



Improving Lives and Communities through Learning

WEA Adult Education Impact Report 2016

WEA Research Unit
November 2016
www.wea.org.uk



**Workers'
Educational
Association**

“

The last year of my life has been very challenging. Learning with the WEA has given me an opportunity to develop a creative skill, which has had a very positive effect on my mental health. Painting is a mindful activity, which provides peace from the constant chatter and worries of the mind. Attending classes has offered me a social outlet which is friendly and a learning environment which is supportive and which offers opportunities for personal as well as artistic development. It would not be exaggerating to say that the WEA has helped me to avoid a slide back into depression at a time when other pressures in my life were significant

”

Preface

This report presents the findings of the research with over 2,000 adult students who responded to questions on the wider impact of their learning with the Workers' Educational Association. The findings share how adult learning impacts so many areas of an individual's life. From building their skills to find work, improving their health and wellbeing to sparking their enthusiasm to be active and responsible citizens of today's world. It also demonstrates how impact extends beyond the individuals, and impacts families, communities and our society as whole.



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The WEA would like to thank all students who participated in the online survey and offered their valuable feedback on their learning experiences with the WEA.

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Publication Date: November 2016

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Introduction

The Workers' Educational Association (WEA) is the UK's largest voluntary sector provider of adult education, which is committed to widening participation and education with a social purpose. It is a community learning provider that works in over 2,500 community based venues and in local networks with partners, providers and services, supporting students to take their next steps. The WEA also has over 3,600 volunteers working in a range of roles. The organisation engages with a diverse range of adults in terms of age, ethnicity, disability and previous educational experience, with nearly half of students returning to education after more than three years. During 2015-16, the WEA recruited 67,895 students on over 9,500 courses in England. In line with the organisation's mission, our courses targeted 40 percent of students living in a disadvantaged post code, 38 percent of students on income related benefits and 45 percent with no or very low level previous qualifications¹.

Community learning

Following an active WEA campaign in 2015, The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills announced that it was making "£1.5 billion available to support adult further education outside the costs of apprenticeship training". This figure forms part of the new adult education budget (AEB). The AEB is a single funding, which includes the Adult skills budget, Community Learning, and Discretionary Learner Support)². Providers are required to demonstrate their contribution and impact in relation to improving productivity, enabling progression on to further learning and employment and creating opportunities for the most disadvantaged people in our society. This annual impact study is a key part of how the WEA demonstrates the impact of its learning in communities.

The Government recognises that informal adult learning contributes to other Government policies by improving people's (especially older people's) health and wellbeing, ability to access digital technologies, cultural development and active citizenship, all of which can potentially decrease burden on public finances (BIS, 2011). This aligns with the WEA's mission to develop educational opportunities for the most disadvantaged in society and to:

- raise educational aspirations;
- ensure opportunities exist for adults to return to learning;
- bring great teaching and education to local communities;
- involve students and WEA supporters as active members to build an educational movement for social purpose;
- and inspire students, teachers and members to become active citizens.

¹ Level 2 or below qualifications.

² Nick Boles MP (2015) Department for Business Innovation and Skills letter to Peter Lauener (CEO of SFA).

Methodology

This research examined the impact of mostly short (between 15 – 30 hours) WEA courses that were predominately completed in the autumn term of 2015. The sample included students who completed courses (single and multiple) in various subject areas within community learning.

The data was gathered using a quantitative online survey sent out to all WEA students with email addresses. The survey received 2,122 complete responses in spring 2016 (about four months after most of the courses finished). The data was weighted to account for unequal probabilities of selection into the sample and non-response. Thus the sample was representative of the entire WEA student population within a margin of error of two percent. Impact on different student groups was analysed by taking key demographic and course characteristics³ into account and were reported where statistically significant. Students' comments from the survey were also analysed to understand the impact from a qualitative angle. This report provides a summary of the key findings.

³ For example, ethnicity, age, gender, claiming of means-tested benefits, qualifications, disabilities and course theme were accounted for with logistic or multinomial regressions.

Student Stories

Beverley improved her Maths and literacy skills and gained confidence to advocate for other people with learning disabilities

Beverley has a learning disability and was lacking functional skills. Her father and then her stepdad both died at a young age, leaving her alone after her mom's passing a few years ago. Beverley worked hard to pass her Entry level 3 Maths test with the WEA and afterwards enrolled on an 'Everyday Literacy (Functional Skills)' course. This gave her great confidence in her own skills to speak in public, which enabled Beverley to give a presentation to senior NHS executives, tackling the issue of care and support in hospitals for patients with learning disabilities. Beverley was able to point out that some of the literature was completely ineffective as some of those with learning disabilities cannot read. She gave suggestions to rectify this, which are now being acted on. She also developed her IT skills from within the centre her WEA class was based. Beverley's positive attitude and determination inspired her peers to reach high too.



Despite having studied English at school in Ukraine and achieving three healthcare-related NVQ Level 3 qualifications since arriving in the UK, Mariia was not satisfied with her writing and speaking in English. She enrolled on a 'Functional Skills in English and Maths' course with the WEA, which she needed to get back into a caring profession within the NHS. Mariia thought that teaching English and Maths skills as they were used in everyday life was very useful. "I soon realized that I was learning new words and phrases all of the time I was attending the Maths class", she says. After receiving her qualification, Mariia is back on looking for NHS jobs and also believes that they would be of use to her career aspirations regarding nursing.

Mariia went on to better her English language that improved her employment prospects and career aspirations

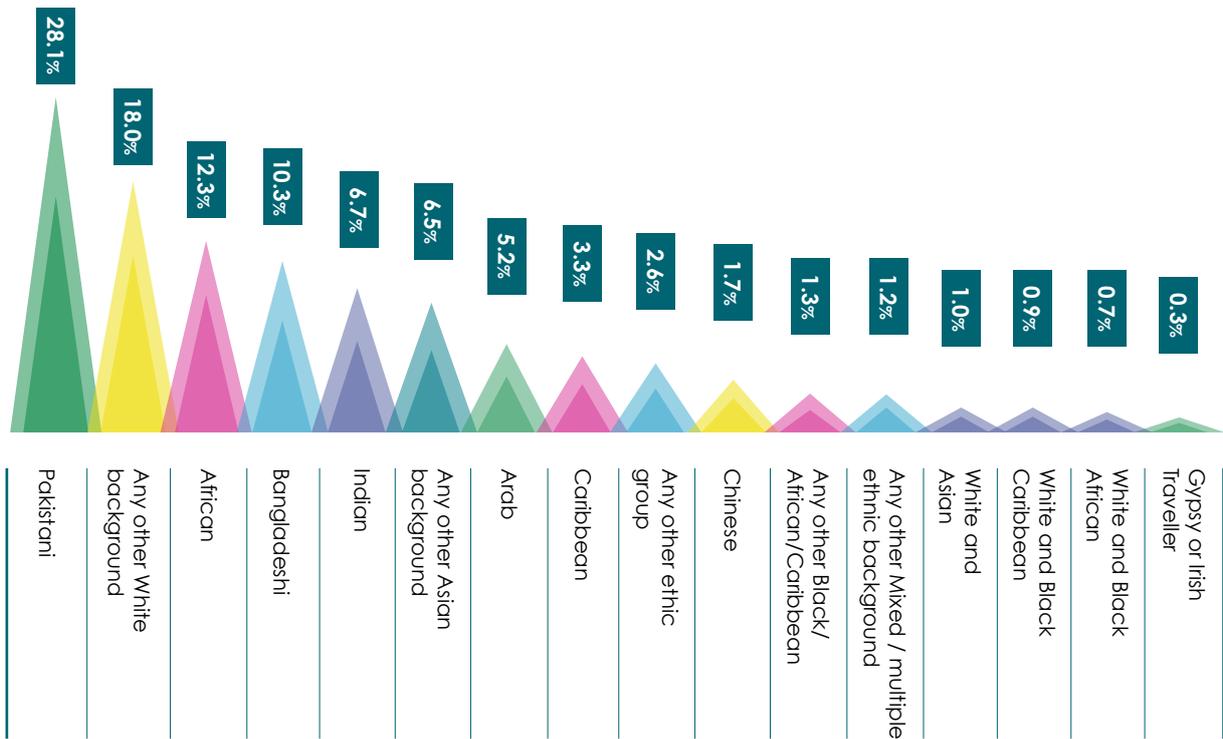
Key Findings

The following sections present the key findings from the WEA Impact research, opening with a profile of the students that attend WEA courses⁴, and then followed by how the courses impacted the various areas of students' lives. In addition to the wider impact to their lives, most WEA students (94 percent) reported being very satisfied or satisfied with their WEA courses and most (94%) of the students felt safe on their course⁵.

Profile of WEA students

A significant majority of WEA students are women (74 percent) and identify as White British⁶ (73 percent). Twenty-seven percent of students identify as Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic or Refugee (BAMER) and 21 percent are non-native English language speakers (ESOL) and they make up 77 percent of all BAMER students. As Figure 1 shows, BAMER students come from diverse backgrounds, though most frequently they are Pakistani (28 percent), non-UK White (18 percent), African (12 percent) and Bangladeshi (10 percent).

Figure 1. Ethnic breakdown of BAMER students.



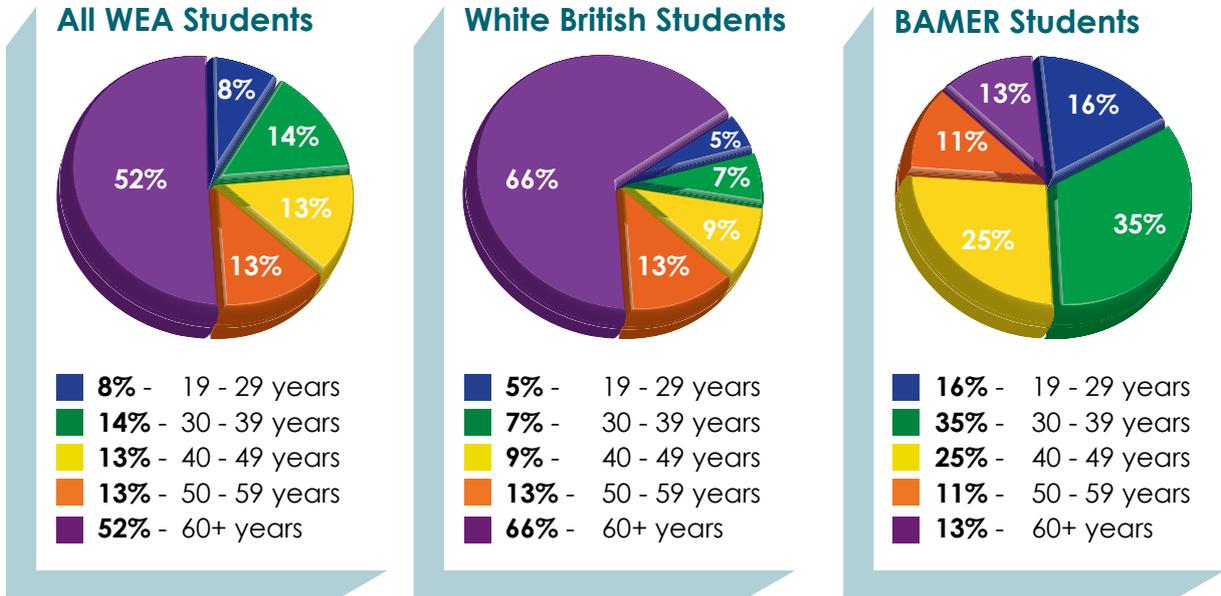
⁴ 68 percent very satisfied, 26 percent satisfied, 3 percent neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 1 percent dissatisfied and 2 percent very dissatisfied.

⁵ 5 percent felt neither safe nor unsafe and 1 percent unsafe.

⁶ Consists of White British, Scottish, English, Welsh, Northern Irish and White Irish.

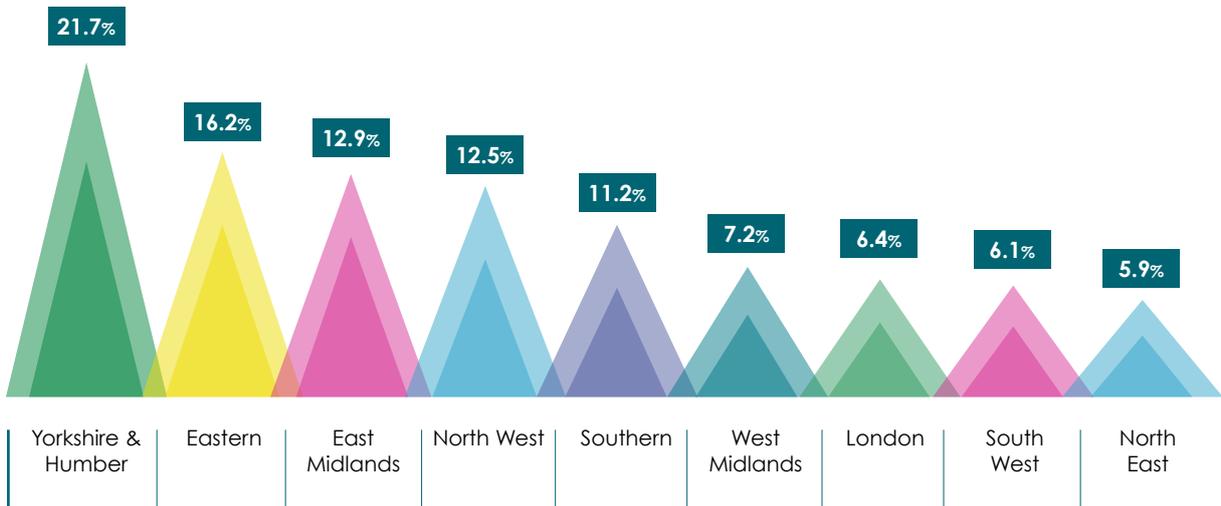
Over half (52 percent) of the students are aged 60 and over, however, BAMER students are much younger than their White British course mates, as Figure 2 demonstrates.

Figure 2. Breakdown of WEA students by age and ethnicity.



WEA is a national organisation, with students coming from both England and Scotland, however this study was based on students from English regions only.

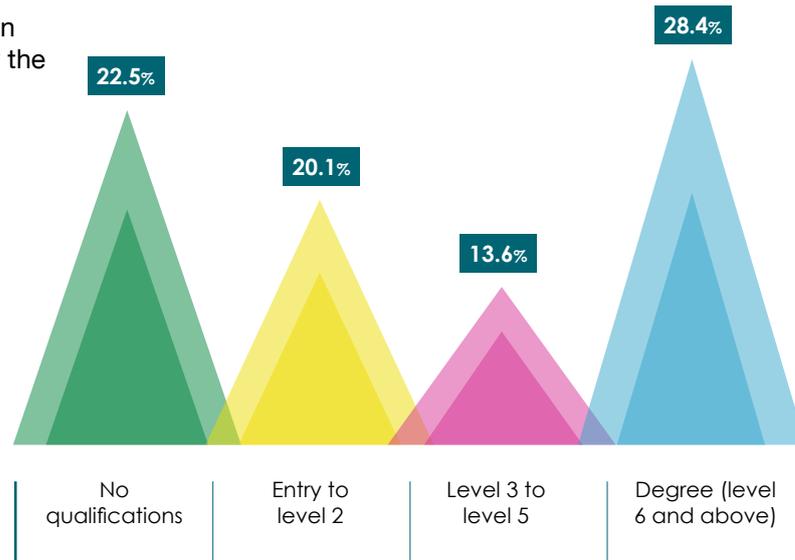
Figure 3. Regional breakdown of WEA students



Almost a third (30 percent) of WEA students reported having a physical health condition or illness (lasting or expected to last for 12 months or more), 14 percent a learning difficulty or a disability and 12 percent a mental health condition (lasting or expected to last for 12 months or more). Plus, a quarter (25 percent) reported being carers for their ill, disabled or elderly relatives or friends.

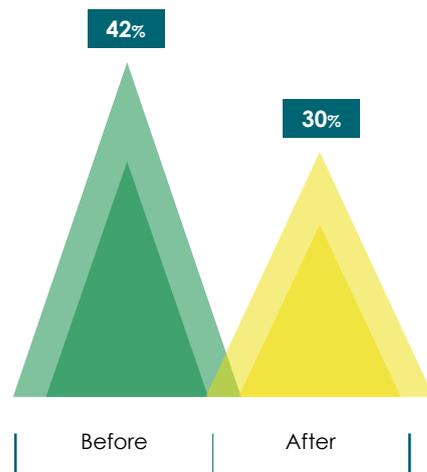
As Figure 4 shows, over a half (56 percent) of WEA students do not have a degree level education⁷. A significant proportion (23 percent) has no qualifications at all, while 20 percent only have entry to level 2 qualifications.

Figure 4. Breakdown of WEA students by the level of qualification



Before starting their WEA courses, 42 percent of students were claiming means-tested benefits and approximately four months after their courses ended (when this survey was carried out) 30 percent of students⁸ reported claiming means-tested benefits (or being an unwaged dependent on someone claiming means-tested benefits). Therefore there was a 12 percentage point decrease in benefit claiming after taking a WEA course. Over half (56 percent) of the students said it would have been difficult to get these benefits to employability without the WEA.

Figure 5. Students claiming means-tested benefits before and after WEA courses



⁷ For further 15 percent of students the qualification level is not known, in equal parts because it was not provided by students or because it could not be translated into the UK qualification framework.
⁸ Excluding 10 percent who did not want to disclose their benefit information.

Patterns of Learning

The majority (81 percent) of WEA students completed one course in the autumn term with approximately 14 percent completing two courses in the same term. About five percent of students took and completed three or more courses with a small minority of students completing between ten and fourteen courses in the autumn term. The precise breakdown is presented in the Figure 6.

Figure 6. Breakdown of the WEA students by a number of completed courses.

| Number of courses completed | Percent |
|-----------------------------|-------------|
| 1 | 81.1 |
| 2 | 13.6 |
| 3 | 3.1 |
| 4 | 1.1 |
| 5 or more courses | 1.1 |

The WEA offers courses in various subject areas. As Table 1 shows, most frequently WEA students completed courses in arts and crafts (36 percent), humanities and science (32 percent) and basic or life skills (24 percent).

Table 1. Breakdown of WEA students by the type of course completed.

| Course type | Examples of courses in the category | % of students |
|-------------------------------|--|---------------|
| Arts & crafts | Painting, woodworking, cinema studies | 36% |
| Humanities and science | Politics, literature, culture studies, introduction to physics | 32% |
| Basic skills | English, Maths, ESOL, ICT | 24% |
| Health & wellbeing | Thai Chi, confidence building, child development and health | 11% |
| Work preparation | CV writing, skills for volunteers, employability skills | 2% |
| Environmental | Gardening, forestry, environmental studies | 2% |
| Trade union learning | Courses delivered for trade unions | 1% |

There were also identifiable trends in how different students picked different types of courses. Table 2 illustrates a typical student for each course type. For example, while women and White British made up the largest proportion of WEA students, trade union courses attracted a majority of men (71 percent compared to a 26 percent average). Meanwhile, BAMER students made up a majority of basic skills students (65 percent) and a little under half of work preparation students (45 percent). Humanities and science were mostly taken by White British students over the age of 60 with higher level qualifications. On the other hand, work preparation and basic skills almost exclusively attracted younger students many of whom claimed benefits⁹ and had lower qualifications than the average WEA student.

WEA courses are within easy reach of its students who travelled an average of 2.9 miles to get to their course venues in 2015-16.

Table 2. A typical WEA student by course type.

| Typical WEA student | Woman 74% | Over 60 years of age 52% | White British 73% | Not on benefits 58% | No quals 23% | Entry to level 5 34% | Degree 28% |
|-------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| Arts & crafts | Woman (75%), over 60 years of age (55%), White British (82%), either on benefits (49%) or not (51%), same qualifications as an average student | | | | | | |
| Humanities and science | Woman (71%), over 60 years old (85%), White British (92%), not on benefits (87%) with higher qualifications (48% with a degree and 30% with Entry to level 5 qualifications) | | | | | | |
| Basic skills | Woman (74%), under the age of 60 (87%), BAMER (65%), on benefits (65%) with lower qualifications (37% with none and 42% below degree qualifications) | | | | | | |
| Health & wellbeing | Woman (82%), under the age of 60 (68%), White British (67%), on benefits (67%) with no qualifications (42%) or entry to level 5 qualifications (33%) | | | | | | |
| Work preparation | Woman (71%), under the age of 60 (92%), almost equally White British (55%) and BAMER (45%), on benefits (79%) with lower qualifications (28% no qualifications, 51% entry to level 5) | | | | | | |
| Environmental | Woman (56%), slightly younger (58% under 60), White British (90%), on benefits (63%) with lower qualifications (39% no qualifications 27% entry to level 5) | | | | | | |
| Trade union learning | Man (71%), under the age of 60 (95%), White British (82%), not on benefits (98%) with average qualifications (61% entry to level 5) | | | | | | |

⁹ Here and further on, 'on benefits' refers to students claiming means-tested benefits during WEA courses.

Students develop a variety of skills

Nearly all WEA students (94 percent) reported developing at least one skill as a result of WEA courses. These are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Proportion of students developing a skill as a result of WEA courses. Here and elsewhere dark blue areas in the table specify that there was no differential effect on a specific group of students (i.e. neither smaller nor greater impact).

94% developing at least one skill as a result of WEA courses

| | ALL | Under 60 | On benefits | BAMER | Basic skills courses | Trade Union learning | Environmental courses |
|--------------------------|------------|----------|-------------|-------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Learning | 76% | | 88% | | 88% | 93% | |
| Communication | 68% | 81% | 80% | 92% ¹⁰ | | 87% | |
| Research | 62% | | | | | 91% | |
| Critical thinking | 60% | | | | | 80% | |
| Creative | 60% | | 73% | 67% | | | 87% |
| Teamwork | 54% | | | | 77% | 89% | 74% |
| Organisational | 47% | 64% | 67% | | | 91% | 70% |
| Problem solving | 47% | 63% | 65% | | | 77% | |
| Analytical | 47% | | | | | 72% | 77% |
| Literacy | 41% | | | 71%, 77% if ESOL | 69% | | |
| Language | 38% | 53% | | 77%, 88% if ESOL | 64% | | |
| IT or digital | 22% | | 32% | | 48% | | |
| Numeracy | 20% | 33% | | 44% | 50% | | |

Most often students developed learning skills (76 percent), communication (68 percent) and research (62 percent), closely followed by critical thinking (60 percent) and creative skills (60 percent). Some student groups were more likely to develop certain skills. For example, students under the age of 60 were more likely to develop “job-related” or life skills such as communication (81 percent vs 55 percent in the older group), organisational skills (64 percent vs 31) and problem-solving (63 percent vs 32), but also language skills (53 percent vs 24) and numeracy (33 percent vs 7 percent). Meanwhile, older students developed critical thinking

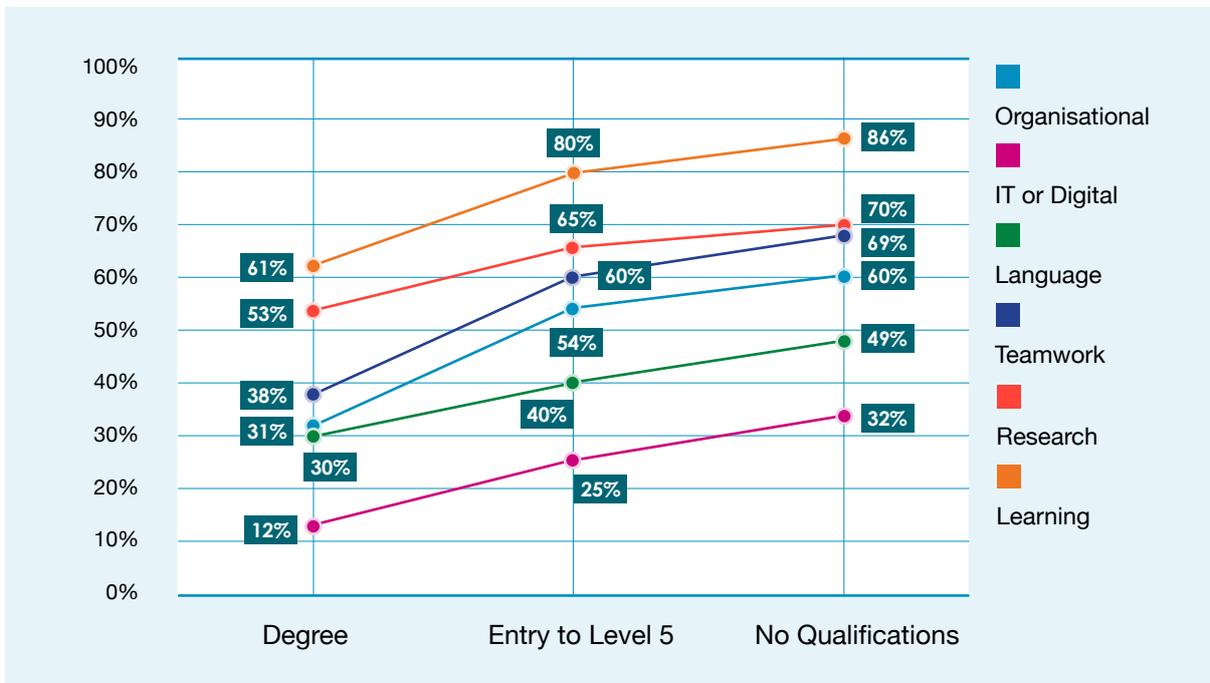
10 ESOL students only.

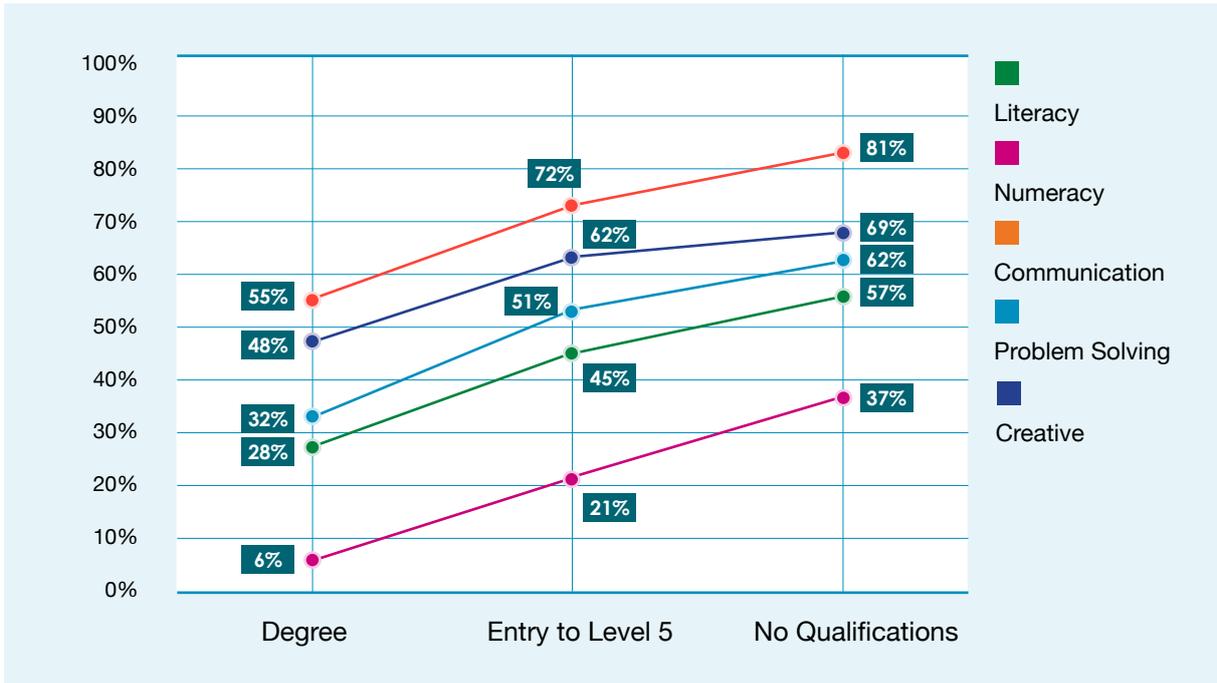
and analytical skills more so than younger students (62 percent vs 58 and 51 percent vs 43 respectively). Students claiming means-tested benefits also developed certain life skills (communication, learning, creative skills, organisation, problem solving) at about 18 to 34 percentage points higher rate than their counterparts not on benefits. Nearly a third (32 percent) of students on benefits also developed IT or digital skills compared to 14 percent of students not on benefits. Furthermore, substantially more BAMER students developed language-related skills, such as communication (92 percent among ESOL students), literacy (71 percent of BAMER, 77 percent of ESOL) and language skills (77 percent of BAMER, 88 percent of ESOL).

Furthermore, students who attended basic skills courses reported greater development of literacy and language skills (twice as likely), IT (three times as likely) and numeracy (five times as likely), as well as learning (16 percentage points higher) and teamwork (29 percentage points) than students on other courses. Similarly, students who participated in trade union learning were more likely to develop all but basic and creative skills. Students on environmental courses also reported higher development of creative, teamwork, organisational and analytical skills. Understandably, art students were more likely to develop creative skills (78 percent compared to 50 percent of students on other courses). Meanwhile, students on work preparation courses were more likely to develop problem solving (79 percent vs 46) and teamwork skills (82 percent vs 54).

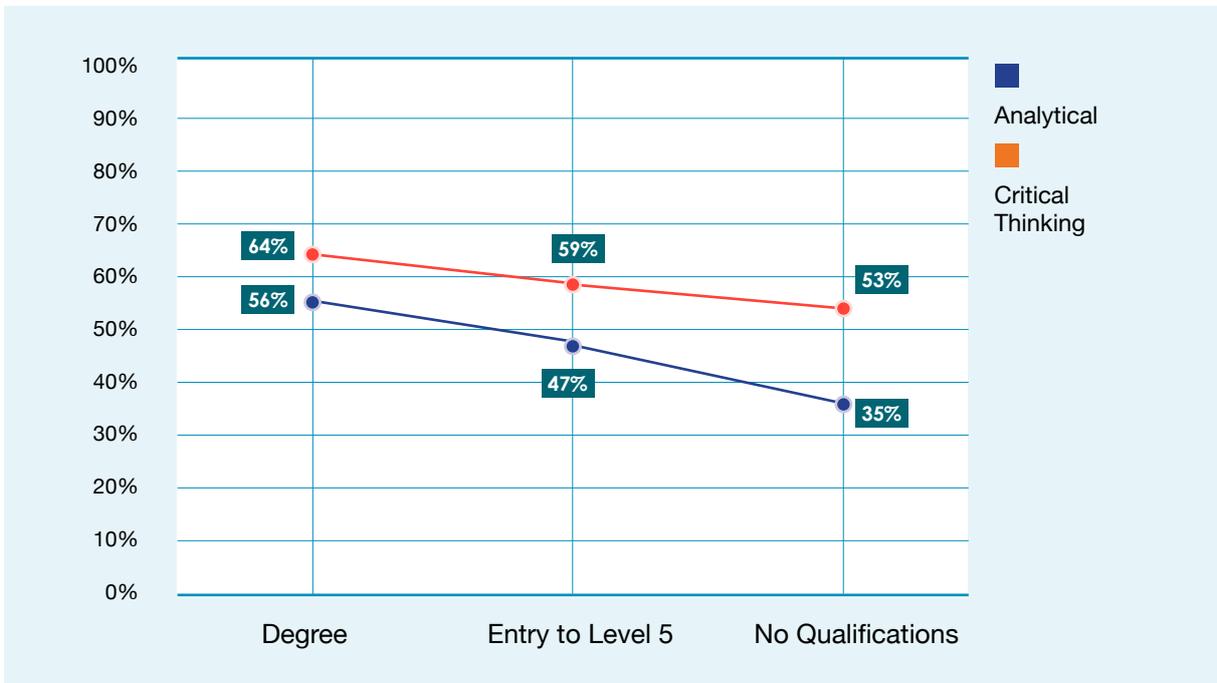
Additionally, even when controlling for other demographic characteristics, there was a marked difference in skill development based on qualifications for all skills but language, as demonstrated in Figure 7. Notably, acquisition of every skill (with an exception of a few) increased for students with lower qualifications. Students who held degrees were, on the other hand, more likely to develop analytical and critical skills.

Figure 7. Proportion of students who developed skills as a result of WEA courses by qualification.





“ I use critical thinking and problem solving skills whenever I need to find solutions or ideas that are ‘outside the box’. I designed a rota at work for me and my colleagues that improved our work life balance and had a positive impact on lifestyle. ”



Student Stories

Marjorie searched for new activities in retirement, became an avid writer and started her own reading and poetry groups

Marjorie has been taking creative writing courses with WEA for about seven years. When she started, she was retired and looking to take up new activities. Marjorie says that in the course she discovered she could write stories and poetry, which she did not do since school. “It had big impact on me, which got bigger over the years”, she says. Marjorie had her stories accepted into publications. Her story about her mum’s Alzheimer’s was published in a book called ‘Turning the page’. Marjorie also notes that she and other students recognise important social benefits they all get from the courses. They gave her enough confidence to start a reading and a poetry group as voluntary work. Most of her learners are older and she witnesses them benefiting. “There is a lady whose husband died six months prior”, recounts Marjorie, “At first she was very lacking in confidence. Now she writes better poems than all of us and got enough confidence to join other clubs”.

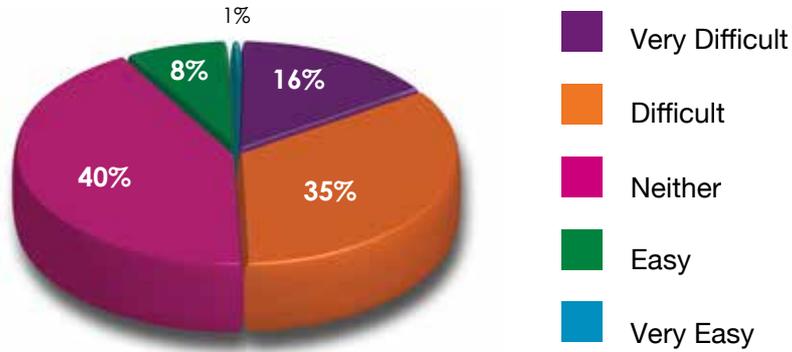


Ahmed had always been interested in working at a school but he did not have the time for lengthy courses nor knew any relevant courses to go into. He found out about ‘Helping in schools’ course with the WEA from a leaflet at his child’s school. “The course was about 26 weeks, but I’d only have to be in for one day and I didn’t really have to give up my employment at the time, so this made me go for it”, Ahmed recounts. The course was free, which also helped Ahmed because he was getting Working Tax Credit. Soon after completing the course, a vacancy for a teaching assistant post came up, for which Ahmed applied for and was successful. “If I hadn’t taken a course with the WEA I don’t think I would’ve been where I am at the moment”, he says. Ahmed believes that many people fail to recognise the importance of having qualifications in addition to voluntary work experience when applying for a similar job.

The WEA course helped Ahmed find a job in a career of his dreams

As Figure 8 demonstrates, just over a half (51 percent) of WEA students claimed that it would have been difficult or very difficult to develop these above-mentioned skills elsewhere if it were not for the WEA. Students under the age of 60, those who claimed means-tested benefits and those with no qualifications reported greater difficulty (57, 61 and 58 percent respectively).

Figure 8. Proportion of students assessing how easy or difficult it would have been to develop skills if it were not for the WEA.



Students become more engaged and active citizens through learning

A large proportion of students (81 percent) claimed that they met people on courses that they would not normally mix with (e.g. different age, ethnicity, social class etc.), this was higher among students under the age of 60 (88 percent). Ninety-two percent of students enjoyed meeting these people. The WEA’s learning is also cascaded to the wider community as 92 percent of students reported sharing what they learned with their friends or family.

The Table 4 shows that from over a third to a half of WEA students got engaged more in their communities as a result of WEA courses.

81% of students claimed that they met people on courses that they would not normally mix with

Table 4. Proportion of students reporting greater community engagement as a result of WEA courses.

| | ALL | BAMER | On benefits | Under 60 | No Qualifications |
|--|------------|---------------|-------------|----------|-------------------|
| More understanding of other cultures | 50% | ESOL 88% | 63% | | |
| More than before respectful to those different from themselves | 44% | 71%, ESOL 76% | 61% | 59% | 64% |
| More interested in making their local area a better place to live | 40% | 73%, ESOL 79% | 58% | | |
| Feeling a sense of belonging to Britain more than before the course | 35% | 71%, ESOL 79% | 52% | | |

A half (50 percent) of WEA students became more understanding of other cultures as a result of their courses, which was higher among ESOL students (88 percent) and those on benefits (63 percent). Forty-four percent became more respectful to those different from them, 40 percent more interested in making their local area a better place to live and more than a third (35 percent) felt a higher sense of belonging to Britain. BAMER and ESOL students were substantially more likely to report improvements in these areas, as well as students on benefits.

Thirty-nine percent of students took part in activities to improve their local community¹¹ as a result of their course, which was higher among ESOL students (67 percent) and those on benefits (52 percent). Plus, 12 percent of all students, 28 percent of BAMER students and 19 percent of students under 60 became volunteers with the WEA as a result of their courses. Twenty six percent joined WEA as a member, which was higher among ESOL students (40 percent).

Furthermore, 24 percent of students claimed the courses made them more likely to vote in next elections (nine percent much more likely and 15 percent more likely). This number was greater among BAMER (58 percent) and ESOL students (65 percent); it was also greater for students under 60 years of age (40 percent compared to eight percent among over 60), those on benefits (38 percent vs 13) and those with no qualifications (40 percent vs nine percent among students with a degree).

Nearly a third (31 percent) of students took more interest in local or national political affairs as a result of the course (see Table 5), which amounted to 43 percent among students under the age of 60. Out of students to whom it was relevant¹², 20 percent took part in a campaigning activity of some sort and 15 percent contacted local or national authorities (26 percent among BAMER). Finally, four percent joined a political party, trade union or an association (six percent among under 60s and eight percent among BAMER).

Table 5. Proportion of students developing greater political engagement as a result of WEA courses.

| | ALL | Under 60 | BAMER |
|---|-----|----------|-------|
| Took more interest in local or national affairs | 31% | 43% | |
| Took part in a campaigning activity (e.g. signed a petition, attended a demonstration) | 20% | | |
| Contacted local or national authorities (e.g. city council, the Parliament) | 15% | | 26% |
| Joined a political party, trade union or an association | 4% | 6% | 8% |

¹¹ Excluding 20 percent of students who claimed there were no activities for them to join.

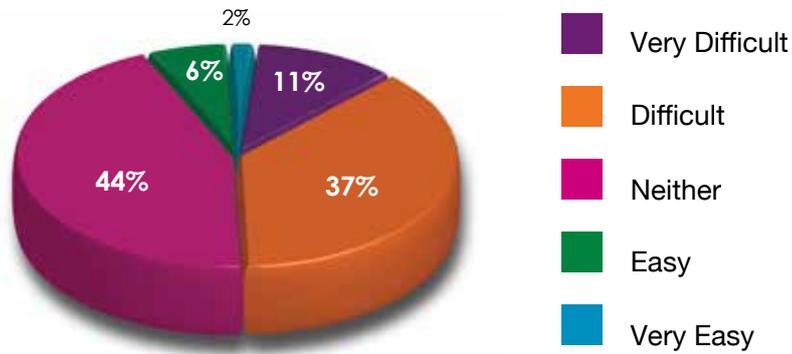
¹² Excludes 13 percent of students who had no need to campaign, contact authorities or join political parties or associations.

Twenty one percent of WEA students became involved in voluntary activities as a result of WEA courses (29 percent among those on benefits). Meanwhile, over a half (55 percent) claimed that their course gave them skills or knowledge that can help in voluntary work¹³. This number was higher among ESOL students (87 percent), students under 60 (75 percent) and those on benefits (71 percent).

Overall, about 80 percent of students improved their community engagement in at least one of the areas mentioned above. Forty-eight percent of these students claimed it would have been difficult or very difficult to achieve that without the WEA (see Figure 9). This amounted to 57 percent among students on means-tested benefits.

21%
of WEA students became involved in voluntary activities as a result of WEA courses

Figure 9. Proportion of students assessing how easy or difficult it would have been to gain community benefits if it were not for the WEA.



Learning improves health and wellbeing

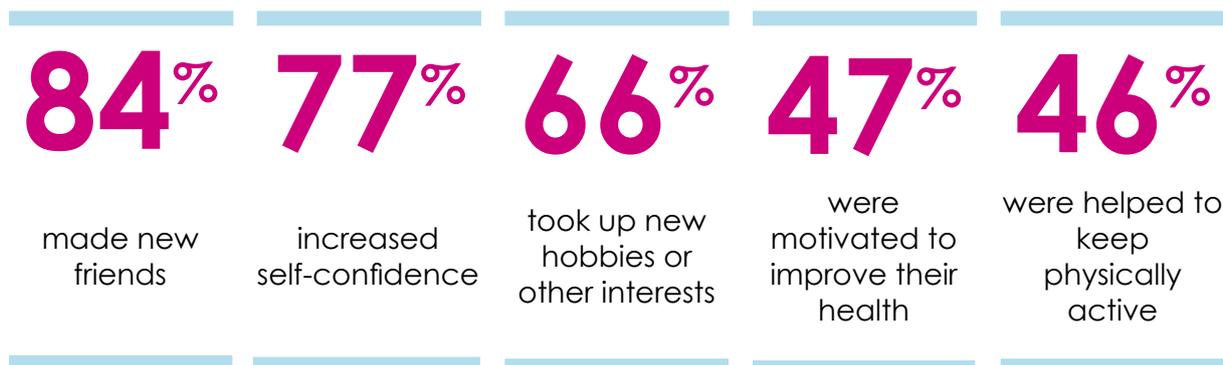
The WEA courses also improve students' health and wellbeing as Table 6 demonstrates. They helped nearly all (97 percent) students to keep their minds active, which was true for all student groups.

Table 6. Proportion of students reporting health and wellbeing impact as a result of WEA courses.

| | ALL | Under 60 | Carers | BAMER | On benefits | Health & wellbeing course |
|--|-----|----------|--------|-------------------|-------------|---------------------------|
| Course helped to keep mind active | 97% | | | | | |
| Course helped to make new friends | 84% | | 90% | | | |
| Increased self-confidence | 77% | 89% | 87% | 94% ¹⁴ | 90% | 94% |
| Encouraged to take up new hobbies or other interests | 66% | | | 79% | | |
| Motivated to improve their health | 47% | 61% | | | 66% | 79% |
| Course helped to keep physically active | 46% | | 59% | 68% | 61% | 76% |

¹³ Excluding 10 percent who were not involved or not interested in getting involved in voluntary work.

¹⁴ ESOL students only.



The courses also helped large majorities of students to make new friends (84 percent), increase self-confidence (77 percent) and take up new hobbies or other interests (66 percent). Almost half (47 percent) were motivated to improve their health and courses helped 46 percent to keep physically active.

As before, some student groups gained greater benefits. More BAMER students increased their self-confidence (94 percent¹⁵ vs 73 percent of White British students), took up new hobbies (79 percent vs 62) and kept physically active (68 percent vs 39). The courses also had greater impact on students on benefits and under the age of 60 in some of the above-mentioned areas. Plus, 70 percent of students with reported mental health conditions or disabilities were more motivated to improve their health. Additionally, 81 percent of students with entry to level 5 qualifications increased their self-confidence and 59 percent of students with no qualifications were motivated to improve their health. While gender seldom affected impact of WEA courses, more women than men made new friends (87 percent vs 77) and women were also more likely to report an increase in confidence (81 percent vs 67).

WEA courses also had a significant impact on improving health and wellbeing of carers. For example, 90 percent of carers made new friends on the course compared to 82 percent of students who were not carers. Eighty-seven percent of carers (12 percentage points more than non-carers) increased self-confidence while 59 percent (15 percentage points more) were helped to keep physically active.

Students completing a health and wellbeing course reported greater improvements in wellbeing in some areas. For example, such courses helped 76 percent of students to keep physically active compared to the 46 percent WEA average. Additionally nearly all (94 percent) students completing a health and wellbeing course also increased their self-confidence (compared to 77 percent WEA average) and 79 percent were motivated to improve their health compared to 43 percent of students who took courses on other topics.

As Table 7 shows, WEA courses also helped to improve students' physical and mental health. This data includes only student who claimed to experience health-related problems¹⁶.

“ The course I attended has helped me enormously. I was very anxious in social situations and hardly able to leave the house. I have been treated for anxiety and depression over a few years. Attending the course gave me the skills to deal with my anxiety. I am now off medication and leading a full and active life. ”

¹⁵ ESOL student only.

¹⁶ I.e. 68 percent in physical health, 66 percent in mental health, 75 percent in stress management and 77 percent in stress reduction.

Table 7. Proportion of the students who improved their physical and mental health as a result of WEA courses.

| | ALL | On benefits | Mental health condition | Learning disability |
|--|------------|-------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| The course helped to reduce stress | 59% | 72% | | |
| The course helped to manage stress better | 52% | 72% | 78% | |
| The course helped with mental health conditions or disabilities | 36% | 55% | 83% | 64% |
| The course helped with physical health problems or disabilities | 28% | 44% | | |

Fifty-nine percent of students reported that the courses helped them to reduce stress and 52 percent reported managing stress better. Thirty-six percent further claimed that WEA courses helped with their mental health conditions or disabilities and 28 percent with their physical health problems or disabilities (this proportion rose to 57 percent for students on health and wellbeing courses). Students on benefits experienced greater improvements in these areas. When it came to students with reported mental health disabilities or conditions, 83 percent of them claimed the courses helped them with their condition and 78 percent managed stress better. Meanwhile, 64 percent of students with learning disabilities felt the course helped them with their mental health condition. Sixty-four percent of carers managed stress better too, while more women (63 percent vs 50 in men) reduced their stress.

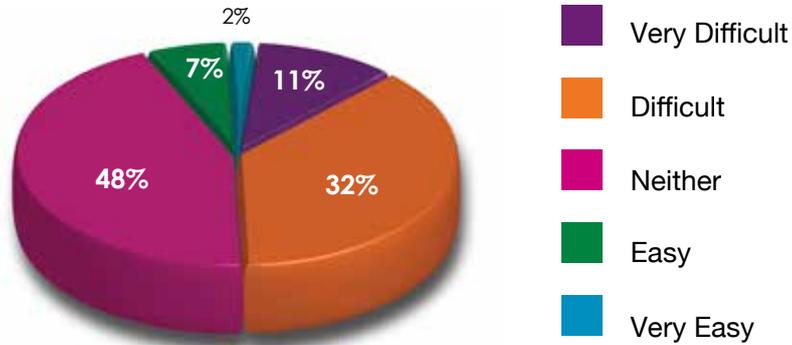
“ A weekly class is very important to me as I am the sole carer of my husband who has a major mental illness and a break from the stresses of this situation is very necessary for my own wellbeing. ”

Overall, 23 percent of students claimed to lead a healthier lifestyle more than before the course. Some student groups were more likely to show improvement in this area, namely students who completed a health and wellbeing course (56 percent), students with a mental health condition (40 percent), under 60 years old (35 percent) and carers (34 percent).

In addition, the courses improved wellbeing ‘a lot’ for 27 percent of students, ‘a little’ for 22 percent and ‘somewhat’ for 39 percent (only 12 percent did not improve wellbeing at all).

Taking all the health and wellbeing benefits mentioned above, 99 percent of the WEA students experienced them. Of them, 43 percent claimed it would have been difficult to get health and wellbeing benefits from elsewhere (11 percent very difficult and 32 percent difficult). Additionally, 58 percent of students on benefits, 71 percent of students with mental health conditions and 78 percent of students who completed health and wellbeing courses claimed it would have been very difficult or difficult to gain these benefits without the WEA.

Figure 10. Proportion of students assessing how easy or difficult it would have been to gain health and wellbeing benefits if it were not for the WEA.



Students develop personally and culturally through learning

Seventy-seven percent of all students claimed that the WEA courses encouraged them to do at least one cultural activity more than before as seen in the Table 8.

77%

of all students claimed that the WEA courses encouraged them to do at least one cultural activity more than before

Table 8. Proportion of students doing cultural activities more often as a result of WEA courses.

| | ALL | BAMER | Under 60 | On benefits | On art courses |
|--|-----|-------------------|----------|-------------|----------------|
| Research | 53% | | | 60% | |
| Read | 41% | 69% ¹⁷ | 51% | | |
| Visit museums/galleries/historic sites | 36% | | | | 43% |
| Do arts or crafts | 25% | | | 36% | 47% |
| Creative writing | 23% | 48%; ESOL 53% | 35% | | |
| Listen to music or play a musical instrument | 17% | | | 26% | |
| Go to the cinema/the theatre/music concerts | 17% | | | | |

¹⁷ ESOL students only.

The most common activities included: research (53 percent), reading (41 percent) and visiting museums, galleries or other historic sites (36 percent) more than before as a result of the course. Those who completed an arts and crafts course, were more likely to visit cultural places (43 percent) and do arts and crafts (47 percent)¹⁸. Students on benefits were also more than twice as likely to listen to music or play an instrument (26 percent vs 11 among students not on benefits), twice as likely to do arts and crafts (36 percent vs 18) and research (60 percent vs 48). BAMER students and students under the age of 60 were, in turn, more likely to read and write creatively more than before the course.

A third (33 percent) of students took part in cultural activities with their friends or family more often than before the course, which was greater among students who took art courses (41 percent). Plus, 61 percent of all students believed that learning with the WEA helped them reflect on social and political matters outside of their course subject. This proportion equalled 77 percent among BAMER and 69 percent among students who took humanities and science courses.

The WEA courses also impacted students' further learning. Thirty-three percent (40 percent of those who completed basic skills courses) enrolled on a taught course. Of them, 28 percent claimed these courses will lead to a qualification¹⁹. Among students who completed basic skills courses and enrolled onto further courses, this proportion equalled to 73 percent.

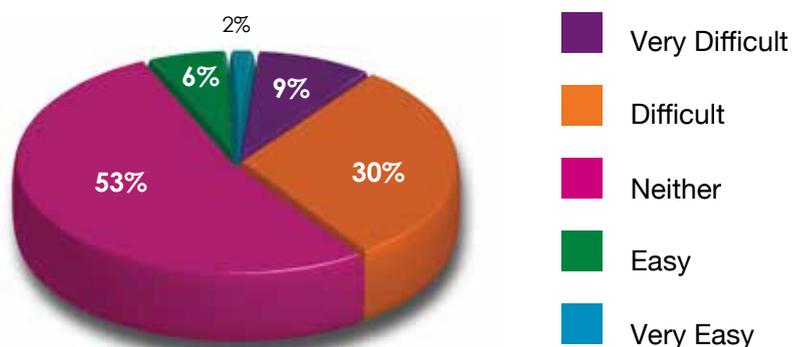
Additionally, 65 percent of students tried to improve their knowledge or skills independently as a result of the course. This impact was greater among ESOL students of whom 76 percent participated in independent learning. Seventy-three percent of students claimed they would know where to go if they needed to improve English, Maths, ICT or vocational skills as a result of their courses²⁰. This proportion was greater among students completing basic skills (80 percent) and work preparation (98 percent) courses.

65%

tried to improve their knowledge or skills independently as a result of the course

Of those 93 percent of students who experienced at least one positive change in their cultural awareness, 39 percent claimed that would have been difficult or very difficult to achieve without the WEA. Nearly half (49 percent) of the students on benefits and 41 percent of students on art courses also claimed the same.

Figure 11. Proportion of students assessing how easy or difficult it would have been to gain cultural benefits if it were not for the WEA



¹⁸ Among students who did not complete an arts and crafts course, 31 percent visited cultural places and 15 percent did arts and crafts more often as a result of the WEA course.

¹⁹ 9 percent did not know if it will or not.

²⁰ Applies to 51 percent of students who claimed improving these skills was relevant to them. Of those to whom these skills were irrelevant, majority (75 percent) were over 60 years of age and 44 percent already held degrees.

Improvements in the employability of students

As Table 9 shows, 47 percent of WEA students at the time of the survey were retired, 17 percent were employed, 12 percent sick or disabled, 10 percent looking after home or family and eight percent were unemployed and looking for work.

Table 9. WEA students' employment status at the time of the survey.

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Employed (incl. part-time, self-employment, parental leave) | 17% |
| Full-time education | 0.3% |
| Looking after home or family | 10% |
| Preferred not to say or other | 6% |
| Retired | 47% |
| Sick or disabled (temporarily or permanently) | 12% |
| Unemployed and looking for work | 8% |

Compared to before the course (Table 10), there was a six percentage point decrease in the proportion of unemployed students, two point increase in employed students and one point increase in unemployed students not looking for work and in retired students. Of those who were unemployed and looking for work before the course, 19 percent became employed after the WEA course.

Table 10. Comparison of students' employment status before and after WEA courses.

| | Before the course | After the course |
|--|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Employed | 15% | 17% |
| Unemployed, not looking for work ²¹ | 22% | 23% |
| Retired | 46% | 47% |
| Unemployed and looking for work | 14% | 8% |

Impact on employed students

Among students who were employed at the time of the survey, 54 percent reported gaining new skills or knowledge they might use in a job as a result of WEA courses. For BAMER students this proportion rose to 75 percent (and to 87 percent among BAMER women). For White British students on benefits this proportion equalled 72 percent. Furthermore, 61 percent of employed students believed that they improved skills or knowledge they already had that could be used in a job. Table 11 presents all job-related outcomes for employed students.

54%

reported gaining new skills or knowledge they might use in a job as a result of WEA courses

²¹ Includes those in full-time education, looking after home or family, sick or disabled.

Table 11. Proportion of employed students receiving job-related benefits as a result of WEA courses.

| | ALL | BAMER | On benefits (White British only) |
|---|-----|-------|----------------------------------|
| Feeling more confident in progressing in their career in the future | 49% | 86% | 71% |
| Were able to do their job better | 41% | 58% | |
| Became more secure in their job | 22% | 48% | 21% |
| Got a new job | 12% | 23% | 29% |
| Got a promotion or greater responsibility in their job | 6% | 11% | |
| Got a pay rise or their earnings increased | 5% | | |
| Became self-employed | 1% | | |

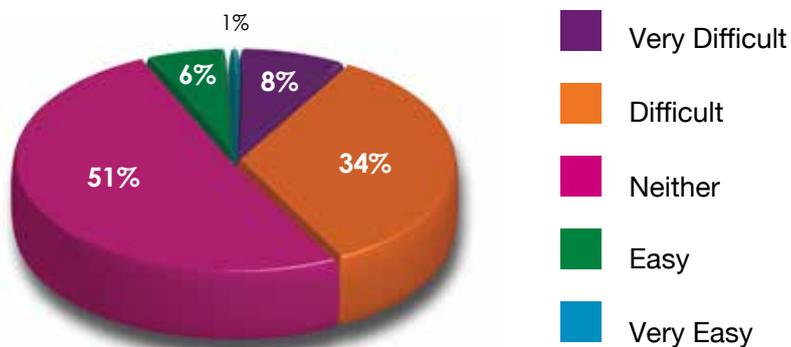
Most commonly employed students became more confident in progressing their career in the future (49 percent), followed by being able to do their job better (41 percent) and becoming more secure in their jobs (22 percent) as a result of WEA courses. Plus, 12 percent of students got a new job as a result of the course, which rose to 30 percent among those who were unemployed and looking for work before

the course. BAMER students reported higher job-related improvements as well. For example, nearly three times as many of them got a new job²² and more than four times as many became more secure in their jobs²³. Meanwhile, White British students on benefits gained more from their courses as well, for example, 29 percent of them got a new job as result of the course compared to only three percent among White British students not on benefits.

In total, 68 percent of employed students received at least one of the above-mentioned benefits. Of them, 42 percent believed it would have been difficult or very difficult to get them without the WEA course.

12% of students got a new job as a result of the course

Figure 12. Proportion of employed students assessing how easy or difficult it would have been to get job-related benefits if it were not for the WEA.



²² 23 percent of BAMER students in comparison to eight percent of White British.

²³ 48 percent of BAMER students in comparison to 11 percent of White British.

Student Stories

WEA courses helped Mark bounce back from his lowest point in life

Before taking a WEA course, Mark thought his life “a total disaster”. He was unemployed in his mid-thirties with no qualifications, confidence or focus in life. Mark also had problems with health, which left him thinking he might never work again. His advisor at the Job Centre persuaded him to do the course in Confidence Building and Transferable Skills. To Mark’s amazement, the course was showing him how to slowly become more confident. Afterwards, he signed up for other WEA courses, which led him to explore other qualifications. Mark is now partway through a Level 2 ‘Support Learning and Work in Schools’ course. This will enable him to get a job as a Level 2 Teaching Assistant. Mark has also been volunteering to make visits to people who have problems with confidence. “I hope these visits helping out and talking about how the courses have changed my life, gives them the hope and knowledge that these courses can help”, Mark says.



Dianne was referred to the ‘Women feeling fine’ course by her psychiatrist. Dianne has a bipolar disorder and had a mental breakdown before the course. Dianne says that the course helped her come out of herself by meeting other people, some of whom had similar problems to hers. She does not go to other places so WEA courses are the main outlet for socialising for her. Her doctor and the psychiatrist are also pleased with her progress. Because of her positive experience, Dianne also went on to learn sociology with the WEA. She is staying on until she gets stronger but she already has plans to start socialising more and to find employment in the future. “The course did wonders”, says Dianne, “It saved my life – I don’t think I’d be here if it wasn’t for it”.

Dianne significantly improved her mental health through learning with the WEA

Impact on unemployed students

Seventy-seven percent of unemployed students looking for work felt more confident about finding a job in the future and 72 percent knew better what to do to get a job as a result of WEA courses. Forty-six percent of students who were interested in finding a job in the future²⁴ increased their motivation to find a job as a result of the course. Among BAMER students this proportion equalled 91 percent, 53 percent among White British students on benefits, 68 percent among students with no qualifications and 87 percent among students on basic skills courses.

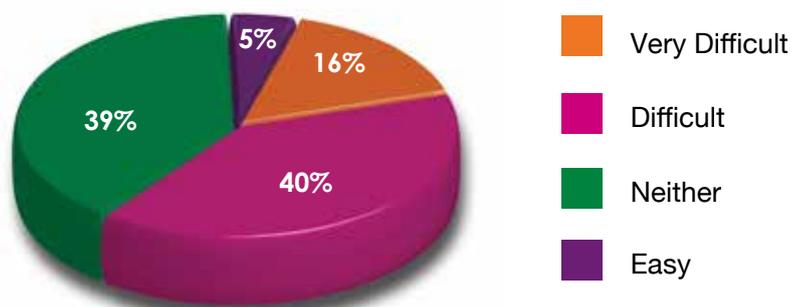


Furthermore, 64 percent of unemployed students claimed the course gave them new skills or knowledge they might use in a future job. Again, this proportion was higher among BAMER students (92 percent), students on benefits (83 percent), those with no qualifications (86 percent) and those who took basic skills courses (92 percent).

Additionally, 66 percent of unemployed students believed their WEA courses improved skills or knowledge they already had that might be useful in a job. For BAMER students this rose to 93 percent, to 80 percent among those on benefits and 88 percent for those who completed basic skills courses.

Overall, 67 percent of unemployed students benefited from the WEA courses job-wise. Over a half (56 percent) of them believed it would have been very difficult or difficult to receive these benefits elsewhere.

Figure 13. Proportion of unemployed students assessing how easy or difficult it would have been to get job-related benefits if it were not for the WEA.



“ The course has helped me to feel better at work through thinking clearly about how I can help improve working conditions for myself and colleagues. ”

²⁴ This group includes unemployed students looking for work, unemployed students not currently looking for work, plus, sick or disabled and in full-time education – in total, 59 percent of all students in this group were interested in finding a job in the future.

Learning with the WEA improves parenting

Twenty-four percent of all WEA students and 50 percent of students under the age of 60 have children under the age of 18. Sixty-eight percent of BAMER students under 60 had underage (under 18) children in contrast to 32 percent of White British. Female students were also more likely to have young children (55 percent vs 33 percent of men), as were students without degree-level qualifications (54 percent vs 36 percent of students with degrees).

Table 12. Proportion of students with underage children reporting parenting benefits as a result of WEA courses.

| | ALL ²⁵ | BAMER | No qualifications | Entry to Level 5 qualifications |
|----------------|-------------------|-------|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| Reading | 71% | 88% | 88% | 72% |
| Writing | 70% | 86% | 86% | 71% |
| Maths | 61% | 70% | 78% | 64% |

As Table 12 shows, 71 percent of parents improved their confidence in helping their children with reading as a result of the course, 70 percent with writing and 61 percent with Maths. BAMER students and White British students on benefits improved their confidence to a greater degree. For example, more than two-thirds of BAMER students developed greater confidence in these subjects compared to just about half of White British students²⁶. Among White British students themselves, those on benefits were about twice as likely to improve their confidence in helping their children as those not on benefits (67 percent vs 32 for reading, 66 percent vs 33 for writing and 61 vs 32 for Maths). Plus, students without degree-level qualifications gained more confidence than students with degrees²⁷.

As seen in the Table 13, 69 percent of parents were more confident in engaging with their children’s school activities as a result of the course and 65 percent were more confident when dealing with issues that affect children. In addition, 58 percent of parents believed that their relationship with their children improved and nearly half (48 percent) helped their children with schoolwork more often as a result of WEA courses. BAMER parents were more likely to develop these benefits along with parents without degrees.

71%

of parents improved their confidence in helping their children with reading

58%

of parents improved the relationship with their children

²⁵ Excluding 6, 7 and 7 percent of students per each row whose children were too young for school.

²⁶ 52 percent of White British parents improved confidence in helping with Maths and 55 percent in reading and writing.

²⁷ See Table 12 for details compared to 38 percent of students with degrees in reading, 36 percent in writing and 28 percent in Maths.

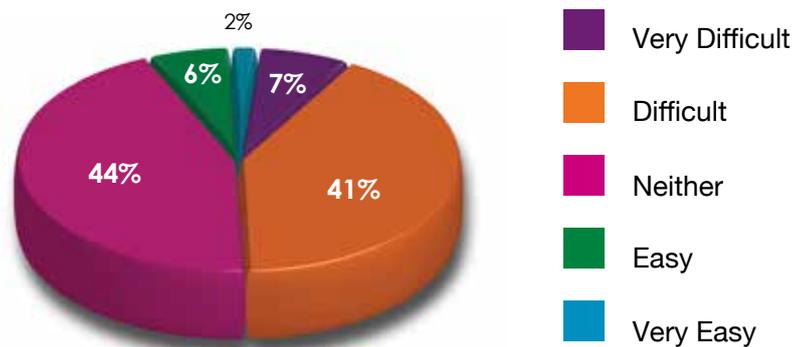
Table 13. Proportion of students with underage children reporting parenting benefits as a result of WEA courses.

| | ALL | BAMER | No qualifications | Entry to Level 5 |
|--|-----|-------|-------------------|------------------|
| More confident in engaging with children's school activities ²⁸ | 69% | 87% | | |
| More confident when dealing with issues that affect children | 65% | 78% | 77% | 70% |
| Improved relationships with children | 58% | 71% | | |
| Helping their children with schoolwork more ²⁹ | 48% | 72% | 62% | 50% |

Forty-five percent of parents encouraged their children to live a healthier lifestyle more often as a result of the course, which equalled to 52 percent for parents on benefits³⁰. Plus, 37 percent of parents took their children to cultural events or places more often. Positive learning attitudes also seemed to get passed on to children. The majority (79 percent)³¹ of parents encouraged their children to learn more as a result of their own WEA course.

Out of 87 percent of all parents who gained some sort of a parenting-related benefit, 48 percent believed that would have been very difficult or difficult without the WEA course.

Figure 14. Proportion of parents assessing how easy or difficult it would have been to get parenting benefits if it were not for the WEA.



²⁸ Excluding 8 percent of parents whose children were too young for school.

²⁹ Excluding 8 percent of parents whose children were too young for school.

³⁰ Excluding 6 percent of parents whose children were too young to be taught about a healthy lifestyle.

³¹ Excluding 7 percent of parents whose children were too young to be taught about learning.

Students who are grandparents are able to support grandchildren more

Thirty percent of WEA students had grandchildren under the age of 18 that they regularly see. White British students were substantially more likely to have grandchildren they regularly see (39 percent vs four among BAMER students), as well as student not on benefits (41 percent vs 14).

54%

of grandparents encouraged their grandchildren to learn more

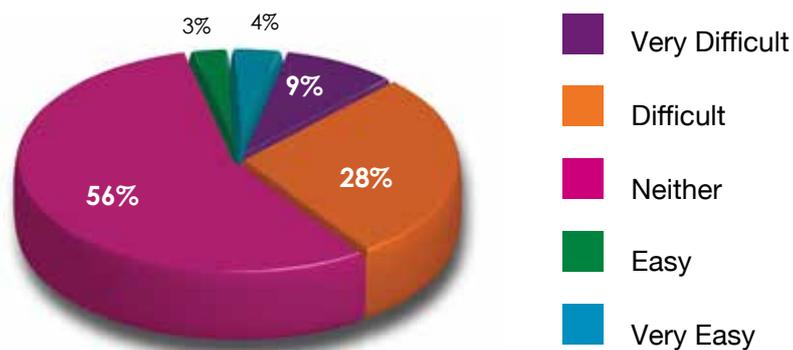
25%

of grandparents improved their relationship with their grandchildren as a result of the course

WEA courses also had impact on grandparents and their grandchildren. Twenty-two percent of grandparents³² helped their grandchildren with schoolwork more and 18 percent took their grandchildren to cultural events or places more³³ as a result of WEA courses. More than half (54 percent)³⁴ encouraged their grandchildren to learn more, which was higher for grandparents not on benefits (61 percent vs 43 on benefits). Additionally, 16 percent³⁵ encouraged their grandchildren to live a healthier lifestyle more. White British grandparents had greater impact in this area with 18 percent of them encouraging a healthier lifestyle in contrast to eight percent of BAMER grandparents. Finally, a quarter (25 percent) of grandparents improved their relationship with their grandchildren as a result of the course.

In total, about 60 percent of grandparents received at least one positive grand parenting benefit as a result of WEA courses. Thirty-seven percent of them believed it would have been very difficult or difficult to get these benefits elsewhere.

Figure 15. Proportion of grandparents assessing how easy or difficult it would have been to get grand parenting benefits if it were not for the WEA.



³² Excluding 18 percent of grandparents who did not help their grandchildren with schoolwork as part of their grand parenting and 15 percent whose grandchildren were too young for school.

³³ Excluding 10 percent of grandparents who did not take their grandchildren to cultural places as part of their grand parenting and 13 percent whose grandchildren were too young to visit cultural places.

³⁴ Excluding 25 percent of grandparents whose grandchildren were too young.

³⁵ Excluding 13 percent of grandparents who did not oversee their grandchildren's lifestyle as part of their grand parenting and 16 percent whose grandchildren were too young.

Doing multiple courses leads to greater benefits for students

As mentioned earlier, about 14 percent of WEA students completed two courses in the autumn term and five percent completed three or more courses. This section examines whether completing more than one course is associated with greater benefits than completing only one course.

As Table 14 shows, completing multiple courses increases the chance to develop nearly every skill. For example, over half (53 percent) of students who completed three or more courses, regardless of course type, developed IT or digital skills compared to the WEA average of 22 percent.

Table 14. Proportion of students developing skills by a number of completed courses (one, two, three or more).

| | ALL | 1 course | 2 courses | 3 or more courses |
|--------------------------|------------|----------|-----------|-------------------|
| Learning | 76% | 75% | 77% | 91% |
| Communication | 68% | 65% | 76% | 83% |
| Research | 62% | 60% | 69% | 74% |
| Creative | 60% | 58% | 64% | 82% |
| Critical thinking | 60% | | | |
| Teamwork | 54% | 51% | 64% | 78% |
| Analytical | 47% | | | |
| Organisational | 47% | 44% | 57% | 72% |
| Problem solving | 47% | 44% | 55% | 73% |
| Literacy | 41% | 39% | 48% | 64% |
| Language | 38% | | | |
| IT or digital | 22% | 19% | 27% | 53% |
| Numeracy | 20% | 17% | 29% | 41% |

Student Stories

Howard has been enjoying a wheelchair accessible course with the WEA

Howard decided to join a WEA gardening course because of his interest in gardening and because the course was wheelchair accessible. He has now been attending for over three years and enjoys working with other students, some of whom have disabilities. "Socialising is very important," he says, "we have a student with a head injury so their memory is not as good. But over the course that person changed, they can remember more". Howard feels fully occupied and able to let himself go on the course, something he could not experience in more teacher-led classrooms. He felt his confidence and creativity grow immensely. Without this course, Howard believes he would not be doing anything, and course kept him and others going.



Being a mum to two small children, Claire wanted to learn new skills, but needed to fit this around her home life. Claire had always been interested in sewing but was not able to pursue this, as it was not offered at school for GCSE. She attended the Hand and Machine Sewing course for three terms and produced some wonderful garments, soft toys, home textiles and gifts. "It's good I don't have to pay for the course, otherwise I wouldn't be able to attend", Claire says. She also commented on the improvements coming to the course had on her wellbeing: "I have a lot of stress in everyday life and coming to the course helps to relieve it". As Claire's confidence and skills improved, she was able to offer help and advice to other students in the group.

WEA offered Claire learning that fit around her family responsibilities and helped her take a break from everyday stress

Completing multiple courses appears to have impact on improving community engagement as well (see Table 15). For example, students who completed three or more courses were more likely to meet people different from themselves (92 percent versus 80 percent for those on one and two courses). More students took part in activities to improve their local community if they took more than one course as well (35 percent among completers of only one course, 52 percent among two course completers and 73 percent for three or more courses). Likewise, almost twice as many students who completed three or more courses became involved in voluntary activities (37 percent compared to 19 percent among single course completers³⁶).

Table 15. Proportion of students getting more engaged in the community by a number of completed courses (one, two, three or more).

| | ALL | 1 course | 2 courses | 3 or more courses |
|--|------------|----------|-----------|-------------------|
| More understanding of other cultures | 50% | 47% | 60% | 73% |
| More respectful to those different from themselves | 44% | 42% | 50% | 70% |
| More interested in making their local area a better place to live | 40% | 36% | 51% | 61% |
| Feeling a sense of belonging to Britain more than before the course | 35% | 33% | 42% | 60% |

Completing multiple courses also increases health and wellbeing in some areas as Table 16 shows.

Table 16. Proportion of students receiving health and wellbeing benefits by a number of completed courses (one, two, three or more).

| | ALL | 1 course | 2 courses | 3 or more courses |
|--|------------|----------|-----------|-------------------|
| Course helped to keep mind active | 97% | 97% | 92% | 100% |
| Course helped to keep physically active | 46% | 44% | 52% | 76% |
| Motivated to improve their health | 47% | 44% | 54% | 80% |
| The course helped with physical health problems or disabilities | 28% | 26% | 37% | 46% |
| Leading a healthier lifestyle as a result of the course | 23% | 20% | 29% | 53% |

36 And 28 percent for completers of two courses.

For instance, a substantially higher number of students were motivated to improve their health if they took three or more courses (80 percent vs 44 percent for a single course) and virtually all students (100 percent) in this group said courses helped to keep their mind active. The greatest outcome of doing multiple courses in terms of health was help with physical health problems³⁷ as it was greater when people completed more than one course (from 26 percent to 37 to 46). Similarly, students taking more courses were more likely to lead a healthier lifestyle as a result of WEA courses (from 20 percent to 29 to 53).

As a general rule, completing several courses did not have any specific effect on students' cultural development, employability, parenting or grand parenting³⁸. One exception is that students who completed three or more courses were more likely to take part in cultural activities with their friends or family than students who only completed one course (46 percent vs 33). Also, students completing multiple courses were more likely to enrol onto other taught courses (31 to 43 to 53 percent) even when different age or ethnicity between these groups was accounted for.

³⁷ Appropriate exclusions of those who did not have health problems taken into account.

³⁸ However, excepting cultural education, sample sizes in these areas were too small for robust analysis.

Conclusions

The evidence in this report highlights the impact WEA adult education courses make to the lives of thousands of people across the country. With a vision and mission to support the most disadvantaged in our society, the WEA provides learning opportunities which are within reach of students and flexible and responsive to the needs of communities. This approach, together with a safe, supportive and suitably challenging teaching and learning environment, has demonstrable and wide ranging impacts on students, including:

- the development of essential employment-related and life skills that improve students' wellbeing inside and outside work;
- a notable improvement in students' engagement with their communities and the fostering of a community spirit;
- conspicuous improvements in the health and wellbeing of students, particularly those with longterm health conditions;
- building volunteering skills in students and an increase in the number of students taking up voluntary work;
- evidence of students becoming more active citizens in our society;
- greater cultural understanding and cultural development in students;
- acquisition of transferable key life skills such as, confidence, team working and critical thinking to help improve employment prospects for both the employed and the unemployed;
- positively impacting parenting and grand parenting skills and improving familial relations;
- a profound and marked impact on the most disadvantaged students, such as those from ethnic minorities, students on means-tested benefits and students with lower level qualifications;
- inspiring and supporting students to take up taught courses and to learn independently, to continue their learning beyond the course, and;
- cascading benefits beyond students and into families and communities.

“

The course has been a vital part in assisting my relocation to the area, helping me make new friends through a common interest. This has developed beyond the group meetings into a wider network of others with the same interests and from that, new interests have developed.

”

Read our vision and values at: www.wea.org.uk/about/vision



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