



Adult Skills Plan 2026

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West
Yorkshire
Combined
Authority

Tracy
Brabin
Mayor of
West Yorkshire

Adult Skills Plan 2026

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Mayor's foreword

As Mayor of West Yorkshire, I'm proud to introduce our Adult Skills Plan 2026, placing people, opportunity and fairness at the heart of our region's future.

Since we began on the journey of devolution, we've seen the power of local decision-making. With control of our Adult Skills Fund, we've been able to target investment in our communities where it makes sense, and where it makes the biggest difference. We've helped more residents gain vital English, Maths and digital skills, retrain for good jobs and progress in their chosen careers. We've worked closely with our local authorities in the region, our colleges, training providers as well as employers and community partners to create a skills system that better serves the people of West Yorkshire.

We have made strong progress, but we know there is still work to do. This plan sets out how we will build on that success and where we go next, demonstrating the impact of our funding and committing us to actions that unlock opportunity, for everyone.

Through devolution, West Yorkshire will be a Region of Learning and Creativity, where everyone, whatever their background, can find their passion, gain the skills they need, and build a rewarding career. Whether that is through first steps into learning, technical training, or higher-level qualifications, this plan is about creating and funding pathways that open doors. Lifelong learning is the cornerstone of a healthy, fulfilling, working life, that suits the needs of the individual to achieve their goals. This plan helps a person turn their individual goals into reality.

Skills also remain critical to our plans for West Yorkshire: from delivering major projects like our tram, ensuring our new, integrated transport system - the Weaver Network - has a workforce that reflects and represents all residents, to accelerating our retrofit vision so that every home is healthy and affordable to run.

This plan will also support job growth in construction, digital, and the creative industries. We will work with wider agendas and partners to leverage investment, ensuring every person's potential is realised and every resident can share in the prosperity of our region.

As we set out in West Yorkshire's Local Growth Plan in 2024, our region has the potential to add a huge £25 billion across the next decade of Gross Added Value to the UK economy. If our Growth Plan is the vehicle to deliver more growth, our Region of Learning and Creativity is the engine that powers it. And the Adult Skills Plan ensures our residents are empowered – putting people firmly in the driving seat to progress and achieve in their lives.

I want to thank all our partners for their dedication and innovative thinking in making this vision a reality. Together, we can ensure that every adult in West Yorkshire has the chance to learn grow and succeed, in turn this will enable our region to thrive now and for the future.

Tracy Brabin, Mayor of West Yorkshire

Executive summary

The West Yorkshire Adult Skills Plan refreshes and refocuses the investment priorities and approach for adult skills commissioning in the region. The plan encompasses first steps learning, technical and vocational programmes and industry-designed training. Building on four years of devolved delivery, the plan sets out priorities for West Yorkshire adult skills investment until 2031, to tackle key skills challenges, respond to the region's evolving economic landscape, and fully utilise the opportunities presented by deeper devolution and the Integrated Settlement.

West Yorkshire is a region of significant potential, with a diverse economy, vibrant communities, and a young population. Yet it faces enduring challenges: lower-than-average qualification levels, high economic inactivity, and skills shortages in both foundational and high-growth sectors. The Adult Skills Plan recognises that addressing these issues is essential for both individual prosperity and the region's inclusive economic growth.

Principles for Investment

The Plan articulates how the vision and objectives set out in the Combined Authority's Local Growth Plan and the Region of Learning and Creativity Strategy will be achieved through adult skills funding in the coming five years, with four principles for investment:

1. Increasing access to learning where it is needed most, particularly for disadvantaged and under-represented groups;
2. Supporting progression from every type of learning, from entry-level to higher-level skills;
3. Connecting learning to sustained employment and career pathways;
4. Ensuring the region has the skilled workforce needed to meet current and future economic demands.

These principles are underpinned by a set of commissioning standards that prioritise learner-centred, place-based, high-quality provision, and a commitment to collaboration, transparency, and social value across the skills system.

The majority of funding will continue to be routed through place based, anchor institutions – the five West Yorkshire local authorities and members of the FE Compact. Where appropriate, grants will be extended to members of the new HE Compact, in recognition of their unique position in supporting innovation and productivity. Competitive procurement will continue to complement granted provision, targeted to ensure residents and employers needs are met, with a priority on partnering with West Yorkshire-based providers.

Progress since Devolution

The Plan celebrates the progress made since 2020, including targeted provision in specific sectors and geographies, expanding entitlements to enable a greater number of residents to access learning, and creating pathways through bridging programmes. Devolution has enabled a number of flexibilities and improvements, and the majority of these will remain or be further developed. The widened access to funding and expanded digital entitlement continue, alongside a commitment to Tailored Learning as a highly effective way to engage disadvantaged learners.

New policy changes

Building on the recent adult skills evaluation, the Plan sets out a number of strategic priorities for the coming five years, to realise the objectives in the Local Growth Plan, including:

- Increasing access to **Level 3**
- Expanding **Targeted Employment Programmes**, based on analysis of existing models and sector needs
- Producing a **strategy for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)** provision
- **Local Growth and Inclusivity Pilots** – focussing on strategic investment needs
- Establishing a **Region of Learning and Creativity Network** to enable engagement with the wider skills system
- Addressing **tutor shortage** issues, working with partners to understand barriers and develop a range of pilots
- Improving **destination and progression data** to better articulate and demonstrate the impact of the funding

Prioritising the funding

The Adult Skills plan is intended to be implemented irrespective of the size of the funding envelope provided through Integrated Settlement, so prioritisation of the funding needs to take place. Whilst maintaining a focus on pathways to Level 2 and entitlements, this will also mean a shift in investment to support a higher-level skills profile, agreed with each Local Authority area in line with demographic needs, over the life of the plan.

The Combined Authority will balance investment with a focus on individual need and continue to prioritise provision which has the biggest impact on progression, underpinned by effective data and intelligence. The Plan sets out how the coming five years will maintain stability whilst innovating, and supporting a cohesive training system.

Leveraging Investment

The adult skills funding received into West Yorkshire is insufficient to deliver all our ambitions alongside every resident's entitlement for basic skills. While some efficiencies identified in the Adult Skills Plan will support the investment shift – it cannot be realised without leveraging additional funds. Adult skills funding should be seen as the 'funding of last resort' - Advanced Learner Loans, Apprenticeships, Lifelong Learning Entitlement and the Growth and Skills Levy should be explored as primary funding options.

The Combined Authority has consistently lobbied for the Adult Skills allocation for West Yorkshire to be increased, reflecting the region's demographics and challenges, and this will continue in the coming five years.

Through targeted investment, innovative delivery models, and a renewed focus on outcomes and progression, the Adult Skills Plan 2026 articulates how West Yorkshire can be Region of Learning and Creativity—where everyone has the opportunity to thrive, and where skills are the foundation of a fairer, stronger, and more prosperous future.

Background and context

The Adult Skills Plan sets out the key priorities and investment approach for all devolved regional adult skills funding in support of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority's [the Combined Authority] priorities. The West Yorkshire [Local Growth Plan](#) and Region of Learning and Creativity Strategy provide the strategic direction for the region's economic and employment and skills ambitions.

The West Yorkshire context

West Yorkshire is a modern, successful region on the global stage. It is a diverse and young region of 2.4 million people, with a workforce of 1.2 million and almost 100,000 businesses. West Yorkshire is home to the largest manufacturing workforce in the North - a creative, digital and technology powerhouse with a financial, legal and professional services sector second only to London.



Transformational regional investment in trams, housing retrofit and energy systems, add to the exciting economic opportunities for the region that could unlock growth and prosperity for residents and businesses across West Yorkshire.

West Yorkshire is a self-contained labour market – 90 percent of workers live in the Combined Authority area – with a diverse economy and sector strengths. However, the region faces key barriers to growth, including a lack of investment, poor connectivity and skills, which are holding back progress (A detailed review of West Yorkshire Labour Market Intelligence is available annually from the West Yorkshire Combined Authority.).

A lack of skills held by the region's workforce is a key constraint on productivity growth:

A deficit of higher level skills:

- 40% of West Yorkshire's population are qualified to Level 4 compared to the national average of 47%.

A high proportion of people with no / low qualifications:

- 13% of working age people in West Yorkshire have either no qualifications or are qualified below Level 2, compared to the national average of 11%.

Youth attainment:

- 80% of young people in West Yorkshire achieve a Level 2 qualification by the age of 19 compared to the national average of 83%.
- 52% of young people in West Yorkshire achieve a Level 3 qualification by the age of 19, compared to the national average of 58%.

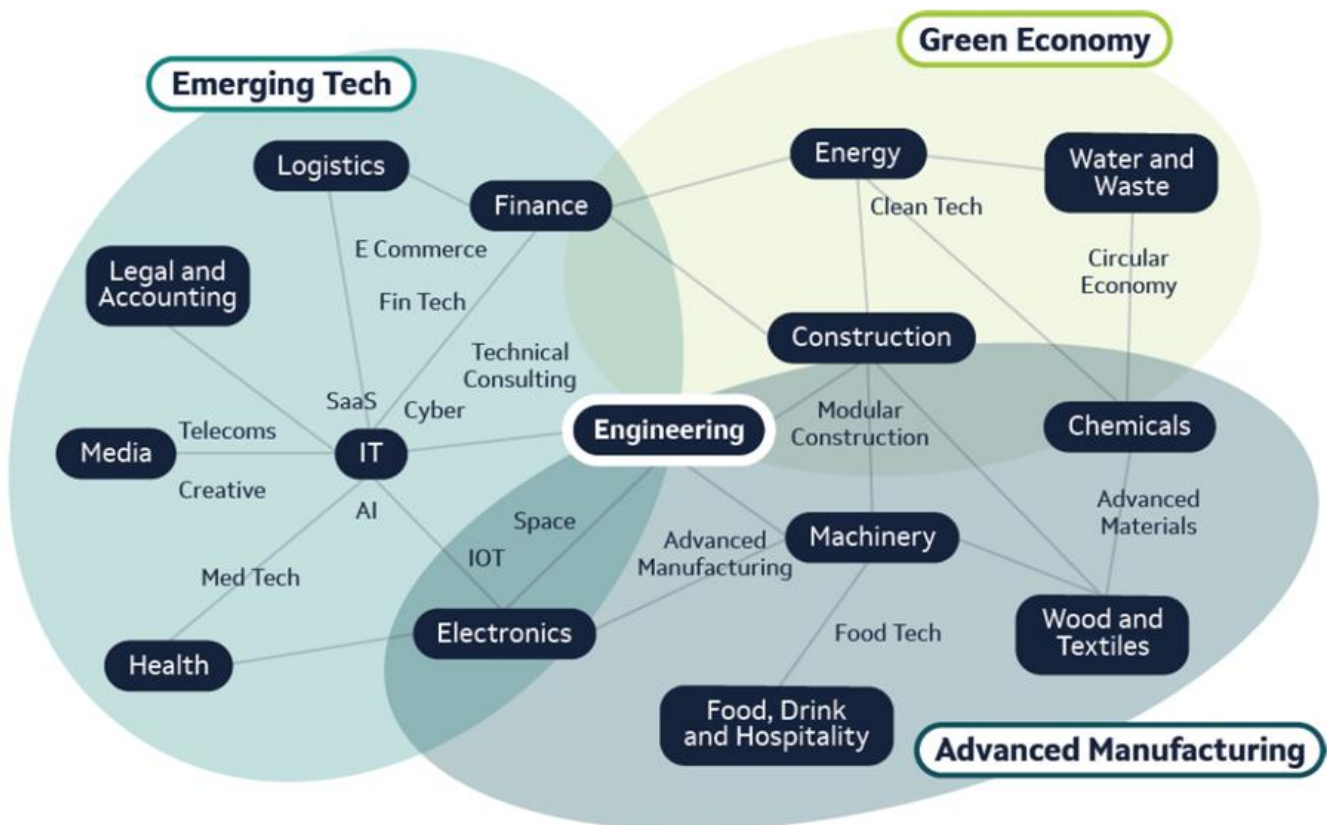
Unemployment and economic inactivity:

- Claimant unemployment in West Yorkshire stands at 4.9% compared to the national average of 4.0% with the claimant rate among young people significantly higher.
- The economic inactivity rate for working age people in West Yorkshire is 24% compared to the national average of 21%.

Opportunity for change

The Local Growth Plan sets out the Combined Authority's approach to supporting the growth of all businesses across West Yorkshire. The West Yorkshire economy has strengths in a remarkably diverse range of sectors with opportunities for growth (as outlined in the diagram below). As identified in the Local Growth Plan, part of the Combined Authority's approach to accelerating the growth of the region's sectors and clusters involves the development of seven West Yorkshire Cluster Action Plans, with a focus on skills built in.

Figure 1: West Yorkshire's High Growth Sectors/Clusters



In addition, transformational investment across West Yorkshire, in mass transit, housing retrofit and energy systems will create new, skilled jobs across the region.

Supporting and developing a skilled workforce and talent pipeline to fill skills gaps and vacancies and meet demand will be key to realise the potential of West Yorkshire's growth sectors and maximise benefits of the planned capital investment. That is why skills lie at the heart of West Yorkshire's plans for inclusive economic growth. They provide the vital link to connect all residents to new opportunities at all stages of their lives and careers.

The Combined Authority will maximise the benefits of devolved functions and funding, stretch its strategic influencing and convening role, and continue to work in close partnership with the region's Local Authorities, colleges, independent training providers, businesses, higher education and voluntary, community and social enterprise sector to achieve the ambitions of the Local Growth Plan.

Devolution in West Yorkshire

***Devolution** in England is the process of transferring accountability, powers and funding from central government to regional and local authorities. Devolution redistributes political, social and economic power by enabling decision making closer to and involving communities.*

In March 2020, the five council leaders of West Yorkshire agreed a transformative £1.8 billion devolution deal with Government to unlock the region's full potential and improve living standards. This included control of the then £63m annual Adult Education Budget for West Yorkshire to closer align spending on skills to the opportunities and needs in the local economy. Delivery of the devolved Adult Education Budget – now called Adult Skills Fund - commenced in West Yorkshire in August 2021.

***Mayor Tracy Brabin** is the first directly elected Mayor for West Yorkshire. Now in her second term, the Mayor was re-elected in 2024 for four years. One of her key ambitions is for West Yorkshire to become a **Region of Learning and Creativity**, where everyone can get the education, skills and training they need to make the most of themselves – regardless of where they come from.*

Driven by a partnership approach, the deal continues to empower the five councils of Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield and the Combined Authority to address issues affecting local communities such as adult skills, work and health, employment support, transport, housing, planning, energy and more.

The devolution agenda has continuously evolved. The Government elected in 2024 is embedding devolution as a way of working and delivering in partnership with regions and Mayors, as well as introducing a consistent framework for deeper devolution.

As part of this, West Yorkshire will benefit from the introduction of an Integrated Settlement from April 2026. The Integrated Settlement will consolidate funding streams across local growth, transport and skills and retrofit (among others) and provide longer-term, more flexible and less bureaucratic funding for regional priorities, including adult skills.

Through the [English Devolution White Paper](#) from 2024 and associated Bill, Government is introducing the concept of strategic authorities at different levels.

*Due to West Yorkshire's longstanding partnership, existing mayoralty and robust governance, assurance processes and financial accountability, the organisation has been designated as an **Established Mayoral Strategic Authority**, which unlocks further devolution. This will come into effect April 2026.*

Adult Skills Funding

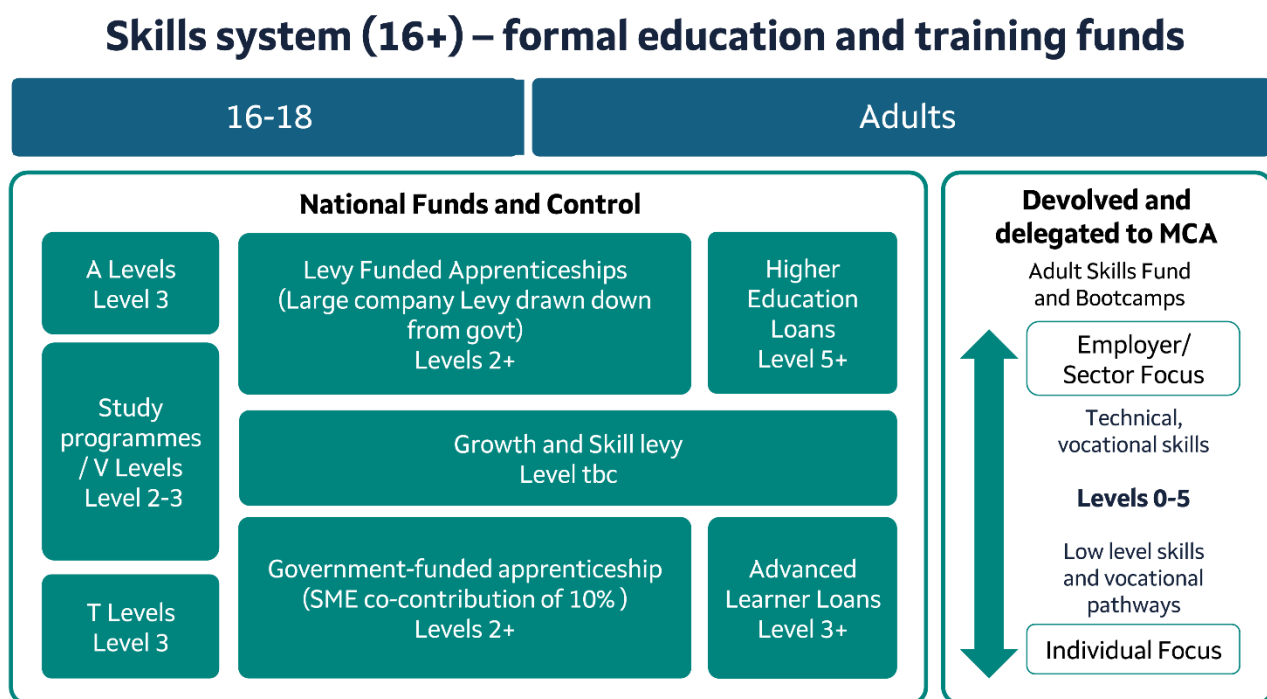
The principal purpose of the Adult Skills Fund (formerly Adult Education Budget) received by Combined Authorities is to engage adults (post 19) and provide them with the skills needed for life, and for entering and sustaining work, an apprenticeship, or other further learning.

The funding pays specifically for learning programmes (predominantly qualifications) and provides an element of learner support funding for those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Adult skills funding in the region supports legal entitlements to fully fund eligible learners to attain basic skills in English, Maths and digital, and to gain their first level 2 and level 3 qualifications. It also provides employer-led technical and vocational training to support people to enter and progress through careers and self-employment opportunities in West Yorkshire's foundational and high-growth industries

The devolved Adult Skills Fund is only one strand within the wider skills system (see Fig 2), including Apprenticeships, Higher Education, A Levels, T Levels, V Levels (forthcoming) and study programmes. These are funded through government, the Apprenticeship Levy (soon to be Growth and Skills Levy), and employer and individual investment (including through government loans). To ensure the funding is effectively commissioned and investment maximised, the Combined Authority needs to ensure the offer is integrated and there are clear pathways and links across the wider skills offers.

Figure 2: The Skills System (16+)



Adult Skills Devolution so far

Devolution of adult skills functions and budgets has already allowed the Combined Authority to better align adult skills funding with the opportunities and needs of local residents and businesses, deliver a more joined-up, responsive and accessible skills system and achieve better value for money.

Over the past four years, West Yorkshire has delivered the following change for local residents and businesses:

- Funding is focused on 'priority' (fully funded) learners (84% starts)
- Funds are increasingly targeted to increase inclusivity (61% ethnic minority, 18% Learners with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities)
- More residents from the most deprived areas are accessing training (42%)
- More residents are gaining English, Maths or digital skills (24,000 starts)
- The funds invested are giving residents their first ever qualifications, and raising skills levels (23,770 starts)
- Learner success is increasing year on year (88%)
- Tracking shows that more learners are progressing after their training.

Integrated settlement

West Yorkshire will benefit from an Integrated Settlement from April 2026. This means a consolidated budget across skills, employment support, housing, economic development and regeneration, transport and environment. This is a welcome step away from fragmented, departmental short-term funding with individual monitoring and reporting requirements towards a longer-term, single outcomes framework agreed between West Yorkshire Combined Authority and Government.

Combined Authorities will have increased flexibility in how funds are deployed and managed at a local level and will be accountable for those outcomes and targets (and where required outputs) which are agreed with government. These will be driven by the strategic ambition set out in the Local Growth Plan.

From 2026/2027 onwards, devolution of non-apprenticeship adult skills funding will combine and un-ringfence funding of the Adult Skills Fund, Free Courses for Jobs and Skills Bootcamps. This funding will form part of the West Yorkshire Integrated Settlement.

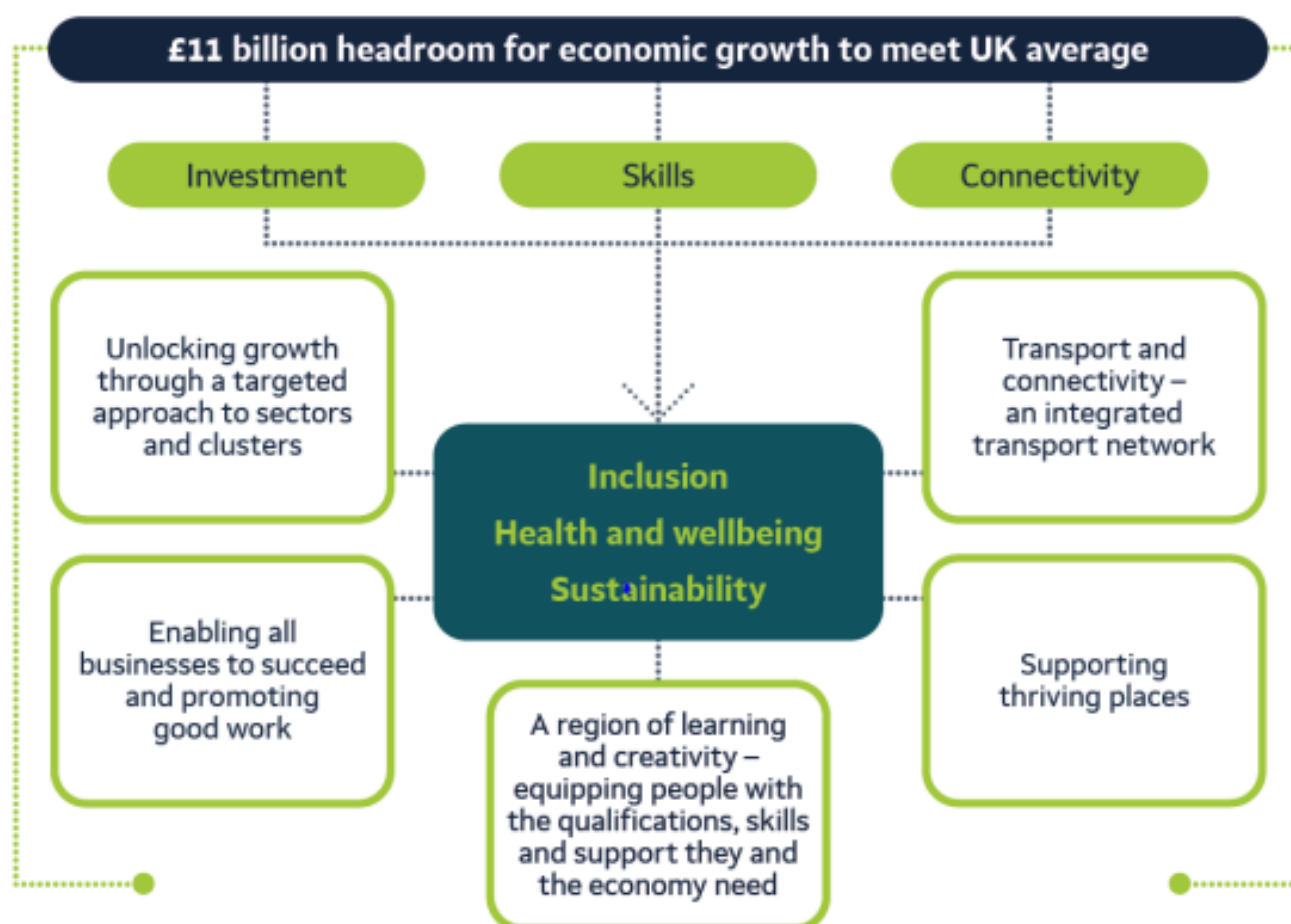
Until the introduction of the devolved Integrated Settlement for West Yorkshire, the Combined Authority has supplemented devolved adult skills provision through funding granted from the Department for Education (e.g. Skills Bootcamps), which is applied for annually, UK Shared Prosperity Funding (e.g. Multiply) and its own Gainshare funding. This has allowed the Combined Authority to deliver provision outside of the eligibility requirements of the Adult Skills Fund, including upskilling adults via short interventions at Level 3 and above in key industry sectors for West Yorkshire. This Adult Skills Plan has been developed in order to ensure readiness to deliver the available adult skills funding as part of the Integrated Settlement from April 2026.

The strategic context

The strategic oversight for the Combined Authority's adult skills funding is provided by the Local Growth Plan and Region for Learning and Creativity Strategy.

The Local Growth Plan is West Yorkshire's evidence-led, ten-year plan to unlock growth and prosperity. It addresses key barriers around investment, connectivity and skills and is centred around significant opportunities in key growth sectors and planned transformational investment in mass transit, housing retrofit and energy.

Figure 3: Local Growth Plan objectives



The Region of Learning and Creativity Strategy sets out the vision for a region where regardless of background, everyone can get the education, skills and training they need to thrive. A region where everyone can find a passion, learn new skills, get a good job, and lead a happy, healthy and fulfilling life. A region with the skilled workforce needed to deliver the Local Growth Plan ambitions, from mass transit and green housebuilding to infrastructure projects and the West Yorkshire HealthTech investment zone, unlocking tens of thousands of good jobs across the region.

Figure 4: A Region of Learning and Creativity – strategic ambitions



Commissioning of West Yorkshire’s adult skills funding is expected to contribute towards all of these strategic ambitions, although the funding has historically focussed on delivering for people.

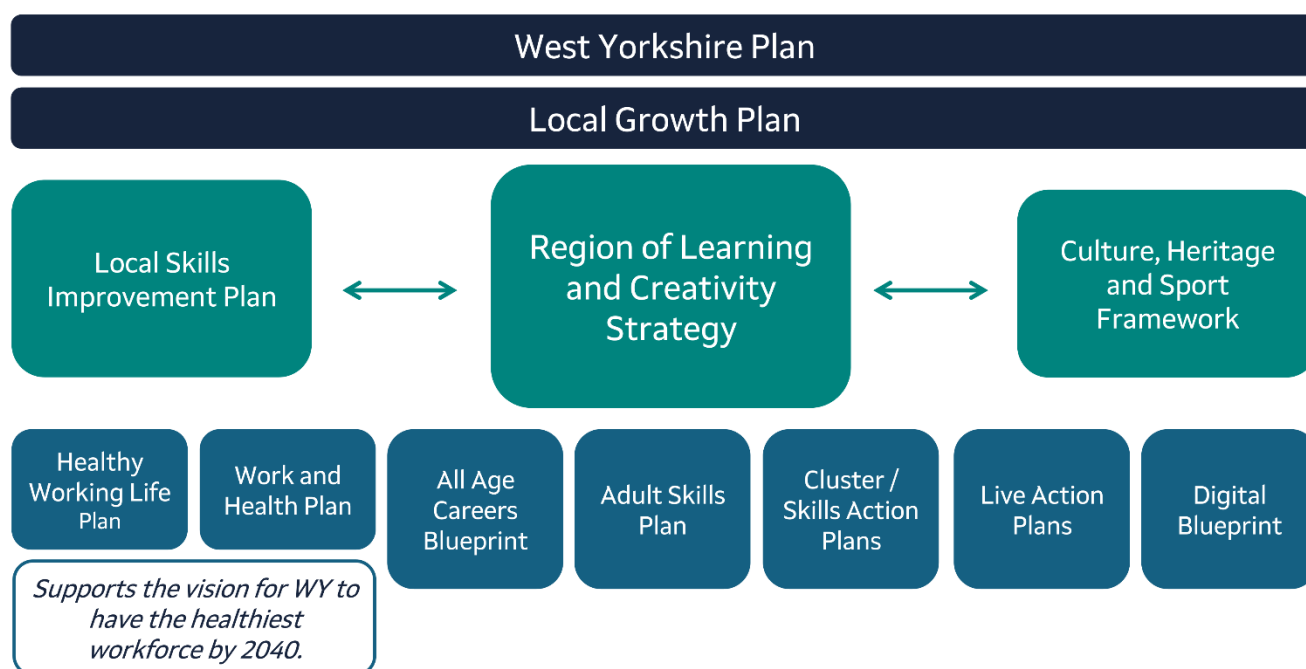
Regional and national alignment

West Yorkshire is well-placed to kickstart government’s economic growth mission, with a significant overlap of regional and national priority sectors for growth, and lead on government’s opportunity mission, breaking down barriers so everyone can contribute to and benefit from good jobs and a stronger economy. Investing in adult skills is intrinsically linked to the successful delivery of both.

However, while adult skills may continue to experience frequent policy change on a national level, such as the reduction to Adult Skills Fund allocations in spring 2025, this Adult Skills Plan will offer certainty for regional investment priorities and mechanisms, while maintaining the ability to be innovative and responsive.

The Adult Skills Plan sits alongside a suite of plans which further articulate the ambition and action carried forward from the Local Growth Plan.

Figure 5: West Yorkshire's Strategic Approach to Adult Skills



Healthy Working Life

West Yorkshire is working in partnership to deliver transformational change to improve population health and wellbeing and economic outcomes. New, personalised support will be delivered for people who are out of work because of a disability or health condition, bringing together health and employment support services in a joined-up approach.

The Work & Health Plan presents the vision for West Yorkshire to help individuals receive the support they need to find and stay in good quality jobs, reducing the number of people becoming and staying economically inactive.

Cluster Action Plans

In its Industrial Strategy, Government set out its plan for economic growth across the UK focussing on eight high-priority sectors as well as supporting the foundational industries (Advanced Manufacturing, Creative Industries, Life Sciences, Clean Energy, Defence, Digital and Technologies, Professional and Business Services, Financial Services). The Industrial Strategy identified regions and Mayors, and skills as key elements for success.

The West Yorkshire economy has strengths in a remarkably diverse range of sectors with opportunities for growth. As identified in the Local Growth Plan, part of the Combined Authority's approach to accelerating the growth of the region's sectors and clusters involves the development of six West Yorkshire Cluster Action Plans: Green Economy, Business, Financial & Professional Services, Health Tech, Digital & Technology, Advanced Manufacturing, Creative Industries.

Following the publication of the national Industrial Strategy, the Combined Authority will ensure the Cluster Action Plans align with national sector plans where applicable.

West Yorkshire All-Age Career Blueprint

The Blueprint positions careers education, information, advice and guidance as a central pillar and entrance point to an integrated skills, employment and career system that is rooted in the regional economy.

West Yorkshire Digital Blueprint

The Blueprint brings together broad policy areas and specific areas for action for a dynamic and thriving digital system in West Yorkshire that is driving growth and improves people's lives and wellbeing.

Continuing the delivery of digital skills, digital inclusion and workforce skills development were identified as a key objectives in the themes of the blueprint

West Yorkshire's adult skills funding remains a cornerstone of investment in the adult skills system. In commissioning regional adult skills funding, the Combined Authority will ensure alignment with the [Local Skills Improvement Plan](#) using it to inform flexibilities and increased investment on skills programmes while also considering its delivery alongside the wider national investment in skills managed by the Department for Work and Pensions, and Department for Education, as well as other devolved functions and regional priorities (Careers Services, Apprenticeships, Higher Education, Adult Learner Loans, Traineeships, prison-based learning).

Working in partnership

West Yorkshire is home to a diverse, complementary skills and training landscape. The region boasts seven further education colleges, including the only specialist construction college in England, seven universities, outstanding adult skills provision in local authorities, a leading independent training provider network and a community-centric voluntary sector. The Combined Authority has built extensive collaborative partnerships across the skills system to address disadvantage across and within districts and tackle skills gaps, and will continue to work closely with partners to maximise the opportunities and benefits of adult skills funding.

Strategic decisions on Adult Skills are taken through the Combined Authority Board, supported by consultation with key stakeholders and partners.

Local Authorities

In addition to their delivery function for adult skills, Local Authorities are key strategic partners in increasing the impact of funding delivery at a local level. Local Authorities have an unique insight into local need, funding usage and the impact of adult skills interventions within their area.

The Combined Authority continues to work closely with the five constituent Local Authorities of Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield, including through an established Adult Skills strategic officer group.

To embed and strengthen this collaborative approach, the Combined Authority will:

- Work jointly with Local Authorities to deliver the Adult Skills Plan, developing evidence bases at district level to assess provision against local priorities and align with West Yorkshire's Growth Plan.
- Involve Local Authority colleagues in procurement, drawing on their strategic and policy expertise to assess provider offers against local need.
- Continue to develop Adult Skills Partnership meetings in each district, open to all Adult Skills providers. These meetings support the development of complementary offers and clear progression pathways for learners, ensuring a joined-up approach to provision. These will also provide a forum to share best practice, identify gaps, and ensure provision evolves in line with community needs.

The Combined Authority will continuously monitor provider effectiveness against delivery plans and alignment with area needs. In-year responsiveness funds will be retained to flexibly address emerging priorities and labour market changes.

Data analysis, performance management, growth requests, and future procurement rounds will be used to evaluate and align funding allocations with strategic priorities and district-level needs.

Further Education Colleges

West Yorkshire's seven Further Education colleges provide people with a pathway into employment, further and higher education or training, to start, progress or change their careers.

They are anchor institutions, of strategic importance to equip people with the right skills to boost productivity and workforce participation and are a key enabler to ensure all residents can be part of West Yorkshire's growth journey.

The [Further Education Compact](#) is an agreement to formalise the partnership between the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, the West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges and all seven colleges in the region. The Compact provides a framework to work effectively together at a local and regional level by setting out aspirational as well as practical commitments and ways of working that increase accountability and transparency.

Independent Training Providers

Training providers deliver skills to young people and adults through a range of programmes and funding schemes. They are a crucial part of the skills system in West Yorkshire, offering specialist and niche provision in key industry sectors, responding to emerging needs on a regional and hyper-local basis and providing agility and flexibility in delivery.

The Combined Authority will continue to seek provision from Independent Training Providers which complements the local and regional offer and meets specific needs, particularly providers which are West Yorkshire-based. A Region of Learning and Creativity network will be established to help the combined authority better understand the offer of and challenges in the sector across the wider skills system.

Employers

Employers have a key role in influencing the upskilling landscape across West Yorkshire, in addition to championing learning and development within their organisation. In order to ensure that they have access to a talent pipeline with much-valued soft and technical skills, employers engage with key stakeholders, including training providers, to shape training provision and also to offer in-work development opportunities to help staff advance their careers. Through co-ownership of the Local Skills Improvement Plan with the West & North Yorkshire Chamber, the Combined Authority will take on a key role to ensure alignment of technical education and training, skills needs of local employers and regional priorities. Business voice guides this work, ensuring that the skills system remains rooted in the real needs of business and the economy.

Higher Education

West Yorkshire's universities have an important role in our skills system supporting students, graduates, and businesses to develop and access higher level skills needed in our workforce to support productivity and growth across West Yorkshire.

The Higher Education Compact was agreed in March 2025 to strengthen the long-term partnerships and commitment to collaboration between the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, regional Higher Education Institutions, and Yorkshire Universities. The HE Compact sets out shared objectives, aligned to the ambitions of the West Yorkshire Local Growth Plan, with a focus on: regional innovation and economic growth; skills and employment; global connections and attracting investment; addressing complex challenges.

West Yorkshire's investment principles

The primary purpose of West Yorkshire's adult skills funding is to engage adults and provide them with the skills needed for entering and sustaining good work, an apprenticeship, or progressing to further learning.

Within the context of the Local Growth Plan and Region of Learning and Creativity Strategy, the Combined Authority has defined the following principles for investment of adult skills funding in West Yorkshire:



Underpinning objectives set in the Local Growth Plan:

- Halve the number of residents with no or low skills
- Ensure everyone who wants one can access a Level 3

West Yorkshire's standards

The Combined Authority is committed to working in partnership with providers and stakeholders to commission education and training provision which meets the needs of the region and its ambitions, both through grant funding and commercial activities.

Provision will be:

- **Learner-centred:** Funding decisions prioritise the needs, aspirations, and progression of adult learners across West Yorkshire
- **Place-based:** Provision reflects the unique needs of local communities and aligns with local and regional economic priorities
- **Inclusive and Equitable:** Supporting access for underrepresented groups and reducing barriers to participation
- **High-quality and Impact-driven:** Excellent provision with measurable outcomes for learners and employers
- **Flexible and Responsive:** Enabling innovation and adaptability to meet emerging needs and opportunities
- **Value for Money:** Funding is used efficiently and effectively, with clear accountability and evidence of impact
- **Progression-focussed:** creating pathways and partnerships that enable adults to grow, succeed and thrive in their lives and the workplace
- **Industry-led:** informed and designed alongside employers and sector experts, ensuring the needs of the regional economy are met

The Combined Authority has a clear strategic leadership role within the skills system, in ensuring that skills investment is driven by local and regional economic needs and the current and future profile of labour market opportunities.

By building on the strong partnerships and networks developed over five years of devolution, providers and partners will deliver education and training provision which drives positive long-term impact for West Yorkshire learners, employers, localities, and the wider economy, through the below values and behaviours.

Partners should be:

- **Open and transparent:** communicating clearly, honestly and transparently with stakeholders, learners and partners to build trust and accountability
- **Collaborative and responsive:** positively and effectively engaging with other providers, partners and stakeholders sharing best practice to strengthen the impact of the skills system across West Yorkshire
- **Rooted in and empowering local communities:** enabling small, specialist, and VCSE providers to access funding and contribute to the skills system
- **Social value-driven:** demonstrating how delivery contributes to supporting the work and health agenda, sustainability, local employment, and future infrastructure readiness

How we commission

Grant allocations to anchor institutions

The majority of funding is routed through place based, anchor institutions, who form part of the strategic infrastructure for skills delivery in West Yorkshire. These are the **five West Yorkshire**

Local Authorities, and the **members of the FE Compact**. Providing funding for these institutions is pivotal in engaging residents in the heart of their communities, developing basic skills and supporting progression through a range of technical pathways. According to their specialism within their local area, their grant agreements will support:

- Delivery of legal entitlements
- Vocational pathways
- Employer-focused provision to address skills gaps
- Supporting the unemployed to progress into work
- Supporting in-work progression of those on low wages
- Upskilling employed adults to progress in the workplace
- Test pilots to address skill gaps and/or trial new learning methods

Each year, providers submit Delivery Plans, which are analysed to ensure they meet identified needs. Delivery Plans are also used to performance manage providers, ensuring that provision remains responsive, high quality, and aligned with strategic ambitions.

We will look to grant fund **members of the HE Compact**, recognising the LSIP's increasing focus on higher education and their unique position in supporting innovation and productivity.

Contracts for services

We will continue to procure services that meet resident and employer needs through open and competitive processes. Procurement opportunities will include all aspects noted above, focusing on gaps in provision, and targeted to avoid duplication of provision, considering accessibility and delivery modes.

Cross-border learner grant agreements

We recognise the strong travel to learn links to colleges situated in neighbouring regions and will continue to preserve learner choice.

From 2021/22 to 2025/26 the Combined Authority grant funded Leeds City Region (Leeds City Region geographically covered all local authority areas in West Yorkshire, comprising Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield, as well as parts of South Yorkshire and North Yorkshire)/Out of Area providers based on 2018/19 learner data that:

- Had an established place-based approach that supported West Yorkshire's strategic ambitions
- Delivered significant volumes of activity within West Yorkshire
- Supported existing travel to learn patterns.

Subcontracting was not, and remains, not permitted through these agreements.

The intelligence gathered over the past four years of the devolved Adult Skills Fund, and the continued devolution to neighbouring Combined Authorities provides a strong foundation to reconsider the current arrangement.

The Combined Authority will continue to fund this provision directly until 2027/28.

Travel to Learn

To support greater access to learning opportunities, the Combined Authority will explore the development of cross-border travel-to-learn arrangements with neighbouring Mayoral Combined Authorities, including York and North Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, Greater Manchester and others as they become devolved.

These arrangements will be designed as reciprocal agreements, enabling residents to access provision across boundaries where it best meets their needs. This approach will help remove geographical barriers to participation and ensure that learners can benefit from the full range of opportunities available across the region.

All learning should be delivered outside of West Yorkshire, and allocations will be based on previous travel to learn patterns

Delivery activity in West Yorkshire

A number of out-of-area providers also deliver within West Yorkshire. Throughout the first four years of Adult Skills devolution in West Yorkshire there has been evidence that not all delivery complements local provision and/or meets the strategic ambitions.

From 2028/29, out-of-area providers delivering in West Yorkshire will be required to submit a business case demonstrating the strategic value of their provision in the region. This will ensure alignment with local priorities, reduce duplication, and help direct funding to the individuals and communities it is intended to support, in line with the new Adult Skills Plan.

Building on devolution: what is staying the same?

A number of policy and funding rule changes have already been delivered in the first four years of devolution to make adult skills provision more inclusive, responsive, and impactful. These changes will be built upon to further evolve the fund.

These changes have been subject to continuous evaluation, including through a recent external evaluation, and the majority of these changes and functions will be retained as part of future West Yorkshire Adult Skills commissioning:

Partnerships with stakeholders and providers embracing a two-way dialogue

Why continue: The evaluation highlights that collaborative relationships between the Combined Authority and providers lead to better curriculum decisions and delivery. 89% of providers rated their Project Lead relationship positively, and 80% appreciated the communication methods (e.g. review meetings, data packs). Continuing this dialogue fosters trust, responsiveness, and strategic alignment.

Regular performance discussions supported by data packs

Why continue: Providers found data packs and review meetings extremely helpful for performance management. These discussions allow the Combined Authority to monitor impact, support continuous improvement, and align delivery with strategic priorities. Future data packs will include clearer explanations and local context to help providers understand and act on the figures.

Widened access to funding (increased the low wage threshold, all-age entitlement to Level 2, full funding for asylum seekers)

Why continue: These flexibilities have increased access and participation for those who need it most. For example, in 2023/24 6,100 adult skills starts were supported via the low wage pilot and 2,450 asylum seekers were supported, removing financial barriers to language skills and integration. These changes support inclusivity and target disadvantaged groups effectively.

Bespoke courses for West Yorkshire employment needs

Why continue: We have commissioned bespoke courses - using 'Z Codes' - funding locally relevant qualifications (outside the national rules), supporting sector-specific needs e.g. incorporating licences to practice in key sectors, bus driving and rail. This flexibility allows rapid response to emerging skills gaps and supports innovation in curriculum design.

Expanded the digital entitlement

Why continue: Digital skills are essential for work and life. Starts on Essential Digital Skills courses grew by 62%, and broader ICT provision accounted for 34% of Level 3 starts. Expanding the entitlement addresses digital exclusion and supports economic resilience.

Training solutions for specific sectors

Why continue: Sector-specific pilots (e.g. telecoms, security, rail engineering) showed strong employment outcomes:

- 58% of learners in the security sector gained employment.

- 63% in telecoms and 55% in rail engineering progressed into work.

These pilots address acute skills shortages and will continue, though sector focus may evolve.

Bridging programmes

Why continue: Bridging programmes help learners transition from Level 2 to Level 3, especially those returning to education. Although not widely utilised there has been positive progression where they have been implemented. Providers will be encouraged and supported to develop bridging programmes.

Engagement in geographic 'cold spots'

Why continue: Targeted pilot programmes in areas with historically low engagement in adult skills such as Kirklees and wards across Bradford have begun to make inroads into addressing underrepresentation. Early findings indicate improved learner progression and more sustained outcomes, demonstrating the value of place-based, inclusive approaches. There is also evidence that some areas remain under-served, including those remote from urban centres e.g. South East Wakefield.

Guided Learning Hours

A traffic light tracking system was introduced to monitor Guided Learning Hours (GLH), requiring approval for delivery below 70% of planned GLH and applying funding reductions when delivery falls below 50%. This approach was implemented to drive quality and ensure value for money.

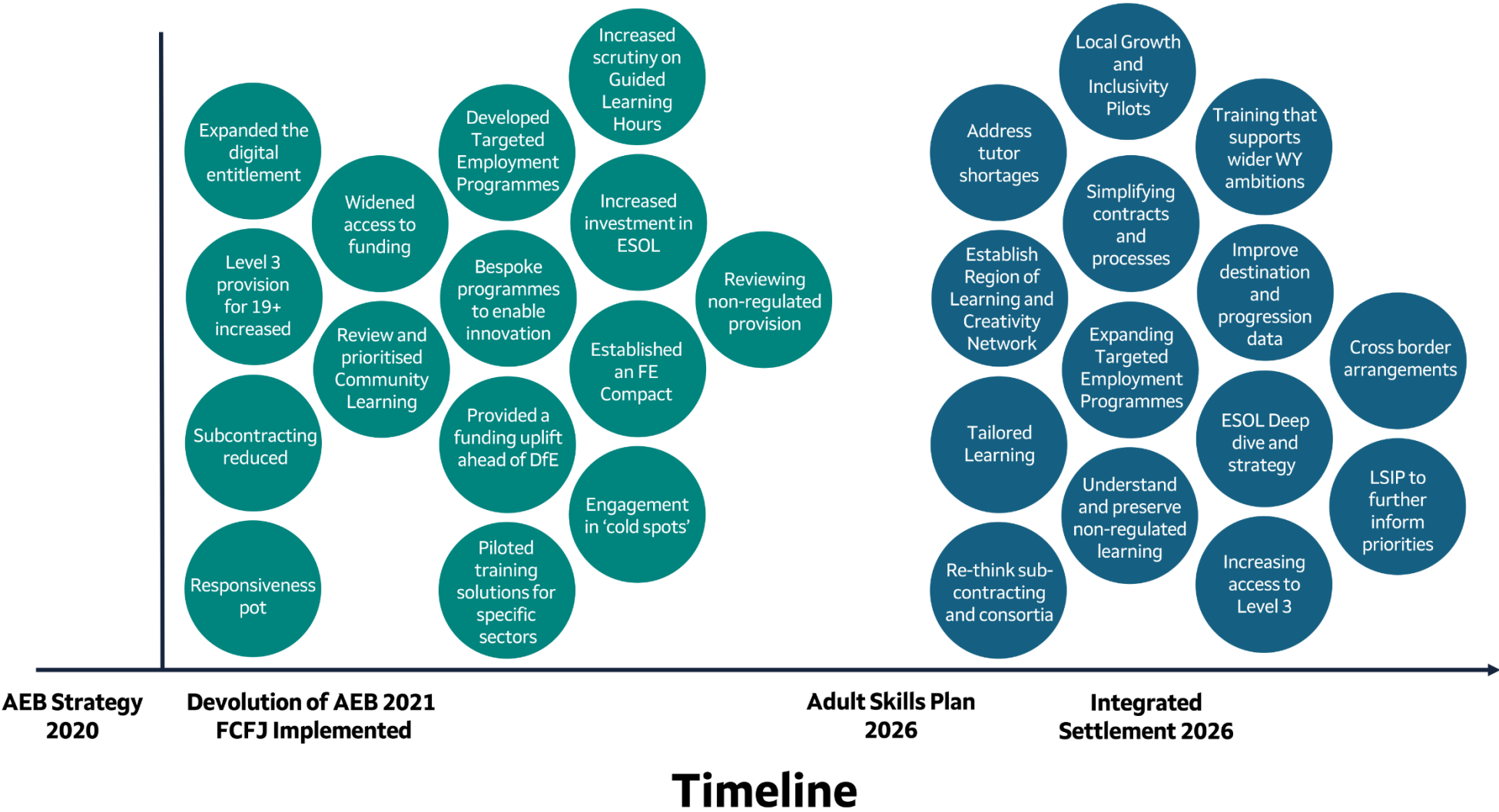
Why continue: It has positively influenced provider behaviour ensuring learners receive the support they need to succeed while improving overall value for public investment.

Commitment to Tailored Learning

Why continue: The review and evaluation of Tailored Learning (previously Community Learning) showed Tailored Learning is highly effective in engaging disadvantaged learners. **66%** of these learners were from the most deprived wards in the region, 24% stating they have a learning difficulty or disability. Tailored Learning participants started with lower qualifications but progressed well, with 62% achieving higher qualifications demonstrating its value in re-engaging learners and building confidence.

Deeper devolution: what's next

Figure 6: Activities Since 2020, Plans from 2025



A Region of Learning and Creativity network – a wider system conversation

Adult skills funding is just one part in the wider skills system. The Combined Authority needs to engage better with the wider skills system and deliverers to hold a two-way conversation, sharing labour intelligence widely, and increasing strategic alignment.

We will establish a Region of Learning and Creativity network to ensure we are hearing voices from across the system. A better understanding of post-16, apprenticeships and employer funded programmes, alongside the barriers and opportunities presented, will help us to target our work and funds more effectively.

Local Growth and Inclusivity Pilots (focused on the strategic investment need)

The first AEB Strategy was written and approved at the height of the COVID pandemic. Responsiveness was understandably a key principle of our commissioning plan and remains pivotal. Our experience of devolution has shown that providers are some of the most responsive actors in the system.

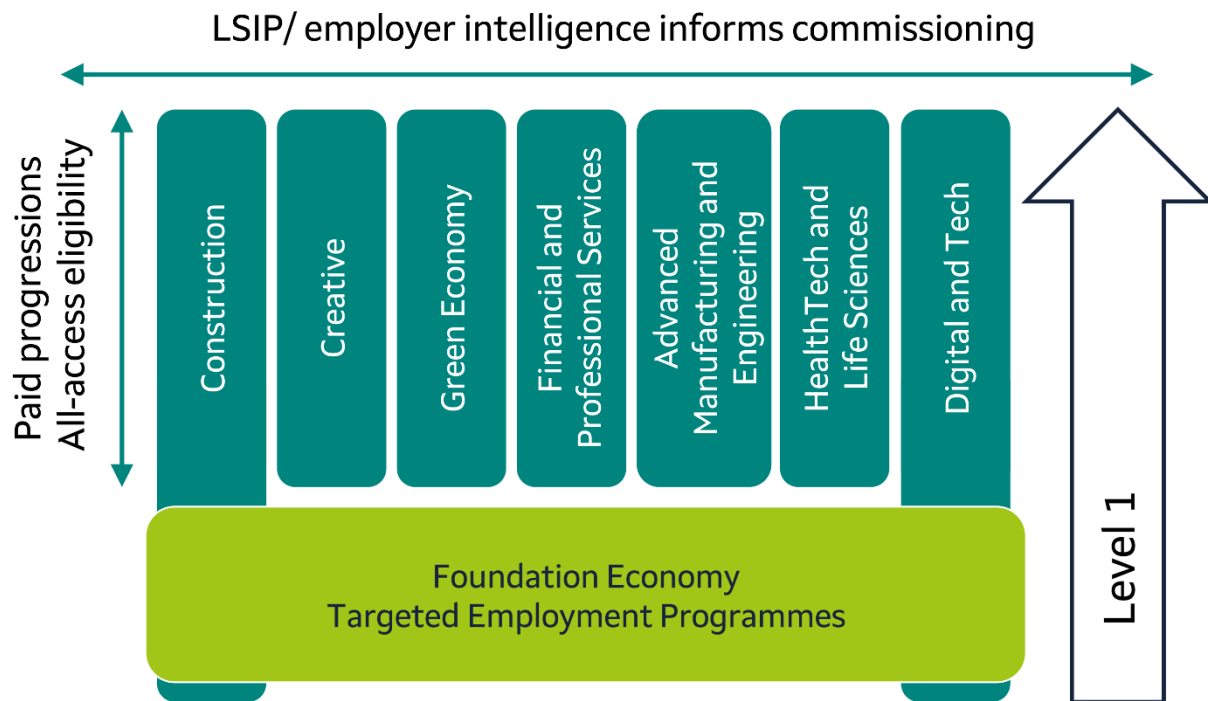
The Responsiveness Pot was created to tackle emerging needs, cold spots, and strategic gaps in adult skills provision. It enabled the Combined Authority to commission targeted interventions as needs arose, foster innovation, and trial new delivery models. A standout example is the bus driver training programme, which successfully addressed a regional driver shortage and was later replicated by other MCAs.

The 'Responsiveness pot' will be replaced by 'Local Growth and Inclusivity Fund' - focusing on the fund's intent. Pilots and programmes will be commissioned in the open market, or co-developed with anchor institutions, to provide solutions to evidence-based problems. This will build on previous commissions for cold-spot provision, sector-focused provision and bridging programmes, including improving data analysis to link underrepresented groups and wards to local employers with vacancies.

Expanding Targeted Employment Programmes

The national Skills Bootcamp model has provided a welcome focus on upskilling adults to meet current sector needs and fill difficult vacancies. We aim to build on our 'Targeted Employment Programmes' (which replaced SWAPs), embracing the ethos of Skills Bootcamps, but evolving to ensure that funding criteria and outcome measurements are relevant and appropriate for the sectors supported.

Figure 7: Focus for Expanding Targeted Employment Programmes



Targeted Employment Programmes (TEPs) will provide flexible sector focussed models and training solutions to meet the needs of specific sectors and tackle vacancy issues. We will continue to commission Level 1 and Level 2 programmes across all sectors, where the primary purpose of programmes is to connect residents to employment opportunities.

TEPs will evolve to provide targeted, employer led provision at higher levels for the key growth sectors in West Yorkshire, based on Cluster skills plans. Funding criteria will be adjusted to ensure it is appropriate for the vacancy and sector needs - recognising the difference in employment patterns and industry need. Employer contribution will be leveraged where possible, with different models and criteria considered for higher-level, intensive and/or bespoke provision.

Increasing access to Level 3

Level 3 qualifications currently make up 11% of the Adult Skills Fund budget in terms of investment. The Local Growth Plan sets a clear ambition that 'those who want to, can access a Level 3 qualification'.

There are multiple actions required to achieve this ambition, starting with ensuring residents have the Level 2 skills needed to embark upon a Level 3 programme. Vocational pathways up to Level 2 need to be strengthened.

Adult Skills provision is not the only funder of Level 3 learning, as a system convener we must ensure the wider provision of apprenticeship, advanced learner loans, the forthcoming Lifelong Learning Entitlement and the Growth and Skills Levy are well known options for individuals to uptake learning opportunities.

That said, a level of increased investment in this area is expected over time. West Yorkshire training providers have a good track record in expanding provision. When the 'Free Courses for

Jobs' (level 3) funding was implemented in 2021, 25% of the fund was utilised. In 2025/26 it is now oversubscribed.

Level 3 investment will focus on providing individuals with their first Level 3, or supporting those who are unemployed or on a low wage to gain a Level 3 qualification fit for the future West Yorkshire economy.

Flexibilities and increased investment on skills for business programmes at Level 3 and above will focus on sectors prioritised in Local Growth Plan, with greater granularity provided in the LSIP report to be published in 2026.

Training which supports wider West Yorkshire ambitions

The forthcoming Integrated Settlement with Government brings an opportunity to build forward on the first four years of devolution. Not only will the flexibility allow for a more strategic and holistic investment in adult skills, we must challenge ourselves to work more holistically across the whole Combined Authority agenda.

The Local Growth Plan set clear ambitions for mass transit and housing, and identified growth clusters for the region. Investment is needed in the skills that will realise these ambitions: construction and engineering skills will be pivotal to underpin the development of a mass transit system and build and retrofit houses.

The Healthy Working Lives agenda has emerged in prominence in the past year, primarily aimed at supporting those who are economically inactive to re-engage with the workplace. Skills provision needs to be integrated with all services that support individuals into employment, so that their connection to work can be sustained.

Increasing access to quality education and childcare places is a key enabler of inclusive economic growth, ensuring more parents can work, and improving the school readiness of the region's youngest residents.

Through collaboration with the Combined Authority's police and crime function and the Violence Reduction Partnership, the Combined Authority has begun to explore how skills can contribute to safer communities supporting ex-offenders on release from prison and piloting Out of Court Pathways that offer training as an alternative to entering the criminal justice system for low-level offences. These initiatives demonstrate the potential of skills as part of a wider system response, but there is more we can do to embed this approach.

Similarly, the region's move towards bus franchising presents a clear opportunity to align skills investment with transport reform. Training for bus drivers and development of new skills linked to roles within a publicly controlled network will be essential to delivering on this ambition.

These ambitions are central to West Yorkshire's growth ambitions and success, however - they are an additional call on an already stretched budget. **To meet these ambitions, investment in adult skills will need to be reprioritised or increased - leveraged from shared agendas, such as infrastructure development funds.**

Building on the FE Compact

Building on the trust established by the FE Compact, we will replace multiple grant agreements by developing a single agreement across funding streams. It will include flexible funds, and move to outcome measurements, which are strategically agreed with colleges to support the

ambitions of the Local Growth Plan. We will continue the notional 3 year allocations and extend to multi-year agreements where our funding agreements allow.

Financial re-classification has hampered FE's ability to invest in strategic skills delivery. We will continue to push government for devolved Further Education capital funding to develop capacity for post-16 education and training based on the needs of our economy and learners - particularly as they relate to regional growth ambitions and opportunities.

Simplifying contracts and processes

The Adult Skills Evaluation is clear that our procurement and contracting has fallen short of our ambitions in recent years, and has affected the timeliness of some delivery. We will enhance the commissioning resource to reinvigorate the existing procurement models, aiming to create more efficient and flexible procured opportunities. We will commission solutions that address problems in the economy, and look to tender contract for services for multi-years, as above - where our funding agreements allow.

Re-thinking subcontracting and consortia

The 2020 AEB Strategy was clear about the need to reduce subcontracting to allow the Authority to have a clear line of sight to delivery and reinvest the management fees that were previously extracted from the system back into learning. By reducing subcontracting in year 1 of devolution £1.9million of management fees were saved, and reinvested to directly fund learning.

Moving on from this, however, we recognise the need to support smaller, grassroots and niche providers, who may not be ready to take on the full machinery of the ILR and skills system requirements, but who have a unique product, method or access to a key demographic. A number of our Local Authorities already demonstrate good practice in this area with their approach to distributing Tailored Learning.

The Combined Authority is committed to exploring consortia models and reviewing the regulations around subcontracting, with the aim to develop more flexible, targeted and locally driven delivery.

Improve destination and progression data

The evaluation of Adult Skills provision in West Yorkshire highlighted a number of recommendations to improve the collection and use of destination and progression data in order to better measure impact.

These include the need to capture learner intent at the point of enrolment, standardise destination data collection across providers, and improve the depth and consistency of data shared with the Combined Authority. Enhancing data on employment quality, aligning learning aims with priority economic sectors, and gathering contact information for follow-up are also essential. Together, these improvements will strengthen the ability to measure impact more effectively, support more meaningful evaluation, inform strategic planning, and ensure Adult Skills provision is responsive to learner needs and regional priorities.

Clarify Learner Intent and Define Success: The evaluation revealed a lack of data on learner aspirations, making it difficult to assess whether Adult Skills provision meets individual goals.

Success varies from employment to personal development so capturing learner intent at enrolment is essential. Building on Tailored Learning and Bootcamp practices, a standardised approach should be adopted across all strands to better evaluate outcomes.

Strengthen Destination Data and Sector Alignment: Destination data is inconsistently collected and lacks depth, especially since its removal from the ILR. A consistent framework is needed for timing, method, and variables—such as job type, sector, and contract—to assess employment quality and education purpose. Additionally, learning aims should be mapped to priority economic sectors to ensure provision aligns with regional labour market needs.

Develop a Shared Impact Framework: Success in Adult Skills provision varies by learner and strand, and the ILR does not capture nuanced outcomes. The Combined Authority will explore creating a shared impact framework that defines desired outcomes (e.g., qualification progression, employment transitions, earnings growth, sector vacancy reduction) and sets clear metrics for each strand. This framework should guide monitoring, evaluation, and funding decisions, and support providers in aligning delivery with strategic goals.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) - Deep dive and strategy

An estimated 51,000 people in West Yorkshire cannot speak English or cannot speak it well. Learner demand continues to rise for ESOL provision, with a 43% increase in enrolments since 2020/21.

Provision is reaching those who need it most: 55% of ESOL learners are from the most deprived communities (compared with 44% of ASF learners overall). The current annual investment stands at £12 million, and demand still outstrips provision.

While this investment is critical to integration and connecting skilled people to employment, we need to understand more about delivery models and ensure provision is fully integrated into wider support opportunities. The Combined Authority will work with the five Local Authorities and their established ESOL networks to understand the progression pathways from ESOL, undertake a 'deep dive' review and develop a strategy for West Yorkshire's investment in ESOL, with a view to informing government policy and funding in this area.

Tailored Learning to engage and move residents forward

The purpose of Tailored Learning is to provide an accessible and engaging starting point that encourages individuals to progress, whether into further learning or employment. Its core objective, as outlined in the Funding Rules, is to widen participation and positively transform lives by supporting progression that is relevant to each learner's personal circumstances. It is a critical first engagement which will support the Local Growth Plan objective to 'Halve the number of residents with no or low skills'.

Providers are expected to actively encourage and support all learners to move forward, whether into more advanced learning opportunities or into work. Learners should not be enrolled on multiple courses at the same level or repeat similar learning aims unless there is a clear developmental benefit. Provision must be purposeful, with progression at its heart.

Building on the evidence base established through the Adult Skills Evaluation, the Combined Authority will collaborate with Local Authorities to review the strategic objectives of Tailored Learning in relation to place. This review will ensure that provision is responsive to identified community needs, offers clear progression pathways, and that curriculum intent is explicitly

aligned with local strategic priorities. This alignment is essential to maximise impact, coherence, and the transformative potential of Tailored Learning across the region.

Preserve non-regulated learning

In response to the Department for Education's removal of non-regulated funding in non-devolved areas for 2024/25, the Combined Authority initiated a review to assess the value, impact, and future role of non-regulated learning. The review involved consultation with delivery partners to understand the distinctions between Tailored Learning and non-regulated aims, quality assurance practices, and the implications of potential changes.

The review highlighted that non-regulated learning plays a vital role in supporting disadvantaged learners, particularly those with low literacy, recent arrivals, and ESOL learners with varied needs. Its flexibility allows for bespoke, contextualised provision that builds confidence and acts as a bridge to regulated qualifications. Providers value its ability to respond to local needs and design inclusive curricula. However, challenges include a large number of available aims many of which misalign with regional priorities and the lack of tiering within entry level, which makes it difficult to track learner progression effectively.

To address the challenges identified in the review, a structured framework of unique non-regulated codes will be developed, aligned with regional priorities. This approach will enable clearer learner progression, more robust data tracking, and stronger strategic coherence across provision, including the introduction of differentiated entry levels to better reflect learner starting points and support targeted progression.

A regionally coordinated ESOL framework is also proposed to address specific learner needs; this will be considered alongside the ESOL deep dive and strategy.

Address Tutor Shortage

There is a longstanding nationwide tutor shortage, particularly in Further Education colleges, with tutor numbers not increasing in line with pupil numbers. In West Yorkshire, demand from young people for training is there, but there are significant issues with teaching capacity in the system.

Large infrastructure projects including house building targets and mass transit mean there is a considerable need for more residents to complete courses in construction, engineering and manufacturing related subjects, to continuously provide a future skilled workforce.

Through devolution, the Combined Authority is responsible for delivering the skills needed to help people meet their potential and support the Local Growth Plan. As a convener, we play a key role in bringing together industry, the education sector, and Local Authority stakeholders to develop and implement solutions in this field.

The tutor recruitment and retention issue is complex and there is no panacea. We will work with partners to understand barriers and develop a range of pilots that explore what impact may be gained through technological boosts, industry exchanges, sponsorship and social value.

How we will invest – evidence based and balancing need

The integrated settlement should provide a holistic fund, which can be applied to the most acute needs. We know already that funds we receive for Adult skills are insufficient to deliver all our ambitions alongside every residents' entitlement for basic skills.

In line with the stated priorities for funding, the Combined Authority will balance investment through the following considerations:

- **Individual and Business need:** The vast majority of Adult Skills funding in the region has, to date, been focussed on individual need in terms of supporting personal progression, connecting to employment, and to an extent – addressing a deficit in the earlier education system to provide residents with basic employability skills. This investment need continues. While integrated settlement will provide flexibility to focus skill investment on employers and growth sector needs, this needs to target areas of market failure, balanced with demographic and basic skills needs.
- **Stability with sustained progress:** The provision in West Yorkshire largely meets learner needs and is working to deliver the skills profile needed: but it needs to accelerate. Existing national and regional models of delivery will be reviewed, built upon and revised to provide fit for purpose, and fit for now solutions. The development of new training models will be evidence based, using intelligence from providers and learners. Test and learn pilots will continue to be used to support innovation and creativity.
- **A cohesive training system:** Adult skills investment is pivotal to upskilling adults, connecting individuals to employment and providing economic growth – but it remains a fraction of the skills and education system. The provider market is vast with varying maturity, capacity and specialisms. The Combined Authority must engage better with the market to ensure adult skills investment can reach niche specialist providers, and that it maps effectively into wider government, business and individual investment in skills.
- **The highest impact for our region:** We must gather effective data which helps us to understand the impact of investment and allows us to better target the funds if they become more limited. We must take care not to overburden the system in data collection – but we have to be able to demonstrate our impact.

Affording change

To date we have been able to afford all policy changes approved for West Yorkshire in the static (and in 2025/26 reduced by 3%) Adult Skills Fund. This has been managed by creating efficiencies and through focused performance management.

The table illustrates the implications that skills policy and previous decisions taken as part of early devolution has had on the use of funds.

Deviations from national skills policy	Implementation	Implication on Funding	Investment Tension (RAG rating is impact on funding)
Widened access to funding (increased the low wage threshold, all-age entitlement to Level 2, full funding for asylum seekers)	2022	More eligible residents	Increased uptake due to access
Bespoke courses for West Yorkshire – using ‘Z Codes’ flexibly to enable innovation	2022	Funding used more flexibly	Reduced qualification ‘stacking’
Expanded the digital entitlement	2022	More courses eligible	Increased uptake due to access
Training solutions for specific sectors	2022	Focused investment	Funded through Responsiveness pot
Engagement in geographic ‘cold spots’	2022	Focused investment	Funded through Responsiveness pot
Provided a 10% funding uplift ahead of DfE	2022	Courses cost more	Increased cost per learner
Tailored Learning – preserved and 10% cost increase	2024	Covered cost of delivery increase	Increased investment
Guided Learning funding reduction at 70% and 50%	2024	Efficiency	Reduces cost per course
Distance Learning Review	Current	Potential efficiency	Potential reduction of provision

	Required Additional investment
	Cost Neutral/planned
	Efficiency created

The table illustrates the implications that skills policy and the stated intentions within the Adult Skills Plan will have on the use of funds. To afford the plan, there will need to be further prioritisation or additional funds.

Deviations from national skills policy	Implementation	Implication on Funding	Investment Tension (RAG rating is impact on funding)
A Region of Learning and Creativity network	Planned	Administration cost	
Local Growth and Inclusivity Pilots	Planned	Replaces responsiveness pot	Replaces Responsiveness pot
Expanding Targeted Employment Programmes	Planned	Replaces current SWAPs, TEPs and Skills Bootcamp spend	Unconfirmed £2m p/a gainshare top-up historically (In part replaces Skills Bootcamps)
Increasing access to Level 3	Planned	'Free courses for jobs' already over subscribed	Additional funds required to increase Level 3 commissioning
Training which supports wider West Yorkshire ambitions	Planned	No additional funding identified	Funding to be leveraged from wider agendas
Building on the FE Compact	Planned	Administration cost	
Simplifying contracts and processes	Planned	Administration cost	
Re-thinking subcontracting and consortia	Planned	Administration cost	
Understand and preserve non-regulated learning	Planned	Cost neutral	
Pilots to reduce tutor shortages	Planned	Not applicable	Additional funds identified
English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) - Deep dive and strategy	Planned	Investment efficiency – no additional funding identified	Implications will follow after deep dive



Requires Additional investment



Cost neutral/negligible

Increasing the skills profile

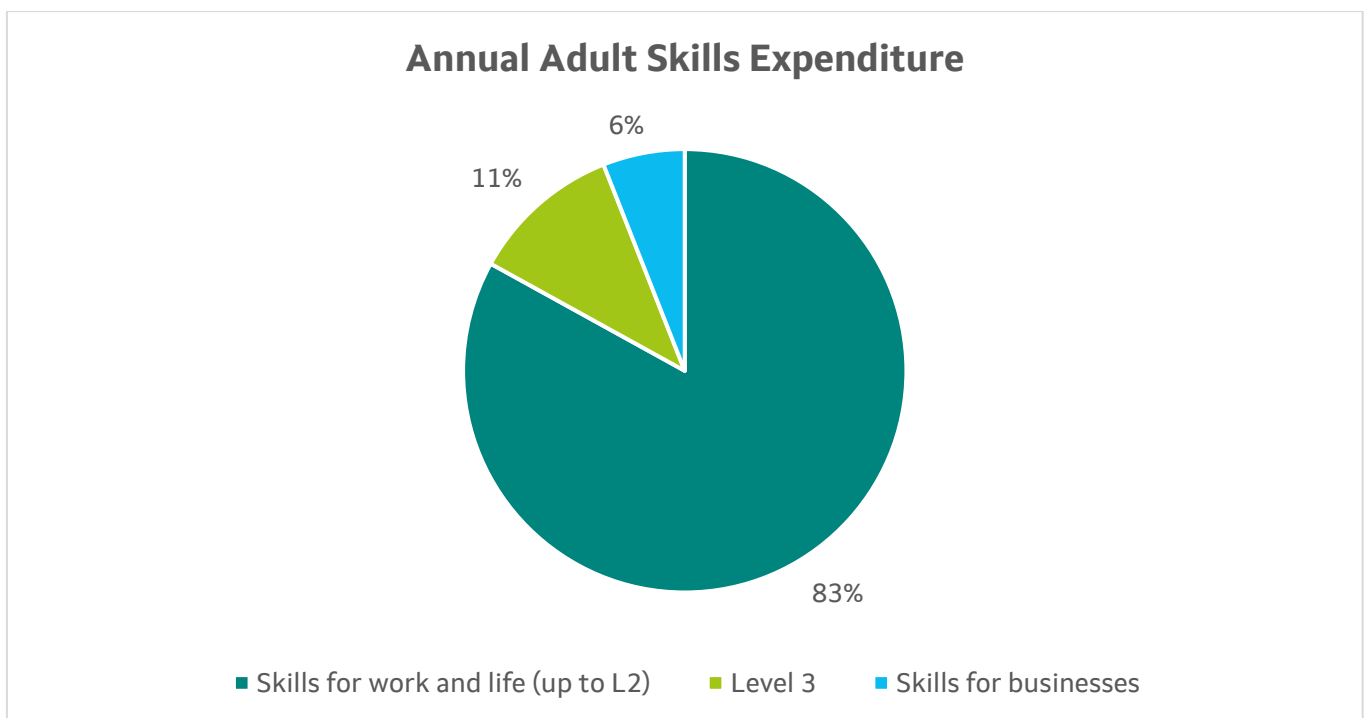
The Combined Authority has consistently lobbied for the Adult Skills allocation for West Yorkshire to be increased, reflecting our demographics and challenges in place. We estimate that the region's funding would need to be raised by around £9m or 13% to reflect the scale of the challenge arising from deprivation, weak skills profile and unemployment, and it is noted that our funding per resident is lower than many other Mayoral Combined Authorities.

Integrated settlement provides opportunity and challenge in how funding is distributed in place, with an increased focus on impact.

Current Investment

Currently, the Combined Authority spends approximately £73 million on Adult skills each year (Multiply funding has not been included in these estimations):

Figure 8: Annual Adult Skills Expenditure in West Yorkshire



The vast majority of spend is focussed on individuals and their skills needs:

- 83% basic skills (up to and including Level 2 provision)
- 11% is spend on Level 3 qualifications

Programmes focussed on business needs make up 6%, much of which are Skills Bootcamps. The remainder have been afforded through a Gainshare top-up, which has enabled the programme delivery to stretch outside the traditional parameters of the Adult Skills Fund.

Prioritisation

The Adult Skills Plan is intended to be implemented irrespective of the size of the funding envelope provided through integrated settlement. To achieve this, prioritisations will need to occur.

Maintaining provision

To achieve the Local Growth Plan Ambition **of halving the number of residents without a Level 2**, pathways to Level 2 need to be strengthened:

- Investment levels in individual legal entitlements to English, maths, digital skills and first Level 2 qualifications should be maintained.
- Targeted Employment Programmes at Level 1 and Level 2 can support any sector, and focus on connecting adults to employment
- Level 2 provision will focus on entitlements: progression to employment, those on a low wage and achieving first qualifications

The ESOL deep dive will provide recommendations on investment, recognising the continued increase in demand and an inability to continue increasing investment, and the current evidence base on progression outcomes.

Focussing on Level 3

Inclusivity and connecting residents to work, can only be achieved alongside investment in economic growth. Evidence demonstrates that Level 3 skills and above contribute the most to economic growth.

To achieve the Local Growth Plan Ambition of **ensuring everyone who wants one can access a Level 3**, over the period of the Adult Skills Plan the investment in funds should shift to support a higher-level skills profile. Acknowledging that the skills profile varies across the five local authority areas, a shift in investment will be agreed and target set with each Local Authority in line with their demographic need.

- Level 3 investment will focus on providing individuals with their first Level 3 (entitlement), or supporting those who are unemployed or on a low wage to gain a Level 3 qualification fit for the future West Yorkshire economy
- Flexibilities and increased investment on skills for business programmes at Level 3 and above will focus on sectors prioritised in Local Growth Plan, with greater granularity provided in the LSIP report to be published in summer 2026
- Adult skills funding should be seen as the 'funding of last resort' - Advanced Learner Loans, Apprenticeships, Lifelong Learning Entitlement and the Growth and Skills Levy should be explored as primary funding options.

Efficiency

The increase in the proportion of Level 3s will be delivered by the **end** of the plan over five years:

- Improvement in destination data collection will inform commissioning: **we will decommission low impact provision**

- The Local Growth and Inclusivity Fund will increasingly target Level 3 provision
- We will continue to drive value for money through proportionate 'Guided Learning Hours' funding reduction
- The distance learning review is likely to recommend efficiency savings

Managing and leveraging investment

While some efficiencies identified in the Adult Skills Plan will support the investment shift – it cannot be realised without leveraging additional funds or prioritising existing spend:

- The Combined Authority will continue to lobby for increased funding for adult skills
- Training which supports wider West Yorkshire ambitions is expected to be leveraged and/or matched by other investment agendas. In line with the recommendations of the Future Ready Skills Commission, a skills premium should be factored into large-scale infrastructure projects
- The Growth and Skills Levy should be explored as a first option for business training needs
- Clear progression routes to apprenticeships and loan funded provision should be identified to help residents utilise other funding options
- Employer contribution needs to be leveraged where possible

Impact and evaluation

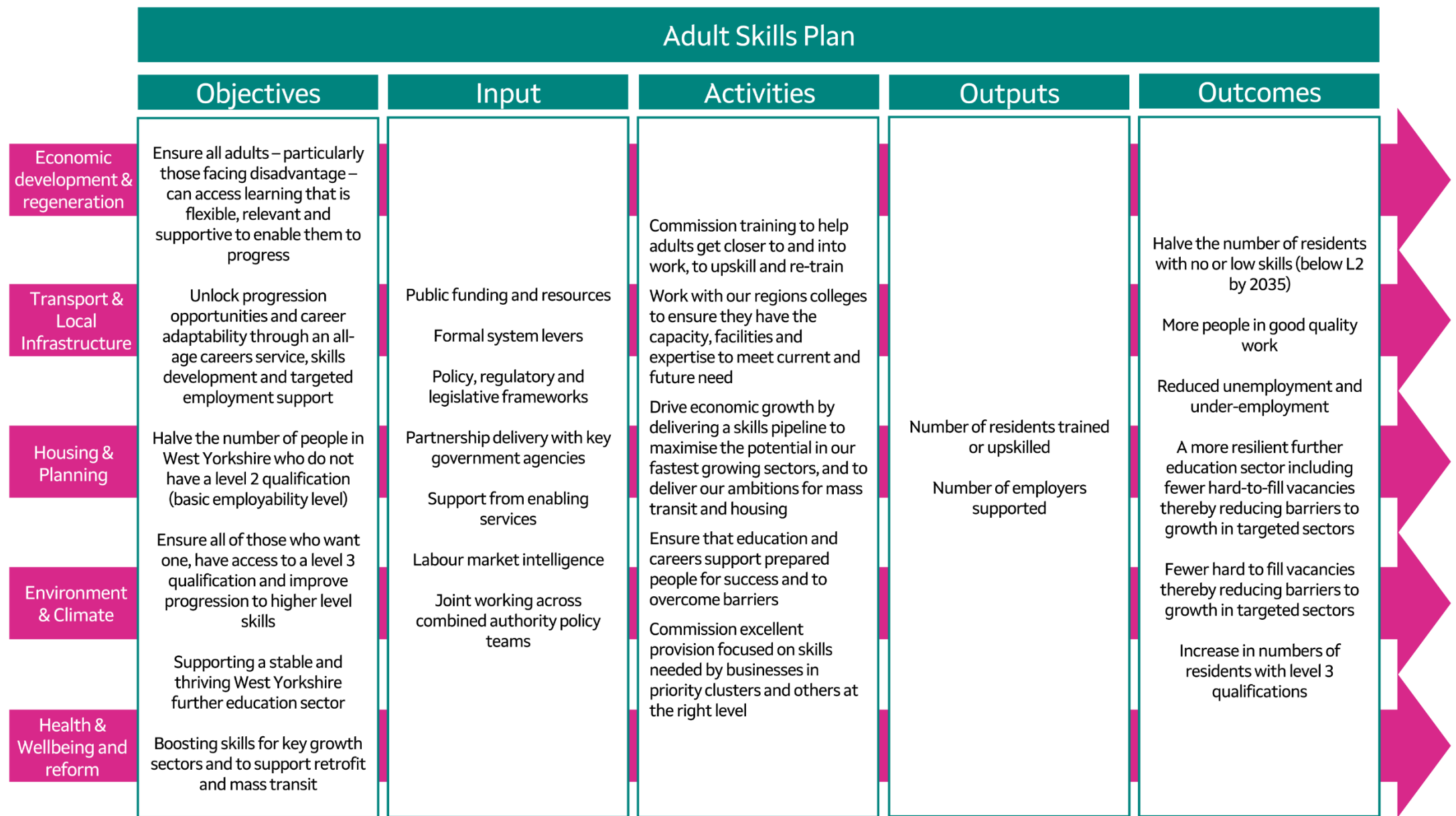
The Adult Skills Plan sets out to deliver meaningful change across West Yorkshire by improving access to adult learning and skills development, particularly for those facing disadvantage. It will help more residents gain the qualifications they need to progress in life and work, with a clear ambition to halve the number of people without a Level 2 qualification by 2035. By expanding access to Level 3 qualifications and supporting progression to higher-level skills, the programme will also enhance career adaptability and open up new opportunities for residents across the region.

A key focus is on strengthening the Further Education sector, ensuring colleges and providers have the capacity, facilities and expertise to meet current and future demand. This will help reduce hard-to-fill vacancies in critical areas such as childcare and teaching, and support growth in priority sectors including retrofit and mass transit.

Evaluation will be embedded throughout the programme to ensure transparency and continuous improvement. Success will be measured through the number of residents supported, qualifications achieved, and improvements in employment outcomes. Labour Market Intelligence will be used to ensure that provision remains aligned with regional economic needs, and feedback from learners, employers and providers will inform future delivery. Annual reports will be published, to help track progress and guide investment decisions, ensuring the programme delivers lasting impact for West Yorkshire.

A formal refresh of the Adult Skills Plan will be undertaken in 2031. We will look to undertake independent evaluation ahead of this, to draw on data available from five years of delivery, and assess progress towards the Local Growth Plan's objectives.

Figure 9: Adult Skills Plan logic model





**West
Yorkshire
Combined
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