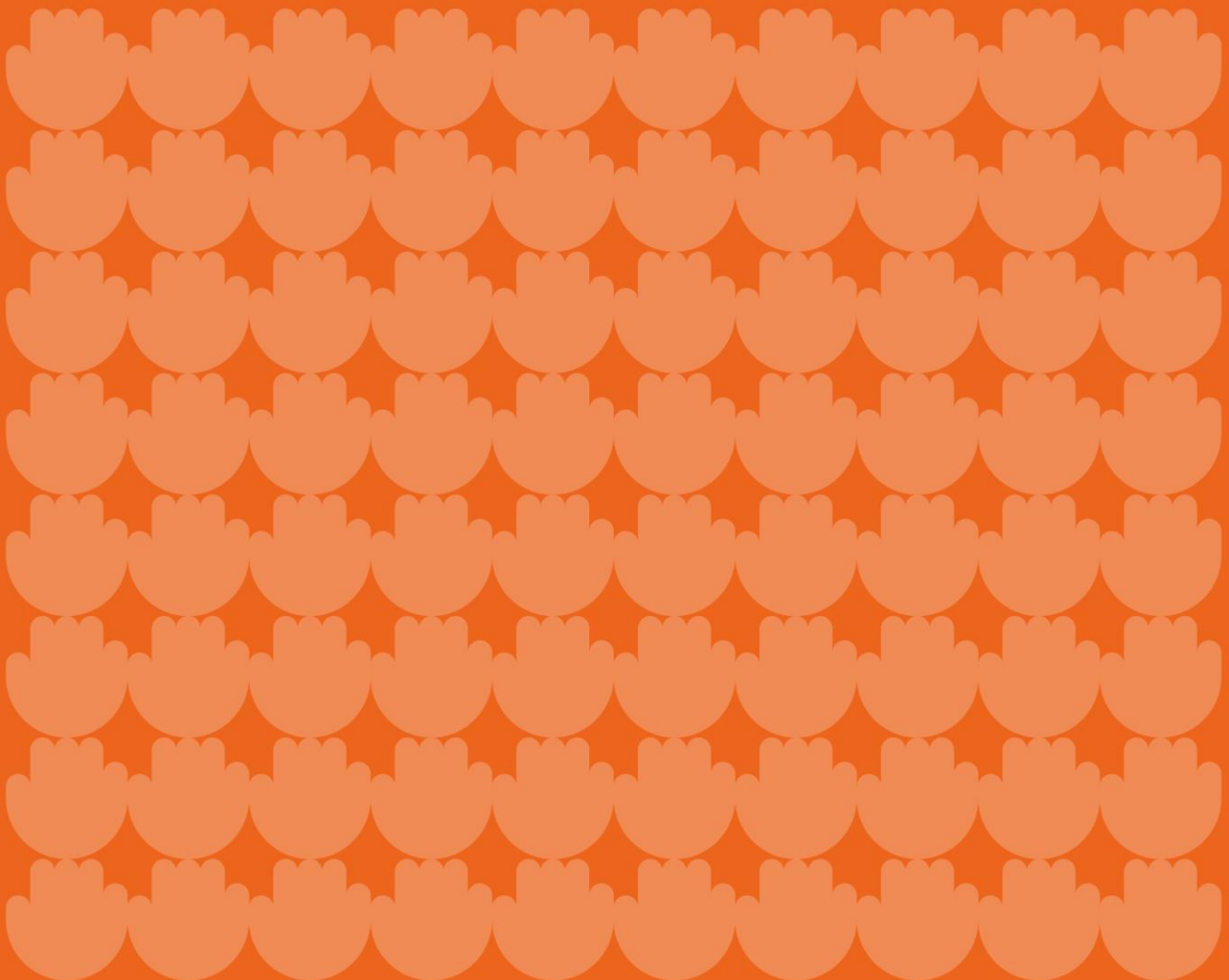


Annex 1 Annual Report 2023/2024



# Greater Manchester's Devolved Adult Education Programme Annual Report 2023-2024



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# Policies for adult education

## Context

The Adult Education Budget (AEB) was devolved to GMCA in 2019 and is a key part of the wider education, skills and employment system for Greater Manchester (GM). Its primary aim is to ensure all GM residents are equipped for life and work, with good job opportunities to progress and develop within a thriving and productive city region economy. It is available to fund skills provision and associated support to GM residents aged 19 or over and is aligned to other GM wide activities for education, skills and work, and other policy areas.

## Skills provider base

During 2023/24 the AEB was delivered by 30 skills providers across GM to support the funding of an adult skills offer to residents. These consisted of the nine GM based Further Education (FE) Colleges, two GM based sixth form colleges and five local authorities, who were grant funded, as well as 14 commissioned skills providers. There were approximately 50 supply-chain skills providers who are partnered with the main skills provider base.

## AEB Strategy

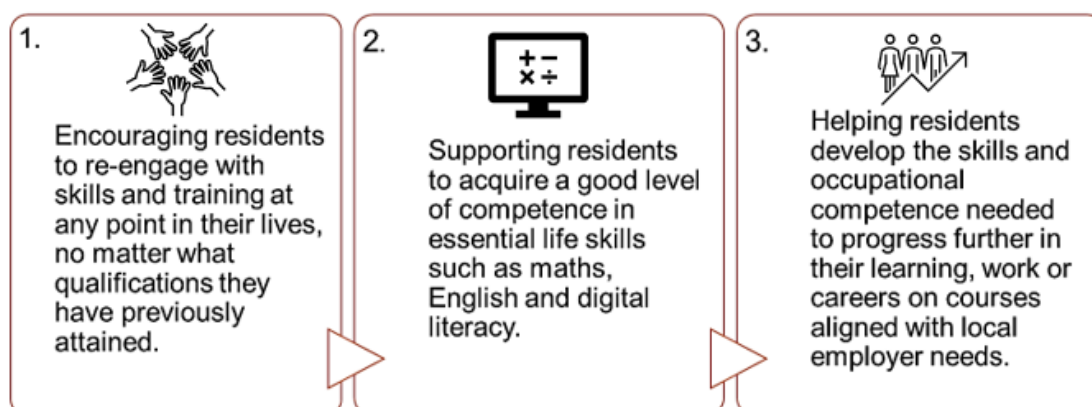
GM is moving into an integrated settlement, and this will enable a greater integrated skills and employment support system that works for everyone as set out in the priorities within Greater Manchester Strategy (GMS) 2021-2031 Good Lives for All (Annex 1):

- A greener Greater Manchester: responding to climate emergency.
- A fairer Greater Manchester: addressing inequalities and improving wellbeing for all.
- A more prosperous Greater Manchester: driving local and UK growth.

The GMS informs the AEB approach alongside the frontier and foundation sectors as identified in Annex 2 – GM Local Industrial Strategy, the recommendations from the GM Independent Inequalities Commission – The Next Level: Good Lives for All in Greater Manchester report (Annex 3), as well as the in-depth analysis provided in Local Skills Report and Labour Market Plan (Annex 4).

# GMCA devolved AEB: Objectives, Themes and Goals

For the 2023/24 academic year, GMCA outlined the strategic direction of the devolved AEB with a clear set of objectives, themes and goals. These objectives remain the same and will support the integrated approach going forward:



The devolved AEB works towards these three objectives through activity, prioritising the following themes:

Encouraging residents to re-engage with skills and training at any point in their lives, no matter what qualifications they have previously attained	Engaging residents through first steps learning and skills
	Improving health, well-being and resilience for learning and work
	Equipping parents and carers to better support children with learning at school or college
	Teaching residents about ways to improve the local environment and reduce their carbon footprint
	Supporting residents to get involved in volunteering and other civic engagement
Supporting residents to acquire a good level of competence in essential life skills	Supporting residents with high needs or disabilities to lead independent lives
	Improving ESOL and helping new arrivals understand UK life
	Improving English and literacy
	Improving maths and financial literacy
	Improving digital skills and literacy
Helping residents develop the skills and occupational competence needed to progress in learning, work and careers on courses aligned with local employer needs	Supporting progression to skills courses that focus on labour market needs
	Supporting national legal entitlement at Level 2 or Level 3
	Providing training and qualifications leading to employment, self-employment, or apprenticeships
	Supporting residents in work to improve skills and be more productive or retrain to find better jobs

A key part of the AEB funding for GM is that each area of funding e.g. Community Learning and Adult Skills delivers activity which prioritises the above themes.

Encouraging residents to re-engage with skills and training at any point in their lives	Community Learning (Funding Model 10)
Supporting residents to acquire a good level of competence in essential life skills	Community Learning (Funding Model 10) Adult Skills (Funding Model 35)
Helping residents develop the skills and occupational competence needed to progress in learning, work and careers	Adult Skills (Funding Model 35)

GMCA especially focuses on the following cross cutting areas through delivery of the devolved AEB:

### **Increasing Prosperity**

- Increasing the overall prosperity of GM by supporting skills training in the growth and foundation sectors of the economy highlighted in the Local Industrial Strategy as well as any other sectors impacted by the Covid pandemic. Adult skills funding will be flexible and responsive to future impacts and changes to the labour market driven by changes in the global economy and events such as Brexit.

### **Reducing Inequalities**

- Addressing inequalities and improving the overall wellbeing of GM residents by targeting those who have experienced the greatest inequality and have the lowest level of previous educational attainment. We need GM to be more equitable, with more opportunities for all our people, and this means levelling up, so that even the most disadvantaged residents in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods are supported and able to access high skills training.

### **Focussing on Local Needs**

- Developing a place-based approach to the planning of course delivery which benefits all localities in GM. A wide range of stakeholder feedback as well as industrial intelligence will be used to determine community and employer needs at the local level. This will help ensure that providers respond to local needs in the best possible way in order to raise the aspirations of all residents and have a transformational impact on communities.

### **Achieving a Carbon Neutral GM**

- Supporting GM to become carbon neutral by 2038 through the delivery of skills training relating to the green economy and showing GM residents how they can reduce their carbon footprint and/or improve their local environment. We will also prioritise the allocation of funding to providers or supply chains that demonstrate a strong organisational commitment to this goal.

## Legal entitlements

All GM residents have a legal entitlement to certain fully funded skills training, irrespective of income or employment status. In several instances, GMCA have extended these legal entitlements in comparison to the national minimum requirements so that a greater number of GM residents can benefit from them, including entitlement to:

A first full Level 2 qualification from a [national entitlement list](#) (i.e. if the resident has not already attained one in prior learning). Nationally, only young people aged 19 to 23 years old can access these.

A range of qualifications in Maths, English and Essential Digital Skills up to and including Level 2. Nationally, essential digital skills are only up to and including Level 1 and only the Essential Digital Skills qualification (EDSQ) is permitted with any non-accredited provision being aligned to the national standards for essential digital skills. GM has widened the scope of qualifications that providers can access to support and improve skills for GM residents.

A first or second Level 3 qualification from a local GM list, the national entitlement list, or the national FCFJ list as follows:

- Locally, all GM residents aged 19 or above are able to achieve their first or second level 3 qualification if they enrol on a qualification from the [GM Level 3 List](#). Qualifications included in this list support the frontier and foundational sectors of the GM Local Industrial Strategy.
- Nationally, all 19 to 23 year olds can undertake their first full level 3 qualification if it is included on the [national entitlement list](#).
- Nationally, all residents aged 19 or above who have not achieved a full level 3 qualification can enrol on a level 3 qualification contained on the National Skills Fund [Level 3 Adult Offer](#). Residents are able to take one short qualification followed by a further one as part of this national offer. Residents can access the offer regardless if they are in or out of work. For those in work GM uses a low wage threshold which has been linked to vacancy pay data for GM's priority and foundational sectors (low wage threshold currently £31,600). Individuals are eligible if they do not have an existing Level 3 and/or if their existing level 3 does not meet the needs of their career goals.

Alongside the complexity of the Level 3 offer and various qualifications available and with a broader eligibility for residents to access the offer, GM developed and implemented a Level 3 Single Pot approach (further details outlined below).

## Key delivery elements

The AEB is a diverse, single budget stream bringing together different strands of 19+ adult further education (excluding apprenticeships and traineeships) and discretionary support. The budget supports a wide range of regulated and non-regulated provision from pre-entry level up to and including level 3 and comprises:

- GM local entitlements that support full funding for:
  - all adults aged 19+ for English, maths and ICT user qualifications up to and including level 2
  - a first full level 2 qualification for all individuals aged 19+
  - a first full level 3 qualification for individuals aged 19 to 23
  - a first or second level 3 qualification to all adults aged 19+
- GM Local Level 3 Adult Offer: designed to support all residents to achieve their first or second level 3 qualification.
- ESOL: full funding is available up to and including level 2 ESOL provision for individuals prevented from looking for employment and / or unemployed and not claiming benefits.
- Sector-based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs): designed to support Jobcentre Plus claimants build confidence to improve their job prospects and enhance their CV, whilst helping employers in sectors with current local vacancies.
- Local flexibility: a range of courses for adults aged 19+ incorporating qualifications, components of qualifications and non-regulated learning up to and including level 2.
- Licence to Practise: to support the construction industry by incorporating the CSCS licence as part of a package of learning.
- Learning in the workplace: to support in-work progression and / or job sustainability that is not a statutory employer requirement.
- British Sign Language: full funding is available for residents, whose first language is BSL, to study for a first qualification in BSL, up to and including level 2.
- Disclosure and Barring Service: to support residents and providers where a DBS check is a requirement of the course.

- Community Learning: to widen participation in education and training to prepare adults for a range of next steps.
- Prince's Trust Team Programme: a 12-week course designed to improve confidence, motivation and skills for eligible residents aged 19–25 years old.
- Learning Support: available to meet the cost of putting in place reasonable adjustments for residents who have an identified learning difficulty or disability, to achieve their learning goal.
- Exceptional Learning Support claims above £19,000: available for residents that need significant levels of support to start or continue their learning.
- Learner Support: available to provide financial support for residents with a specific financial hardship preventing them from taking part / continuing in learning.
- Hardship: available to provide support for residents with a specific financial hardship to cover the costs of course related fees, i.e. accreditation fees, transport costs.
- Childcare Costs: available to residents to cover childcare payments with a childminder, provider or childminder agency that is registered with Ofsted.
- Residential Access Funding: to support residents that need to live away from home to access specialist provision that cannot be accessed locally.
- Free Courses For Jobs Offer: a targeted level 3 adult offer to support adults without an existing full level 3 qualification. Details outlined above.

## GM Adult Skills Level 3 Targeted Offer

GMCA has continued its 'single pot' simplified funding approach to level 3 qualifications. The single pot amalgamates the Level 3 Free Courses for Jobs pot and the current GM Level 3 flexibility. This means a common eligibility criteria and increased scope of qualifications into one funding pot. The approach means that:

- It simplifies a complex system for AEB skills providers and offers greater flexibility.
- It maximises the range of level 3 qualifications available for employers and GM residents to access with a greater emphasis on GMs Foundation and Growth sectors of the local economy.

This targeted offer was in response to a statistic that revealed across Greater Manchester, 54.4% of the population aged 16+ had attained a level 3 or higher qualification, compared



to 56% for England and Wales (Source: 2021 Census data). GMCA were aware that this had clear implications for productivity and business growth, as well as for those residents' likelihood of progression and social mobility, hence the continuing need for engagement with lower skilled residents, progressing them through the qualification levels and into sustainable employment.

Driving up level 3 attainment has proved incredibly successful, with an increased number of GM residents gaining a level 3 qualification year on year since devolution, this has increased from 655 learners in 2019-2020 to just over 5,000 learners this year.

Progression from Level 2 has been key with learners developing further skills equipping them to progress onto higher level courses as their skills developed. The expansion of selected Level 3 qualifications has allowed providers to support more progression up to Level 3. For example, one provider explained how they had used the Level 3 flexibilities to provide courses for HR professionals, allowing them to upskill and progress with their employer.

## Economically Inactive (People facing barriers)

A resident might be considered economically inactive if they are long term sick or disabled, looking after home or family, retired, student or other reasons. In GM, an average of 14% of residents are considered economically inactive (Source: NOMIS 2025). (Appendix D details some of the work that has begun on the Economic Inactivity Trailblazer, a joint initiative between GMCA Working Well and Adult Skills). GMCA Adult Skills consider a resident to be unemployed or economically inactive, and eligible for full funding, if one or more of the following apply:

- The resident is not in employment / self-employment and is in receipt of out of work benefits;
- The resident is not claiming any benefits and is available and looking for work, i.e. economically inactive;
- The resident is undertaking ESOL learning aims, is not in employment / self-employment and is prevented from looking for employment.

GM residents who meet the criteria above are fully funded to access the following core devolved Adult Skills Fund activities:

- Residents aged 19 plus:
- all regulated and non-regulated provision up to and including Level 2;
- individual Level 3 units;
- Level 3 qualification(s) from the combined level 3 approved qualification list;
- Residents aged 19-23 years old:
- a first full Level 3 qualification as part of their legal entitlement.

In 2023-24, Adult Skills were accessed by 8,155 economically inactive GM residents. The table shows the ten GM providers who have assisted the highest numbers of economically inactive residents:

Provider	Economically Inactive Learners
LTE Group	1224
Salford City College	962
Bolton College	762
Manchester City Council	761
Wigan And Leigh College	700
The Oldham College	469
Back 2 Work Complete Training Limited	396
The Trafford and Stockport College Group	395
Hopwood Hall College	366
Tameside College	363

## Local Authority Grants

GMCA maintained its commitment to a place-based approach in 2023/24 by continuing with the Local Authority Grants Programme, making up to £150,000 available from its devolved AEB allocation to each of the ten local authority areas in Greater Manchester to support local work and skills priorities. Outreach activities delivered under this programme focused on engagement and addressing the barriers and constraints for residents around accessing adult skills. Local authorities use the funding to support three key aspects linked to skills and work (not direct skills provision):

- **Alleviating barriers** to adult education, skills or training within a local authority area:
  - In the year 2023/2024 this strand of the programme engaged with 5,346 residents, providing them with support on how to access adult education programmes as well as increasing their prospects of entering the workforce.
  - 1,757 residents progressed into skills provision as a result of this support. Work continues to measure the outcomes for these residents, e.g. enrolment, completion and progression into further learning or into employment.
  
- **Digital inclusion** to alleviate digital barriers within a local authority area to increase access to essential digital skills for residents:
  - 8,945 residents were engaged and supported on this strand of the programme in 2023/24 giving them increased confidence and skills to competently use digital equipment and feel digitally included.
  - 227 local volunteers were recruited and trained to provide digital support to local residents who presented as digitally excluded, e.g. digital skills champions.
  - 1,602 residents were able to access a digital device or access the internet who otherwise would not have been able to.
  - 711 residents progressed onto an essential digital skills provision as a result of this support.
  
- Supporting the **GM ESOL Advice Service** to ensure a single gateway for adults with English language needs to access learning that is right for them in each locality:
  - At the centre of this approach is a local, centralised assessment process and referral service into ESOL provision in each local authority area.
  - A key focus is to establish and manage one waiting list in each area that serves all local ESOL skills providers to reduce duplication.
  - In 2023/24 this service engaged with and assessed more than 12,122 residents with 6,640 residents enrolling onto ESOL skills provision.

The LA Grant programme requires local authorities to robustly monitor and track the progressions and outcomes of residents who have been engaged by each service to provide strong evidence of impact and value for money. Progress and impact reports, and evidence of spend are submitted on a quarterly basis, with clear information provided on the agreed project outcomes. Local authorities can commit to programmes which they know will benefit their residents most, and this flexibility allows for a range of effective impacts which put the resident at the centre of the process.

# Place Based Pilot Projects

In 2022-23, grant funded allocations to some GM colleges were under-committed and this was viewed as an opportunity to test some pilot-based projects. In 2023-24, £1,040,292 was reallocated for 'test and learn' initiatives in response to local priorities.

- Bolton – £242,381. Five projects including increased engagement in specific neighbourhoods and cohorts, and to boost information and guidance for SEND learners and in community learning.
- Oldham – £131,542. Two projects including targeted vocational ESOL and increased information and guidance for those furthest away from the employment.
- Salford – £511,250. Five projects including increased engagement in specific neighbourhoods and cohorts, adapted learning for adults with learning disabilities, ESOL and integration for new arrivals, addressing barriers to progression from Level 2 to Level 3 Adult Skills provision.
- Trafford and Stockport – £155,500. Two projects including increased information and guidance to vulnerable adults and community ESOL.

## Cross Programme Delivery

### GM Multiply Scheme

Multiply is a UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) funded national programme, commissioned and delivered locally, to support adults who do not have GCSE/Level 2 Maths, or equivalent, to gain skills in Maths/Numeracy. The scheme aims to increase overall participation and achievement in Level 2 Maths, ultimately leading to wider skills, by supporting those who would not normally consider skills training within a college environment. In GM, we have utilised the Multiply funding to add value and complement existing Adult Skills activities in and support residents who would not normally access Adult Skills.

GMCA has approached this by commissioning Multiply activity that:

1. Targets certain areas in GM, in particular residents in most deprived areas that could benefit from Multiply and wider adult skills provision

2. Tailored provision for key groups of residents – offender groups and care experienced young people
3. Co-commissioning with AEB to increase scope and test new approaches of Adult Skills activity

## EmployGM

EmployGM is a platform that helps people find jobs, search for courses, and find localised support across the ten boroughs of Greater Manchester. The service launched a campaign to support people considering their options including employment and skills development routes. The campaign drew on labour market information and sector insights to highlight current Manchester employment trends and help inform residents considering their next steps.

To support GM residents considering their next steps, the platform's campaign drew on key findings from GMCA's Labour Market and Sector Insights report, providing insight into local job trends - from vacancy figures to the most in-demand skills across each borough. The latest report covering the Spring period (March – May 2024) found high demand for roles like teaching assistants and customer service positions, the former of which was the most advertised job in the past year.

It also revealed that the public sector employs just over one in three workers in GM, across health, education, emergency services, and local government, and that a steady increase in future demand for construction jobs is also expected, with an estimate of around 11,000 new jobs expected in GM by 2027.

## Future Priorities

GM's future priorities link to their deeper devolution deal and the Education, Skills and Work Team continues to plan and prepare for the transition to an Integrated Settlement including:

1. Building on the past five years of delivery and policy design, GMCA will embrace the move to the Integrated Settlement to ensure a more streamlined funding approach that allows residents to enter, sustain and progress in work. It will continue to build labour market intelligence so that provision is also sector specific.

2. Review of key areas including funding of non-learning activity e.g. earnings adjustment, implementing an approach to capture stronger destinations and outcomes for learners and how these areas are relevant for GM. The aim is to influence funding structures and the development of a destination tracking approach to support progression and job outcomes.
3. Conducting reviews into delivery to understand overlap, duplication and gaps across commissioned Adult Skills provision. The Integrated Settlement will allow better control over what is delivered in GM, working with integrated partners across employment and health, and putting in place a system that facilitates more efficient spending and makes the skills £ go further. This will also reduce ineffective delivery, ensuring more focused delivery that will produce better outcomes for all stakeholders.
4. GMCA will continue to test new ways of working, particularly to work closer and with other policy areas, to ensure the support which is place for residents meets their needs and improves their opportunities to move closer and in to work as well as support employers to recruit from a good talent pool and improve the skills of their workforce.

# Appendix A: Policy changes implemented as a result of funding being devolved

The following policy changes have been introduced since devolution to extend the provision that was available at a national level to benefit a wider range of GM residents and / or support our Local Industrial Strategy.

First Full Level 2 Expansion	At a national level, only learners aged 19-23 were entitled to a fully funded first full Level 2 qualification. In GM this entitlement was made available to residents aged 24 and over who are either unemployed or employed, irrespective of their income.
British Sign Language	In GM we extended the legal entitlement to include British Sign Language as well as English. This is fully funded up to and including Level 2 for any GM resident whose preferred language is BSL or who cannot access spoken language due to a hearing impairment.
Low Wage Threshold	At a national level only residents who were earning below the national minimum wage, currently £21,673, could have access to fully funded courses through what was a pilot model, which was rolled out across England. In GM we increased the low wage threshold to reflect the national real living wage as per the Living Wage Foundation and inflation rates, currently £23,104 which meant more residents would be eligible to access certain skills courses and provision.
Digital Skills	All GM residents can access a range of free Digital Skills / ICT qualifications up to and including Level 2 irrespective of employment status or income. At a national level this only applies up to and including a Level 1 qualification in Essential Digital Skills.
Level 3 Qualifications	GM has enabled providers to deliver individual Level 3 units whether standalone, as a combination of L3 units or delivered alongside other qualifications, in order to support specific training making residents more employable.

	<p>GMCA developed and implemented a local level 3 qualification offer to support the growth and foundation sectors identified in the Local Industrial Strategy and other sectors showing gaps in skills or occupational recruitment gaps. These courses are available to all residents who do not have a first Level 3 qualification or need to retrain in a second Level 3 area. The list of qualifications is reviewed regularly to ensure it is meeting the needs of businesses and employers across GM.</p>
CSCS licence to practise for construction	<p>In GM, the CSCS licence requirements can be funded and incorporated into a programme of learning that supports progression into the construction industry. The funding available covers the costs relating to the delivery of a Level 1 Award in Health and Safety as well as the CITB Health, Safety &amp; Environment CSCS test and the CSCS blue card.</p>
Free learning for residents with English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) needs	<p>At a national level only active benefit claimants looking for work can access fully funded ESOL provision. In GM all economically inactive residents with ESOL needs, irrespective of benefit status, have access to free ESOL provision up to and including level 2. This includes residents who are prevented from looking for employment and / or unemployed residents who are not claiming benefits.</p>
Workplace delivery	<p>GM will fund any learning at an employee's workplace that supports in-work progression and / or job sustainability and it is not a statutory employer requirement. Nationally only legal entitlements are permitted to be delivered in the workplace.</p>
Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) costs	<p>Sometimes DBS checks are required for residents to participate in AEB-funded learning. In GM these costs can be funded through the Adult Education Budget where it is a requirement of the resident's course. Nationally the training provider usually meets these costs.</p>



# Appendix B: Monitoring and Evaluation of Policy Changes, Test and Learn Flexibilities and Cross Programme Delivery inc. case studies

A key benefit of devolved funding, particularly for AEB, is that GMCA can flex the offer for short or extended periods of time, and test whether these flexibilities make the necessary impact or not. These test and learn flexibilities can be developed and implemented with one or more of the skills providers currently delivering the AEB offer. The principle of the flexibilities can be established through any of the following mechanisms:

- from an emerging need within the overall economy
- a need highlighted and evidenced by an individual or group of providers, i.e. employers informing providers about the difficulties they are experiencing with recruitment due to a lack of certain skills.
- specific issues highlighted from other areas of best practice which AEB could support in a beneficial way.

With devolved funding we can then flex an offer, whether establishing 'new' courses or a combination of qualifications to support specific targeted activity, as well as making adjustments to the level of funding, or agreeing on levels of funding applied to certain courses or qualifications. The test and learn flexibilities must still follow the principles of what AEB is focussed to do and for the residents it supports.

## Workplace Learning

One of GMCA's AEB flexibilities (as specified in the Funding and Performance Management Rules) is the Workplace Learning flexibility. This flexibility stipulates that GMCA will fund any regulated qualifications and/or learning aims which is delivered at an employee's workplace. The emphasis is on supporting in-work progression and job sustainability, provided the learning is not a statutory employer requirement. This flexibility represented a departure from the national standard of the time, where only legal entitlements were sanctioned for delivery within the workplace.

### Kraft Heinz Case Study:

Kraft Heinz identified a critical challenge in their operations: a predominantly single-skilled engineering workforce. This limitation resulted in workflow inefficiencies and production bottlenecks, which hindered their ability to meet increasing operational demands. To address this, Kraft Heinz sought a structured programme to cross-skill their engineers, enhancing workforce flexibility, driving efficiencies, and preparing for advancements in automation, robotics, and digitalisation.

Additionally, the programme aimed to invest in employees' professional growth, fostering engagement and motivation through voluntary participation. This initiative complemented Kraft Heinz's existing Level 3 Technical Operator Programme, further embedding a culture of continuous improvement and professional development.

The Cross-Skilling Engineering Programme showcases the power of tailored, collaborative training solutions in driving operational improvements and workforce development. By focusing on selected units from the OAL Level 3 Diploma, this initiative not only addressed immediate skill gaps but also prepared Kraft Heinz's engineers for the future of digitalised and automated manufacturing. Through strategic delivery and strong partnerships, this programme has set a benchmark for innovation and employee engagement in workforce upskilling.

Marianne Thomson, Training and Development Manager at Kraft Heinz, highlighted the programme's significance:

*“With the pressures on businesses these days, it is vital that we look at how we drive efficiencies. This is a perfect example of this in cross-skilling our engineering workforce. Not only does it drive time efficiencies, but it also strikes at the heart of engaging our employees by giving them this amazing opportunity to upskill. This is purely voluntary, so the fact that 48 employees have stepped forward to take this chance means it is a strong endorsement of what we are trying to achieve. We at Kraft Heinz could not have done it without the partnership from Wigan & Leigh College and Greater Manchester Combined Authority, who have released vital funding to support this innovative and important upskilling programme.”*

As part of this collaboration Wigan and Leigh College highlighted a range of important outcomes that benefited the learners of this programme:

- **Efficiency and Productivity:** The cross-skilling initiative has enabled engineers to address a broader range of tasks, reducing response times and creating efficiencies in workflow. This directly supports improved production rates and minimises downtime.
- **Employee Engagement and Motivation:** The voluntary nature of the programme has fostered strong engagement, with 48 employees stepping forward to participate. Employees feel valued, empowered, and equipped for future challenges in the industry.
- **Future-Ready Workforce:** The inclusion of automation, instrumentation, and digitalisation training positions Kraft Heinz’s workforce to adapt to advancements in smart manufacturing, robotics, and digital technologies.
- **Collaborative Success:** The programme is a testament to the strength of partnerships between Kraft Heinz, Wigan & Leigh College, and GMCA. The collaborative approach ensured that the programme was tailored to industry needs and supported through vital funding.

Due to the success of this initiative in upskilling, KraftHeinz employees the programme will continue for 2024/25.

## GM Adult Skills Targeted Level 3 Offer

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### NCFE Level 3 Cyber Security

Xyrius working collaboratively with BAM, Manchester Digital Inclusion Officer Chris Northern and Virgin O2. Most of the group had already completed level 2 qualifications in Cyber and were keen to continue their studies and progress onto level 3, but a community location needed to be identified that all the learner could travel to. BAM Construction, who as part of their commitment to the residents of Manchester donate a Community Hub to use free of charge for suitable community events. Chris Northern worked tirelessly to signpost the residents to the courses, so that the group could gain much needed digital skills. *“It is particularly important to know how to stay safe online on both a personal and business level, this course gives the group the knowledge and skills to feel confident online”* Margaret Brewer.

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### Level 3 Autism Samantha Smirfin Plato Training

It will help me in becoming a 1 to 1 support within a school setting then in the future becoming a SENCO. This course has helped me with my IT skills as making me submit the work online and do it all online has given me a chance to learn more. This course help me with my knowledge on cooccurring condition and how they affect the individual and how it is hard to get a diagnosis of this conditions when the person already being diagnosed with autism. This course has helped me be able to speak more in a group of people I don't know. It has built my confidence up. I will be able to look at every child with autism as an individual that the condition is not the same with anyone.

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### Level 3 Autism Rezwana Haque Plato Training

I have learned a lot about strategies when there's challenging behaviour, their characteristics, why things bother individuals and how to handle those situations. I wanted to do the course as my daughter has Autism and this will help me to understand her. This course was like an eye opener for me when I struggled to understand many things, where to seek help, child development helped me with the strategies and intervention to put up when it gets worse and where to ask for help. I will use all my knowledge to help my daughter with her challenging behaviour. I would also like to do a SEN course in future and might also be a SENCO teacher.

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## Local Authority Grant Programme:

### Alleviating Barriers to Adult Education, Skills or Training:

#### Rochdale

Some success stories from the *Focus and Fly* Group: **Resident S** started a volunteer role, running cooking sessions on a budget, also looking into setting up a joint new business with 2 others to run health and wellbeing sessions include cooking, confidence building and meditation. S will be accessing support and information from our Build a Business Advisor. **Resident P** will be starting on the Basic Reading and writing classes, to improve his confidence accessing information and being able to read and respond to short text messages. **Resident J** has been supported to enrol onto a CSCS course, and is now on an employment Programme where he has updated and improved his cv and once he has successfully completed the course, is feeling confident to apply for construction jobs after being out of work and homeless in the last 2 years. **Resident R** is still homeless and sofa surfing, but has attended all the sessions with Focus & Fly, has become very motivated, started a voluntary role supporting others at a community group. And has developed his confidence and now thinking about future training opportunities in order to create a pathway back towards employment once his housing situation improves and allows him to realistically move towards this

#### Bury

59 residents attended a Work & Wellbeing event with 35 residents making a follow-up arrangement or interview. The purpose of the event was to: Highlight current employment and volunteering positions available with a range of partners/employers and offer participants the opportunity to meet (face to face) with local employers/partners to discuss positions available. Provide an opportunity for participants to receive impartial career information, advice and guidance from Bury Adult Learning, JCP, Ingeus and VCFA. Provide an opportunity to enrol on courses within Bury Adult Learning Service's new program and other local providers, ie, Bury College.

#### Tameside

A jobs fair in Spring 2023 attracted over 900 Tameside residents....*a record number!* And a larger than usual number of employers and providers from the British Army to the Hyde Group. The feedback received on the day was exceptional, and pointed to everyone that attended finding it useful, and achieving what they came to achieve. Employers are already asking about their place at the next event.

## Alleviating Digital Barriers to increase access to Digital Skills for Residents:

### Trafford

Khesiwe said that she will be using the laptop to do online training and completing job applications. She said she was halfway through a software training course when her last laptop broke and she couldn't complete the course in time. She said it will also help her daughter with her school studies and coursework.

### Salford

A young man with ESOL needs, wanted to buy a successful fast food business and needed help "from the start." He received support to get online and to apply to banks for possible loans. We looked online at the support available from The Prince's Trust Enterprise Programme and applied online for him to join The Enterprise Course. He was supported in finding and securing a place at a fast food outlet, to gain experience in the sector. He is receiving on-going support to buy a business.

### Bolton

Ethel is completing a health and social care qualification and could not have done so without a chromebook from the lending library and data from the national databank. She explained on a project showcase video interview that it has also helped with her children's mental health as they are able to use the device with her supervision.

## ESOL Advice Service:

ESOL services is an absolute lifeline for some learners. Over the years we have had users move on to further education and even full-time employment. The demand has increased over the years. I think the provision has catered for our users, however we still have a huge demand and always have a waiting list in the Spotland/Falinge area - the demand is only going to increase. I hope we can work together to combat this and provide the service in the future for all. We have an increasing number of residents moving into the area who cannot speak English - how are we going to combat this? Do we put on more classes? - some points to consider. The ESOL service has improved massively over the years, better managed, better staffed and better communication. This has led to a very successful partnership and has impacted very positively on our service users.

**Spotland Community Centre**

When I came to the UK from Albania, my English language skills were very poor. In Albania, I graduated from university with a degree in Psychology because I was always passionate about this subject. I had to leave everything, and I moved to England with my family. I've always wanted to continue studying and exploring my knowledge in Psychology but first I had to improve my English. I had to start from the beginning, so I've attended ESOL classes. I was anxious and a little confused at the start, but I knew that I had to learn English for my own development and future career in Psychology. Another very important reason I started the ESOL course was to overcome all everyday challenges that I had to face. Learning English gave me the confidence, the feeling of security and independence. I have noticed that my English has improved a lot since I've started this class and I look forward to continuing to learn and get better at it. I am able to deal with everyday challenges now.

**Nexhmije Leka, ESOL Entry Level 3 – Lifelong Learning**

I attended a confidence building course with The Princes Trust. For that reason, it gave me the confidence to attend my ESOL Assessment at the Oldham Civic Centre. Even though my English was not good, but I feel my assessment went well. Since starting the class I have gained a lot of confidence. My English is a lot better. Before I started my class, I needed an interpreter to help me when attending GP and other appointments. But since I started learning and attending my classes I do not need one. Overall, I have been very happy with my learning. I cannot wait to continue and progress.

**Maryam Bibi, ESOL Entry Level 2 – Lifelong Learning**

Drop ins, such as in Deepdish, and assessments out in the community, are an amazing way to work collaboratively, within our community centres and partner organisations. Also supporting the EM Coffee Mornings, are an absolutely brilliant way to connect with our community and I find them very valuable to attend with many referrals from this event. Without the service so many people in our community would be missed, the exceptional way the team work collaboratively across the community, other external partners and the council services, to make sure people can access other support shows how well regarded the service is and how it is an outstanding way of working for our community, with our community.

**Liz, Asylum Coordinator**

## GM Multiply Scheme

Activity	Link to AEB funded provision / future adult skills activity	Lead provider
<p><b>Pan Greater Manchester Multiply Skills Offer</b></p> <p>This will provide relevant and accessible Maths/numeracy skills across GM aimed at those residents within the most deprived areas. This will engage residents with short &amp; engaging courses, with a view of progressing onto relevant further learning, including Maths qualifications. This offer offers over 100x different courses, ranging from budgeting to accredited qualifications.</p>	<p>AEB funded courses are a key progression route for residents engaged. 59% of residents engaged to date have progressed to AEB funded provision.</p>	<p>The Growth Company</p>
<p><b>GM Community Grants</b></p> <p>A community grants programme which allows small VCSE organisations &amp; Housing Associations to submit bids for up to £100k to carry out projects in localities, with the purpose of mobilising disadvantaged or excluded unemployed and inactive people to enable their progress towards further education</p>	<p>Co-funded by AEB, this commission tests new approaches on engaging with residents and progressing them into relevant skills provision.</p>	<p>Workers' Educational Association</p>
<p><b>Enhanced Level 2</b></p> <p>This will offer additional support and help for Greater Manchester residents enrolled on Level 2 Maths via AEB, but might not achieve their qualification. This might be because they withdraw from the course or fail the exam.</p> <p>This support was ring-fenced to current Greater Manchester AEB providers delivering <b>Level 2 Maths qualifications</b>.</p>	<p>Directly supporting and adding value to AEB funded Level 2 Maths qualifications</p>	<p>Multiple, adding value to current AEB funded provision</p>



Activity	Link to AEB funded provision / future adult skills activity	Lead provider
<p><b>Multiply for Care Leavers</b></p> <p>A tailored offer to support care experienced adults across Greater Manchester around maths &amp; numeracy. Delivered in 2 parts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Outreach &amp; engagement led by the LA</li> <li>2. Multiply Skills Offer</li> </ol>	<p>Testing new approaches to engaging with residents from particular groups and proof of concept for 1-1 delivery</p>	<p>10x Local Authorities</p>
<p><b>Multiply for Offenders</b></p> <p>Multiply will provide additional specific maths/numeracy courses to residents referred to the GM Integrated Rehabilitation Service – Employment, Training and Education (ETE) offer with a view of increasing confidence with numbers, providing real life skills that incorporate maths and numeracy and increase the resident’s chances of progressing onto further skills provision that is relevant to them.</p>	<p>Testing new approaches to engaging with residents from particular groups and proof of concept for 1-1 delivery</p>	<p>Achieve North West</p>

## Enhanced Level 2 case study:

**GREATER  
MANCHESTER**  
DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY FOR OUR WORKFORCE

“

My worry about maths was gradually eased by the course tutor and the one-to-one lessons I accessed. I enjoyed coming to my classes as the teacher was also very patient, kind and helpful.

Support was put in place so I felt able to speak up when I did not understand, which isn't something I could do in school.”



Funded by  
UK Government



Levi, 60, struggled with memory difficulties in school, which led to a negative learning experience and a phobia of maths.

To improve his knowledge, he accessed the Manchester Adult Education Service, which supports residents to learn new skills and give them the confidence to complete various qualifications.

As well as being shown how to create a maths 'memory book' to help with revision, Levi felt supported enough to speak up when he did not understand.

Recently, Manchester Adult Education Service and other training providers helping residents

with maths confidence received funding from the city-region's Multiply programme to offer additional resources such as extra tuition time, individual support sessions, alternative exam venues and bespoke help for exam anxiety and stress.

## Pan Greater Manchester Multiply Skills Offer case study:



**Making learning more accessible with tailored bi-lingual workshops** - Residents are benefiting from tailored maths courses to help them learn new skills and overcome language barriers. Around 60% of learners enrolled onto Greater Manchester's Multiply programme since its launch identify as being from racially minoritised communities. Learners say they feel more confident as a result and are more likely to complete their course. More than half of learners enrolled onto this strand identified as being from racially minoritised communities. One course tutor recognised the critical need for language

inclusivity. She started to offer bi-lingual classes in her area to ensure residents speaking English as a second language could fully benefit from the course. Since November 2023, First Choice Homes Oldham has supported residents with budgeting and numeracy confidence as part of a trial delivering the course content in Urdu and Punjabi. They said:

- “In the past few months of running the courses, we have achieved a 100% attendance rate. Delivering the course in learners' native language alongside English allows them to fully benefit while also providing them with a comfortable space to practise their English skills.”
- “The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with participants eager for the next course and enquiring about further learning opportunities.”
- “The concept of ‘maths skills’ can be daunting for many individuals, but the ‘Making Better Choices & Budgeting’ course is designed to help learners become more confident using numbers effectively in daily life, whether at home or work.”

The introduction of the Multiply course in Urdu and Punjabi is a great example of the programme's flexibility around residents' circumstances and demonstrates GMCA's commitment to ensuring everybody has access to learning opportunities.

**Learner Majida Shaheen, 42, from Oldham**

*"I've learned budgeting skills that allow me to better manage my household finances and help my kids with their homework. Connecting with other women in my community through this course has also been very beneficial."*

**Nazia Azeem, aged 48, from Oldham**

*"The accessibility of Multiply in Urdu and Punjabi has not only simplified learning but also made it enjoyable. I've already recommended it to my cousins and friends who started today, and I want to encourage more women in our community to participate."*

**Mehwish Rani, aged 33, from Oldham**, also experienced boosted confidence as a result of the of the course.

*"The course in my native language has significantly boosted my understanding and confidence. It's encouraged me to practice my English and equipped me with essential skills like using a calculator, understanding percentages, and making better choices while shopping."*

## Employ GM

EmployGM is a platform that helps people find jobs, search for courses, and find localised support across the ten boroughs of GM. Below are the 2023/24 engagement figures:

EMPLOYGM 2023/24												
Analytics	Launch to date	July	June	May	April	March	February	January	December	November	October	September (pre-launch)
		2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2023	2023	2023	2023
<b>Total Users</b>	14619	2,725	1638	1577	1584	2042	3460	603	399	645	501	151
<b>New Users</b>	14272	2,578	1514	1457	1460	1911	3367	547	356	588	494	145
<b>Page Views</b>	49647	6,164	5765	3687	12,733	5320	8351	2019	1276	2517	1815	276
<b>Sessions</b>	19706	3,372	1864	2009	1640	2719	4583	903	609	978	712	175
<b>Bounce rate</b>	43.48%	47.36%	47.91%	45.74%	45.06%	43.55%	39.41%	45.40%	43.84%	41.10%	38.06%	49.14%
<b>Avg. Session Duration</b>	02:22	01:49	01:34	01:48	02:08	02:42	02:24	03:26	03:55	03:49	3:58	3:02
<b>Engagement rate</b>	56.52%	52.64%	52.09%	54.26%	54.94%	56.45%	60.59%	54.60%	56.16%	58.90%	61.94%	50.86%

## Appendix C: Analysis of delivery in Greater Manchester and Local Impact

Funding Model	2023/24 Learner Participation	2023/24 vs 2022/23	2022/23 vs 2021/22	2021/22 vs 2020/21	2021/22 vs 2019/20	2023/24 Number of Enrolments (% of total)	2023/24 vs 2022/23	2022/23 vs 2021/22	2021/22 vs 2020/21	2021/22 vs 2019/20
Adult Skills	42,238	-4.96%	-4.18%	5.80%	11.70%	92,434 (71.3%)	-2.62%	-3.57%	6.90%	11.50%
Community Learning	21,385	10.43%	6.65%	33%	10.40%	37,227 (28.7%)	15.16%	11.75%	30.20%	11.90%
Total				-	-	129,661	1.89%	-0.09%	11.40%	11.60%

Note: learner totals left blank above due to double counting when splitting by fund model (leading to over-inflated totals). For example, if a learner did at least one Adult Skills course and at least one Community Learning course they are counted in both categories. The total number of learners in 2023/24 was 54,702.

### Completion Status

Funding Model	2023-24 Total Enrolments	2022-23 Completed Learning Activities (% of total, %-point change vs 2022/23)	2023-24 Withdrawal/Break in Learning or Transfer to New Aim (% of total, %-point change vs 2022/23)	2023/24 Study Continuing (% of total, %-point change vs 2022/23)
Adult Skills	92,434	77,964 (84.34%, -3.03%)	12,051 (13.04%, -1.29%)	2,419 (2.62%, +4.27%)
Community Learning	37,227	35,305 (94.83%, +15.20%)	1,920 (5.16%, +15.38%)	2 (0.01%, -87.50%)
All Learning	129,661	113,269 (87.36%, +2.00%)	13,971 (10.77%, +0.71%)	2,421 (1.87%, +3.64%)

## Outcome

Funding Model	2023-24 Total Enrolments	2023-24 Achieved (% of total, %-point change vs 2022/23)	2023-24 Partial Achievement (% of total, %-point change vs 2022/23)	2023-24 No Achievement (% of total, %-point change vs 2022/23)	2023-24 Not known but complete (% of total, %-point change vs 2022/23)	2023-24 Study Continuing (% of total, %-point change vs 2022/23)
Adult Skills	92,434	74,600 (80.71%, -2.39%)	71 (0.07%, +91.89%)	15,277 (16.53%, -4.88%)	67 (0.07%, -15.19%)	2,419 (2.62%, +4.27%)
Community Learning	37,227	34,496 (92.66%, +15.59%)	0 (0.00%, 0.00%)	2,729 (7.33%, +10.62%)	0 (0.00%, 0.00%)	2 (0.01%, -87.50%)
All Enrolments	129,661	109,096 (84.15%, +2.66%)	71 (0.05%, +91.89%)	18,006 (13.88%, -2.81%)	67 (0.05%, -15.19%)	2,421 (1.87%, +3.64%)

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## Learners Exercising their Statutory Entitlement to Full Funding

Entitlement Category	2023-24 Learner Participation	2023/24 vs 2022/23	2022/23 vs 2021/22	2021/22 vs 2020/21	2023-24 Number of Enrolments	2023/24 vs 2022/23	2022/23 vs 2021/22	2021/22 vs 2020/21
Digital (Essential – i.e. Basic – Skills)	874	-17.47%	-6.53%	608%	1,068	-19.15%	7.57%	663%
Digital (all SSA 06.2 up to L1)	1,303	-44.17%	-5.51%	-28%	1,655	-40.04%	-5.77%	-47%
Digital (all SSA 06.2 up to L2)	1,823	-42.80%	-24.83%	-25%	2,209	-47.05%	-35.98%	-42%
English	6,516	-0.11%	4.96%	20.50%	7,091	0.30%	-5.20%	9.80%
Maths	8,305	-1.37%	32.74%	18.10%	8,956	-1.20%	24.93%	7.90%
Level 2 (19-23s)*	307	-28.10%	-20.93%	-10.40%	345	-22.99%	-22.49%	-11.80%
Level 2 (all ages)*	1,022	-27.21%	-27.78%	1.30%	1,094	-25.43%	-28.58%	1.70%
Level 3 (19-23s)*	710	-17.25%	-16.21%	-5.20%	790	-14.78%	-15.96%	-3.30%

### Notes:

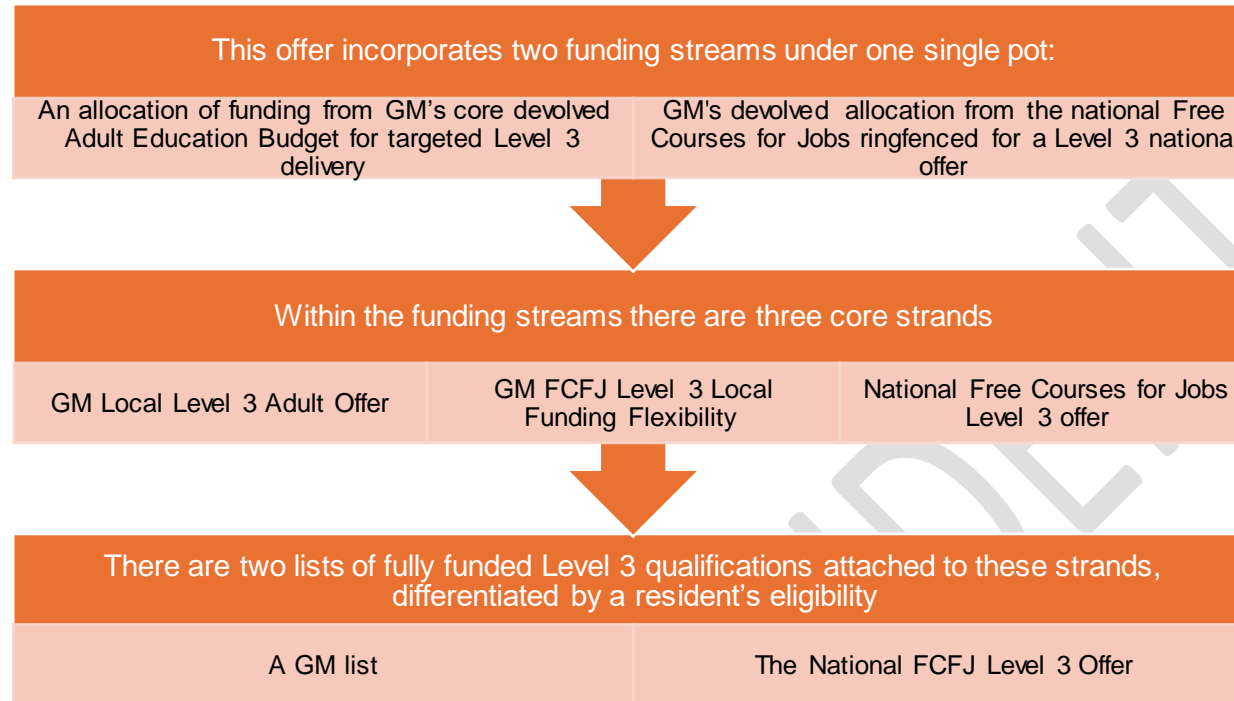
In 2023/24 national entitlements enrolments (highlighted yellow above) came to 17,460 (18.8% of all adult skills enrolments).

The entitlements highlighted blue indicate ones extended by our local flexibilities.

The data was sourced using the Occupancy Report (rather than the ILR).



## Level 3 Activity 2023/24 – GM Local L3 List and FCFJ



L3 Category	Learner Participation	Number of Enrolments
GM Local L3 List	659	697
FCFJ (Local Flex) Ages 24+	1847	2193
FCFJ (National) Ages 24+	2376	2580
FCFJ (National) Ages 19-23 <i>Funded via AEB Core</i>	305	336

## Local Authority Grant Programme

<b>Alleviating Barriers</b>					
Residents engaged and supported through the programme		Residents progressed onto training or skills provision	Residents signposted to other support services	Residents undertaking voluntary activity or work experience	
5346		1757	6495	810	
<b>Digital Inclusion</b>					
Residents engaged and supported through the programme	Residents given access to digital devices or given support with internet connection	Volunteers or staff trained to support residents	Residents supported to use digital devices	Residents who progress to digital training after the programme	
8945	5675	227	1602	711	
<b>ESOL</b>					
Number of residents engaged and supported through the programme	Number of residents who have completed ESOL assessments	Number of residents who have joined an ESOL course	Number of residents who have joined training /courses other than ESOL	Number of residents who have been supported in other ways	
12122	10447	6460	809	2768	

Other information relating to GMCAs ASF can be found via this webpage - [Adult Skills Fund - Greater Manchester Combined Authority \(greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk\)](https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/adult-skills-fund)

Decisions relating to 2023/2024 allocations and plans are taken to the GMCA meetings - [GMCA Part A Report Template \(greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk\)](https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/gmca-part-a-report-template)

## Economic Inactivity

In GM, an average of 14% of residents are classed as economically inactive, with 97,000 of these, 3.5% of total residents, actively seeking employment. In GM there are a multitude of reasons that a resident is classed as economically inactive, including but not limited to caring responsibilities, long term sick, retirement, and students.

Work has begun to align skills, employment and health across GM adult provision through the integrated settlement, with work aligning specifically on the Economic Inactivity Trailblazer, a joint piece of work between GMCA Working Well and Adult Skills. In GM we want to use the Trailblazer to add to the building blocks of the Live Well ambition of bringing together support and services around people's needs through holistic offers and centres. The key objective for Adult Skills and Inclusive Employment is to maximise the reach, effectiveness and impact of the range of existing services that could support people who are economically inactive to participate in the labour market, by transforming how partners and services work together locally.

In aligning these services, the 97,000 residents of GM that are currently economically inactive and seeking employment will receive a more targeted offer that allows them to address multiple potential barriers to employment, across education, work, skills and health.

GM has been asked to lead on this partnership to develop and deliver an Economic Inactivity Trailblazer with stakeholders both internal and external. Each trailblazer will receive up to £10m funding to deliver the approach in 2025/26.

# Evaluation of Adult Skills Provision in Greater Manchester

## Executive Summary

Learning & Work Institute, Institute for Employment  
Studies, BMG Research

December 2024

In partnership with:



Funded by:



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## Executive summary

This executive summary provides an overview of the key findings, conclusions, and recommendations from a retrospective impact evaluation of both the Adult Education Budget (AEB) and Skills Bootcamps programmes in Greater Manchester (GM), two key, individual components of the adult skills landscape and offer.

### Messages for the Adult Skills system in Greater Manchester

AEB and Skills Bootcamps delivery to date reflects two different programmes and approaches to adult skills, with their own distinct aims and objectives. The evaluation also considered both programmes in the context of the overall adult skills system and the integrated settlement, which will support streamlining and joining-up of the system to better meet the needs of learners, employers, providers and wider skills stakeholders in GM.

### Defining the system

- Both evaluations found that there was at times a lack of clarity about the interface between different elements of Adult Skills provision, and how different funding streams fit into the wider GMCA funding model, creating the potential for some inefficiencies and inconsistencies in the system overall.
- Existing provision is targeting residents' needs for skills at Level 2 and below (with high demand for some provision). There is a clear place for this provision in supporting engagement and access to learning, which in turn can support progression pathways to Level 3 and above.
- The overall trajectory of AEB-funded Adult Skills enrolments in GM area remains flat, while employer investment in skills, which in the UK has fallen by 26% since 2005 and lags behind international comparators,<sup>1</sup> is often focused at higher level skills needs. Engaging more residents in learning is likely to require greater investment in skills, whether from central government, via the integrated settlement, or through employer and individuals' investment in skills<sup>2</sup>.
- It is recommended that:
  - GMCA sets out clear priorities and objectives for adult skills delivery, the funding streams which underpin this activity, and how these link to and support wider Mayoral priorities (including health and wellbeing, and progression into work, housing and clean energy priorities).
  - GMCA considers where there is any potential duplication or gaps in the system, allowing them to further communicate to providers about the types of courses they might consider, more clearly define what the holistic adult skills offer is for GM

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<sup>1</sup> L&W (2021) Learning at Work: Employer Investment in Skills

<sup>2</sup> Individuals invest more than the government and employers in skills, although there are stark inequalities in who is able to invest in their own learning, in terms of both money and time. See L&W (2023) *Time to Learn: Increasing Participation in Learning*. <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/time-to-learn/>

residents from pre-entry to Level 4, highlight any key priority areas, and how this interacts with the rest of the education and skills landscape and local policy priorities.

### **Provider engagement and partnerships**

- Provider understanding and behaviour is a key influencer of how the skills system is delivered in GM. It is recommended that:
  - GMCA work closely with providers to further evidence the decision-making processes that go into determining which courses are offered and to who. This will inform future decisions about funding priorities, and any lobbying work to national government.
  - Providers, employers, and partners are brought together so they may share their experiences of course design and delivery and share effective practice when collaborating.
  - GMCA may consider taking the lead in bringing together MCAs to discuss and compare their experiences of delivering adult skills since 2019/20, and establish ways to produce regular data sharing and benchmarking approaches and opportunities.

### **Delivering the vision**

- When navigating wider challenges when delivering against the GMs strategy, the following recommendations could be considered:
  - Supporting workforce development to ensure high quality staff e.g. by working to identify opportunities for industry and academic placements.
  - Using the multi-year integrated settlement to encourage longer-term delivery contracts and funding models for providers.
  - Working with providers to consider where there may be inconsistencies in learner support available, and identify where elements of wraparound support should be more standardised to allow a more consistent offer.
  - Developing an annual approach to programme evaluation to ensure emerging challenges can be addressed, and changes can be made accordingly.

### **Findings and recommendations from the AEB evaluation**

The AEB evaluation found that satisfaction with the devolved provision from GMCA was high among providers and learners.

Since 2019/20 AEB-funded provision in GM has grown, and while the Covid-19 pandemic led to some temporary reduction in learner numbers, these have grown subsequently, with providers noting that they feel a return to pre-pandemic 'business as usual'. GM has been particularly successful at encouraging learners to return to Community Learning, which is typically offered face-to-face.

Providers were engaging with most elements of the policy and had found the process of devolution straightforward, as a result of GMCA's commitment to ensuring a smooth

transition process. They welcomed the increased flexibilities and the approach the GMCA team took to engaging with them and discussing the opportunities made available through these changes. Providers found this helped their relationships with employers, as this allows them to work with them more flexibly to design and deliver courses that meet their recruitment needs, and the needs of their existing staff.

GM's local expansion of eligibility for courses at all levels, and the work providers do to reach different groups has had a positive impact on helping to reduce inequality in GM and engaging residents to equip them with the skills they need for employment. This can be seen through growth in the number of learners from a range of demographics and disadvantaged groups, with learner representation exceeding local characteristics in several key groups including above average engagement from ethnic minorities and people with disabilities and health conditions who were not in employment when they started their course.

Learners were typically highly positive about their courses and learning experience, and a large proportion had been motivated to commence their course for employability reasons, as well as health and wellbeing reasons. There was a high level of achievement among learners on AEB-funded courses (with low levels of drop-out), and learners report a range of outcomes both in terms of skills development, employment, and health and wellbeing.

### **Areas for development and recommendations**

While satisfaction with the devolved-AEB, and GMCA's approach to delivery was high, there were a few areas where additional refinement was identified as being potentially beneficial to future delivery.

#### **Skills strategy**

Some providers perceived a tension in between delivery at Level 2 and below, and priorities for Level 3 skills. This reflects challenges inherent in providers' own decision-making about the curriculum offer and the most effective use of their funding allocation locally, but also, in some cases, misconceptions about GMCA's approach to funding learning at Level 3 and the National Skills Fund for Level 3 (now Free Courses for Jobs).

- Providers may benefit from further assurance that their offer is in alignment with wider GM strategy. GMCA should consider how its skills and inclusive employment strategy and the adult skills offer to GM residents can most effectively be articulated and then communicated

Overall funding levels for AEB were raised as a key challenge for providers, both in making allocation decisions for their course offers, enabling in-year course growth, and ensuring high quality provision in the face of cost increases.

- Through the new integrated settlement, GMCA may identify opportunities for further investment, or opportunities to advocate to central government.
- GMCA could work with providers to explore how to tackle underspend in the current budget, areas of duplication between AEB funding and other sources, and how the AEB budget may be used more efficiently by providers.



- In the context of the integrated settlement, GMCA may also want to consider how responsibility for investment in different types of adult skills and training programmes is balanced between public funding and employer investment.

A key area where learners felt more improvement could be made was around awareness of what provision is available and the availability of fully-funded courses to help support more residents into learning.

- GMCA could consider enhancing its work with providers to support communication of the GM adult education, skills and training offer, to enhance provider's own marketing and recruitment strategies
- GMCA could consider a programme of adult learning awards, which can be used to highlight the impact of learning and recognise and promote learner, provider and employer excellence in adult skills programmes.

### Outcomes

Providers and learners both highlighted the important of non-qualification outcomes. However, currently robust evidence and data on wider outcomes and impact of learning are not available to support policy development in GM.

- GMCA could working with providers to develop more systematic approaches to capturing the wider outcomes of learning, such as enhanced employment outcomes data (including quality of work measures) and a range of social outcomes, including health and wellbeing and social integration.

### Delivery

The funding picture is complex, and a key aim for GM and GMCA is that adult skills funding becomes less ringfenced, with one funding stream, and clear targets, measures and outputs. To further enhance providers' understanding of the GM AEB offer, GMCA should consider:

- Enhancing existing communications of funding rules and flexibilities, so that provider understanding is more consistent. This might include funding summaries, eligibility flowcharts, simplified information in different languages, and Q&A channels and/or webinars to complement the formal funding documents. These activities should also engage curriculum teams.

Learners and providers both highlighted the importance of high-quality staff in their success and experience on their course. However, providers also noted that increasingly staff recruitment was a challenge for them.

- GMCA should work with providers to identify existing workforce development approaches, recruitment pipelines, and areas of good practice.
- GMCA might consider conducting an audit of workforce capacity and development needs to support future delivery in priority areas. They might also consider working with the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) to enhance the national workforce professional development offer for GMCA.

Providers perceived a lack of opportunities for information sharing relating to the AEB, while stakeholders also noted that existing provider network meetings were more focused on providers promoting new delivery.

- GMCA could consider offering AEB contractor meetings offering more clearly defined provider discussion or working groups focused on specific policy issues and challenges. It may be effective to ensure further engagement at operational levels to further understand how the flexibilities may be used.

Providers identified that the levels of engagement and help offered by GMCA contract managers were very helpful, and that relationships were stronger than under ESFA arrangements; however, some those with lower value contracts viewed contract management arrangements as disproportionately burdensome.

- GMCA might consider exploring the potential of a more differentiated provider management model based on levels of risk.

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## **Findings and recommendations from the Skills Bootcamps evaluation**

Key findings for the Skills Bootcamps evaluation centred on the strategic aims of Skills Bootcamps, engagement with Skills Bootcamps, guaranteed interviews and Covid-19 effects. In general, there was an overall perception that GMCA are aware of the needs of the local area and that the support provided by GMCA to organisations during contracting was useful in enabling successful participation in Skills Bootcamps.

The strategic value of Skills Bootcamps in GM was viewed as supporting the training needs of local small employers as well as making a valuable contribution to growth strategies in the area. Providers particularly noted that the strategic value of the Skills Bootcamps has been contributing to the levelling up agenda. Skills Bootcamps have provided opportunities for the establishment and strengthening of provider–employer relationships in GM. Contact with employers was one of the central motivating factors for Skills Bootcamp enrolment for learners.

Even though overall satisfaction with Skills Bootcamps in GM was high, bootcamps offering formal accreditation and guaranteed interviews were associated with the highest satisfaction levels. The details of what qualified as a guaranteed interview, however, were not always clear to the learner.

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, most employer and provider respondents in the GM surveys indicated that the Skills Bootcamps were effective in getting people back into work. Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on Skills Bootcamps included who was targeted as learners to take part, the format of delivery (i.e. more online delivery) and availability of job opportunities.

### **Areas for development and recommendations**

A key differentiator with the AEB provision and the Skills Bootcamps is the degree to which, until now, national priorities and guidance steer delivery. While there has been some limited flexibility for GMCA to tailor Bootcamp provision, decision-making has not been under its control. This may be changing as national funding for bootcamps is under review, and the alignment with a reformed growth and skills levy is a consideration.

Since November 2024, procurement of bootcamps now sits fully with local areas, specifically mayoral combined authorities, local authorities or local enterprise partnerships. This indicates an opportunity to ensure the best possible match between local economies and skill demands, and the Bootcamps offer. The broad concepts of Bootcamps remain the same, in terms of employer engagement, collaboration on curriculum design to meet local skills demands and provision of guaranteed interviews but local areas can now work to optimise demand and outcomes relevant to local need.

Given this changing procurement context, the current evaluation indicates some areas for consideration by GMCA and its partners.

### **Strategy**

There is a high degree of support from partners and providers for the strategic value of Skills Bootcamps and the contribution to levelling up. With GMCA now having more control of the local skills system through the new integrated settlement, it can ensure that the role

of Bootcamps is clarified relative to other parts of the offer, such as AEB, and apprenticeships. This will ensure bootcamps are taken up by learners who can most benefit.

- Articulate the fit of the bootcamps within the system for learners – short term training options to top-up skills level ready for entry performance and to meet employer needs.

The increased role for GMCA in the system and in Bootcamps means it can ensure local employers' needs are fully reflected. Through leveraging local knowledge and insight on skills gaps and demands, GM can shape guidance for new procurement that meets needs as well as build knowledge and engagement with Bootcamps. Longer delivery contracts may support better relationship building to increase impact.

- Drive high-quality engagement by providers with employers to secure training that meets local needs, building expectations for what this looks like in GM to ensure that local bootcamps have the quality GM expects.

The coordinating role of GMCA was an area of significant value add for local stakeholders taking part in the research. Continuing with these existing forums, providing the join-up for providers working within the GMCA will drive best practice.

- Continue local forums and use these to drive a focus on quality, including quality in the provision of the guaranteed interview, tailoring to local needs and building the connectedness of bootcamps within the local system.

### Delivery

A key issue for bootcamps (not simply in GM) is the limited knowledge of what they are, who they are for and what difference they make. As Bootcamps become part of a local system of provision, there is opportunity to increase knowledge for learners through improved employment and careers support, and signposting between provision in different parts of the system.

- Increase community understanding of Bootcamps to build demand from those who can most benefit.

To ensure Bootcamps are supportive of individual needs and circumstances, some useful flexibilities have been embedded by providers. GMCA can help spread this good practice to ensure local residents have the best opportunities.

- Consider best practice delivery mechanisms in provider forums to ensure residents' needs are met
- This should also emphasise best practice in meeting employer needs for Bootcamps to provide the expected outcomes

Learners are attracted to Skills Bootcamps for the potential career opportunities they offer. However, career progression as captured by the KPI target is lower than expected. Aiming to drive provider performance on this measure will add value.

- Encourage providers to embed tailored employability support through matching new skills acquired to occupations to ensure learners are equipped to maximise new skills to meet their own goals for career development.

### Outcomes

Increasing scrutiny on the guaranteed interview component of bootcamps will increase quality and learner satisfaction, ensuring the match between learners' expectations and what is delivered. The interview is a key attractor for learners to join courses, but some providers may not be clear on what constitutes the interview and practice can vary.

- With local determination, GMCA can specify expectations and agree any sectoral flexibilities that are pertinent with providers to drive performance.

The current data available for evaluation could be improved – in common with findings from national evaluation.

- The report suggests a number of ways the data tool could be developed further. It also recommends a GMCA learner survey to capture feedback and more insight into outcomes, which can help GMCA attune the local system over time to best meet the needs of residents.

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