£1,987,427	£121,654,238
Variance	-£1,206,659	-£5,786,053	-£5,403,494		-£10,408,778
% to contract	99%	76%	0%		92%

Detailed spend

The following outlines AEB spend by learner characteristics. Detailed tables on each characteristic can be found in Appendices III and IV. These learner funding breakdowns show how the WMCA has used devolved funding to target specific groups and to respond to regional challenges in a flexible and targeted way.

- **Age:** The 24-49 age group accounted for 69% of spend in 2022/23. This group comprises 44% of the 19+ resident population. Compared to other age groups this group has higher levels of unemployment and economic inactivity in the West Midlands region.
- **Ethnicity:** Ethnic minority groups account for 34% of the resident over-19 population and 63% of funding. In part this is due to ESOL funding (14% of total) but also reflects that residents from ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely to live in the most deprived parts of the region.
- **Sex:** Female learners received 52% of funding (compared to 59% nationally), or £4.78m more than males. The gap between female and male participation closed by five percentage points compared to 2021/22. Since devolution, we have seen a shift towards a more equal balance of male and female learners, as we have sought to tie investment more closely to labour market requirements.
- **Disability**: Learners with a learning difficulty and/or disability and/or health problem (LLDD) accounted for 15% of spend in 2022/23. This compares with 21% of the 19+ resident population. Unemployment, economic inactivity and underemployment are all challenges which disproportionately impact disabled residents. Among the economically inactive in the region, long-term health is the primary reason for not working.
- **Employment**: Rates of unemployment in the West Midlands are higher than the national average. In the last academic year 70% of all funding was delivered to unemployed residents. Low wage residents are also a priority in the region and in 2022/23, 6,000 enrolments were by people in low-wage work (5%).
- **Subject Areas**: The WMCA has worked with employers and industry to identify both current and emerging skills gaps.
    i. In 2022/23 we launched both a Health and Social Care Sector Plan and an Engineering and Manufacturing Sector Plan to address a shortfall in skilled labour in the region, enhance productivity, and drive growth. By partnering with colleges, universities, and training providers, the plan aims to improve the range of sector-specific training available and make it more flexible in delivery.
    ii. In 2023 we launched our Plan for Growth which identifies seven sectors where the West Midlands has potential to become a leader both nationally and internationally. Our offer, particularly at Level 3 and above, will increasingly reflect these priority areas. These include ICT (14% of funding) and Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies (8%). The Health, Public Services and Care sector consistently has the highest number of vacancies in the region. Last year, 12% of funding was against an aim in this subject area.
    iii. We also recognise that many of our residents require basic skills in order to make their first steps into the labour market or to improve their chance of progressing into better work. To that end, 32% of funding was against Preparation for Life and Work aims.

Learner & Enrolment Summary

In total the WMCA supported 74,136 learners across the West Midlands Combined Authority area. Of which, 16,497 (22%) learners took part in Community Learning courses and 57,639 (78%) in Adult Skills formula funded programmes.

This is an increase in the volume of learners from 2021/22 of 8.9%. Adult Skills funded learners increased by 9.4% while Community Learning increased by 3.9%, indicating continued recovery from the impact of the pandemic.

WMCA are working with our provider base and stakeholders to ensure that the increasing reach and participation in Adult Skills programmes we have seen since devolution of AEB continues into the 2023/24 academic year. In 2022/23 we implemented an increase of 10% on the base rate for formula-funded provision. The increase in numbers was therefore limited and driven through strategic use of Free Courses for Jobs and Bootcamp funding to increase participation at higher levels.

Learners enrolled on a total of 165,834 aims in the 2022/23 academic year. Of these, 133,373 (80%) were Adult Skills formula-funded and 32,461 (20%) were Community Learning. These figures constitute an increase in enrolments of 32% for Adult Skills and a decrease of 3.7% for Community Learning compared to the previous year.

Participation in Legal Entitlement Programmes

A total of 16,720 learners participated in learning via legal entitlement in 2022/23, accounting for 23% of all WMCA-funded learners. Overall, the number of learners accessing training through legal entitlement fell by 2,536 compared to the last academic year when 28% of learners accessed programmes through legal entitlement.

There was an increase in access to English function skills of 3% on last year but in all other areas of legal entitlement the number of learners fell. In Maths and Digital functional skills, the fall was 4% and 7% respectively. The number taking both Maths and English fell by 845 (21%) and those taking a Level 2 or 3 qualification dropped by 1,469 (28%). See Appendix II for a detailed breakdown.

In the 2023/24 academic year we are investing in efforts to increase participation in adult learning, including the take-up of legal entitlement and basic skills qualifications. Our 'Know How' campaign is targeting residents who haven't previously considered adult learning. Residents are challenged to consider how undertaking adult education could impact their lives for the better, before being signposted to the range of skills provision available through WMCA-funded programmes.

We are rolling out Multiply for in-work adults to help develop numeracy and support in-work progression and we are developing new foundation skills programmes to improve outcomes for learners. Our new foundation skills offer is grounded in six key principles: place-based, flexible and accessible, tailored, contextualised with personalised wrap-around support, and with clear progression pathways. All programmes are designed with locality in mind, as we recognise that context is central to the way in which numeracy, literacy or language skills are acquired. We are strengthening wrap around support and including counselling and mentoring where appropriate. We want learners to feel that they have ownership of their learning and so providers will have a mandate to embed strong and verifiable progression pathways that will be shared with learners as part of their programme.

Local impact

In 2022/23, investment and learner numbers increased across all seven local authorities in the WMCA area. Half of all WMCA funding was spent on residents of Birmingham (£54.9m), which reflects the distribution of the population within the Combined Authority area (38% of 19+ live in Birmingham), as well as the distribution of need (50% of ESOL need is in Birmingham and 39% of those with no qualifications live in the city). We have seen some rebalancing of funding between the seven authorities since devolution in 2017 and we expect to see this continue as we continue to evolve our offer and align it to local need.

We work closely with the seven local authorities and our providers to identify localities and communities with specific learning and upskilling needs. This work takes place at all geographic levels from the strategic region-wide vision for AEB in the West Midlands down to the provider catchment and outreach area which touch on specific communities, areas of deprivation, and local employment opportunities.

The WMCA has identified four key areas of focus for adult education delivery and benefit realisation, they are:

1. Provide a good education up to Level 2 for those who need it.
2. Moving residents into good jobs.
3. Higher skills: Upskilling and reskilling to respond to the regional economy.
4. Support our communities to be stronger and benefit from inclusive growth.

Since devolution, we have implemented funding flexibilities and incentivised curriculum design to tackle the specific challenges of our local economy and the needs of our diverse communities. The following provide examples of where the flexibility offered by the devolved funding model, along with local insight, have proven effective in addressing some of the core challenges of the region.

Into Work Provision

In the year to September 2023[1], the unemployment rate in the WMCA area was 6.0%, 2.2 percentage points higher than the England average, while the economic inactivity rate was 24.7%, 3.5 percentage points higher than the England average. Conversely, we know that there are high vacancy rates in some of our key regional sectors including the Construction, Rail, Engineering, and Health & Social Care sectors.

Since 2019/2020, we have worked with Colleges and Independent Training Providers in the design of bespoke sector plans and programmes to address these local issues. Examples of these include the Health and Social Care Plan, the Construction Gateway, the Sector Gateway and our new Into-employment funding methodology. Our SWAP provision funds inactive as well as unemployed residents – a key flexibility offered in the WMCA area and made possible by the devolution of funding to the authority.

These programmes are designed to maximise resources for colleges, whilst improving outcomes for learners. They are typically structured in two-to-three phases. Phase 1 facilitates access to employment in the chosen sector. Phase 2 prepares learners for in-work progression, and some programmes offer a Phase 3 to develop specialisms within the construction industry. The programmes also fund wrap-around, which may also continue after the programme has finished, as a form of in-employment support to secure sustained employment.

Over the last three years, WMCA Into-employment provision shows a strong and sustained improvement in job outcomes. In 2019/2020, the job outcomes rate stood at 26%, improving to 41% in 2020/2021 and, to 42% in 2021/2022. In the most recent academic year (2022/23) the trend continued with outcomes reaching 49%.

Sector-based plans

At a sector-specific level, delivery in the Health and Social Care sector has seen several improvements in outcomes for learners. Positive destinations (education and paid employment) have improved at all levels, compared to 2021/2022, with the most significant improvement seen in Level 1 certificates from 41% in 2021/2022 to 61% in 2022/2023. This is the result of sector plans now being much more established and providers continuously improving on their design to promote outcomes. At Level 3, the proportion of learners going on to positive destinations has improved from 31% in 2021/2022 to 39% in 2022/2023. Overall positive progression has increased to 52%, compared to 49% in 2021/2022.

We will continue to work with providers to reduce the number of awards and certificates and focus on full qualifications. We will continue increasing enrolments on Access courses and will work with providers to develop more modular provision at Levels 4 and 5, as a local response to vacancies.

Our place-based approach to programme development and delivery allows us to continue working with our providers to further adapt our programmes to meet local authority priorities. To this effect, we work continually with each one of our seven constituent local authority skills leaders in the creation of place-based implementation plans. These plans link key skills priorities to the appropriate funding line and to the right programme to maximise impact.

[1] ONS Labour Force Survey, January 2024

Conclusion

Since the devolution of AEB funding in 2019 the WMCA has worked hard to establish and evolve its adult education offer. We have strong working relationships with our providers, with our local authorities, with industry and employers and, most important, with our residents. Our commitment to innovation and improvement is born out in the data which shows a continued improvement in learner numbers, enrolments and value for money. But beyond these metrics we have also seen qualitative impacts. By providing courses that are higher quality, better targeted and more appealing we have developed an offer that is serving the needs of both the local economy and our residents.

As the West Midlands grows, both in population and economic output, the AEB offer will continue to be a critical part of ensuring the region's success. Our plans for 2024/25 and beyond take forward the concepts of flexibility, innovation and accountability that we have established as core to the AEB offer in our region and which are made possible through the devolved funding model. The WMCA is proud to be at the forefront of AEB policy innovation and is committed to using all of the levers at our disposal in improving the lives of our residents and securing our regional economy.

Appendix I: Notes on ILR Data

Disclosure control

If the number of learners is below 10 or the percentage of learners or enrolments is below 1% then the report will not specify the exact number of learners in the report.

Calculations & measures

Unless otherwise stated above each individual table, the data will be from Funding Model 35 and Funding Model 10. Funding for Funding Model 10 is not broken down to individual learners as the financials for this are not generated in the Occupancy Report like they are for Funding Model 35.

As per the DfE methodology no aims have been removed from this report. If the aim was in the R14 ILR then it has been included in the above, regardless of whether the aim passed the funding qualifying period.

When referring to Funding Delivered, this is the amount of money that a provider has put through their ILR returns and not necessarily how much funding they received.

Appendix II: Summary Tables

Learner totals may not match across tables. This is because leaners who enrol on more than one course may have different characteristics from one enrolment to the next. For example, they may have moved into a different age category, gain or lost employment, etc.

WMCA-funded learners

Funding Model	22/23 learners	21/22 Learners	20/21 Learners	19/20 Learners	18/19 Learners
35 (Adult Skills)	57,639	52,224	50,115	54,942	70,367
10 (Community Learning)	16,497	15,875	10,338	13,134	19,777
Total	74,136	68,099	60,453	68,706	90,144

WMCA-funded enrolments

Funding Model	22/23 Enrolments	21/22 Enrolments	20/21 Enrolments	19/20 Enrolments	18/19 Enrolments
35 (Adult Skills)	133,373	125,457	100,544	107,332	141,306
10 (Community Learning)	32,461	33,713	21,692	22,952	36,880
Total	165,834	159,170	122,236	130,284	178,186

Overview of learners participating in legal entitlement programmes 2022/23

	Total Learners	Learners participating in Legal Entitlements	Learners participating in Legal Entitlements %
WMCA	74,136	16,720	23%

Breakdown of learners participating in legal entitlement programmes

	2022/23	2021/22	% Change
English Functional Skills courses	3,474	3,375	3%
Maths Functional Skills courses	4,332	4,507	-4%
Maths and English Functional Skills courses	3,236	4,081	-21%
Essential Digital Skills qualifications	1,863	2,009	-7%
Legal entitlement for Level 2	1,732	2,296	-25%
Legal entitlement to Level 3	2,083	2,988	-30%
Total	16,720	19,256	-13%

Appendix III: WMCA Delivery Tables

Qualification Level (Adult Skills and Community Learning)

	Learners	Enrolments	Funding Delivered	% of funding
E	14,854	30,674	£21,200,671.44	20.31%
1	13,999	21,512	£13,539,243.88	12.97%
2	20,861	30,469	£29,417,713.25	28.19%
3	12,430	13,174	£26,784,973.86	25.66%
4	630	649	£1,008,588.43	0.97%
5+	449	457	£824,220.91	0.79%
X	25,407	51,502	£11,593,517.40	11.11%
Total	88,630	148,437	£104,368,929.17	100%

Age (Adult Skills)

	Learners	Enrolments	Funding Delivered	% of funding
19-23	9,651	20,517	£21,313,501.30	19.45%
24-49	40,273	94,276	£75,676,760.68	69.08%
50+	8,033	18,576	£12,566,745.74	11.47%
Total	57,957	133,369	£109,557,007.74	100%

Age (Community Learning)

	Learners	Enrolments
19-23	808	1,249
24-49	10,555	19,530
50+	5,197	11,682
Total	16,560	32,461

Sex (Adult Skills)

	Learners	Enrolments	Funding Delivered	% of funding
Female	32,277	74,646	£57,169,108.70	52.18
Male	25,381	58,727	£52,393,245.22	47.82%
Total	57,658	133,373	£109,562,353.99	100%

Sex (Community Learning)

	Learners	Enrolments
Female	12,267	25,095
Male	4,232	7,366
Total	16,499	32,461

Ethnic Group (Adult Skills)

	Learners	Enrolments	Funding Delivered	% of funding
Asian	14,730	36,719	£28,909,368.19	26.39%
Black	12,061	29,023	£24,462,070.28	22.33%
Mixed	3,380	7,682	£6,400,591.90	5.84%
Other	4,670	12,246	£8,696,796.09	7.94%
White	21,310	43,432	£36,871,073.35	33.65%
Not known	2,177	4,271	£4,222,454.08	3.85%
Total	58,328	133,373	£109,562,353.93	100%

Ethnic Group (Community Learning)

	Learners	Enrolments
Asian	5,003	10,889
Black	2,210	4,209
Mixed	595	994
Other	1,393	2,489
White	6,959	13,295
Not known	384	585
Total	16,544	32,461

Disability (Adult Skills)

	Learners	Enrolments	Funding Delivered	% of funding
1	8,997	20,646	£16,884,937.01	15.41%
2	47,313	108,804	£88,776,708.63	81.03
9	1,962	3,923	£3,900,708.28	3.56%
Total	58,272	133,373	£109,562,353.93	100%

See following table for code definitions

Disability (Community Learning)

	Learners	Enrolments
1	3,038	6,310
2	13,102	25,551
9	408	600
Total	16,548	32,461

Codes defined as:

- *1 - Learner considers himself or herself to have a learning difficulty and/or disability and/or health problem.*
- *2 - Learner does not consider himself or herself to have a learning difficulty and/or disability and/or health problem.*
- *9 - No information provided by the learner.*

Employment Status (Adult Skills)

	Learners	Enrolments	Funding Delivered	% of funding
Employed	20,257	33,356	£32652236.98	29.8%
Unemployed looking for work	32,392	86,519	£65730256.06	59.99%
Unemployed not looking for work	6,531	13,484	£11161484.52	10.19%
Unknown	12	14	£18,376.36	0.02%
Total	59,192	133,373	£109562353.93	100%

Employment Status (Community Learning)

	Learners	Enrolments
Employed	2,919	5,023
Unemployed looking for work	5,350	10,356
Unemployed not looking for work	3,048	6,447
Unknown	5,897	10,635
Total	17,214	32,461

Tier 1 SSA (total)

	Learners	Enrolments	Funding Delivered	% of funding
01 - Health, Public Services and Care	13,129	18,738	£13,672,133.81	12.48%
02 - Science and Mathematics	2,955	4,038	£3,211,729.21	2.93%
03 - Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care	1,358	1,628	£1,842,657.25	1.68%
04 - Engineering and Manufacturing Tech	3,843	5,735	£9,061,761.56	8.27%
05 - Construction, Planning, Built Env	7,093	10,722	£12,733,534.95	11.62%
06 - Information and Communication Tech	13,438	18,185	£15,003,386	13.69%
07 - Retail and Commercial Enterprise	4,015	6,009	£4716929.33	4.31%
08 - Leisure, Travel and Tourism	1,256	2,269	£771,940.24	0.7%
09 - Arts, Media, and Publishing	4,746	8,757	£1262490.99	1.15%
10 - History, Philosophy and Theology	285	409	£11,094.91	0.01%
11 - Social Sciences	190	203	£462,962.51	0.42%
12 - Languages, Literature and Culture	4,660	5,959	£2,389,779.32	2.18%
13 - Education and Training	2,498	2,662	£2,403,307.26	2.19%
14 - Preparation for Life and Work	30,972	69,669	£34,783,644.08	31.75%
15 - Business, Admin, Finance and Law	7,278	9,126	£7,235,002.45	6.6%
Total	96,716	164,109	£ 109,562,354	100%

Appendix IV: Local Authority Tables

Total Funding 2022/23

Local Authority	Funding Delivered	Funding %
Birmingham	£54,914,581.11	50.12%
Coventry	£9,215,627.78	8.41%
Dudley	£8,313,948.66	7.58%
Sandwell	£12,435,533.28	11.35%
Solihull	£3,466,287.04	3.16%
Walsall	£7,663,470.06	6.99%
Wolverhampton	£11,518,216.55	10.51%
Other	£2,034,689.41	1.85%

Funding Model 10 (Community Learning) by Local Authority: Learners (totals)

Local Authority	22/23	21/22	20/21	19/20	18/19
Birmingham	6,744	6,371	4,412	4,628	6,673
Coventry	2,064	1,939	1,264	1,977	2,745
Dudley	1,756	1,810	1,192	2,069	3,046
Sandwell	1,848	1,865	953	1,374	1,903
Solihull	665	471	290	538	742
Walsall	1,459	1,547	779	460	1,584

Wolverhampton	1,939	1,869	1,501	2,064	3,088
Other	52	3	15	24	-

Funding Model 10 (Community Learning) by Local Authority: Learners (percentage of WMCA total)

Local Authority	22/23	21/22	20/21	19/20	18/19
Birmingham	40.8%	40.1%	42.4%	35.2%	33.7%
Coventry	12.5%	12.2%	12.1%	15.1%	13.9%
Dudley	10.6%	11.4%	11.5%	15.8%	15.4%
Sandwell	11.2%	11.7%	9.2%	10.5%	9.6%
Solihull	4.0%	3.0%	2.8%	4.1%	3.8%
Walsall	8.8%	9.7%	7.5%	3.5%	8.0%
Wolverhampton	11.7%	11.8%	14.4%	15.7%	15.6%
Other	0.3%	0.0%	0.1%	0.2%	-

Funding Model 35 (Adult Skills) by Local Authority: Learners (totals)

Local Authority	22/23	21/22	20/21	19/20	18/19
Birmingham	26,485	24,605	23,191	26,866	35,517
Coventry	6,242	5,543	5,604	5,716	6,626
Dudley	4,887	4,418	3,961	4,153	5,253
Sandwell	6,742	6,123	6,099	6,534	7,938
Solihull	2,130	1,867	1,748	1,753	2,363
Walsall	4,175	3,946	4,137	4,321	5,572
Wolverhampton	6,246	5,546	5,442	5,432	7,107
Other	933	176	15	167	-

Funding Model 35 (Adult Skills) by Local Authority: Learners (percentage of WMCA total)

Local Authority	22/23	21/22	20/21	19/20	18/19
Birmingham	45.8%	47.1%	46.2%	48.9%	50.5%
Coventry	10.8%	10.6%	11.2%	10.4%	9.4%
Dudley	8.4%	8.5%	7.9%	7.6%	7.5%
Sandwell	11.7%	11.7%	12.2%	11.9%	11.3%
Solihull	3.7%	3.6%	3.5%	3.2%	3.4%
Walsall	7.2%	7.6%	8.2%	7.9%	7.9%
Wolverhampton	10.8%	10.6%	10.8%	9.9%	10.1%
Other	1.6%	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%	-

Completed Funding Model 35 (Adult Skills): Learners

Local Authority	Continuing	Completed	Withdrawn	Temp withdrawn	Other	Total
Birmingham	1,710	22,008	6,092	34	1	29,845
Coventry	391	5,067	1,486	4	1	6,949
Dudley	455	3,933	988	5	1	5,382
Sandwell	555	5,561	1,281	13	1	7,411
Solihull	277	1,710	352	2	1	2,342
Walsall	343	3,490	714	9	1	4,557
Wolverhampton	381	5,345	1,118	2	1	6,847
Other	93	788	59	1	1	942

Achieved Funding Model 35 (Adult Skills): Learners

Local Authority	Achieved	Awaiting result	No achievement	Partial achievement	Total
Birmingham	20,664	257	8,818	153	29,892
Coventry	4,609	78	2,169	20	6,876
Dudley	3,677	42	1,395	17	5,131
Sandwell	5,210	76	1,803	34	7,123
Solihull	1,581	17	510	12	2,120
Walsall	3,258	48	1,102	18	4,426
Wolverhampton	4,964	51	1,755	53	6,823
Other	736	36	74	3	849

Appendix V: WMCA Adult Learning Awards Winners

All winner case studies (with accompanying videos on the WMCA website: Adult Learning Awards (wmca.org.uk)

Geoff Carter (winner Learner for Work Award):

After falling on hard times with the loss of his wife to cancer, Geoff initially struggled to find work – but got back on his feet after coming across the RMF Training Academy. Through his strong work ethic and commitment to providing for his family, he was able to make a change in his life and become an inspiration to his six children by undertaking training which resulted in landing a role with HS2 Rail Project in the West Midlands.

"Doing my construction training with RMF was the best decision I ever made.

"After 12 months on Universal Credit, my [DWP] work coach recommended RMF Group's training courses, and I went from years of struggle to full time work in the space of months, being contracted to HS2 through RMF's construction division.

"RMF Group went above and beyond to support me and are the reason I stayed in work through all the grief.

"RMF's training gave me back my self-esteem and confidence that I'd lost after years of no work. I realised how capable I was and what I could achieve thanks to them.

"My children have now seen living proof of what's possible in life when given the right opportunity. I went from living in a car that I couldn't always afford fuel for, to long-term work on a fantastic project as a skilled and qualified labourer.

"Thanks to RMF, I have been able to show my children what a good working life is, and create structure in my life, which is all I've ever wanted.

"My work in general has inspired me to be active in the community and give back. Whenever I come across homeless people in my day-to-day life, I always make a point to inform them of RMF Group's training programmes and tell them my story. I know what they're going through, so I know what can be done. I want to inspire them to go to their work coaches and get off the streets.

Dara McCarthy, Head of Social Value at RMF Group said: "Geoff has overcome devastating obstacles during his learning journey but has still earned key qualifications to gain employment in the construction sector – his CSCS Card, CPCS Certifications for Dumper Roller and Banksman, and DAMS certifications.

"Geoff persevered with his training and secured his role with the HS2 project. He has overcome immense adversity that most of the working population will never experience and has managed to stay in employment and maintain a positive outlook throughout. He believed he was able to make a change in his life and is proof that stable and sustainable careers can be created through the RMF Training programme."

BritAsia Academy (winner Innovative Delivery Award)

As one of the UK's biggest broadcast channels, Birmingham-based BritAsia TV have used their 15 years of broadcasting experience to help train over 200 learners in film, content and social media.

The broadcast channel runs several bootcamps that cater to young learners looking to enter the competitive creative industry and supports them to gain skills in video content creation, production, greenscreen shooting, photography and cinematography essentials.

Gaurav Raturi, Project Head of BritAsia's Digital Upskill Bootcamp said: "Currently Birmingham is being referred to as the next film hub after London, but there has been a shortage of film and video talent. BritAsia is ensuring the Midlands creates the talent pool to cater to the demand of the industry.

"Our bootcamps offer a unique and hands on experience for learners. Almost all (95%) of our learners get a job interview within 90 days of completing the programme and, to date, over two thirds have gone into jobs, self-employment or an apprenticeship."

"The success of our bootcamps would not be possible if we weren't a major media company with our in-house studio accessible to learners. We provide opportunities to work on high-end and fast-paced content creation, comparable to any brand in the industry. Being a broadcast studio right in the city centre provides the best location, accessibility, and exposure to the region for all learners."

"Participants experience live shoots, events, case studies from festivals, companies and our very own TV channel. The programme is created with a set of experts, mentors and team members who are industry leaders, with achievements including creating short films, high production content for global events like TEDx summits, International Film Festivals in Birmingham as well as working on BAFTA coverage, live broadcast for the Queen's funeral from London along with entrepreneurial experience of running digital studios and TV content creation projects."

Manpreet Aulakh, one of the learners on the programme said: "I loved doing the bootcamp as the team were so supportive and helpful whenever I needed guidance. Checking in every other day to make sure I was okay made me more aware of the positive impact the bootcamp was having. I now want to continue adding to my skillset and progress further into my career choice.

"The company has also made me feel comfortable that if ever I need support I can go back and ask for guidance."

Ian Winfield (Tutor Award)

Ian Winfield is passionate about helping people communicate more effectively with the Deaf community by inspiring learners from all backgrounds on his Deaf Awareness and British Sign Language (BSL) courses. A tutor with Dudley Adult and Community Learning for the past decade, Ian is always seeking new and innovative ways to improve his teaching methods by embracing technology and sharing ideas.

"I meet people who panic when faced with a Deaf person. This motivates me to teach Deaf awareness and sign language because I believe this is how we can make a more inclusive community in the UK."

Ian describes how he has recently launched a course for the Deaf community delivered in BSL on Basic ICT skills. "It allows Deaf people to learn a basic set of IT skills in their first language, from a Deaf teacher, helping them get online, develop employability skills and setting a positive role model around work opportunities for people who are Deaf. Over the last year, I've developed links with the Dudley Council Inclusion Group and delivered CPD to employees enabling a broader understanding of how Deaf Awareness is considered and used within the workplace. This has enabled the group to promote and use these skills to support them in their professional roles when advising the public."

"It's important for me to keep developing my own skills too, so as part of my continuing professional development I have delivered training to my own colleagues to support their understanding and awareness. I have gained the highest language qualification for British Sign Language Level 6, and I have volunteered to work with a team of translators, translating English into BSL."

Tim Jarvis and Janet Lavelle, Ian's line managers at Dudley Adult and Community Learning, said: "Ian inspires everyone he meets, with his insightful approach to sharing and promoting Deaf Awareness and in his passion for teaching and commitment, excellence, and professionalism. He sets the bar at its highest for others to follow, he is a true role model for the teaching community."

"The difference Ian has made to learners is immeasurable. He has helped countless learners to achieve their goals and reach their potential. Ian goes above and beyond for his learners, and he is always available to answer questions and provides encouragement to help his students succeed."

A learner on his course said: "Ian is fully supportive throughout the course. He takes time to get to know you, in order to adapt his delivery to suit our needs. He has a great sense of humour which comes through in every lesson."

RMF (Engaging Adults in Learning award)

Giving everybody a chance to create a stable future for themselves, no matter their background, is a key driver for independent training provider RMF Group. They design training programmes which are simple and easy to access and offer guaranteed interviews for all learners.

RMF have been successful in supporting ex-offenders and the long-term unemployed into jobs in the construction, rail and equine industries. They have seen a reduction in re-offending rates and an improvement in employment rate for this group, three times the national average.

"We think it's important to engage adults in learning because they deserve the opportunity to realise their potential regardless of what they may or may not have achieved beforehand. So, our approach is to meet people where they're at, give them support and guidance, as well as the additional skills they need," said Kathryn Michaels, Strategy and Growth Consultant at RMF.

Taking that first step back into adult learning can be difficult. To help their learners, RMF are committed to providing whatever support is needed for learners to successfully complete their course, whether that is support for Maths and English, delivering one-to-one mentoring, providing accommodation and resettlement services for learners without a fixed address, or helping ex-offenders who are adapting to life outside of custody. This helps learners to achieve the best possible outcomes and feel fully prepared to embark on a new career.

This innovative training provider has strong links with employers across the West Midlands, enabling learners to access jobs and valuable work experience on high profile projects such as HS2, Metro Link and community housing projects. The courses are employer-led, with recruiting employers providing each learner with a guaranteed interview.

Construction and rail courses are taught at dedicated facilities, enabling learners to gain skills and experience of working with a wide range of equipment and machinery on a real site. The equine course is delivered in partnership with Solihull Riding Club, providing learners with valuable experience of working with horses in the workplace. One of the learners has gone on to work at the Grand National through his job with Milton Harris Racing, gained as a result of the programme.

Molly Forsyth from RMF Group says: "Our aim is to leave no learner behind and to make change happen in the local communities of the West Midlands. We create careers and invest in the personal development of our learners, by improving their employability through professional coaching, community activities, and one-to-one mentoring."

David, who took part in one of the programmes, said: "RMF gave me a fresh start and turned my life around when I thought I wouldn’t get a second chance after being inside. After gaining my qualifications, I worked for J. Murphy and Sons as a Site Supervisor. I have since returned to work for RMF Group and progressed into a CPCS supervisor role at the RMF Training Academy, to give people the opportunities that I was given once upon a time."

Sigma Connected (Large employer award)

Call centre operator Sigma Connected have trained over 1,000 unemployed people across Birmingham to help them access new careers. In partnership with BMet College, Sigma have re-trained through a series of innovative Sector-Based Work Academy Programme (SWAP) courses.

When Sigma Connected expanded into a Birmingham City Centre location to increase their talent pool and more than double the size of their workforce, we established a strategic partnership at BMet College to support their growth and investment in the region.

Suzie Branch-Haddow, Vice Principal at the college describes how they created a bespoke three-week SWAP programme focussing on recruiting, training and developing staff. "The course supports unemployed people, and the training is focused on skills that

Sigma needs in contact centre roles, including customer service, financial understanding, problem solving, communication and digital skills.

"The programme has been flexible to respond to the needs of residents and now runs online following the pandemic, as well as supporting a work from home model to help more people back to work. Sigma attends parts of the training programme with us to meet with candidates along each part of the training journey. Sigma also works in partnership with Jobcentre Plus, for example visiting Jobcentres in the region to meet with work coaches and hosting open days at Sigma for work coaches to visit the business and hear about the vision and plans from a senior manager.

"The training programme has been a superb success and provided the business with a group of talented people – some of whom are set to take on wider management roles. Earlier this year, all 30 candidates secured roles with Sigma. Not only that, they have a 90% average success rate of recruiting into roles, they have reduced recruitment and onboarding training costs by 72% and they have diversified the types of staff through alternative recruitment methods which has improved their customer experience.

"One of the real benefits is that we are equipping local people with the skills and experience they need to sustain long-term employment. It's the latest in a long line of growth news for Sigma over the past few years. Our expansion into Birmingham, bringing new jobs to the city and adding quality people to our team has been vital to that success."

One learner who took part in the programme said: "I would not be where I am today if it was not for the training and support, I received at Sigma. Sigma helped me find the perfect career path for me and I could not be more grateful for it. I am still learning and developing with Sigma, and I see myself doing so for many years to come."

Another learner added: "After seeing how exciting the course was, it gave me a new-found insight into a career path towards training and development. Not too long after joining an opportunity came with the training team and I just had to apply. Now seven months later I am a seconded Assistant Trainer and am loving my new career."

Sarai Richards (Inspirational Adult Learner award)

Sarai's journey started when she enrolled onto a course at City of Wolverhampton College's Electric Vehicle and Green Technologies Centre to ensure she had the latest knowledge and skills to succeed in this constantly evolving sector. After completing the course, the college were so impressed by Sarai that they appointed her as a tutor. Being a young black female in the industry, she hopes her experience will inspire other women of any background to pursue a career within the automotive industry.

"I wanted to do this course for personal development. With technology being an ever-changing factor in the world, brushing up on new processes and information is always valuable and will keep you-up-to date with the present times.

"I was aware that technology in the motor trade especially, is progressing towards being predominantly electric. With government trying to achieve zero emissions by 2050, I wanted to be proactive and get a head start in obtaining the qualifications needed for this. I hoped that by achieving this knowledge and skillset that it would set me apart from my peers.

"My family and my boyfriend are always the first to tell their friends about my skillset, which in turn gives me a sense of pride as well. Before joining the trade, I had never come across any female mechanics, let alone a black female. I feel very proud of myself for being persistent and achieving what I have attained so far."

Louise Fall, Deputy Principal at City of Wolverhampton College said: "We saw the potential in Sarai as a person and recognised her skillset to employ her as a tutor and coach to other learners. From not having a full time and paid job before starting with us, she has expressed her thanks to us for giving her this exciting opportunity as a full-time wage has greatly improved her personal and financial situation.

"Having an engineering background, she quickly realised that knowledge isn't everything and having the ability to get the message across to students is harder than it looks. The ability to recognise different learning styles and personality types to make sessions engaging, informative and interesting has seen her progress quickly - with fantastic feedback from students who have had the pleasure of her unique and personable delivery style."

CodeYourFuture and Capgemini UK (Successful partnership award)

Unemployed adults and those in low paid work have gained better paid jobs in the fast-growing digital sector in the West Midlands thanks to an exciting partnership from CodeYourFuture and Capgemini UK. The training provider and employer have teamed up to train residents in software development, as well as providing support with one-to-one mentoring, career insight days and homework clubs.

The flexible and inclusive programme has been designed around learners' other commitments to allow them to continue working around their study – tuition is free, and childcare and travel costs are covered too.

CodeYourFuture and Capgemini have a really innovative approach to learning. They work together closely to understand both the challenges facing students and the needs of employers, so they can offer a truly end-to-end solution.

The training programme is exceptional because it's opened up access to meaningful employment and a stable income for unemployed and underemployed socially excluded adults in the West Midlands. It's also established a new way of recruiting employees to the tech sector – one of the fastest growing industries in the region.

The year-long training programme is remarkable for supporting adults of any age who would struggle to access traditional ways of learning, by structuring free training around other work responsibilities, and providing people with laptops, childcare and travel costs. This approach is replicable by other initiatives.

Since 2020, over 150 learners have been helped by the programme with 72% of graduates getting jobs in the technology industry with international organisations like Capgemini.

The programme has been designed to improve the diversity of people working in the technology sector and help people increase their earning potential. More than four in 10 learners so far are female and over half are from ethnic minority backgrounds.

One of the learners said: "I thought I'd never get a chance to break into the tech industry because of where I come from. But CodeYourFuture opened a door for me and changed the course of my life."

Another learner added: "CodeYourFuture have been instrumental in helping me get started at Capgemini. They really care about supporting people from underprivileged and minority backgrounds, and it's made a huge difference for me."

Asha Kaur (Step into Learning award)

After working in the manufacturing industry for many years, Asha Kaur wanted to pursue her passion for HR and joined Coventry College's CIPD Level 3 Foundation in People Practice course to support her career change. Despite feeling nervous about stepping back into a formal education setting after three decades, Asha is living proof that is OK to step out of your comfort zone to achieve your career goals.

"I really pushed myself to do this course having not been in education for many years. It was challenging at times, but well worth it to achieve my ambitions of improving my life and achieving something for myself. This was my main motivation to step into the unknown and I wanted to make the most of a new opportunity to learn and grow.

"My learning journey has given me confidence and knowledge whilst gaining new skills. My family and friends have commented on the transformation in my self-esteem.

"Feeling more self-assured has made a huge difference to me professionally as well as personally.

"At work I am able to question the way things are done in HR and Management. My colleagues also take me more seriously and see that I have gained knowledge.

"I feel inspired by others, sharing my knowledge with them and learning from my peers. I have met new people and learnt new things. My tutors and colleagues have been hugely supportive.

"Looking back now, I feel that I should have started this learning journey earlier and not be afraid."

Aysha Anwar, Business Lecturer at Coventry College said: "It was difficult for Asha entering education as a mature adult and learning how to write assignments, but she has worked hard and has overcome a lack confidence and self-belief.

"Asha implements the learning into her workplace and offers them advice and guidance on how to improve. She is a credit to her organisation."

Ideal for All (Community Learning Award)

Ideal for All is a pioneering disabled people's charity based in Sandwell. Their recent 'Stand Out' project, funded by the West Midlands Combined Authority, has supported 77 young disabled adults to access specialist support, training, volunteering and employment opportunities during and after the Commonwealth Games.

Ideal for All support disabled people and young adults not in education, employment or training (NEET) to develop skills for the workplace and secure meaningful employment. They provide a wide range of training and support, including health and mental wellbeing to boost self-esteem, resilience and confidence. Participants can also get involved in outdoors activities in the local community, in one of three purpose built therapeutic garden sites in the area.

Of those who took part in the 'Stand Out' project, 26% got a job, 30% went on to a volunteering role.

Alistair was one of the participants on the project. "I was demotivated and out of work, not knowing what was out there for someone like me. But working outdoors with the community was fantastic. Learning practical skills and working alongside people with disabilities was mind-blowing. With foundation-level training, I worked my way up to a full-time paid health and wellbeing officer role. Thanks to everyone here, I have gained practical skills and grown as a person. It's the people that make this place."

Meganne, another participant who contributed over 550 hours of volunteering in the community said: "When I come here, I feel more in control. I can do things and make a difference to myself and others. I feel like I am moving forwards and not stuck anymore. We make things, cook and enjoy the space. I feel free again."

Callum added: "I have Autism and think differently to other people. I really enjoy coming here. It helped me gain confidence. I want to keep volunteering and I will do my paid job too. Everybody should come and do this to feel good and help others."

Emelye Westwood, Head of Operations at Ideal for All said: "We know from experience that young people need specific help to transition into work. We support them through wide ranging 'wrap around' support. Our point of difference - core specialist employability functions are reinforced through 'holistic' growing opportunities delivered from our three purpose-built garden sites."

LJM Homecare (SME of the Year award)

LJM strive to offer the very best care in people's homes and know that staff development is key to achieving this. By developing their skills, staff not only gain the qualifications required to work and progress in the care sector, but they are also able to improve the quality of care that they offer. The health and social care sector is a major part of the West Midlands economy and LJM's commitment to provide rewarding career options for local residents is a great example for other small businesses in the region.

One employee, Michelle Hinton said: "I came to LJM thinking I would be doing quite mundane tasks as I genuinely thought that this was my ceiling point.

"The business saw that although I lacked confidence, my desire to succeed and hardworking nature led them to invest time and support in opening up career opportunities. I was hesitant at taking the chance and thought that there was no way I could do a Level 3 in anything, however, my line manager and tutor both reassured me that I had the ability to achieve and that they would offer as much support as possible.

"Since beginning the course, I have been amazed at how much I have developed. I feel that I am learning new skills every day, and this is reflected in the quality of care that I provide to our service users."

The training is delivered in partnership with West Midlands-based provider BCTG. It includes a combination of one-to-one sessions with a trainer, online learning, and observations. LJM have supported their staff throughout, offering flexibility and ensuring the needs of every individual is considered.

Steve Burnet, Lead Business Development Co-ordinator at BCTG, said: "LJM are extremely keen to show people the real side of caring in the community, to correct the myths and encourage people to look at a career in care."

West Midlands
Combined Authority