

WEA Accountability Agreement and Local Needs Duty 2025/26

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Adult Learning Within Reach



WEA's Purpose

WEA's purpose is to bring adult education within reach of everyone who needs it, fighting inequality and promoting social justice. WEA empowers adults by bringing great teaching to local communities across England and Scotland with a mission of providing access to education for adults right on their doorstep. WEA believes that the opportunity for a better future is too often made inaccessible for reasons including cost, location, and a lack of information. WEA is committed to removing barriers to education so that individuals can improve their own life chances and have a

positive impact on their communities and society as a whole.

As the UK's largest institution of adult education, the WEA operates with a national reach and a deeply embedded local presence. Our Strategic Plan and Accountability Agreement are grounded in our charitable mission to deliver high-quality, accessible education that supports social justice, economic empowerment, and civic participation. including measuring success and ensuring local responsiveness across our key strategic themes:

Learning for Life

To empower individuals with the skills, confidence, and knowledge needed for personal development, health, and wellbeing, with a particular focus on learners who face disadvantage. WEA co-design provision with local partners to reflect community needs, including specific provision for mental ill health recovery, ESOL learners, and digital inclusion.

Learning for Work

To support adults furthest from the labour market to develop work-related skills and confidence, with progression into employment, self-employment, or further vocational learning. Our regional forums (Local Advisory Panels) and relationships with Jobcentre Plus, DWP, NHS, local skills boards, inform a responsive and evolving curriculum.

Learning that Builds Communities

To strengthen communities through education that fosters inclusion, cohesion, and civic engagement. Community organisers and development workers are central to our place-based model. We prioritise hyper-local delivery in underserved areas and co-produce curriculum with communities, ensuring relevance and inclusion.

Quality and Learner Success

To ensure high-quality, inclusive education that leads to positive outcomes for all learners.

Context and Place

The WEA is a national institution of adult learning and skills and delivers courses across all regional areas in England. The WEA receives and manages substantial public and charitable funding, from devolved combined authorities, from central government and via a range of other sources.

Lifelong learning is becoming ever more important. As technology alters our economy and careers get longer, people need empowering to update their skills. The same is true for life outside of work, with people needing to know how to access essential public services and remain active and engaged in their communities.

The WEA's approach is to work hyper-locally to understand communities' needs and deliver education that supports adults' progress towards work and further learning, that builds confidence and life skills and that creates a sense of community purpose and pride.

Our learners travel less than 3 miles to their learning and we seek to position ourselves in areas with the highest levels of need. On average the WEA engages with 18,000 learners across 4000 courses per year.

The WEA works closely with partners and employers across England. Our collaborative work at a local and regional level adds value to the regional economy, securing synergies across organisations and sustained outputs.



Who learns with the WEA?

In 2023/24 – the year for which we surveyed learners - the WEA had **18,706 learners** across just over 4,000 different courses. Of these learners...

75%

were women



59%

had a highest qualification at or below GCSE

51%

declared they received welfare benefits

47%

lived in a disadvantaged postcode area

36%

were from an ethnic minority background

27%

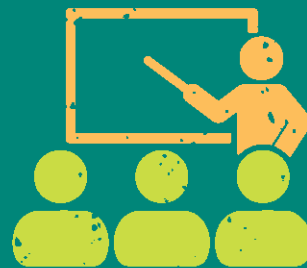
were aged 65 or over

19%

had learning disabilities or are disabled

73%

attended courses in a venue



30%

attended online courses

68%

attended community learning courses



29%

attended learning for work courses

Approach to Developing the Accountability Agreement

Engagement with Key Stakeholders:

The WEA engages with a wide range of stakeholders in addition to funding bodies to inform curriculum design and enrich our learners' opportunities for development and progression through Civic Stakeholder Engagement, Employer Engagement and Professional Associations.

Civic Stakeholder Engagement:

The WEA contributes to shaping policy for adult education nationally and ensures its currency related to the latest societal and economic priorities. Through our political engagement, stakeholder and partnership working, we ensure that the benefits of adult education to individuals, economy and society are recognised and advocated for.

Our civic stakeholders include national and regional organisations, including:

- North East Mayoral Combined Authority
- York & North Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority
- South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority
- West Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority
- Greater Manchester Mayoral Combined Authority
- Liverpool City Region Mayoral Combined Authority
- West Midlands Mayoral Combined Authority
- East Midlands Combined County Authority
- Cambridge & Peterborough Mayoral Combined Authority
- Greater London Authority
- West of England Mayoral Combined Authority
- Cornwall Mayoral Combined Authority
- Department for Education
- Department for Work and Pensions
- Learning & Work Institute
- Trade Union Congress
- HOLEX
- Association of Colleges
- Institutes of Adult Learning
- Local and Upper Authority areas
- Coalfields Regeneration Trust

The WEA's work with employers, both local, regional and national, leads to the curriculum that reflects the appropriate knowledge and skills that provides a gateway into a range of sectors. and meaningful partnerships.

Ofsted, 2024: *"Leaders and managers work well with key strategic stakeholders and employers regionally and nationally, such as local enterprise partnerships (LEPs), the GLA, MCAs, the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, and the NHS, to understand and identify skills needs. In Liverpool, managers are part of the industrial strategy group and the northwest business forum. Consequently, they understand well what the skills needs and shortages, and the difficulties in recruitment, are in this area. In Leicester and Leicestershire, WEA provides digital skills training to tackle digital poverty in response to needs identified by the LEP".*

Contribution to National, regional and local priorities

Highly Effective Curriculum Planning

The WEA delivers courses of learning that develop the skills, confidence, motivation, and resilience of adults of different ages and backgrounds.

The WEA's curriculum planning approach ensures our provision meets local need whilst considering a range of data sources and labour market intelligence. It is comprehensive and based on both qualitative and quantitative analysis, and which has learners, skills and employer needs at the centre, using labour market statistics, impact studies, and a range of market intelligence to assist in the design of curriculum.

The WEA works closely with key local, regional and national partners including Local Authorities, Job Centres, employers, trade unions, third sector organisations and other charities to align curriculum objectives and learning to identified need, and uses a wide range of information to inform our offer.

This approach has also aided the WEA to fully understand the contribution it makes and the value it brings locally and regionally. We consider this analysis alongside national, regional and local priorities, and the technical and employability skills needed within sectors and occupations. Through each LSIP we further refine and align our curriculum to support both

the critical essential skills and technical skills needed to support people into work, including those returning to work and those who have been unemployed for long periods of time.

The curriculum reflects the most appropriate clear learning pathways to guide learners in their educational journeys from Tailored Learning opportunities through to level 3, whilst recognising learner skill development and contributions from partnerships and collaborations. Therefore, priority areas of learning are built in a manner that ensures our learners develop quickly and have seamless progression routes. The WEA uses a balanced approach to scrutinise and evaluate its curriculum plan containing a range of factors, including elements such as market demand, size and economic value through to outcomes and impact.

The WEA also evaluates internal factors that impact its planning. These include quality measures, capacity, capability, the physical, digital infrastructure and people/internal skill resources required, alongside the sustainability and longevity of curriculum. It allows an approach to education and learning which runs through every subject and every course that supports learners to stay with us and achieve more.



Local Needs Duty

The Department for Education has identified national skills priority areas. It is in this context that the WEA has set its priorities for 2025–26:

Skills Priorities

<p>Health & Social Care</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Occupations in high demand are care and home workers, nursing auxiliaries and assistances, residential, day and domiciliary care managers and proprietors; medical practitioner; youth and community workers; health services and public health managers and directors; Physiotherapists; Pharmaceutical technicians and Pharmacists.</i> <p>The WEA delivers a range of health and care courses dedicated to supporting individuals’ physical, emotional, and social well-being and courses such as counselling diplomas.</p> <p>The WEA also delivers an impactful Step into Care course consisting of a training and work placement programme designed to support learners who are interested in working in a care and support role. The Step into Care programme includes the development of the essential knowledge for new care workers and a deeper understanding of conditions such as mental health, dementia, autism and learning disabilities. Learners will also gain support with CVs, application forms and interviews.</p> <p>The WEA matches learners with employers who has a live, non-ringfenced vacancy at their organisation and the learner will be supported to undertake a working interview.</p>
<p>Digital & Technology</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>The continued digitisation and automation of workforces across all sectors is increasing the demand for skilled workers to tackle skills shortages across the region and country. Currently, 52% of the population lack the essential digital skills required for the workplace.</i> <p>The WEA addresses digital exclusion in the UK through a variety of community-based digital skills programmes for adults who face barriers to traditional learning by equipping adults with essential digital skills for life, learning, and work, bridging the digital divide by reaching digitally excluded groups and supporting employability, independence, and social inclusion.</p> <p>Our curriculum offer serves first-engagement learners at Tailored learning entry, with progression routes through to level 1.</p>

Skills Priorities (continued)

<p>Foundational Skills</p>	<p>● <i>English and maths are considered essential skills for everyday life, employability, and further learning. The UK government recognises that low levels of literacy and numeracy are linked to Lower income, Unemployment, Poor health, Reduced civic participation. The benefit of Adult English & Maths Education is to enable access to jobs, apprenticeships, and training, improving the ability to manage health, navigate services, increases confidence, independence, and civic participation and helps close productivity gaps and supports levelling up.</i></p> <p>The WEA delivers inclusive and accessible programmes in English, maths, and ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), targeting adults who face educational, social, or economic barriers offering courses in tailored learning through to level 2. Courses are delivered nationally in learning centres and online, using flexible formats. Small, supportive classes are focused on confidence-building and progression pathways through to employment support.</p>
<p>Transferable and Sectoral Skills</p>	<p>Transferable skills development including research, critical thinking, communication, problem-solving, analytical skills, organisational skills and time management skills are a key part of adult education and are embedded across our curriculum. They are explicit in our core and employability skills offer and personal and professional development courses such as confidence building assertiveness and public speaking. LSIP research shows these as the most in demand employer skills, yet the most lacking in job candidates.</p>
<p>Employability / Business Skills</p>	<p>Employability skills are essential for helping individuals prepare for, find, and sustain employment. These include transferable skills like communication, teamwork, problem-solving, digital literacy, and time management. The WEA delivers programmes that improve job search skills, confidence, and workplace behaviour.</p> <p>The courses engage people with barriers to employment, including long-term unemployed and also those needing to upskill and re-skill and support local economic development by addressing skills shortages. The WEA employability skills courses also include contextualisation to key sectors.</p> <p>The WEA has also invested in an Employability & Futures Hub at the new Scunthorpe and Brighton Learning Centres.</p>

Objectives

Objective	Measures	Match to National / regional / local Priorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rebalance the curriculum in line with changes to funding allocation and national funding rules ● All learners with employment aspirations are effectively prepared for work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure the WEA maintains the financial health rating of 'good' with less income ● Co-design the employability provision to increase the opportunities for learners to interact with employers, agencies that provide career guidance through workplace visits, talks, insight days, progression fairs – Evidenced through Schemes of Learning and the learner survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● DfE, MCA & GLA funding rules and allocations ● LSIP priority cross cutting theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase the offer of digital courses providing learners with progression pathways from Tailored Learning onto accredited provision at Levels 1 and 2 ● Develop a Digital offer at level 3 ● Address shortage of IT teachers, by offering initial teaching qualifications (L3 Award in Education and Training) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase the number of learners accessing digital skills provision to 800 enrolments in 2025/26 ● National level 3 offer developed and available for delivery in August 2026 ● Increase the number of learners accessing initial education programmes to 50 enrolments in 2025/26 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Digital & Technology: local (LSIP, employers), regional (MCA & GLA) National (DfE)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase provision to address skills shortages across Health & Care including a national Step into Care offer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase the number of learners accessing Health & Care provision to 500 enrolments in 2025/26 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Health & Social Care: local (LSIP, employers), regional (MCA & GLA) National (DfE)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sustainably grow our foundational skills offer (English, maths, ESOL) to enable more adults to progress in life and work. ● Embed transferable skills into courses that prepare learners for work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase the number of learners accessing English, maths and ESOL provision to 3000 in 2025/26 ● Design the curriculum offer to fully embed cross sectoral transferable skills – Evidenced through Schemes of Learning and learner surveys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Foundational Skills: local (LSIP, employers), regional (MCA & GLA) National (DfE) ● Transferable skills is an LSIP priority cross cutting theme

Local Needs Duty

In response to The Skills Act (2022), Trustees have conducted a review of our delivery, determining how well our curriculum meets local needs across each of our strategic objectives.

The review considered our approach to identifying need through local needs assessment, how this informed curriculum planning and how managers used self-assessment processes to determine how well we met need.

The review also considered our stakeholder engagement and how we work with a broad range of partners to reach into communities.

It also considered the relevant findings and recommendations from our recent Ofsted report and used these to inform a series of improvement actions and activities.

Corporation statement

I, John Widdowson, Chair of the Board of Trustees for the WEA, recommend this statement as a true reflection of the work and ambitions of the WEA.



John Widdowson
Chair of Trustees, WEA





This plan will be published on the WEA's website within three months of the start of the new academic year.

Supporting documentation

- WEA Strategy -** wea.org.uk/resources/wea-strategy
- WEA Impact Report -** wea.org.uk/about-us/our-impact
- WEA Ofsted Report -** wea.org.uk/resources/ofsted-report
- WEA Trustees Report -** wea.org.uk/resources/trustees-report

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