



Adult Learning
Within Reach

WEA Impact Report

Learning with Purpose

2024/25



Introduction

Learning across a lifetime should be recognised as an essential public good at the heart of a healthier, fairer society.

Adult learning is narrowing once again. Public funding is being increasingly squeezed into an almost exclusive focus on skills for jobs. That shift matters. It sidelines learning that builds confidence, improves health and wellbeing, strengthens community connections, and enables people to participate in democracy. It also ignores the reality of many adult learners, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, whose next step is rarely a straight line into work but a longer journey that begins with inclusion, curiosity, and belonging.

This narrow focus misses something more fundamental. Lifelong learning has intrinsic value. It shapes people, places, and societies, not just CVs. For more than a century, WEA has known this to be true. In a context where that truth is being underestimated and under-resourced, doing nothing is not an option.

Against this backdrop, WEA is evolving with purpose. Our direction is clear. As an education charity we champion a broad and economically just lifelong learning approach that meets social needs, not just job market demand.

And we are committed to placing lifelong learning at the heart of place based planning, rooted in communities and shaped by real lives. This is not a departure from who we are, but a return to our roots and the principles we were founded to serve.

There are reasons for confidence. Our 2024/25 Ofsted inspection confirmed WEA as a Good provider, with Outstanding in behaviour and attitudes and personal development, recognising the quality, relevance, and impact of our work. And in 2026 we launched our Lifelong Learning Labs, bringing together partners, experts, communities, and learners to shape a new lifelong learning strategy. We will publish the findings at the end of the year, making the case for learning with evidence, innovation, and conviction and calling on government to act.

This impact report comes at a critical time. It shows why our work matters and the difference it makes for individuals, communities, and society. The issue is not a lack of proof, but a lack of priority. Learning across a lifetime should be recognised as an essential public good at the heart of a healthier, fairer society. Its continued erosion leaves too many people with fewer chances to grow, adapt, and take part fully. That is not the future we should accept, and together we can change its course.



S. A. Parkinson

Simon Parkinson
CEO and General Secretary, WEA



Our learners

WEA learners are adults from all walks of life, learning at different stages. Some come to improve language skills, gain qualifications, or find work. Others learn to try something new, build confidence, or manage their wellbeing.

In 2024/25, WEA supported **over 14,000 individual learners** across **31,042 course enrolments** on **3,243 courses**, taught by **472 tutors** in England. **6,325 learners enrolled in more than one course**. On average, learners enrolled in **just over two courses each**.

14,073

individual learners supported by WEA in 2024/25



1,839

learners gained a qualification through WEA programmes in 2024/25

Qualifications achieved

Nearly half of these achievements were **Entry Level qualifications (48%)**, supporting learners at the very start of their learning journey. A further **42% went on to achieve Level 2 qualifications**, showing clear progression into higher levels of learning.

Learners outside the workforce

More than half of learners were not in work or retired. Many were balancing health conditions, caring responsibilities, or other barriers to employment.

58%

of learners were not in work or retired in 2024/25

Most popular subject areas

21%

of learners took an ESOL course, making it the most popular subject

ESOL = English for Speakers of Other Languages

Skills for Work programmes attracted 13% of learners, covering areas such as digital skills, education and childcare, community interpreting, and employability.

A further 10% were in Skills for Life courses, supporting confidence, communication, financial skills, and wellbeing.

Alongside this, many learners chose courses driven by interest and enjoyment. **Arts and Crafts** attracted over 18%, while **Languages and Culture** courses accounted for 15%. The remaining 23% of our learning offer covers a broad mix of sector subject areas.

Supporting learners

Access to learning depends not just on the courses offered, but on whether people can overcome the practical, financial, and personal barriers they face.

In 2024/25, WEA's learner support helped many people take part in their learning. This included administering the government's Discretionary Learner Support fund which helps with costs like travel and childcare, and Additional Learning Support for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities.

For many, support with travel, equipment, childcare, or adjustments in the classroom makes the difference between being able to learn or not at all.

Over 500 learners received Discretionary Learner Support, which helps learners who would otherwise struggle to take part in learning because of financial pressure or practical access issues. The fund covered:

- 211 learners' travel costs
- 144 learners' course fees
- 53 learners' IT device loans
- 36 learners' childcare costs
- 12 learners' other course costs

119 learners received Additional Learning Support, which provides support for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities, including classroom support, assistive equipment and tailored adjustments.

507

learners received Discretionary Learner Support

119

learners received Additional Learning Support

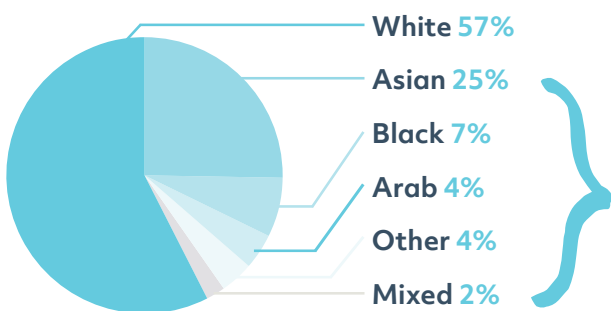
Who WEA reaches

Our learner data shows the distinctive reach of WEA. Over two thirds of learners start with qualifications below Level 2. Many live in disadvantaged areas, claim Universal Credit, or are outside the workforce. A significant number come from minority ethnic backgrounds or speak English as an additional language.

Together, this shows WEA's strength in reaching adults who are often under-represented in education. At the same time, the wide mix of subjects and ages reflects the broader role adult learning plays in supporting wellbeing, curiosity, and lifelong participation.

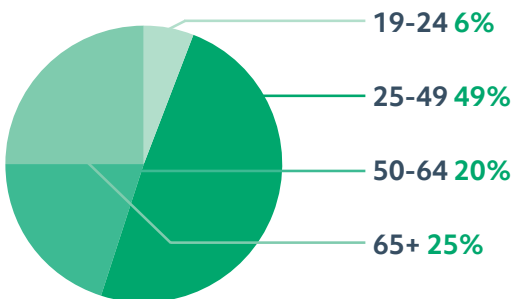
WEA's programmes help open doors and build inclusion, supporting people to develop skills, confidence, and connections at every stage of life.

Ethnicity

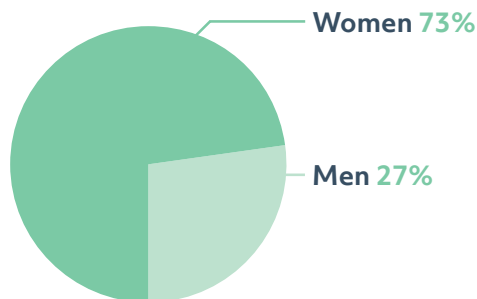


43% of learners came from minority ethnic backgrounds

Age



Sex



- 45%** of learners reported having no formal qualifications
- 23%** of learners reported that English was not their first language
- 23%** of learners reported attaining qualifications below Level 2
- 48%** of learners lived in the most disadvantaged postcode areas
- 54%** reported receiving Universal Credit or similar benefits

Where learning happens

Where learning takes place shapes who can access it, how confident they feel attending, and whether they continue. WEA delivers learning through a mix of partner venues, our own hubs and online provision, designed to meet learners where they are.

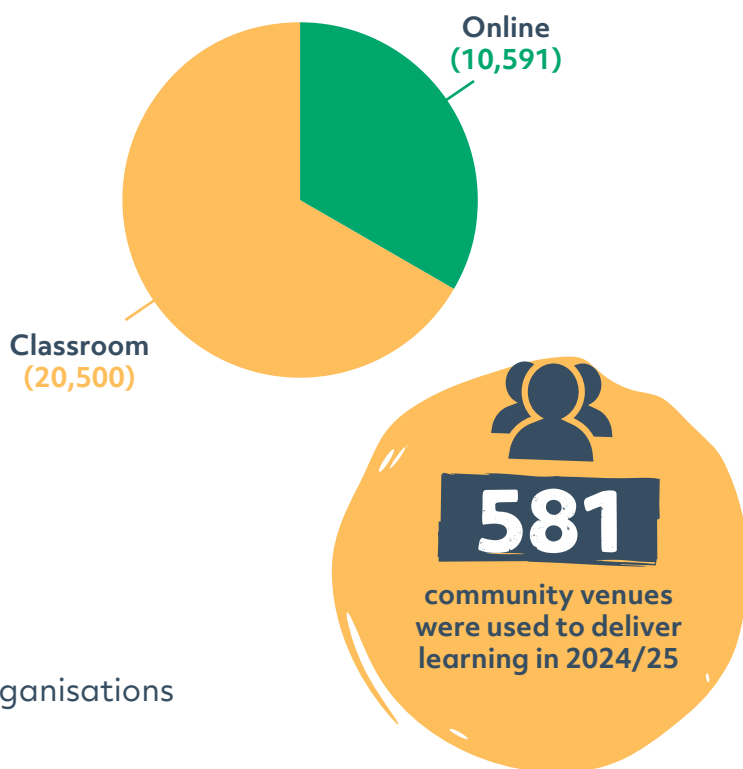
Two thirds of our learning took place in **classrooms (20,500)**, with one third taking place **online (10,591)**.

Community-based venues

Our learning takes place in a wide range of settings, including:

- Community centres
- Libraries
- Schools and children's centres
- Faith buildings
- Voluntary and community sector organisations
- Employment and support services
- Arts, cultural and sports venues

Delivering learning in familiar, local settings helps remove barriers to taking part. For many learners, especially those returning to education or facing disadvantage, where learning happens can determine whether they take part at all.



42%

of WEA's partner venues are in the most deprived areas of England

A further

25%

are in the next most deprived areas

Nearly

70%

of learning delivered was in communities facing the highest levels of socioeconomic disadvantage



Improving our sites

In 2023, WEA received **£9.6 million** across three grants from the Department for Education: the Capital Improvement Grant, Capital Transformation Fund, and Energy Efficiency Grant. This funding helped us improve our buildings, purchase new sites, and reduce our carbon footprint.

In 2024/25, we **redeveloped two existing hubs**, York Court in Bristol and our Nottingham site, transforming them into welcoming community learning spaces. The Nottingham hub features a complete redesign with

three teaching rooms, soon to be four, alongside dedicated spaces that better support tutors and learners. The reimaged layout creates a more flexible, engaging environment for learning, while thoughtful sustainability elements, including renewable energy features and a greenhouse that supports wellbeing, reflect our commitment to long-term impact as well as education.

In 2024-25 WEA's total income was **£27.4 million**. Our principal funding came from the Adult Skills Fund via the Department for Education, which provided 41% of our total income for the year, and via the Mayoral Combined Authorities at £6.2m.



Working with Partners

Partnerships are central to how WEA reaches learners and delivers learning. We work alongside a wide range of organisations to ensure provision is accessible, relevant, and rooted in local communities.

These partnerships help us engage learners, deliver learning in trusted settings, and support progression into further opportunities.

WEA works with partners across many sectors, including:

- Local authorities
- Community and voluntary organisations
- Employability and skills services
- Housing associations
- National and government bodies

Each partnership plays a different role, from outreach and referral to co-delivery and progression support.

Tackling mis and dis information

In January 2025, WEA launched a free self-directed online programme to empower individuals to spot, challenge and prevent the spread of online mis and disinformation.

Further to this, WEA partnered with award-winning journalist, Amanda Ruggeri to launch a free webinar. Attended by over **450 people**, the aim of the session was to promote critical thinking and equip individuals with the tools to spot manipulative tactics, verify information before acting and support others to resist harmful narratives.



Our work in Scotland

WEA's work in Scotland is defined by a strong partnership-led approach, delivering learning that is locally responsive, accessible and closely aligned with community needs.

Provision spans a wide range of programmes, including ESOL, numeracy, digital skills and vocational pathways, with a particular focus on supporting individuals facing barriers to education and employment.

Our partners in Scotland include local authorities, third sector organisations, community groups and national partners.

Expanding access through accredited and innovative delivery

WEA Scotland delivers the accredited Community Interpreting qualification (SCQF Level 5), acting as both provider and awarding body.

In 2024/25:

- delivery took place in partnership with Ayrshire Councils, ESOL Scotland and Glasgow Life

- learners progressed into voluntary roles and paid employment

In 2025, WEA delivered its first pilot programme in a Glasgow secondary school, in collaboration with Clyde Gateway and Scottish Sports Futures.



Kincardine Community

In 2024, WEA partnered with Kincardine Community Council to offer a **stained-glass window course** to local residents to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Miners' strike in Fife.

Throughout the eight-week course, learners developed their communication and team-building skills by gathering insight, generating ideas and clarifying challenges in the early stages of the project.

Through their own memories, visits to exhibitions and historic exploration of the strike, learners were encouraged to record their thoughts, feelings and impressions and created a stained-glass window which is now publicly displayed in Kincardine Community Library.



Fife: pathways into employment

In Fife, strong partnerships with third sector organisations and the local authority supported clear progression routes into employment or further study.

A key collaboration with Fife Gingerbread referred parents returning to learning onto the 20-hour Introduction to Pupil Support course.

This course:

- built knowledge and confidence
- developed practical skills for Pupil Support Assistant roles
- provided a digital badge to support employability

Our partnership with WEA has significantly strengthened the support we offer to parents. The joint approach builds confidence, enhances employability, and provides clear insight into the PSA role. The digital badge offers formal recognition of achievement and a boost to CVs.

Jane Cussans at Fife Gingerbread

Personal Assistants Network Scotland

WEA Scotland facilitates the Personal Network Scotland (or PANS), which is a free membership scheme for anyone who is employed to provide support for someone to enable them to live as independently as possible. Personal Assistants who are part of the Network benefit from advice & guidance, events and networking opportunities.

PANS is funded by the Scottish Government and facilitated by WEA.

In 2025, PA Network Scotland worked closely with Social Work Scotland and Independent Living Group Employee Assistance Programme.

1,698

people are currently members of the Personal Assistants Network Scotland

Community grants in Manchester

Between 2023 and 2025, Greater Manchester Combined Authority commissioned WEA to deliver a **£5.5 million** Community Grants Fund.

The programme was structured around two complementary strands:

Strand 1: Essential Life Skills

This strand focused on engaging residents who were not currently accessing skills provision and were unlikely to do so without targeted outreach.

Delivery included:

- numeracy and financial skills
- English language (excluding ESOL)
- digital literacy

Strand 2: Progression into Inclusive Employment

This strand focused on individuals facing more complex barriers to employment, including:

- long-term unemployment
- mental health challenges
- caring responsibilities

Delivery included:

- tailored employability support



130
community-based
projects supported
during round one

6,600

residents supported
during round one

A key strength of this strand was its informal and accessible delivery, which helped reduce stigma and create welcoming environments for learning.

Participants reported increased confidence in everyday activities, including:

- budgeting
- navigating digital tools
- supporting their children's education.

- work tasters and employer engagement
- personalised pathways into work

Participants developed practical skills and were supported to move closer to employment, with some progressing directly into jobs or further programmes.

Josh's story

From care experience to leadership

As Josh approached his 21st birthday, life felt precarious. A care leaver from Trafford, he was living on very little money and facing the real risk of homelessness.

Through a Greater Manchester Community Grant-funded project, Josh joined Marvellous Mentors, an introduction to youth work programme where he helped with activities and engaged with participants. Drawing on his lived experience, Josh began supporting care leaver forums and speaking up for others like him. He later shared his story at a social value event attended by local stakeholders and decision-makers.

Through the programme, Josh grew in confidence. He found his voice, built leadership and mentoring skills, and gained real workplace experience which helped him move into paid work.

Josh's story is about real change. He moved from instability and constant worry at work, to responsibility and a leadership role in his community. It shows what long-term, structured support can make possible when people are seen, trusted and backed to build their own future.

Please don't treat me as a statistic. We're not numbers. **We're people. I live and hurt, and I just want to work and have somewhere stable to live.**

Josh

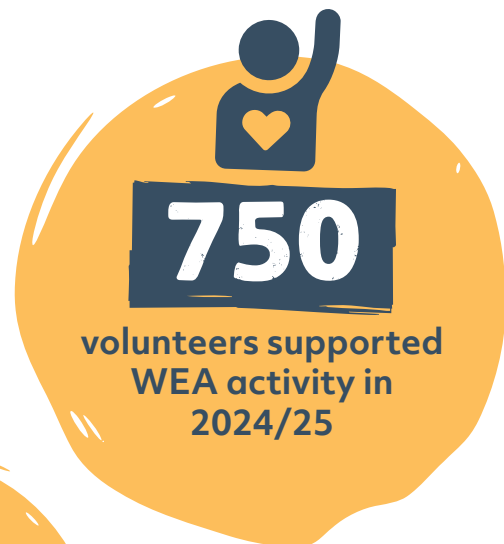
Volunteering with WEA

There is no single way to volunteer with WEA. In 2024/25, **750** volunteers supported WEA's work, giving their time, skills, and experience in a wide range of roles.

Volunteers supported our work by:

- Leading in our governance
- Supporting learning in the classroom
- Engaging local communities
- Speaking up for lifelong learning

For many volunteers, involvement goes beyond supporting delivery: it reflects a deeper commitment to lifelong learning and community development.



So much of the attention in educational discourse focuses on mainstream pre-19 education, and adults are often an afterthought. Volunteering for the WEA is a chance to advocate for this group, help provide access to vital learning opportunities, and positively affect change in my local area.

David
WEA volunteer



Personal benefits

Our volunteers reported strong personal benefits from their involvement at the WEA.

77%

feel more included in their community

75%

describe their experience as personally fulfilling

68%

feel they made a difference

I like that the WEA champions continuous adult learning and facilitates it through its range of courses, events and volunteer programmes, which aligns with my own values of continuous learning and upskilling. You have a chance to creatively explore and express what you enjoy and are good at, and there is flexibility to make use of your own ideas and ways of working.

Denise
WEA volunteer



Our membership

Membership is a big part of who WEA is. Members help guide the organisation via our good governance, shape our priorities and values, and keep the lifelong learning movement alive.

Being a member means more than taking a course. It's about being part of a community that believes in lifelong learning, having a voice, and working together to make a positive difference.

In 2024/25, WEA had **6,226 members**. Less than a third paid a membership fee. This reflects WEA's commitment to keeping membership open and

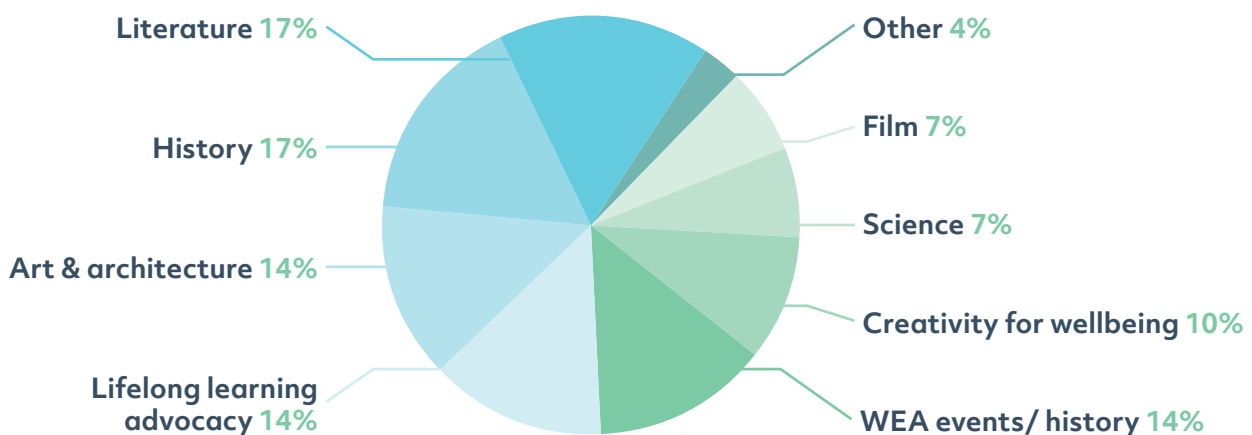
accessible, regardless of people's financial circumstances.

Survey results show that most members join because they believe in what WEA stands for. **Around 90%** said their reasons included:

- A belief in the value of adult education
- Wanting to support WEA's work
- Being part of a community that shares these values

In 2024/25 we delivered **29** member events. **20** of those were online, with an average of **206** attending each event.

Our member events cover a wide range of themes, reflecting our members interests:





Being a member has helped my connections to family, friends and my local community in that it gives me things to talk about and share knowledge.

Margaret
WEA member

I am largely housebound due to mobility problems, I live alone and have a strong desire to maintain my level of mental and social stimulation.

Rosamund
WEA member

In 2025 our Protect Adult Learning campaign challenged cuts to the Adult Skills Fund which threatened access to learning for thousands of adults. We mobilised learners and supporters to sign a petition, contact MPs and mayors, and share powerful personal stories about the value of adult education.

Unfortunately, the cuts went ahead nationally and locally, but the fight to properly fund adult learning continues. Lifelong learning transforms lives and communities and should be protected, not reduced.

Why not join WEA as a member and become part of a movement that helps others and transforms lives by bringing lifelong learning within reach.

wea.org.uk/become-member

Sarah's story

"During covid I lost my best friend which was a really challenging time for me. I lost my confidence and suffered with terrible anxiety."

During a difficult time in her life, Sarah, who worked as a team leader in a busy charity shop, made the decision to take time out of employment to prioritise her mental health.

She enrolled onto WEA Ways to Wellbeing, a course that promotes

positive wellbeing and equips learners with coping mechanisms to help combat low mental health.

The course, held inside a local community centre, supported Sarah to find connection through group discussions and creativity including creative writing and poetry. Sarah has since completed a Digital Skills course and has found inner confidence and a sense of belonging through the WEA.



The course helped me create close bonds with people and gain confidence. I now feel stronger as a person.

Sarah



Taraneh's story

"I realised being a mum and waking up to my son everyday was what gave me energy and decided I wanted to work with children."

Originally from Iran, Taraneh moved to the UK from Italy to find better job opportunities. Following the birth of her son and the breakdown of her relationship, Taraneh suffered with depression and had to take time out of work. Becoming a single mother with no family nearby to support her, she felt isolated and hopeless.

Taraneh spent the next four years working in the Care sector and although she enjoyed her work, she had a desire to learn something new.

After finding the WEA, she completed a Diploma for Early Years Practitioner course and successfully interviewed afterwards for a job at a local nursery. She is now studying to become a Room Leader.



I love working at the nursery and being around children.

It doesn't feel like work at all!

Taraneh





wea.org.uk

For further information on the research that underpins this report email: research@wea.org.uk

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