Effective practice in English and maths for adult learners in London

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1. Executive summary

In 2018 the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, published London's first Skills for Londoners Strategy[1] and subsequent Skills for Londoners Framework which set out the Mayor's vision and plans for supporting all Londoners to access the education and skills to participate in society and progress in education and work. Within this, low levels of qualifications and skills in literacy and numeracy were identified as key skills challenges for Londoners.

Participation of adults (19+) in basic English and maths skills provision (Level 2 and below) in London has been in decline, reflecting the national picture. Nationally, funding rates have remained unchanged between 2013 and 2020, resulting in a real terms reduction; providers have highlighted the challenges associated with 'doing more with less' to engage more adults in provision and support them to achieve.

In 2019 the Mayor of London took control for London's share of the Adult Education Budget (AEB). Since then, he has implemented a number of changes so that learning in London is more accessible, locally relevant, and makes an impact. To address the challenges facing English and maths provision in London, the Mayor has introduced a yearly funding uplift for all AEB English and maths qualifications up to and including Level 2. Known as the 'London factor', this uplift, starting in 2020/21, reflects higher delivery costs in London and makes more funding available per learner. In 2022/23, the London Factor was increased to 13.5%.

However, there are still existing barriers that can deter people from taking up learning opportunities in English and maths, and progressing into further learning. These include both practical and attitudinal barriers, such as a lack of awareness of provision, practical barriers such as childcare, and negative perceptions of education resulting from past experiences.

Low levels of literacy and numeracy not only act as a substantial barrier to work and education opportunities; they can impact learner health and wellbeing and social integration. London also has a uniquely competitive labour market, which means a higher proportion of people without qualifications are more likely to be unemployed or in low-paid work than in other regions.

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[1] https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/jobs-and-skills/jobs-and-skills-research-and-strategy/skills-roadmap-and-other-strategies

The Mayor wants to support learners' progression in learning, employment and in their personal and communal lives by ensuring that all Londoners have access to the basic skills they need to progress within education and/or into work. With many Londoners still requiring basic skills, the AEB must continue to have a focus on delivering provision at Level 2 and below.

Therefore, it is crucial barriers and solutions to engagement with, participation in, and achievement and progression in basic English and maths provision is better understood by the Greater London Authority (GLA) and Further Education (FE) providers. This report, commissioned by the GLA, seeks to better understand these barriers and recommends how providers can better reach more Londoners, ensure achievement and progression in English and maths, and deliver improved outcomes for learners. It also makes recommendations for the GLA at a pan London-level.

Research aims

This research has three main aims:

1. To identify existing barriers to participation and achievement in English and maths

2. To understand what works to support participation and achievement in English and maths

3. To understand and build on good practice to develop further insights to support London's AEB provider base to deliver improved outcomes

To achieve these aims, Learning and Work Institute (L&W) examined effective practice across the learner journey, divided into three broad stages: recruitment and engagement; retention, persistence and motivation; and attainment, achievement and progression. A number of aspects of effective practice recurred throughout these stages; these are considered separately as cross-cutting themes.

The research took a mixed-methods approach, including a provider survey and depth interviews. Individualised Learner Record (ILR) data used covers the period 2016/17 – 2018/19 and fieldwork took place in autumn 2020. This means that subsequent developments or impact as a result of AEB delegation to the Mayor of London in 2019 may not be fully captured in this report.

Key findings

Effective practice in recruitment and engagement

- Online and social media marketing can be effective when the information reaches learners, but approaches are inconsistent and may not reach or engage some potential learners.

- Word of mouth is highly prevalent and can be effective in encouraging enrolment; however, further actions are needed to boost participation.

- Community outreach activity and providers' local knowledge promotes recruitment and engagement, but not all providers offer community-based programmes.

- Regular contact from provider to learner at enrolment stage supports engagement.

- It is essential to align the learner with the right course for their needs. A comprehensive initial assessment of learning and wider support needs, in a supportive environment (including a personal interview), is a key tool.

- Providers identify that employer support could be an effective method to increase learner recruitment, yet there are few examples of this in practice.

Effective practice in retention, persistence and motivation

- The role of the tutor is pivotal in effectively supporting adult learners to persist in their learning and stay motivated. Most providers cited the value of having experienced and qualified teaching staff; however, many identified recruitment and retention of high-quality staff as a sector-wide challenge.

- Being able to differentiate approaches and activities to meet learners' learning needs is a vital part of the practitioner skillset, as is providing high-quality feedback. To support them in their role, having access to high-quality Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and other networking and development opportunities is crucial.

- Flexibility in provision is central in supporting learners to persist and stay motivated. This includes having a range of class times, delivery modes and support to continue learning where personal circumstances affect learners' participation.

- Learners engage well when there is range of course content, activities, and resources, including group discussions and relevant topics.

Effective practice in attainment, achievement and progression

- Individual learner starting points and challenges vary and must be taken into account; the resulting individualised support is essential for progression.

- Different qualification types, including Functional Skills and GCSE, present distinct opportunities and challenges for different cohorts. It is important to ensure a good fit between learner needs and aspirations, and the qualifications and non-accredited learning available.

- Providers report that the increased demand placed on learners by the reformed Functional Skills qualifications requires a more explicit focus on targeted revision and exam preparation, and on supporting the needs of specific cohorts.

- In addition to learning outcomes, providers recognise a range of wider outcomes achieved through English and maths provision, with some capturing these through RARPA[2] processes and/or learner surveys.

- Access to information, advice and guidance is important to support adult learners' further progression. This may be underdeveloped.

Effective practice in supporting adults throughout the learner journey

These findings are cross-cutting, relevant to all stages of the learner journey from engagement, through to achievement and subsequent progression.

- Non-accredited provision – such as the delivery of bridging courses between levels, or taster sessions – can play an important role in supporting learners throughout their learner journey. Providers able to flex their delivery in this way are able to offer differentiated provision that meets a wider range of learner needs.

- Community-based provision supports learners to participate and persist with their learning. Community-based outreach and delivery encourages adults from different backgrounds and across all ages to learn new skills and can help adults to overcome attitudinal barriers to learning.

- English and maths provision that is contextualised to a community setting or a workplace can support progression. Providers working in partnership with community organisations and employers is a key facilitator to this.

- Embedding digital skills provision into English and maths classes, or English and maths into a vocational course, can support learner motivation, attendance and progression.

- There are advantages to online provision, particularly for learners studying at higher levels. However, for others, including learners studying at lower levels and adults

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[2] Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement

experiencing digital exclusion, some element of face-to-face provision and support is highly beneficial throughout the learner journey.

- Childcare responsibilities and not having access to childcare provision is a key barrier to learning for many adults, particularly for female learners. Partnership working can help to overcome this by enabling providers to deliver in venues with existing childcare provision.

- Peer support can help learners at all levels throughout their learning journey.

Recommendations

Recommendations are presented in three cross-cutting areas: access, flexibility and quality. These support engagement and recruitment of learners, persistence in learning, and achievement and progression.

These recommendations are intended primarily to support providers. Further considerations for policy development are included below.

Effective practice in recruitment and engagement

- **Improve the visibility of English and maths learning opportunities to learners and stakeholders, to stimulate demand.** Providers should ensure that their offer is clearly and comprehensively marketed.

- **Enhance partnership working between providers, community organisations and employers.** A range of partnerships helps recruit learners from a range of backgrounds, and to engage more learners overall in English and maths learning.

- **Address practical barriers to learning, in particular childcare.** Providers can support this through partnership working, such as delivering courses in venues that have childcare provision available.

- **Providers should maintain comprehensive and supportive initial assessment and induction processes that identify learning and wider support needs.** This should include an interview with a tutor as well as skills assessments.

Effective practice in retention, persistence and motivation

- **Develop an online English and maths offer, building on the lessons learned during the coronavirus pandemic.** Providers should continue work to develop their online models, to support adults who may find face to face provision challenging to attend, for example shift workers.

- **Use the full flexibility of the AEB, including to provide non-accredited learning where appropriate**. Providers should ensure they use the full potential of the AEB to offer provision such as non-accredited community or family learning and short courses for employers.

Effective practice in attainment, achievement and progression

- **Maintain and develop a diverse, differentiated and flexible learning offer to meet learners' needs, including community-based and workplace provision.** A range of qualifications, non-accredited learning (e.g. Family Learning) and courses, including in the workplace, is likely to support more adults, including learners with additional needs, to participate and progress, and helps address different kinds of English and maths learning needs.

- **Providers should support progression by ensuring that they have access to high-quality information, advice and guidance.** Whilst providers offer support to further learning internally, there may be scope to develop further partnerships that support learner progression and positive outcomes.

- **Ensure professional learning and development (PLD) opportunities are available and accessible to London's English and maths workforce.** Providers should ensure practitioners have access to the sector PLD offer via the Education and Training Foundation.

- **Support the wider outcomes measurement of English and maths learning, enhancing the evidence base on the impact of adult English and maths learning.**

Policy considerations

The GLA could consider further supporting provider implementation of these recommendations in a number of ways. This section sets out suggested actions for the GLA, alongside related policy updates.

- Increase strategic support to **raise awareness of opportunities for English and maths learning** and stimulate demand, among Londoners and key stakeholders.

In October 2022, the Mayor held London's first Adult Learning Awards, celebrating adult learning in the capital and recognising the achievements of learners, learning providers, employers and community organisations.

The Mayor's Jobs and Skills Campaign aims to increase awareness of London's adult education opportunities and wrap around support among Londoners. As part of this, the Skills for Londoners Community Outreach Programme will seek to engage and reach

diverse communities across London to raise awareness about London's skills offer, and to provide referral routes for Londoners to access the range of learning opportunities available.

- Support the development of **more effective partnership working between providers and key stakeholders, including employers** and the National Careers Service, to drive participation in English and maths learning.

The Mayor is working to increase the integration of London's learning and skills offer, including with employers and service providers, in a number of ways. This includes working with local business representatives to develop the direction and priorities for London's Local Skills Improvement Plan, ensuring that the plan meets London's labour market needs.

Through the No Wrong Door programme, the Mayor is working to address structural barriers Londoner's face in accessing good work, by coordinating employment and skills support between local authorities, providers, Job Centre+ and other services to ensure Londoners can find the support they need regardless of their starting point. Four Integration Hubs have been established across the capital (led by each of the subregional partnership areas) to link people with local skills and employment providers. The programme launched in July 2022.

The new London Multiply programme will also see further education (FE) providers work in partnership with employers who could benefit from improving their workforce's numeracy skills, at no cost to the business.

- Ensure that wider work to improve the availability of accessible childcare in London includes a **focus on removing childcare as a barrier to accessing learning**.

The London Multiply programme will provide dedicated courses for parents wanting to support their children with maths at home and will offer learning in a variety of settings, such as digital learning and community learning, giving parents flexible options to access skills provision, including the provision of childcare.

- Consider the potential for **a pan-London online English and maths learning offer.**

- **Identify the workforce development needs of English and maths practitioners in 19+ provision** in London, and working with the Education and Training Foundation and London's teacher training providers, ensure the availability and accessibility of a relevant offer.

- Ensure that **providers are supported to use the full flexibilities of the AEB to develop responsive provision**, and that **approaches to wider outcomes measurement are accessible to learners with low English and/or maths skills**.

The GLA measures the social and economic outcomes of basic skills provision. The new London Learner Survey will measure these outcomes with a survey sent to learners shortly after their course commences, and a follow-up survey five months after course completion. Results will be available March 2023.

2. Introduction

2.1 Policy context

The responsibility for the Adult Education Budget (AEB) in London has been delegated to the Mayor of London since August 2019. To deliver the AEB, the Greater London Authority's (GLA) 2018 Skills for Londoners Strategy[3] and Skills for Londoners Framework established detailed plans for supporting Londoners to obtain skills to learn, achieve and get on in the city. Within this, low levels of qualifications and skills in literacy and numeracy were identified as key skills challenges for Londoners.

In January 2022, the Mayor published his Skills Roadmap for London[4], which set a clear direction of travel for adult education in the capital, including for the £320m per annum AEB for the current mayoralty and beyond. The Roadmap sets out how London's adult education offer will be even more locally responsive to the needs of London's communities and businesses, and is accessible to Londoners.

This includes a focus on learning that supports progression. London is different from the rest of the country; given the competitiveness of London's labour market, a higher proportion of people without qualifications are more likely to be unemployed or in low-paid work than in other regions. Londoners therefore need support to gain essential skills at Level 2 and below.

There are concerns about how effectively adult English and maths provision progresses learners to achieve the skills needed for good work, and for active participation in their communities. Nationally, basic skills in English and maths up to and including Level 2 are covered by a statutory entitlement for full funding, for age 19+ individuals who have not previously attained a Grade C/Level 4 or higher. Prior to the delegation of the AEB to the Mayor, adult (19+) participation in basic English and maths courses in London was in decline, reflecting the national picture. Nationally, funding rates remained unchanged between 2013 and 2020, a real terms reduction, and providers highlighted challenges associated with 'doing more with less' to engage more adults in provision and support them to achieve.

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[3] https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/jobs-and-skills/jobs-and-skills-research-and-strategy/skills-roadmap-and-other-strategies

[4] https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/jobs-and-skills/jobs-and-skills-research-and-strategy/skills-roadmap-and-other-strategies

To address the challenges facing English and maths provision and to make basic skills provision more accessible for all Londoners, the Mayor has introduced a number of flexibilities to the AEB, these include:

- From 2020/21, yearly funding uplift for all AEB English and maths qualifications up to and including Level 2, known as the 'London factor'. This uplift reflects higher delivery costs in London and makes more funding available per learner. In 2022/23, the London Factor was increased to 13.5%.

- Supporting more Londoners in low pay to access skills provision by extending the financial eligibility threshold for AEB learners to London's Living Wage (from 2019/20 academic year).

- Fully funding AEB-eligible people seeking asylum for AEB-funded provision, where previously there was a co-funding requirement (from 2023/22 academic year).

- Waiving the requirement for family members of eligible UK and EEA nationals to have three years of ordinary residency to access AEB funded provision (from 2023/22 academic year).

- Funding for Londoners not in employment who are unable to evidence state benefits and who are therefore locked out of funded training (from 2022/23 academic year).

The GLA recently received a regional allocation of just under £41m to deliver government's new numeracy programme Multiply. The London Multiply programme will support thousands of Londoners with no or low numeracy qualifications access essential numeracy skills training for free. The GLA has allocated proportionally higher funding to local authorities where data has highlighted a local skills need. The Multiply programme in London will support people to have the numeracy confidence and skills they need for life and work, including to better manage everyday finances, help children with their homework, progress into further learning and access good jobs.

The Mayor's ongoing Jobs and Skills campaign aims to raise awareness of adult education opportunities and wraparound support among Londoners and employers, including with groups of Londoners most underrepresented in the AEB.

The Mayor wants to support learners' progression in learning, employment and in their personal and communal lives by ensuring that all Londoners have access to the basic skills they need to progress within education and/or into work. With many Londoners still requiring basic skills, the AEB must continue to have a focus on delivering provision at Level 2 and below.

This research is intended to help identify how commissioners and providers of basic skills provision can best use the additional investment of the London Factor in the AEB and the London Multiply programme to deliver improved outcomes for learners.

2.2 Research aims

This research has three main aims:

1. To identify existing barriers to participation and achievement in English and maths

2. To understand what works to support participation and achievement in English and maths

3. To understand and build on good practice to develop further insights to support London's AEB provider base to deliver improved outcomes

To achieve these aims, L&W examined effective practice across the learner journey, divided into three broad stages: recruitment and engagement; retention, persistence and motivation; and attainment, achievement and progression. A number of aspects of effective practice recurred throughout these stages; these are considered separately as cross-cutting themes.

2.3 Approach

Fieldwork for the research took place in autumn 2020, just over a year after AEB delegation. This limits the extent to which participant responses can provide insight into the impact of more recent policy initiatives.

The wider context of the coronavirus pandemic in this period also influenced provider responses. Providers were prompted to reflect on 'business as usual' as well as their experience of delivering English and maths during the pandemic.

A further limitation is that delays in receiving access to ILR data meant that the qualitative research phase took place prior to ILR analysis. This restricts the extent to which the qualitative research explores trends identified in the data.

The research took a mixed methods approach involving:

A rapid review of existing evidence to understand the barriers and effective practice in access and progression in adult English and maths provision (see 2.4 below).

Individualised Learner Record (ILR) data analysis[5] to examine participation and programme completion rates for adult (19+) learners in English and maths provision across London's AEB providers, controlling for various learner and provider characteristics. The analysis includes all AEB funding models (adult skills and community learning) and used learner postcode data to include only London residents. The analysis uses data for the 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19 academic years, the most recent full year data available at the time the research was commissioned. This period precedes AEB delegation to the Mayor of London.

It is important to note that the ILR analysis in this report is not directly comparable to other sources of data, including DfE published data, due to differences in population coverage. For example, the analysis includes learners at training providers who no longer have delivery contracts with GLA. In addition, the analysis considers each year in isolation rather than tracking learners across years, and is therefore conducted on a slightly different basis to other available datasets.

Provider research:

    a) **Online survey** (38 respondents made up of English and maths curriculum managers and head of departments from FE colleges, Local Authority providers, Institutes of Adult Learning and Independent Training Providers (ITPs))

    b) **Provider interviews** (26 depth interviews)

Learner research consisted of four focus groups with learners at a range of provider types (FE, ACL and IAL) and studying English and/or maths at a range of levels up to and including Level 2.

A research advisory group (RAG) was formed and met three times throughout the course of the study to help shape the direction of the research, review findings and help shape recommendations. The RAG included representatives from the Association of Colleges, HOLEX, UCL Institute of Education and Central London Forward.

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[5] This work was produced using statistical data from ONS. The use of the ONS statistical data in this work does not imply the endorsement of the ONS in relation to the interpretation or analysis of the statistical data. This work uses research datasets which may not exactly reproduce National Statistics aggregates.

2.4 Evidence review: key findings

This section summarises key findings from a rapid review of the evidence on effective practice in adult English and maths[6]. The rapid review informed the design of subsequent research tools, including the provider survey and interview guides. It also informed the selection of examples of effective practice presented throughout this report, which are chosen to align with the wider evidence base on effective practice.

There is limited amount of robust and causal evidence on the different approaches used to support engagement, persistence and achievement of adults in basic literacy and numeracy provision that relate specifically to London and UK-based populations.[7]

The review looked at the evidence in three broad themes:

- Engagement and recruitment of learners

- Learner retention, persistence and motivation

- Supporting learner attainment, achievement and progression

Key findings are summarised below:

Engagement and recruitment
- Adults who left compulsory education with low literacy and numeracy skills often view their time spent in education negatively, creating challenges for engaging and recruiting this group.

- Learners who struggle to find learning provision accessible are more likely to engage in literacy provision that uses approaches less reminiscent of the school curriculum.

- Highly supportive enrolment environments benefit recruitment; motivations for enrolling on courses vary (e.g. by age) and providers should consider these in their approaches to recruitment.

- Learners need to have teachers they can relate to; a lack of acknowledgement of diversity can be a disincentive for BAME learners to engage with learning programmes.

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[6] For further information and references, see Learning and Work Institute (2019) *Evidence review: what works to improve adult basic skills?* https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/evidence-review-what-works-to-improve-adult-basic-skills/

[7] Vorhaus, J., Litster, J., Frearson, M., Johnson, S. (2011) *Review of research and evaluation on improving adult literacy and numeracy skills*. Research paper no. 61. London: Department for Business and Skills

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- In the workplace, supportive managers, union representatives and colleagues are important in motivating other workers to take up and persist with basic skills education; however, the majority of employers do not offer workplace basic skills training and may not recognise or identify employees' basic skills needs.

- More needs to be done to ensure increasing numbers of adults can utilise flexible opportunities to learn in the workplace; informal workplace learning activities, in collaboration with employers, can help reach employees who have low basic skills.

- Providers must ensure clear and up-to-date information about their basic skills provision is available.

- Involvement of partners increases participation for those who struggle to access learning provision.

Retention, persistence and motivation

- Significant focus needs to be given to retaining learners during the early phases of participation in learning provision.

- Those on lower level courses are at increased risk of withdrawing, with consequences for progression to Level 1 and Level 2.

- Learners who have not previously engaged in adult learning are more likely to withdraw from courses than those who have.

- Blended learning can promote learner persistence, since it allows participants a level of control over when and where they learn; however, some learners prefer the structure and routine of classroom learning to help them stay engaged.

- Motivation and persistence increase when literacy and numeracy are embedded in other learning provision or content; embedded learning increases likelihood of course completion.

- Community-based learning promotes persistence in learning, particularly with those who have been reluctant to participate.

Supporting attainment, achievement and progression

- The impact of learning provision on progression is challenging to assess, because of different approaches to measurement of progress and/or outcomes.

- The qualifications, practice and experience of teachers impacts adult literacy and numeracy learning outcomes, but more data is needed.

- Teachers need to have flexibility to adapt learning content to ensure the needs of individual learners are addressed.

- Family literacy programmes have mixed outcomes for adults' literacy skills; however, improvement is noted in wider outcomes such as increased self-confidence and progression to further learning.

- Workplace learning encourages positive learning outcomes when linked to employees' occupational progress; progress is supported by literacy and numeracy provision that is contextualised to the workplace.

- Findings from behavioural research demonstrate the impact of interventions such as supportive text messages on learner achievement and progression.

3. Findings

This section sets out findings from the research activities, linked to the key themes in the evidence review: engagement and recruitment, retention and motivation, and progression and achievement.

First, in **Section 3.1**, we establish a summary of the **current landscape of adult English and maths provision** in London, drawing on analysis of ILR data on learner participation and completion, and the provider survey on the characteristics of learning provision. Annex A expands on this in further detail.

Second, taking each theme in turn, we focus on **specific aspects the learner journey** in relation to:

- **Recruitment and engagement (Section 3.2),** including barriers to engagement, approaches to marketing and recruitment, the location of provision and initial assessment

- **Retention, persistence and motivation (Section 3.3),** including barriers to retention, the role of the tutor, flexibility of provision and course content

- **Attainment, achievement and progression (Section 3.4),** including the format and content of assessments, supporting achievement in examinations, monitoring progression and outcomes

Finally, in **Section 3.5** we identify cross-cutting aspects of effective practice in **supporting adults throughout the learner journey**. They include:

- The role of non-accredited provision

- Community provision and outreach

- Workplace provision

- Online delivery

- Additional support for learners

3.1 English and maths provision in London: key characteristics

Using provider survey data, this section presents a summary of the key characteristics of English and maths provision for adults in London, providing a snapshot of the landscape in autumn 2020.

It then summarises analysis of ILR data on adult (19+) participation in AEB English and maths learning (including adult skills and community learning funding models) for the academic years 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19. Further detail of this analysis can be found in Annex A.

Current practice

Although provision is varied, some common characteristics are present between survey respondents (Figure 1).

- **Levels offered:** The majority of providers (at least 30 out of 38) offer courses between Entry level 1 and Level 2. Pre-entry or below Entry level 1 courses are far less common (14 out of 38).

- **Guided learning hours:** The most common (25 out of 38) provision contact hours are three-to-five hours per week.

- **Times of day provision is offered:** Provision timing is flexible, and most providers offer courses throughout the day. Most providers (34 out of 38) offer a degree of flexible learning e.g. drop-in sessions or enrol any time.

- **Provision type:** Roughly half the providers offer online and blended learning options, but very few allow complete learner control. Most (33 out of 38) offer embedded learning[8].

- **Additional support:** The majority of providers offer multiple elements of support (creche facilities, travel costs etc), but no single type of support is prominent.

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[8] It is important to note that definitions of embedded and blended learning vary between providers. The review found limited reference to contextualisation of learning, with the terms 'embedded' and 'contextualised' used interchangeably in much of the literature. We provide further definition of these terms in Section 3.5, where findings on embedded and contextualised approaches to delivery are discussed.

Figure 1: Characteristics of English and maths Provision
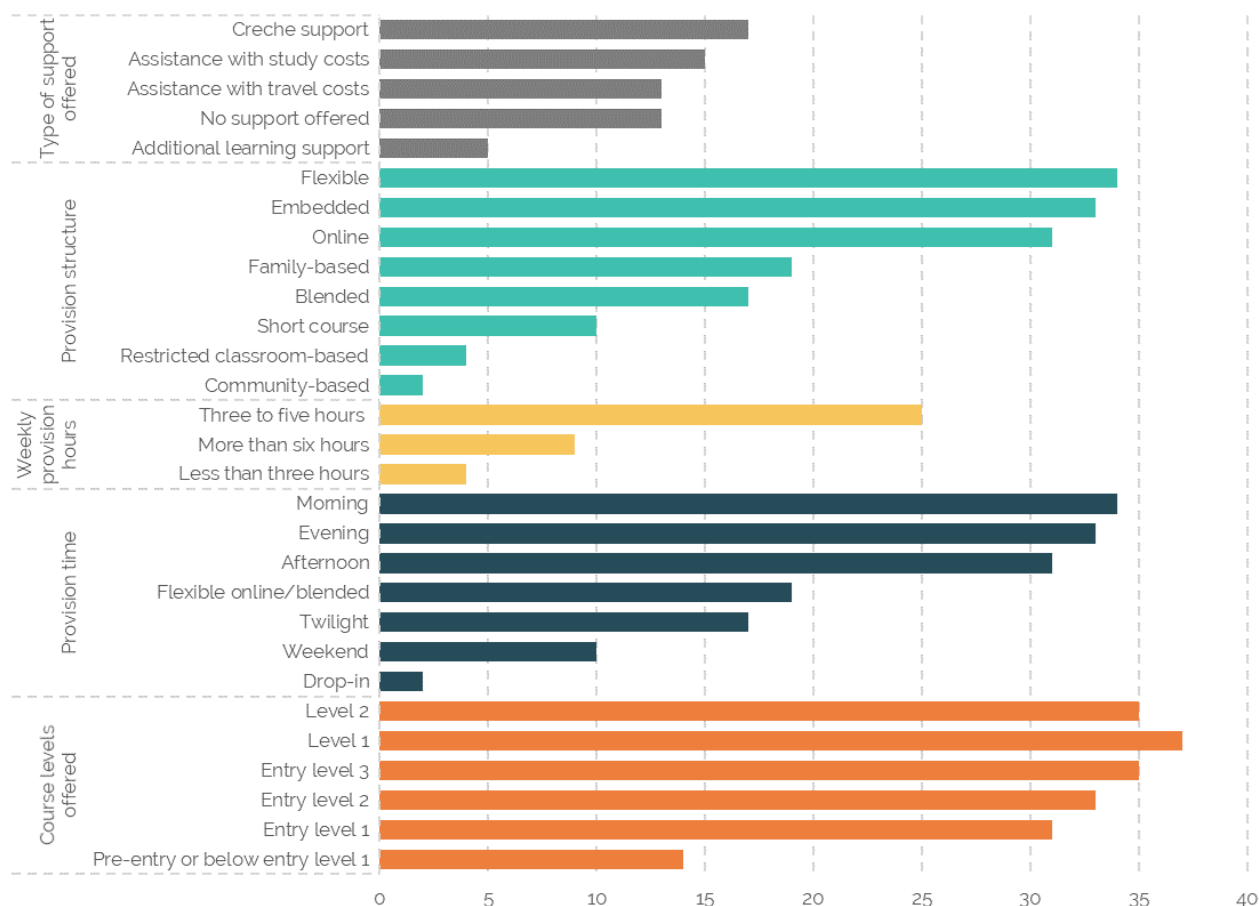
Source: L&W E&M provider survey (n = 38)

Participation

ILR analysis for the period 2016/17 to 2018/19 shows that adult participation in English rose by 10% and in maths by 13%. Overall participation in English was 33,414 in 2016/17, rising to 39,445 in 2017/18 and then dropping to 36,622 in 2018/19. Overall participation in maths was 28,401 in 2016/17, rising to 34,574 in 2017/18 and then dropping to 32,118 in 2018/19.

However, these figures should again be treated with caution given the long-term decline in English and maths learner numbers in England identified in DfE participation data.[9] To

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[9] Gov.uk, 2022. Explore Education Statistics. It is important to note that the analysis presented here is not directly comparable to other sources of data, including DfE published data, due to differences in population coverage. For example, the analysis includes learners at training providers who no longer have delivery contracts with GLA. In addition, the analysis considers each year in isolation rather than tracking learners across years, and is therefore conducted on a slightly different basis to other available datasets.

provide some context for these levels of participation, in 2016 there were 1,216,000 Londoners aged 19-64 whose highest qualification was below Level 2, dropping slightly to 1,186,600 in 2019.[10] Locating the trends for English and maths within the broader context of the qualification levels of London's working age population suggests that there nevertheless remains considerable scope to address English and maths skills levels.

In both English and maths, the data show larger increases in participation by male learners (by 16% in English, 23% in maths) compared with female learners, and amongst learners with no qualifications (by 36% in English, 41% in maths). Participation increased more by learners from 'other' ethnicity groups (by 29% in English, 42% in maths) and 'mixed' ethnicity groups (by 23% in English, 24% in maths), compared with Asian, white and black backgrounds. The data show that participation in both English and maths has decreased for 19-24 year olds, by 13% and 10% respectively.

Completion

The average (mean) programme completion rate by provider is 81% for English and 83% for maths. Programme completion rates are broadly similar for men and women and across ethnicity groups in both English and maths, and generally increase with age. Learners with learning difficulties and disabilities have similar completion rates to those without, with respective rates of 86% and 87% in English, and 86% and 89% in maths, in 2018/19.

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[10] Annual Population Survey, Jan-Dec 2016 & 2019. 'Other' qualifications were counted as below Level 2.

3.2 Recruitment and engagement

The recruitment and engagement process is the beginning of a learner's journey. Support in these early stages is crucial in supporting potential learners to recognise the benefits of taking part in learning and understand how it supports their longer term ambitions.

This chapter sets out findings from the provider survey, interviews and learner focus groups. It explores effective approaches in the recruitment and engagement of adult learners in basic skills provision, including effective practice to address key challenges at this initial stage.

In the provider survey, providers deemed practical barriers (e.g. childcare, financial costs) to be the most prominent barrier to learner recruitment, cited by 24 out of 38 respondents (see Figure 2). However, during interviews providers also reported attitudinal barriers as highly prevalent. Typically, this included a lack of confidence and a perceived stigma attached to disclosing a basic skills learning need. One provider observed that there is generally more stigma attached to disclosing a literacy need than a numeracy need. The same provider and the only male learner who engaged in the research also felt that this stigma may be more commonly experienced by male learners than female learners.

Employer support (e.g support to attend training, offering provision in the workplace) was most commonly reported as the method that would increase learner engagement, cited by 27 out of 38 respondents. However, only a very small minority of providers reported working with employers to deliver English and maths provision, limiting insight into this topic. Workplace provision is discussed further in Section 3.5.

Figure 2: Recruitment and take up (barriers and suggested support)
Source: L&W E&M provider survey
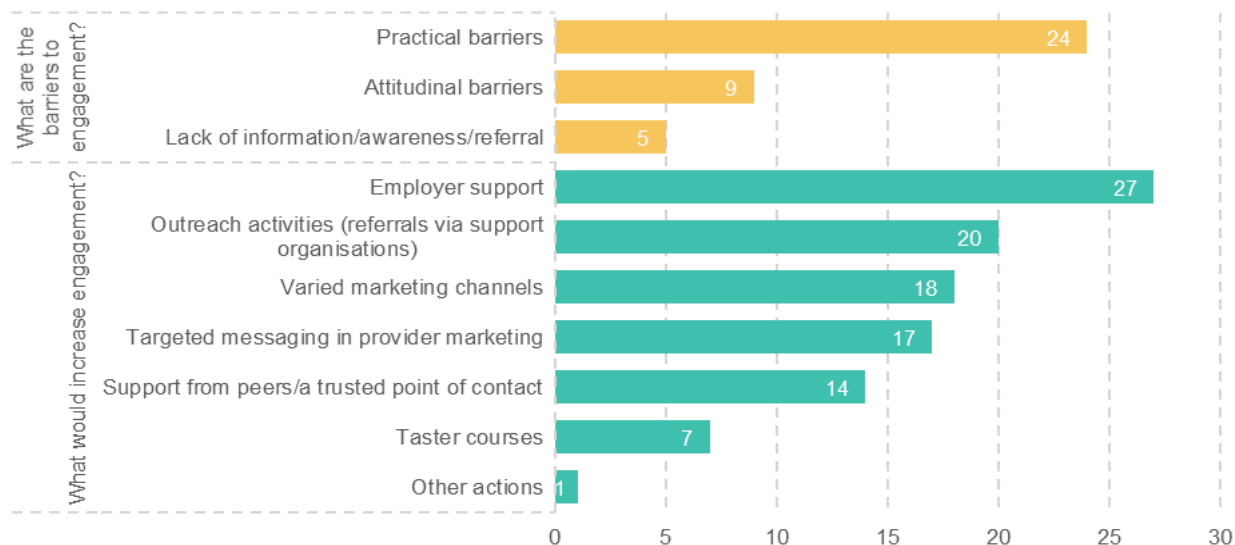
Recruitment methods

In the provider survey, the most frequently reported method of marketing was via social media and digital marketing campaigns. Whilst these approaches were also noted in provider interviews, not all organisations have the means to make extensive use of digital platforms. The larger FE providers and ITPs with wider catchment areas utilise their marketing departments to advertise courses via websites and social media channels. A number of learner focus group participants knew of the courses on offer via colleges' Facebook pages. However, some learners commented that they find navigating websites problematic due to the amount of information available.

Word of mouth was frequently cited by providers and learners as the way in which learners found out about a course. Hearing positive reactions from friends and peers who are attending courses, or had completed their studies, motivates potential learners to approach the same provider for information and registration details. Recommendations from trusted community organisations, such as their doctor's surgery, were also common.

> *'I heard about the adult education college from the doctor's…I went to the reception area I tried to just pronounce, 'Prescription, I want the prescription.' I couldn't, I couldn't. I started crying and she told me, 'Don't worry' … there is adult education college … you can join there and you can improve your English'.* (Learner)

Providers also use a range of means to reach out to potential recruits. However, disparities in participation rates by demographic group (see Annex A) suggest that there may be a

need to better understand the different needs in providers' local communities, monitor participation and recruitment rates, and tailor approaches to recruitment accordingly.

Examples of approaches used to recruit learners included:

- Leaflets and posters at community venues (for example, libraries, schools, medical centres) and letters through the door (for example, from the local authority)
- Attending community meetings and groups (for example, parent and toddler groups, faith groups)
- Information stalls in local town markets
- Organising/participation in family fun days
- Provider websites; partner websites (for example, school and charity websites)
- Social media
- Open days/evenings
- Taster sessions
- Referrals from partner organisations, such as Job Centre Plus, employment support agencies, charities and the local authority
- Employer referrals

The extent to which these approaches are used differed across providers. Some ACE providers reported restrictions on the marketing strategies they can use, as they are required to conform to Local Authority policies.

Advertising courses online

When coronavirus meant that provision shifted online, one ACE provider set up a working group of curriculum managers and IT specialists to develop an improved digital marketing strategy.

They used the strapline 'Business as Unusual' to advertise online courses, with accompanying information videos on the various courses on offer to increase accessibility.

All providers noted recruitment has been more challenging in 2020/21 because of coronavirus. Many emphasised the drop in enrolment numbers overall, but particularly at Entry level which had resulted in pausing provision at this level in some cases. Most

providers noted that learners studying at lower levels tend to have limited digital skills, which impact on their ability to find out about courses and to undertake the necessary application process online. This outcome has caused considerable concern among providers:

> *'I said to the team, English and maths should be about reaching those learners who need us most, and in this COVID period, we're not doing that'* (ACE Provider)

> *'Our Level 1 to GCSE provision has grown, but it's basically our Entry level position has been decimated and, for me, that's really sad'* (ACE Provider)

During coronavirus restrictions, providers have tended to use remote online initial assessments. Some conduct telephone or video interviews to assess learners. In some instances, paper-based forms are posted to applicants. Providers reported that many applicants are comfortable with the online approach and can see the benefits of a blended approach to the initial assessment with the actual assessment being done online, with tutor support either by telephone or video platform. These experiences have influenced many colleges to plan to continue with blended delivery of the curriculum in future.

However, most providers reported that the transfer to a digital system is not ideal for all adults, particularly those who want to enroll on the lower level courses:

> *'We initially mostly did paper-based [assessments], and then switched to online, and what we realised is having the online-only option was not suitable. There were some learners, they just felt too nervous. They didn't have the skills. They didn't understand.'* (Independent Training Provider)

Regular contact at enrolment stage
In line with wider evidence, providers note the importance of maintaining contact with learners between enrolment and the start of courses. This was seen as even more important in light of coronavirus restrictions, because of the decreasing social interaction and increasing isolation. Many providers report making use of mobile phone apps and online communication methods to keep in touch with learners to maintain their engagement.

Course location and cost
Many learners said that course location is an important influencing factor in their decision to engage and continue with learning. One focus group participant noted that a key attraction of the English and maths classes is that the college is next to their daughter's school, and they can fit attending classes between school drop off and pick up times.

Another participant said that course location is very important because she is unable to travel long distances because of family responsibilities.

> *'In the beginning I remember the time and the place, it was suitable for me, and my son at school next to the college. I said, 'I can go.'* (Learner)

It is also important to note that financial considerations are very influential in shaping whether adults would enrol on courses; as one learner commented, *'the course is also free, that's a big thing'*.

Initial assessment

Providers reported a variety of approaches to the initial assessment of English and maths skills which is undertaken as part of the recruitment process. Many providers use off-the-shelf packages, such as BKSB and Skills Forward, while a few providers find these too 'systematised' and prefer to use bespoke initial assessments considered less rigid:

> *'We use a paper-based assessment that we've put together that really fine-tunes exactly what level we think that they should be on'* (FE Provider)

Many take a 'blended' approach offering computer-based or paper-based assessments followed by a face-to-face interview with a tutor to conduct a more in-depth needs assessment. Tutor involvement is considered vital to ensure accurate assessment and placement. A number of providers report breaking down the assessment process into smaller steps, in order to avoid it becoming too stressful and overwhelming for applicants; this was particularly the case when adults apply for both English and maths courses.

Most providers take steps to provide reassurance and clarity about purpose throughout the initial assessment process. One learner's experience illustrates the importance of doing so, in order to ensure the learner is not deterred from enrolment. This learner had been directed to the assessment room, without having an opportunity to ask any questions about the course in advance, and found the process very stressful as it was '*like a test'*:

> *'I didn't like [it] because to just be thrown in at the deep end with no one telling me anything. I sat there for an hour doing the English online assessment… How can you give somebody a test, an online assessment, as an adult, who has been out of education for such a long time? If you fail that online assessment, you will not be able to join the class'.* (Learner)

According to many providers, an interview process (alongside skills assessment) during the initial assessment is essential to understand the wider needs and learning aims of new recruits, not only for their learning, but also for providers to understand any wider barriers

learners face. By supporting these broader needs, wherever possible, the providers hope to smooth the learner's journey from the outset and therefore aim to avoid any challenges becoming a barrier to learner persistence.

Initial assessment – taking a holistic approach

One ACE provider takes a holistic approach to the initial assessment process. They find this enables them to take into account a comprehensive picture of each individual learning – including their learning needs and aspirations as well as their wider needs and individual circumstances.

The process consists of an online assessment followed by an interview with a subject specialist. They note that this is a costly model, however it ensures each learner is paced in the right course.

'Because we also do a combined recruitment process, interview process, it means that we can pick up people who have come for childcare say, or for bookkeeping, who really need some maths as well. So, we make sure that we look at the learner holistically. It's not an enrolment, it's a placement in your courses as you as a learner. I think that's one of our real successes. It's a very expensive model because of using subject specialists and interviewing everybody.'

Unanimously, providers view it as essential to align the learner with the right course for their needs. ILR data (Annex A) shows a low number of withdrawals due to transfer between courses, suggesting that most providers place learners into appropriate provision. A thorough, comprehensive initial assessment in a supportive environment is the key tool to facilitating this.

The literature notes the need for a highly supportive environment for those enrolling on literacy and numeracy courses, and that providers should clearly understand an individual's motivations for learning and the challenges they face in pursuing their learning goals.

> *'We want to make sure that learners get on the right course... we don't want to get learners on courses, and they realise that it's not something that they can do, and then they drop out ... So, we try to stop that right in the beginning, if we think that learners can't cope with something, then we always recommend something else for them'* (ACE Provider)

'We have to assure the learner that we don't want to set them up to fail, so we want to put them on a course that's at the appropriate level that they're working at so we can support them to achieve and progress to the next level' (ACE Provider)

A 'staged' induction process is employed by several providers, where new recruits are enrolled on a course initially, but are reassessed within a month. If the reassessment demonstrates the learner was assigned to a course that does not meet their learning needs, they are moved to a course that is more appropriate for them.

Summary

When considering approaches to effectively engage and recruit English and maths learners, some key points emerged:

- Online and social media marketing can be effective, but approaches are inconsistent and may not reach or engage some potential learners.

- Word of mouth is highly prevalent and effective in encouraging enrolment; however, further actions are needed to boost participation.

- Community presence and outreach and providers' local knowledge promotes recruitment and engagement, but not all providers offer community-based programmes.

- Regular contact from provider to learner at enrolment stage supports engagement.

- It is essential to align the learner with the right course for their needs. A comprehensive initial assessment of learning and wider support needs, in a supportive environment (for example, by including an interview process), is the key tool to facilitating this.

- Provider survey responses highlighted employer support could be an effective method to increase learner engagement, yet there were few examples of this in practice.

3.3 Retention, persistence and motivation

In the next phase of the learner journey - when a learner has joined a learning programme - it remains essential to support learners' persistence and motivation to help them complete their course. As well as high quality course content and teaching, this requires a continued focus on addressing wider needs, overcoming barriers and providing support for ongoing participation in learning.

This section sets out the findings from the provider survey, provider interviews and learner focus groups. It explores effective approaches to retaining learners, promoting persistence and maintaining their motivation to learn and develop skills. This chapter also considers the key challenges at this stage of the learner journey and highlights effective approaches to address these.

According to the survey findings, practical issues (childcare, financial costs etc.) continued to be the most prominent barrier to learner retention, cited by 37 out of 38 respondents (see Figure 3), and when compared to take-up, attitudinal barriers such as confidence were found to be a more prominent barrier to retention. ILR data (Annex A) on reasons for withdrawal shows that 'personal reasons' is the most commonly recorded category, where the reason is known. Strikingly, ILR data show that in the majority of cases (typically over 85% in a given year), withdrawal reasons are recorded as either 'not known' or 'other'.

When asked what support could overcome said barriers, providers echoed their perceived barriers; the most prominent responses for supporting retention were related to practical support (e.g. childcare, transport), cited by 32 out of 38 survey respondents, and flexible provision (e.g course timings and length), cited by 23 out of 38 survey respondents. Although some respondents (21 out of 38) felt that financial support would be helpful in retaining learners, very few withdrawals for financial reasons are recorded in the ILR data (Annex A).

Figure 3: Retention (barriers and suggested support)

Source: L&W Provider Survey data (n = 38)
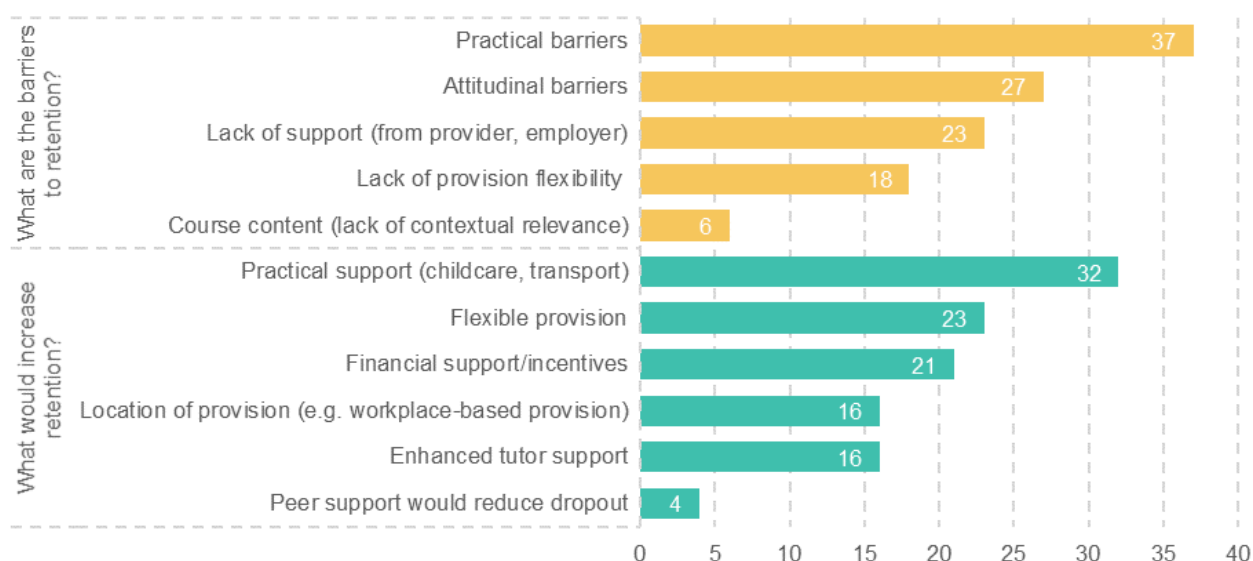
Role of the tutor

The majority of providers and learners identified the role of the tutor as pivotal to effectively support adult learners to persist in their learning and stay motivated. Most providers cited the value of having experienced and qualified teaching staff and yet many lamented recruitment and retention of high-quality staff as a sector-wide challenge.

These findings resonate with the evidence review, which found that the qualifications, skills and experience of educators impact learning outcomes. However, the current literature suggests a need for greater insight into how teachers can be supported to work with adult learners with limited literacy and numeracy skills.

From a learner perspective, most were concerned primarily with the personal attributes of their tutors, emphasising the importance of having a caring, patient tutor who provides clear explanations and guidance:

> *'I really enjoy it. It's due to the way they present the subject to all, the way they explain it patiently for us to understand. So, it's really given me more courage to want to continue.'*
> (Learner)

Responding to individual needs

The evidence review and provider survey both highlighted a particular need to support persistence for learners working at lower levels and for learners who have been out of education for a significant length of time. Providers emphasised that the tutor's understanding of individual learner needs and their ability to adapt their teaching

approaches, methods and activities to meet those needs is key to supporting persistence and motivation; this finding on the benefits of pedagogical flexibility is also evident in the literature. Providers also cited the tutor's ability to build a positive rapport with adult learners as important in maintaining learner persistence.

> *'I think the calibre of teachers is really, really important, with adults. Often, if someone's had a bad experience of English or maths at school, it takes a very good teacher to unlock that misunderstanding. There's anxieties around something. That takes patience and time.'* (FE Provider)

Regular one to one communication and check-ins with learners (face-to-face, email, text or phone) helps to build a positive rapport with learners and increase confidence; this finding has also been highlighted in the behavioural research literature. This has become increasingly important in the context of online learning to support persistence and motivation. Many providers commented that moving provision online has increased their ability to provide individualised support because there are a variety of ways to communicate quickly and easily.

One provider stressed that it is important to note that learners' needs evolve and change as their learning progresses, rather than being a linear progression trajectory. Taking into account these changing needs via regular formative assessment and continuing one to one support is crucial to meeting needs.

Adapting provision in response to learner need

One provider identified spelling as a key skills gap among their English learner cohort. They therefore designed and ran a 6-week supplementary spelling course to sit alongside the English course. Attendance and engagement were extremely high as the provision was designed with learner need at the centre. Learner feedback showed that they felt they had increased confidence and ability.

Many adult learners have a range of personal circumstances that can act as barriers to learning, including: working hours and childcare responsibilities, their previous experiences of education and challenges such as housing status and mental ill health.

Many providers cited understanding these needs, and taking empathetic approaches in response to them as crucial to supporting learners to continue attending:

'Being a compassionate provider that understands that a lot of these people are on lower wage, have more complex needs and lives. It seems like a simple thing, but it's been probably the most successful strategy for us.' (Independent Training Provider)

Feedback and tutorial support

Most providers and learners commented on the importance of high quality feedback, with positive aspects helping to boost motivation and persistence, along with clear identification of areas for development:

'I think for adults, and especially at Entry level and Level 1, … there's no replacement for face-to-face tuition and that quality of feedback that learners appreciate from a teacher being in a room with them' . (FE Provider)

'[The tutor] used to check my homework nicely and encourage me in a nice way, so that encouraged me to go further.' (Learner)

Providers also identified that one to one tutorials provide valuable opportunities for personalised feedback, as well as to put in place any wider support that may be needed, for example to address challenges in attending classes regularly.

Recruitment and retention of appropriately qualified teaching staff

A number of factors were identified by providers as supporting teachers to work in the ways suggested above. These included:

- Small class sizes, allowing more personalised and tutorial support

- Access to high-quality professional learning and development (PLD) training opportunities, supporting newly qualified teachers to develop their skills and more experienced teachers to update subject-specific skills

- Access to professional networking and exchange opportunities for tutors to share knowledge, practice, and resources, internally and between providers.

- Valuing staff working on adult basic skills programmes, including through recognition of achievement and terms and conditions of employment.

Many providers noted that recruiting and retaining high-quality teaching staff is a key challenge:

'A number of [the tutors who applied] didn't even have the basic qualification, which is the Level 3 award in education and training and a number of people really did not address the person spec at all…younger people, we can't retain them ... once they've finished their training and then they're ready to move onto a full time, or a more secure position, we lose them and we often lose them to FE' (ACE Provider)

'Retention of staff is not happening because people get fed up because you pile people with bureaucracy and paperwork they're going to vote with their feet and walk off and do something else' (ACE Provider)

One provider explained that their current teaching staff are dedicated, highly experienced adult literacy and numeracy teachers. However, this cohort of teachers are nearing the end of their careers and they fear this expertise will be lost. They reported that newly qualified teachers tend to be well trained GCSE practitioners but may lack specific expertise or experience in adult teaching and learning:

'There are teachers, that benefited from Skills for Life, trained specifically to unpick adult literacy problems, that were trained in terms of vocational and real-life context, that have refined their approaches over time and are very experienced in supporting adults. These group of teachers are at the more mature end of their careers. If they go, I haven't got that specialism. It's crisis point in the sector, as to where we will recruit from and how we will support and train and deliver to adults in the future.' (FE Provider)

To overcome this challenge, providers suggested more London-specific opportunities to access PLD:

'What I'd like to see is, in London, the GLA maybe organising London-based training in each of the areas offering teacher training, so that people could progress from Level 3 to the Diploma.' (ACE Provider)

Flexible provision and timetabling

About half of the survey respondents reported offering flexibility in their provision. Although not formally defined, this refers to having a range of times and attendance patterns available to learners. In interviews, providers identified flexible provision and timetabling as central to supporting learners to persist and stay motivated.

Flexible provision – effective practice examples

Key examples of flexible provision include:

- Offering a range of morning, afternoon and evening classes

- Scheduling classes around learners' working hours

- Offering the same class repeated at various times and days throughout a week

- Offering options to catch up if any sessions are missed e.g. through one to one tutorials or making materials available online

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- Offering drop-in sessions, either face-to-face or online

Many providers and the majority of learners emphasised the importance that a flexible approach – such as having a range of provision options throughout the day – can have in enabling learners to continue with their learning, because it allows them to fit learning around other commitments including work and childcare:

'I think the fact that we are able to offer a wider range of times and time slots available, does help with people to be able to stay on courses because they're finding a time that is appropriate for them' (Institute of Adult Learning)

'I found that the schedule is pretty flexible. For example, the grammar classes run on Mondays or on Wednesday. So, if you cannot make it to the Monday class, you can join the Wednesday class, so it's flexible' (Learner)

Course content

As discussed above, learning content that is relevant and meaningful to learners through contextualisation and/or embedding is helpful in supporting ongoing engagement and persistence in learning. Learners also provided a number of examples of the kinds of class content and activities that support their continued motivation. These include:

- Using a range and variety of resources and learning materials, including websites, apps and videos

Providers and learners emphasise the importance of having access to a range of teaching and learning tools to support consolidation of a new topic or revision. This supports progression and achievement as well as maintaining learner motivation.

- Opportunities for interaction with peers and group discussion

Most learners reported that they really enjoy opportunities for class discussion and cited the benefits it can have on their confidence levels. However, one provider lamented that the guided learning hours can place limitations on their ability to spend time on such activities – which they find particularly hinders the quality of English courses:

'That joy of learning at times, especially when you're talking about the discussion elements of English, are sometimes missing in those functional skills English classes, where there's a lot of pressure on the teacher and learner to perform to a skill set that's defined by an exam curriculum and you've got 3 hours once a week to deliver that over 33 or 34 weeks for most of our adult learners' (FE Provider)

'I feel when we can engage ourselves with the talking it gives us more confidence to go on.'
(Learner)

- Relatable, relevant and meaningful topics

One provider finds that role play based on real-life situations, as a way of developing communication skills, supports learner engagement. Another provider reported that, in a journal writing project, learners took ownership of their learning because the task was meaningful to them, supporting continued engagement.

Summary

When considering approaches that effectively support continued learner retention, persistence and motivation, the following key points emerge:

- The role of the tutor is pivotal to effectively supporting adult learners to persist in their learning and stay motivated. Most providers cited the value of having experienced and qualified teaching staff and yet many lamented recruitment and retention of high-quality staff as a sector-wide challenge.

- Being able to differentiate approaches and activities to meet learners' learning need is vital, as is providing regular positive and constructive feedback and providing one to one support as required. To support them in their role, having access to high-quality CPD and other networking/learning opportunities is crucial for tutors.

- Flexible provision and timetabling are central to supporting learners to persist and stay motivated.

- Learners appreciate and engage well when there is a range of course content, activities and resources, including group discussions and relevant topics.

3.4 Attainment, achievement and progression

This chapter describes approaches providers consider effective in enabling learners to accomplish their learning aims, and progress, setting out the findings from the provider survey, interviews with providers, and focus groups with learners. The chapter explores the way in which providers and learners assess and define achievement, including in 'softer' skills such as confidence, and the approaches providers take to help learners progress through the levels in English and maths, into further learning and employment. This chapter also highlights the challenges faced by learners and providers in reaching this stage of their learning journey and how these barriers are managed. As noted above, fieldwork took place in autumn 2020, just over a year after AEB delegation. This limits the extent to which participant responses can provide insight into the impact of more recent policy initiatives.

According to the survey findings, the most prominent barriers to attainment, achievement and progression are the format and content of assessments, cited by 33 out of 38 providers (see Figure 4). This was closely followed by the lack of support that is available to learners at transition points (for example between course levels), cited by 28 out of 33 providers. Notably, practical barriers were not a prominent barrier to attainment and progression. When providers were asked about what could support attainment and progression, the most common response was flexible or alternative assessment options, cited by 23 out of 38 providers.

Figure 4: Attainment, achievement and progression (barriers and suggested support) Source: L&W E&M provider survey (n = 38)
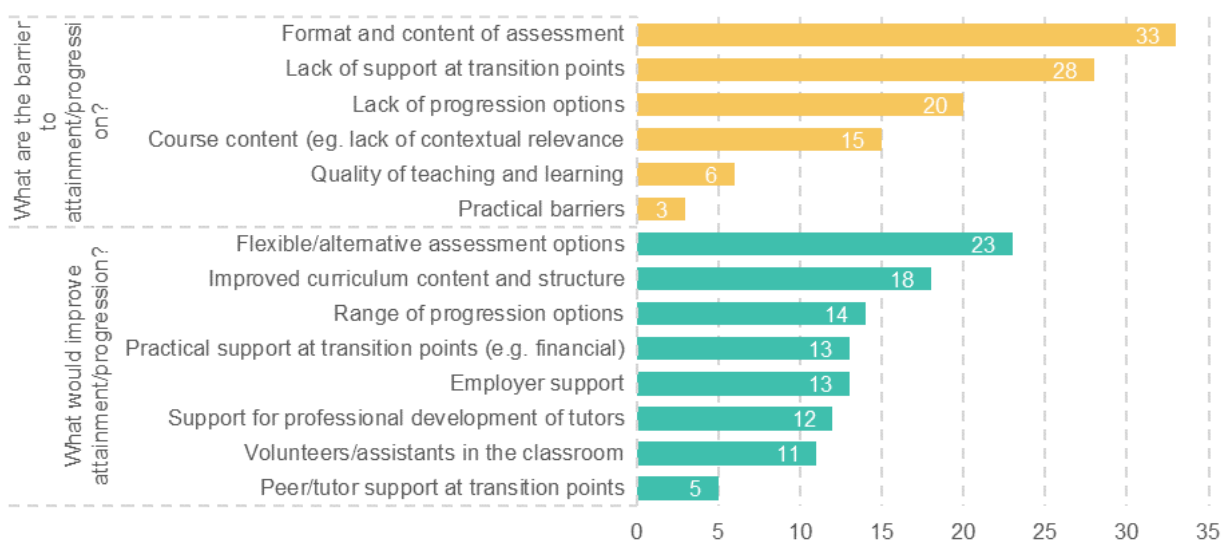
Format and content of assessment

For learners, studying for a qualification that suits their level, learning needs and future aspirations is key in supporting achievement and progression. For providers, qualification achievement is one of the principal metrics for quality and funding purposes in AEB provision, and ensuring learners achieve the qualification or learning aim they are enrolled for is a key focus.

Providers reported that the availability of different types of English and maths qualifications for adults (mainly Functional Skills and GCSEs), available through a wide range of awarding bodies, presents opportunities and challenges. Many providers made a general observation that the overall demand of the exam content has increased since the Functional Skills reforms.

Awareness of qualifications

Many providers feel there is a lack of clarity among learners and employers about the difference between Functional Skills and GCSEs. This impacts on learners' understanding of which options appropriate for them. They feel this is exacerbated by inconsistent narratives about the purpose and equivalency of Functional Skills and GCSE qualifications in the wider skills and employment policy context:

> *'This constant changing for people about the equivalency of these qualifications and that changing, it's confusing for people.'* (ACE Provider)

Some providers suggested that a government-led awareness raising campaign is needed to address wider issues in learner and employer perceptions and understanding of English and maths qualifications for adults.

Exam format

Many providers highlighted current exam formats as a key barrier to achievement for some learners. This had become particularly clear for one provider in light of the shift to teacher assessment rather than examinations, during the coronavirus pandemic:

> *'What [the teacher-assessed grades process] evidenced for us was that many learners can demonstrate the skills in a less stressful setting than an exam.... it does make you question ... … the increasing move towards timed assessments, for some learners, just does not support their success and achievement, or recognise the progress they've made'* (ACE Provider)

Providers commented that Functional Skills exams can pose particular challenges for learners with 'spikey profiles', who may be working different levels in different skills, for example in reading and in writing. They highlighted that, often, a full Functional Skills qualification is not achievable for all learners. The current qualification design is not

unitised, requiring learners to pass all skills areas (i.e. in Functional Skills English, reading, writing, speaking and listening) simultaneously and does not offer recognition of achievement in these skills separately. This can negatively impact on motivation and progression:

> *'That's very demoralising at the end of the year, to fail a qualification when they actually have passed 2 elements of it, and I think it's a problem'* (Institute of Adult Learning)

One provider highlighted that the structure of Functional Skills qualifications poses more of a challenge in English than in maths. This is because the English qualification comprises three parts whereas the maths has just one, although the guided learning hours are the same:

> *'I think it feels unfair to our English and maths teachers when English has three component parts to achieve something and maths only has one, and they still have the same number of […] learning hours attached to each one'* (FE Provider)

Many feel unitised qualifications would provide an effective solution.

Unitised qualifications

Most providers called for unitised qualifications for accredited courses as a solution to support increased achievement rates for more learners and overcome the challenges described in the section above:

> *'[The] enjoyment [of learning] and a sense of satisfaction, can be lost quite easily on an exam-driven course…It feels a bit too regimented with functional skills, whereas actually using smaller chunks of learning that are relevant and personalised to them would probably engage learners far more effectively and hopefully retain them, and hopefully help them pass their Functional Skills at the end of it because they build smaller stepping stones to success'* (FE Provider)

> *'We need to get the learners to do Level 1 and Level 2 but in fact we can't put them on a Level 1 and Level 2 Functional Skills course that they will fail because they aren't at that level. They need something funded that can help them, these stepping stones towards these skills.'* (ACE Provider)

> *'The unit portfolio-based qualifications would be helpful, especially for learners who do have anxiety issues and find exams difficult and overwhelming'* (Institute of Adult Learning)

A small number of providers gave examples of delivering 'stepping stone' awards in English and maths that offer short programmes of unitised or portfolio based provision in order to improve learner progression. As discussed above, survey responses also highlighted that some providers offer non-accredited provision between formal course

levels to provide an alternative progression route for those identified as requiring further support to move to the next level.

> **'Stepping stone' awards in English and maths: adapting provision to meet adult learners' needs**
>
> One FE college restructured their English curriculum in order to better meet learner needs and ultimately improve retention and progression.
>
> They found that the one-year Functional Skills course resulted in high attrition and poor outcomes for learners. Adult circumstances can often change and can often not commit to such a long course.
>
> To overcome this, they have developed two short courses each lasting 18 weeks that allows learners to work on portfolio based qualification. This helps to build their confidence without the pressure of an exam.
>
> One ACE provider runs unit-based awards for learners studying at Entry level and Level 1 to support their progression into Functional Skills.
>
> This 15-week, portfolio based programme is designed to support learner progression. They find that having a tutor and a volunteer tutor delivering it together works well to meet learner need and provide additional support.

Despite these examples, the majority of providers did not report that they offer these bite-sized awards in English and maths. Although most providers did not offer a reason for this, one organisation explained that although they perceived 'stepping stone' qualifications to be beneficial for supporting learner progression, they felt that the awards would not support employability outcomes. Other factors, such as increased costs and administrative burdens (e.g. tutor assessment, awarding organisation registrations) due to entering learners for multiple units may also influence provider decision making on their qualifications offer.

Supporting achievement in examinations

Providers cited revision sessions and sessions focussed on exam technique as crucial to supporting achievement in English and maths. Some noted that they have developed this approach since the Functional Skills reforms in response to the requirements of the new subject content. One provider offers topic-based workshops based on the gaps in learner knowledge and skill in order to support targeted revision and maximise attainment:

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'We look at the current cohort to see what their low scores are on and we offer the workshops for targeting topic-based workshops. It's not just a revision session, those are different. We try to make sure they're very focused.' (ACE Provider)

Using exam diagnostics tool to deliver targeted exam preparation support

One FE college uses a diagnostic report from their awarding organisation to identify the areas where learners scored lower. They then use this information to provide targeted support to develop skills in these particular areas.

'That's very useful, to pinpoint where the learners have failed. Then you can concentrate on that to support them.'

Support for specific cohorts
Learners studying at lower levels

Providers emphasised that the focus of their support is on learners studying at lower levels and those with 'spikey' profiles who would benefit targeted support in one skills area. Supporting Entry level learners to progress to higher levels is key to achieving higher attainment and achievement rates in English and maths overall. Programme completion rates (Annex A) suggest that providers support learners with low prior achievement levels particularly effectively. Providers identified providing regular one-to-one sessions as an effective approach to delivering support for Entry level learners, yet some lamented that this can be very resource and time-intensive which limits the amount they can offer.

Learners with an ESOL need

Many providers reported that a large proportion of their English and maths learners have English as their second or an additional language.

As noted above, mixed messages about the purpose of different English qualifications impact learner decision making about which qualification is best suited to their needs. In ESOL, this is additionally affected by the different funding arrangements in place for ESOL qualifications and Functional Skills English, under which learners who are not unemployed or on a low income pay a co-funding contribution for ESOL, whereas Functional Skills is fully funded for all learners. By increasing the low wage fee remission threshold, the GLA has enabled more learners in employment to access fully funded ESOL provision.

A few providers reported that some learners request Functional Skills English or maths courses for employment-related or other reasons, but are identified at initial assessment

as requiring an ESOL course, meaning that appropriate placement into provision can be a challenge:

> *'Being in an English class instead of an ESOL class has all kinds of ... social connotations for them, or feelings of belonging somehow ... I think that's the dilemma for colleges really, to try and persuade learners that they need to do the course, that is the one that will serve their interests best, or serve their educational needs best, but it can be a hard sell, not letting learners have a go at the exam.'* (Institute of Adult Learning)

To maximise achievement rates for learners with ESOL needs in Functional Skills provision, some providers offer additional workshops run by ESOL tutors focussing on the language and grammar of exam questions. For example, one FE college runs maths provision from Entry level 1 to Level 1 with an ESOL bolt-on. This course is delivered by maths tutors with a background in teaching ESOL, which the provider finds works well to meet the needs of this cohort.

Some providers highlighted that the question wording in Functional Skills maths exam papers is a particular barrier to learner achievement for learners with an ESOL need. This is due to Functional Skills maths assessments tasks often taking the form of a scenario, which the learner must read and understand in order to identify and complete a mathematical task. Some providers called for flexibility in exams to support achievement for learners with a literacy or language need, such as additional time or translation support.

To overcome this challenge, a few providers enter learners for GCSEs, which typically make less use of scenario-type tasks. They report that this results in better achievement outcomes for learners with an ESOL need:

> *'We're finding that students are better served by completing the GCSE in maths. We find that they're able to cope better with the language, they're able to cope better with the questions there, and there is a marked difference [in results].'* (FE Provider)

> *'We think that it supports students with an ESOL need. So, we have some classes which are Eduqas GCSEs for adults, which we think will be more accessible for them. The questions are shorter, lower mark tariffs, and things like that'* (FE Provider)

Learners with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LDD)

Some providers also highlighted challenges around supporting learners with LDD needs to progress and achieve, within the current funding parameters. They reported that adult learning support funding is often insufficient to fully meet the support requirements in relation to adult learners' needs. In some providers, learning support resources are prioritised for those on a vocational pathway or 16 – 19 study programme, disadvantaging

adult learners enrolled in part-time English and maths provision. Despite these concerns, ILR data (Annex A) show similar completion rates for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities and those without.

Monitoring and recognising progression

Most providers highlighted the need for learner progress to be monitored regularly through formative assessment, and the importance of recognising the progress made. Many providers highlighted the importance of recognising that individual learner starting points, needs, past experiences and aspirations for progression vary and all need to be taken into account to provide support in response to each individual's set of circumstances. They see this as crucial in effectively supporting progression. Providers acknowledged that learning is not linear for many learners, and that an iterative approach is needed, in order for students to maintain a sense of progress.

Some providers found that for learners studying at lower levels, gaining the skills and knowledge to achieve a qualification may not be a meaningful progression route in the first instance. Instead, supporting them to attend regularly, make friends, build confidence and have an enjoyable learning experience provides a foundation to support progression over time:

> *'Don't forget about the Entry level learners who we have a massive impact on... just coming to a class every week and making some friends and seeing that actually everybody else is in this boat as well, 'I'm not the only person in the world that can't spell. I'm not the only person in the world who doesn't know how to multiply numbers.' Suddenly, wow, that opens up a whole world with them. And that's really important'* (ACE Provider)

> *'Their needs change and their needs progress, and the more empowered they feel the more aspirations they have. Part of it is qualification and part of it is about their personal development, so I think if we didn't keep an eye on all of those elements we wouldn't really be delivering a good service'* (Independent Training Provider)

Despite the value of non-accredited provision in these situations (discussed above), some providers did report challenges where learners placed particular value on accredited provision.

Funding and progression

Many providers noted that the funding system assumes a 'one size fits all' approach which does not recognise individual progression trajectories and inhibits providers' ability to deliver appropriate courses for their learners:

> *'The challenge has always been the lack of hours that are linked under the funding regime to Functional Skills, the English and maths …The assumption is that the guided learning*

hours are one-size-fits-all, and that's not appropriate… I think part of the challenge is to make sure that we give them the skills that they need that are real-life and practical, not just the certificate'. (FE Provider)

Some providers identified this as being a particular challenge for some learners with an ESOL need who are studying an English Functional Skills qualification. They note that this cohort would benefit from some additional time during the course to meet their language learning needs, but the guided learning hours do not allow for such flexibility:

'Sometimes [learners with an ESOL need] they need longer, they need an element of second language learning that isn't really built into the time that a Functional Skills qualification is funded for' (Institute of Adult Learning)

Measuring outcomes

The most often cited method for measuring outcomes is qualification achievement, due to its importance in the funding and quality regimes. Other ways of measuring 'hard' outcomes mention by providers included: via learning resource packages such as BKSB and Skills Forward, student retention and course completion data, and via learner destinations data.

The importance of capturing wider social outcomes and the progress students made in their development of softer skills – such as confidence – was emphasised by most providers. These skills are highly relevant in learners' day-to-day lives and underpin their ability to progress in their learning subsequently. Many providers captured learner outcomes such as increased confidence, feeling able to be a part of the community, ability to help children with their schoolwork and physical and mental health benefits. Whilst the majority of organisations recognised the importance of capturing these wider benefits, it tended to be community focused providers who dedicated a lot of resource to prioritising socially focused goals of their learners. One provider reported that measuring softer skills is well-established for ESOL provision but not for English and maths. Methods used to capture wider outcomes included:

- **Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA)** is used by many providers to record learner progress on non-accredited learning programmes. The RARPA process is embedded in documents variously referred to as Individual Learning Plans, Individual Learner Journeys or Individual Records of Progress, and often include a range learning objectives and wider personal objectives.

- Many providers undertake **learner voice surveys**[11] to capture learner outcomes and views and opinions. Some providers report that these surveys capture information on a range of outcomes; for example confidence gains, health benefits, social inclusion, intention for further learning, feeling part of their community, helping children with homework.
- Some providers also organise **student forums** where learners discuss their progress towards and attainment of academic and non-academic outcomes.

Onward progression

Providers offer various levels of support for their students' onward learning journeys, generally within their own organisation. Some colleges have integrated processes whereby English and maths tutors liaise with other departmental leads internally to meet learners' progression needs. Some providers offer internal referrals to support learners' wider progression, such as signposting to job clubs or employability training. A number of providers undertake detailed exit interviews to understand their learners' aspirations following completion of their courses, so they can signpost the best options for their next steps.

One ACE provider reported trying to set up partnerships with employers in their borough so they could support work shadowing and employment opportunities for learners, but coronavirus had delayed these discussions.

Summary

When considering approaches that effectively support learner attainment, achievement and progression, the following key points emerge:

- Individual learner starting points and challenges vary and must be taken into account; the resulting individualised support is essential for progression.

- Different qualification types (Functional Skills and GCSEs) and diverse awarding bodies present distinct opportunities and challenges for different cohorts. It is important to ensure a good fit between learner needs and aspirations, and the qualifications available. Providers can support this through a flexible offer of Functional Skills, GCSE, unit-based awards and non-accredited provision.

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[11] In 2021/22, the GLA's London Learner Survey started to capture a range of outcomes from AEB provision, including in relation to employment and social outcomes.

- Increased demand placed on learners by the reformed Functional Skills qualifications requires a more explicit focus on targeted revision and exam preparation, and supporting the needs of specific cohorts.

- In addition to learning outcomes, providers recognise a range of wider outcomes achieved through English and maths provision, with some capturing these through RARPA processes and/or learner surveys.

- Ongoing pathway support and access to information, advice and guidance is important to support adult learners' further progression.

3.5 Supporting adults throughout the learner journey: cross-cutting themes

This section explores what works to support English and maths learners at Level 2 and below across the learner journey. Drawing on findings from the provider survey, provider interviews and learner focus groups, the themes presented emerged consistently in the research as important in supporting learners all stages, from initial engagement through to achievement and progression.

Non-accredited provision – taster and bridging courses

Providers identify offering non-accredited short courses as effective in supporting learners throughout their learner journey. This is mainly practised by Local Authority Adult Community Education (ACE) providers, but also by some Further Education (FE) providers who explained they were able to use their Community Learning funding allocation to put on this offer.

At the engagement stage, providers report that a 'taster course' can provide a gentle transition into learning for adults, develop skills in a low-pressure environment and ensure learners are on a suitable course so that they are ready to join accredited courses later on. This approach also helps to build confidence – a key enabling factor in improving motivation:

> *'A number of learners actually need a much more gentler approach into learning ... before we enrol people onto the longer courses that first term, we put people on a community learning aim to ease them into it, and then from January, we enrol them onto a GCSE learning aim. It just gives them that 10 weeks to sort of relax into the course, to actually realise, you know what, I can do this…Learners who come back to us in January [after short course] are likely to be with us until the end of the course'* (ACE Provider)

Taster courses to support engagement

One ACE provider offers a non-accredited mixed level taster course for learners who miss the main enrolment periods and want to join a class later in the year. This increases opportunities for engagement for a number of learners who would otherwise have to wait until the following September to join an accredited course. As well as maximising engagement opportunities, these taster courses also support skills development:

'After Christmas, we start non-accredited mixed level courses called tasters and that's our way of getting around people coming in term 3 where it's too late to get them onto our accredited course, to get them engaged so we get them upskilled a little bit, so they're ready to move onto accredited provision in September'

As well as this approach working well for adults who might not have engaged in provision for a while, providers identify that taster courses can act as a hook to engage adults:

'… for people that maybe haven't done maths for a while, know what level they need to get onto, but they're not quite there yet, so we get them up to scratch for a September start and we're trying to aim that towards people that maybe are on furlough and might be looking to change their career, but need their maths and English. So, we're piloting that to see how that goes' (FE Provider)

To maximise progression and achievement, some providers also run non-accredited 'bridging courses'. Providers identify that progressing from level to level can be a significant 'step up' in difficulty that many learners find challenging. Bridging courses help to fill this gap and support smoother transitions through the levels. For example, one ACE provider has developed a 'Pre-GCSE' bridging course aimed at supporting learners who have completed Level 2 English and maths and who want to prepare for and progress onto a GCSE course. This course was designed by both a GCSE tutor and a Functional Skills tutor.

Bridging courses for English provision – using Community Learning funding

An FE college has always found that the lack of flexibility in funding has been a key barrier to adult learner progression in English courses. They feel that adults need more time to be ready to progress to the next level – not only to develop skills but also confidence:

'One of our key barriers within English is that adults need more time, so you've not only got their skills to develop, but you've got to get their confidence, their health, all these other barriers get in the way, meaning that a student might finish at Entry 3, but is not necessarily ready to achieve a Level 1 qualification.'

To overcome this challenge, they used the Community Learning funding allocation for the first time this year to provide bridging courses between levels to support learners studying English to prepare for the next level:

> *'We've been able to offer in English for the first time that bridged 2 courses… The bridges have been an added flexibility that we've had to engage more learners this year because we've got something to offer them that will help support them'*

Based on the success the English department have had with this approach, the maths department are planning to develop a similar model.

Bridging courses – Supporting progression

One FE college offers non-accredited bridging courses in both English and maths for learners who have completed Entry level 2 and wish to progress to Entry level 3.

The college takes an assignment-based approach to the bridging course as this builds on existing skills and provides opportunities for frequent feedback which helps identify which aspects of the curriculum learners need to improve further. The college finds this approach helps develop skills without the pressure of an exam.

Other providers report adding a non-accredited course onto an accredited course to increase the learning hours in preparation for the final exam and the next level:

> *'it gives us flexibility because, to be honest, 55 hours to achieve Functional Skills qualifications is not enough for everybody, so this is why we can stretch our course so it's taking a whole academic year, so the learners who need that time will have that time. I think it's good practice that we have longer courses for Level 1… part of that is then developing their preparedness for Level 2'* (ACE Provider)

Some providers use this approach to offer provision specifically aimed at certain learners, for example those with LDD. The flexibility in learning hours and pace of course supports progression.

However, most providers did not provide examples of this practice indicating that it is not widespread. Some explained that they do not feel able to flex their funding due to a perceived lack of clarity around the rules:

> *'Some of the funding rules are a bit open to interpretation in different ways, and sometimes when we ask for clarity, we don't really get that clarity. We just get told to read the rules and we say, 'We've read it, but we don't understand it, so can someone just explain it to us?'*
> (Independent Training Provider)

Many providers feel that the current funding arrangements pose a significant limitation to introducing flexible options such as taster or bridging courses – an offer that many see as key to supporting learners to engage, persist and achieve. In light of this, some providers called for better funding of non-regulated (non-accredited) learning in order to support learner achievement:

> *'We offer too many hours really to make sure that people pass. If you balance that against the funding that we get, I don't do that calculation because I don't think we're going to have much change, if any, from it. So, that's the issue, is there are not enough funded hours. They need something funded that can help them, these stepping stones towards these skills.'* (ACE Provider)

Community provision and outreach

The evidence review highlights the value of community provision in encouraging learners to participate and persist with their learning. The evidence shows that community based outreach encourages adults from different backgrounds and across all ages to learn new skills. In both the survey and provider interviews, community based outreach and provision is seen as a highly effective way of supporting adult English and maths learners throughout their journey, particularly for adults with attitudinal barriers to learning. Given their remit, Adult Community Education services most commonly provided examples of this approach. However, there are examples of FE colleges co-sharing community venues with the Local Authority and sub-contracting providers to deliver provision in local community venues.

At the engagement stage, community based providers reported using their detailed local knowledge to engage people through targeted leafleting in the community and presence at community events. Staff (who often lived in the area) attend mother and toddler groups, faith forums and other local meetings to inform the community of the courses on offer. They also organise and run their own events.

Generally, providers suggested that ESOL and family learning provision are more commonly based in community settings than English and maths. One provider reported 'piggy-backing' on existing ESOL provision being delivered in the community, to engage with more learners who might be interested in taking up English or maths provision. Others reported working with their family learning teams to provide some English and maths provision in the community.

One provider employs learning ambassadors to work within the local communities which they found worked well to promote the courses on an individual basis. Another, in line with survey findings (see recruitment and engagement section above), explained that

community outreach at engagement stage is an ideal approach to overcoming barriers that adults in their local community tend to face:

> *'If I was setting up that ideal provision, there would definitely be a way of getting teachers, specialists, out into the communities doing initial assessment and talking to community groups'* (ACE Provider)

Community based outreach and provision

One ACE provider described multiple ways in which their set up and approaches support them to get a good understanding of the local need and offer provision accordingly.

Firstly, they are situated in a Learning Hub that co-locates with a local primary school and creche facilities. In addition to this, they use approximately 30 community learning sites across the borough including community centres, libraries and primary schools. They also use local level data to target provision in areas with specific need, for example areas of high deprivation. Proactive community outreach also helps them to get a good understanding of the local need. For example, through attending an event at a local charity, they found out that most learners wanted evening courses only because of work commitments.

Face-to-face promotion of English and maths at key venues in the community is an effective approach to engagement for this provider. They also note that legitimacy plays a key role in effective engagement:

'I went [to a local school] to do a presentation, and we had about 50 learners in that hall ... once they knew that we were genuine and ... part of the council. I think the council stamp bears a lot of merit ... they went and told their friends, and when we actually started the courses, we were flooded with learners'

Providers noted that adults often have longstanding barriers to learning such as lack of confidence, negative experiences at school, and undiagnosed learning difficulties such as dyslexia. To overcome these barriers, outreach activities focus on building trust and confidence, providing adults with the opportunity to participate in non-formal, social group activities such as art classes, cooking clubs and family events rather than on trying to engage them in English and maths courses:

> *'… the whole ethos of our work was to build relationships with local people and to gain their trust'* (ACE Provider)

Providers stated that it was only when time and resources are spent building relationships and helping the adults to develop confidence, that staff feel they can raise the more academically focused learning opportunities on offer:

> *'Learners might engage with us first on the local community fun day and they come along with their kids, we give them a leaflet 'have you ever thought about a maths class?' Then they come along and start their journey like that … and then in four- or five-years' time they're doing Level 2 and also doing a Childcare course or an employability unit'* (ACE Provider)

According to community based providers, they have a strong connection to local residents that enables an understanding of learners' needs and helps flex their approach in response. This supports persistence in learning:

> *'Because we're so local and the people that we work with are part of our community, we understand that people's lives are not so straightforward, and they really have got other issues in their lives. We can't say 'we're going to take you off the maths course because you haven't attended 2 lessons'. You just have to listen to the reasons.'* (Independent Training Provider)

Community based provision also acts as an important vehicle to progressing learners into more mainstream or formal provision. Many of the learner focus groups participants explained that they had initially engaged in community learning, before moving onto English and maths in the main centre. This suggests that community learning provision that is joined-up with provision at higher levels can therefore act as a key progression pathway for many learners.

One provider is planning to deliver English and maths GCSEs in the community in the next few months, to provide a progression route for learners:

> *'We want to look at how we can innovatively deliver GCSEs in terms of the local community'* (ACE Provider)

Contextualised and embedded provision

Most providers cited the benefits of contextualised provision. This report defines contextualised provision as teaching and learning where English and maths is the main learning aim but it is taught and learned via a specific context to the learners[12]. These providers reported that contextualised provision works well in specific settings where learners have a common interest or goal.

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[12] In contrast, embedded provision is defined here as studying English and maths as part of a vocational or other learning aim.

A number of providers gave effective practice examples of contextualisation, including:

Family Learning

Providers gave multiple examples of building partnerships with primary schools, nurseries and women's centres enabling them to deliver family learning provision to parents who have the goal of helping their children with school work. According to some providers, such provision can have two-fold benefits: an improvement in the children's performance following the parent classes, and supporting a proportion of these adults to develop their English or maths skills at college. Many providers identify contextualised family or community learning as an effective starting point for adults to engage, continue and progress in learning.

Family learning and contextualised provision

One ACE provider runs a large non-accredited family learning provision at local primary schools. The majority of provision is Entry level maths courses. A key enabling factor to this is developing strong partnerships with local primary schools, which they have dedicated time to invest in.

They find that this provision works well to meet learners needs, maintain engagement and support progression because learners have a common goal and similar interests. Many of their learners also share similar backgrounds and are highly motivated to learn and achieve:

'parents in this borough are very educationally orientated, so they want it, they enjoy it, it's what they came to the UK for, one of the reasons they came here. So, it's a very strong provision.'

They find this provision works well to funnel learners into accredited courses at their main centre:

'So, we use family learning as a vehicle for people to get started on their path. It's a great thing.'

At work

The findings from the evidence review illustrate that adults progress in their learning when literacy and numeracy provision is contextualised to the workplace. The evidence indicates, however, that more needs to be done to promote and facilitate employer involvement in workplace learning. This is a challenge, which is also noted in the provider interviews (see below).

Although there were few examples overall, some providers built partnerships with employers to deliver contextualised provision. In two cases, FE colleges were contracted to run bespoke GCSE English and maths courses for local NHS workers who needed these qualifications to progress in their employment. The courses included a focus on the literacy and numeracy skills required by the learners' job roles.

Delivering contextualised provision in the workplace – a provider-employer partnership

Working with partner organisations to deliver contextualised taster sessions is also effective to engage employees and encourage them to pursue their learning. For example, tutors from an ACE provider went into a school to upskill Teaching Assistants in maths with a 'Prepare for GCSE' course. As a result of this provision, six of the nine Teaching Assistants went on to enrol on a maths qualification course with the provider.

Embedded provision: effective practice examples

The evidence review found that motivation and persistency increase when literacy and numeracy are embedded in wider programmes of learning, for example vocational qualifications in subjects such as health and social care and construction.

However, whilst the provider survey suggested embedded delivery is well-established, the interviews found few examples of embedded provision. This may reflect differing provider and practitioner interpretations of terms such as 'embedded' and 'contextualised'.

Although the evidence suggests embedded approaches are effective, provider perceptions are mixed, reflecting some practical challenges in the delivery. However, providers did report some benefits to embedding digital skills within English and maths delivery.

Embedding English and maths into vocational aims

Some providers find that embedding English and/or maths into a vocational course supports learner motivation, attendance and progression. For example, one ACE provider runs Entry 2, Level 1 and Level 3 Childcare with English embedded. Another provider observed that it was easier to embed English than maths. Providers considered Functional Skills English and maths easier to embed than GCSEs, due to the curriculum content of Functional Skills being more suitable for alignment with a wide range of other subject areas.

Some providers expressed concerns about fully embedded provision. These providers commented that embedding English and maths in vocational courses does not help students to progress as much as when courses are delivered separately, due to the skills set of staff required to teach the different subject specialisms.

One provider supports learners to study English and maths *alongside* a vocational main aim which they find boosts persistence and attendance, as there is overlap between the two and skills development can be strengthened:

> *'I think that the best way of ensuring that they sustain and retain is because they are doing a main aim with us as well. Just coming to our premises to attend English and maths for adult learners can start to feel a bit like a chore.'* (Independent Training Provider)

However, other providers and some learners said that studying multiple courses at once can be overwhelming.

Embedding digital skills in English and maths

Some providers gave examples of embedding digital skills provision into English and maths classes which they find supports learners to develop their digital skills at the same time as English and maths. One provider also reported the benefits of this approach on learners' wider skills development (e.g. developing independent study skills):

> *'[We] have classes in an IT room so that we're developing that skill ... alongside maths and English, because it also helps them so much with independent learning, where they can go away and do some learning on their own, on a website or check things for themselves'* (FE Provider)

Some learners agreed. Although there were no examples of fully embedded provision, they highlighted the benefits of learning ICT alongside English and maths to their progression:

> *'I found when I did ICT course, it helped me a lot to do my English and maths, for being on the computer. So, I think ICT course is very good'* (Learner)

Although this practice was happening prior to coronavirus, some providers commented that this year had catalysed a process of embedding digital skills into English and maths provision:

> *'What would have happened in 15 years' time I think has happened now. So, everyone's pretty much scrambling around in Zoom. It's an opportunity to actually embed digital technologies with English, maths and ESOL'* (FE Provider)

Some providers welcomed the Department for Education's new digital skills entitlement[13] as helping to drive this approach forward and supporting adults to improve English and maths skills too.

Workplace provision

The evidence review notes the benefits of workplace-based provision and highlights that more focus needs to be placed on ensuring that increasing numbers of adults can take up opportunities to learn in the workplace. According to the literature, this requires effective development of partnerships between providers and employers.

Overall, the research found few examples of provider-employer relationships, with only a small minority of providers reporting delivering workplace-based provision. Providers commonly highlighted the challenges of forging long-standing partnerships with employers which providers feel tend to be hindered a lack of employer awareness of the benefits of basic skills provision and a lack of incentive to provide this to their staff:

> *'Our business development team [have tried] to engage employers for the benefits of them and developing their workforce English and maths, but we've not had very much interest at all.'* (FE Provider)

Those providers with workplace delivery highlighted a number of benefits, including:

- supporting contextualisation (see above)

- increased flexibility, and therefore increased accessibility to learners, supporting participation.

One ITP delivers Functional Skills English and maths (Entry level to Level 2) at the learners' place of work to fit round shift patterns. The tutors deliver one-to-one teaching sessions and incorporate job related examples to contextualise the learning. The provider finds that these individual and bespoke sessions enable learners to progress and achieve their learning outcomes.

However, most providers reported that employer awareness of the benefits of basic skills provision is low and there is a perceived lack of incentive for employers to support basic skills development. Some providers suggested that measures to support employers to support skills development training for employees would be beneficial.

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[13] In 2020, the Department for Education introduced a new entitlement to fully funded essential digital skills qualifications, at Entry level and Level 1, for adults with no or low digital skills. Alongside the new entitlement, the Department is reforming basic digital qualifications, introducing new Essential Digital skills qualifications (EDSQs) and new Digital Functional Skills qualifications (Digital FSQs).

Online delivery

Online provision and digital approaches to supporting learners were prevalent themes in all areas of the research. In line with the wider evidence on blended learning, the findings from the provider research show that overall there are advantages to online approaches for some learners – particularly those studying at higher levels. However, the existing evidence and the findings suggest that, for other learners, some face to face provision and support is highly beneficial throughout the learner journey.

Providers with a more substantial online presence and digital infrastructure have been able to continue to engage learners during coronavirus restrictions, while providers with less online delivery have been more restricted in their recruitment activities during this time.

Online learning was commonly discussed by providers in relation to the impact on provision from coronavirus. Overall, the findings shows that providers see online learning presenting opportunities and challenges for supporting learners to persist and stay motivated. Learners also shared mixed views of online learning. Some identified face-to-face learning as more engaging, while others enjoyed the flexibility online learning offers.

Online learning: benefits

The benefits reported by providers include:

Flexibility

Most providers reported that online provision can boost persistence for higher level learners because of the flexibility it offers, enabling learners to engage at times convenient to them. Some providers maximised this flexibility by recording and sharing the lessons and additional resources enabling learners to revisit content that they may have missed during the original session:

> *'Where we've got learners who normally have to miss a lesson because of childcare or because of illness, they're able to join remotely so they're not missing any lessons. Plus, they record the lesson, so even if they miss a bit, they can go back and they can have a look at it'* (FE Provider)

> *'I would say probably 50% of them didn't actually attend the live session, they watched in on catch-up - when they could access it because of home life and home circumstances.'* (FE Provider)

Some providers reported that recorded sessions also provide an additional revision resource for learners preparing for exams. This was also evident in the survey with providers noting that online platforms facilitate self-study, enabling learners to reinforce

their understanding of course material. Many providers explained that they will continue to record sessions, given the benefit they have seen as a result:

> *'Throughout Covid we started to record our Zoom classes as well and we post them on the Google Classroom. So, they can even re-watch the whole class. It helps them when they do their assignments, exam prep. So, that's been quite an effective tool for us.'*
> (Independent Training Provider)

Recorded sessions with tutor support

One provider has built a library of 'Looms' – a bank of slides on various topics covered throughout the course, with a video of the tutor guiding the learners through the content of each one and providing explanations. Learners can access these at any time to revise a topic. The tutor video adds an element of personalised learning that supports engagement and motivation.

Approaches to delivery

The majority of providers have shifted their delivery online via the use of video conferencing tools such as Zoom and Google classrooms during coronavirus. Others have engaged with online learning solutions that provide adaptative and tailored Functional Skills learning provision.

For some providers, the shift to online learning has worked well – measured by learner engagement and feedback. Notably, many providers identified attaching IT support classes to English and maths provision as effective in helping learners to access online courses and IT facilities, maximising engagement of learners.

This has prompted these providers to develop an increased offer of blended provision for higher level courses as they think about post-coronavirus provision. For example, one FE college is developing a new blended learning strategy for Level 1 and Level 2 provision. They have invested in an interactive English and maths platform.

Opportunities for social connection

Most learners reported that online provision has also provided opportunities to connect socially, which supported their motivation during lockdown.

Removing barriers

A few providers noted that online learning can remove practical barriers to attendance such as travel costs and childcare arrangements.

Online learning: the challenges

However, providers noted that online provision is not effective for all learners. Some of the challenges include:

Challenges for learners

According to most providers, learners studying at lower levels and adults experiencing digital poverty are groups who face particular barriers to this provision type, resulting in higher attrition. Providers highlighted that there is often intersectionality between these two groups:

> *'It broke my heart to hear one of the students saying he didn't stay to the end of the lesson because his credit had run out'* (FE Provider)

One provider noted that for learners studying at Entry level and Level 1 there is no replacement for face-to-face tuition and that quality of feedback that learners appreciate from a teacher being in a room with them.

The majority of learners who engaged in this research have childcare responsibilities. For some, trying to juggle learning at home while caring for children presented a real challenge. One provider provided similar feedback from learners, reporting that for some parents, learning during lockdown had presented significant challenges:

> *'We had stories during lockdown of learners getting up at four o'clock in the morning because that was the only time a) the machine was available, or b) it was the only quiet period in the house because the children were running around.'* (FE Provider)

Supporting learners to engage and continue learning during coronavirus

To overcome these challenges, as social distancing measures eased, many providers developed some workarounds to meet these learners' needs and ensure they can continue learning via some face-to-face and additional support. Examples include:

- Offering drop-in tutor sessions for learners in community venues such as the local library or on Zoom

- Socially distanced classroom-based learning

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- Rotating class groups – dividing the class in two and offering classroom-based provision on alternate weeks to each group

- Sending paper-based resources by post

- Developing information sheets and guidance documents and videos to support learners to access email and online learning platforms

- Embedding digital skills provision into the English and maths classes to support digital skills development:

'Supporting learners to develop those digital skills alongside their English and their maths learning has enabled them to stay learning with us' (ACE Provider)

Challenges for tutors

Some providers noted that tutors who have little to no experience of delivering provision online have faced particular challenges during coronavirus. One provider reported that their teachers dedicated to adult provision had faced more challenges than their teachers delivering 16-19 provision, because the latter are more confident in sourcing innovative online teaching and learning resources:

'Within the 16 to 18 cohort, we've got a group of teachers [who are] younger and far more innovative, because they are from a different generation from some of our more established teachers who tend to teach Functional Skills to the adults.' (FE Provider)

Some providers note overcoming this by providing teacher training and support during the transition to online delivery:

'[We] put all of our resource on the upskilling of our teaching staff ... [We had] daily Teams training events. We really went all out to make sure every teacher had the capability ... [and every teacher] had ICT facility at home. That's the most crucial thing'. (Institute of Adult Learning)

Additional support

This section discusses a range of effective practice in wraparound support for learners, alongside English and maths delivery, to support engagement, retention and achievement.

Providers identified that conducting a thorough and comprehensive initial assessment and induction process that takes into account learning and wider needs (e.g. personal

circumstances) is key in enabling appropriate support to be put in place upfront, helping to avoid support needs becoming a barrier to learning later in the course.

One provider explained that having access to different funding streams enables them to employ support workers to meet learners' wider needs, but highlighted the difference in funding levels between 16–19 programmes and AEB-funded provision, which alone is not sufficient to provide this broader support:

> '*The overarching idea of the [16–19] study programme is that wraparound support around that student, and we've felt that just because you're over the age of nineteen doesn't mean that you don't need that.*' (FE Provider)

Childcare provision

As evidenced in the literature review, survey findings and focus groups with learners, childcare responsibilities and/or not having access to suitable childcare provision is a key barrier to learning for many adults.

Overall, the survey and interview findings suggest that there is a clear gap in formal support with childcare, despite Learner Support funding intended to remove this barrier to learning. According to most providers, childcare remains a prevalent issue that can hinder learner persistence and particularly affects female learners:

> '*That's part of the reason why we don't do daytime English and maths for adults, because we don't have crèche facilities at the college ...That is a barrier for women. I would say that's the main barrier that I'm aware of*'. (FE Provider)

One provider commented that the paperwork to apply for childcare funding can be a barrier in itself. They contrast this with straightforward process of delivering childcare provision via a GLA pilot which provided childcare funding for ESOL learners:

> '*[The ESOL pilot] was so refreshing. We didn't have to ask them any questions, just 'you've got children, they need care, and this is how old they are'. It was just so good to be able to do that.*' (Independent Training Provider)

Childcare: Effective practice examples

One provider was able to ease the problem of childcare provision because of their co-location with a local school:

'We have a secondary hub and we share the premises with the primary school. Because of having our own centre, we have crèche facilities at the centre, and we are able to support some learners who have childcare problems' (ACE Provider)

Another was able to secure childcare provision when they were delivering classes at their partner sites:

'We don't have funding for childcare … we negotiate childcare in some of the schools and the children's centres that we work. Usually they say, 'Yes,' because the learners are parents in the school. So, that works and the childcare there works extremely well' (ACE Provider)

Some providers were able to draw on additional funding from trusts and foundations to provide childcare assistance for adults who would otherwise be unable to engage in learning.

Peer support

Providers and learners commonly reported that peer support plays a key role in supporting learners throughout their learning journey; the benefit of peer support in maintaining learner motivation and persistence has also been noted in the literature. This has implications for providers' design of programmes for adult English and maths delivery, particularly in light of a likely future shift to online teaching and learning in future, as described above.

Providers and learners gave examples of how peer support helps with recruitment and engagement: 'seeing people like them' motivated them to take the first steps into learning and stay learning in the early stages. This can help overcome attitudinal barriers such as lack of confidence or self-esteem:

> *'Once they get into a classroom, they know that there are a lot of people like themselves and they feel very comfortable in the classrooms'* (ACE Provider)

> *'[There are a] lot of the learners who may have said at the start, 'We don't want to do this course ... What tends to happen is [they look at those doing the course] and say, 'Right. If that other fellow can do it, I can do it.'* (Independent Training Provider)

LEARNING AND WORK INSTITUTE

A provider delivering classes to staff at Heathrow airport found that although initially reluctant to participate in the programme, staff began to engage when they saw the progress their colleagues were making.

Both providers and learners explained that peer support and the social benefits that learning brings (i.e. making friends) can support persistence and motivation at a practical level for example completing homework tasks:

> *'Everything is possible because when you have friends in the class, you can make a group and you can share your thoughts when we do homework. So, we do it like this and that way we make friends, we build communications which helps, so it helped.'* (Learner)

> *'With the online groups, they asked if we could facilitate and set up their own ... Google accounts and they've created their own Google Hangout and met each other and talked about their work ... I think when you have that social element to it, retention is going to be there'* (Independent Training Provider)

A few providers reported that peer support can benefit both learners in higher level provision and learners studying at lower levels. For learners in higher level provision, it gives them increased responsibility which can boost confidence. For learners in lower level provision, peer support can remove barriers around the power dynamic between teacher and learner. Learners feel more able to ask questions and check if they are unsure, which helps maintain engagement. Examples of this include:

- Former learners visiting classes as learning ambassadors early on to encourage and motivate new starters

- Peer to peer workshops during the course

- Running mixed ability classes

One provider described the benefits of mixed ability classes as fostering a co-learning space and strengthening the community of learners:

> *'It takes away just the focus of learning, it builds that community, that relationship and that's what our whole company ethos is about. It's about creating a community vibe and a co-learning space, rather than, 'I'm Level 2 I'm here to focus solely on me and myself.''* (Independent Training Provider)

Peer support: Improving achievement

Peer support can also support achievement. For example, one provider has learners in higher level provision run peer support learning and revision session which as well as support progression of learners studying lower level courses, has a positive impact on the peer teachers' achievement:

'We've got a cohort of learners who provide extra support for learners in the Functional Skills maths and GCSE classes…they run that session themselves. What we've found from doing that is the confidence that that gives those learners means that they tend to get the best grades, is the main thing. They get that opportunity multiple times to explain it to somebody else, it means that their own skills and their own confidence is off the scale.' (ACE Provider)

Other additional support

According to providers and learners, other kinds of additional support which benefit learners throughout their journey are:

- **Financial support,** for example with transport costs

- **Access to wider support services,** such as referral to a wellbeing team

- **Wider skills and learning support,** such as digital skills (see above)

Summary

The key cross-cutting themes on what works to support English and maths learners at Level 2 and below throughout their learner journey that emerged from the research include:

- The important role non-accredited provision – such as bridging courses or taster sessions – can play in supporting learners throughout their learner journey. Providers that flex their AEB allocation in this way are able to differentiate provision that meets a wider range of learner needs.

- Community-based provision supports learners to participate and persist with their learning. The evidence shows that community-based outreach encourages adults from different backgrounds and across all ages to learn new skills and can help adults to overcome attitudinal barriers to learning.

- English and maths provision that is contextualised to a community context or a workplace can support progression. Providers working in partnership with community organisations and employers is a key facilitator to this.

- Embedding digital skills provision into English and maths classes, or English and maths into a vocational course can support learner motivation, attendance and progression.

- There are advantages to online provision – particularly for learners studying at higher levels. However, for some learners, namely learners studying at lower levels and adults experiencing digital exclusion, some element of face-to-face provision and support is highly beneficial throughout the learner journey.

- Childcare responsibilities and not having access to childcare provision is a key barrier to learning for many adults - particularly for female learners. Partnership working can help to overcome this by enabling providers to deliver in venues with existing childcare provision.

- Peer support can help learners at all levels throughout their learning journey.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

This section sets out recommendations for the development of policy and practice in adult English and maths basic skills provision in London.

Recommendations focus on areas where the research identifies scope for providers to build on effective practice in the sector, within their own institution. Where appropriate, the recommendations highlight where Adult Education Budget policy and commissioning can support the embedding and development of effective practice in delivery. Actions that the GLA could take forward at a pan-London level, to support London's English and maths providers and learners, are also included. These are presented alongside details of the steps the GLA has taken since the research was carried out.

Recommendations are presented in three themes: engagement and recruitment of learners; retention, persistence and motivation in learning; and attainment, achievement and progression.

4.1 Recruitment and engagement

Providers

Our findings suggest that providers should:

- **Improve the visibility of English and maths learning opportunities to learners and stakeholders, to stimulate demand.**

Providers use a range of strategies to recruit learners, but these have not been effective in addressing declining participation in 19+ English and maths learning, or disparities in the participation of different groups of learners. Providers should ensure high-quality course information is visible to learners and stakeholders – including community partners and employers. Providers should consider their marketing and communications strategies to support increased take up. Findings from wider research[14] into supporting adult participation in learning suggest that tailored messaging that appeals to learners' needs, motivations and aspirations to target specific groups or communities is effective. Rather than focussing on courses and qualifications, messaging should show a potential learner how, for example, improving English or maths skills might help them start a new career in

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[14] Learning and Work Institute (2021) Cost and outreach pilots evaluation (see page 27)

a local growth sector. For employers, messaging should clearly highlight the business benefits of an English and maths offer in the workplace[15].

- **Enhance partnership working between providers, community organisations and employers.**

Evidence from this research suggests that the involvement of partners supports access and participation in adult learning, especially for adults who may face specific barriers and groups who are underrepresented. Providers should continue to develop and where possible extend their collaborative working with community-based partners, local authorities, public services and employers to support outreach delivery and referrals into learning. A number of London boroughs have successfully developed collaborative working arrangements between providers and wider stakeholders to co-ordinate ESOL provision and address issues in supply and demand. In ESOL, partnerships typically work to address high demand, but a similar model could also focus on stimulating demand for adult English and maths learning. Local authorities could consider developing similar models for adult English and maths, working with the local authority adult education service, the principal FE college(s) in each area, and involving a wide range of stakeholders and other public services in the partnership[16].

- **Address practical barriers to learning, in particular childcare**.

Having access to affordable and available childcare is a key barrier to many adults who want to take up English and maths. Providers can help address childcare needs and boost their own childcare provision (where available) by developing partnerships with other providers or organisations that have childcare provision in place, such as community venues with creches. Providers could also develop their family learning offer, including models where parents and children learn together, to improve access for learners with childcare responsibilities.

- **Maintain comprehensive and supportive initial assessment and induction processes that identify learning and wider support needs.**

A high-quality, personalised initial assessment and induction process effectively supports adults to overcome barriers to learning and start their learning journey. Communications with learners during recruitment should be clear, timely and use appropriate formats to

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[15] Learning and Work Institute (2020) Better Basic Skills, Better Business

[16] L&W has developed resources to support local ESOL partnerships, which may also be relevant for English and maths providers: https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/resources-to-support-the-development-of-local-esol-partnerships/

reach learners e.g. phone, text messages. Initial assessment should include a one-to-one discussion with a tutor, alongside assessment of English and maths skills and identification of any barriers and support needs, for example assistance with childcare or travel costs. This ensures the experience is welcoming to the learner, and supports providers to offer learning that meets a learner's needs.

Policy

Strategic support to boost access and participation in English and maths is also required. Given the stark decline in participation in adult English and maths learning, and the constraints on providers' capacity for marketing and outreach activity, there is a broader case for action to raise awareness of adult English and maths provision in London among the general public and employers.

- **The GLA should consider supporting provider marketing and outreach by running a London-wide awareness-raising campaign, in line with other recent skills and employment campaigns such as on apprenticeships.**

L&W's 2021 Adult Participation in Learning Survey[17] found that, nationally, only two in five adults are aware that fully funded English and maths courses are available. Adults who left school earlier, those with lower levels of qualification and those who have not recently engaged in in learning are all less likely to be aware of this offer. Taking the same approach to messaging as described above, and delivered in partnership with key public services and sector organisations, such as the National Careers Service, Jobcentre Plus, Housing Associations and other public services, a London-wide campaign could promote English and maths learning opportunities and help stimulate demand.

In October 2022, the Mayor held London's first Adult Learning Awards, celebrating adult learning in the capital and recognising the achievements of learners, learning providers, employers and community organisations. The Mayor's Jobs and Skills Campaign aims to increase awareness of London's adult education opportunities and wrap around support among Londoners. As part of this, the Skills for Londoners Community Outreach Programme will seek to engage and reach diverse communities across London to raise awareness about London's skills offer, and to provide referral routes for Londoners to access the range of learning opportunities available.

The GLA should consider ways in which partnership working can be made central to 19+ English and maths delivery, and where value can be added at city-wide level. The GLA should consider how the AEB commissioning process and/or provider performance

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[17] https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/adult-participation-in-learning-survey-2021/

management could support and incentivise further partnership working in adult English and maths delivery, including with employers. To support employer engagement, the GLA could consider an employer basic skills pilot scheme (similar to the ESOL Plus Employer Pilot), to explore what works in employer engagement and workplace delivery of adult English and maths.

The Mayor is working to increase the integration of London's learning and skills offer, including with employers and service providers, in a number of ways. This includes working with local business representatives to develop the direction and priorities for London's Local Skills Improvement Plan, ensuring that the plan meets London's labour market needs.

Through the No Wrong Door programme, the Mayor is working to address structural barriers Londoner's face in accessing good work, by coordinating employment and skills support between local authorities, providers, Job Centre+ and other services to ensure Londoners can find the support they need regardless of their starting point. Four Integration Hubs have been established across the capital (led by each of the subregional partnership areas) to link people with local skills and employment providers. The programme launched in July 2022.

The new London Multiply programme will also see further education (FE) providers work in partnership with employers who could benefit from improving their workforce's numeracy skills, at no cost to the business.

The GLA should work to ensure that the role of accessible childcare provision in supporting access to adult skills and education is given due consideration within the Mayor's wider work to improve childcare provision in London. The London Multiply programme will provide dedicated courses for parents wanting to support their children with maths at home and will offer learning in a variety of settings, such as digital learning and community learning, giving parents flexible options to access skills provision, including the provision of childcare.

4.2 Retention, persistence and motivation

Providers

The findings of this research suggest that providers should:

- **Develop an online English and maths offer, building on the lessons learned during the coronavirus pandemic.**

There is clearly a role for online learning as part of a range of diverse and flexible learning options that are accessible to a range of adults. As online learning becomes better established, providers should draw on lessons learned from moving delivery online during the coronavirus pandemic to continue to develop models of online delivery of English and maths.

- **Use the full flexibility of the Adult Education Budget and Multiply, including to provide non-accredited learning where appropriate.**

The findings show that offering non-accredited short courses and unit-based awards can be effective in supporting learners throughout their learner journey. Where possible, providers should draw on the effective practice examples presented here to introduce more flexible learning provision and options to support adults to engage and persist in learning, and help them progress to Functional Skills and GCSE qualifications. However, examples of this were not widespread, with some evidence that awareness of the possibilities within AEB funding is limited.

Policy

To support Londoners to learn online, the GLA could consider commissioning further research and/or pilots to help understand what works in online delivery of English and maths for adults. In the longer term, and to reduce overlapping and competing efforts by providers to develop and resource an online offer, the GLA could consider commissioning a single provider to design and deliver an online English and maths provision for Londoners. This offer could be targeted at those learners who are most likely to be able to benefit, such as learners with higher level English or maths skills who are in employment and find face-to-face delivery difficult to attend. The online offer could be complemented by a widely available face-to-face drop in or tutorial support service offered by providers to a universal specification, to ensure that learners have the opportunity to access tutor and/or peer support locally.

The GLA should consider how AEB commissioning and/or performance management can support providers to deliver a range of learning provision. This could include developing additional guidance on how AEB funding can be used to for these purposes. Providers could also be granted discretion over a small proportion of their overall funding allocation to support innovation and/or flexible delivery in English and maths, an approach which has been successfully trialled in some other areas with devolved Adult Education Budgets.

4.3 Attainment, achievement and progression

Providers

The findings of this research suggest that providers should:

- **Maintain and develop a diverse, differentiated and flexible learning offer to meet learners' needs, including community-based and workplace provision.**

In order to support all learners, a differentiated learning offer is vital. This includes a range of accredited and non-accredited provision, such as good quality Entry level provision, family English and maths learning in community settings to engage less confident learners, 'traditional' classes in colleges and adult education centres, as well as working with employers to run contextualised workplace literacy and numeracy provision. A range of qualifications and courses is likely to support more adults, including learners with additional needs, to participate and progress.

Where a single provider does not have capacity to offer this range of provision, partnership working and co-ordination can help, to ensure that provision is joined up and progression routes are available. For example, one provider might focus on working with learners in the community, whilst another focuses on employer engagement.

As a minimum, providers should ensure their English and maths offer includes a range of flexible options for adult learners, including those with childcare responsibilities and shift workers. For example, offering classes at evenings and weekends that fit around working hours, repeating classes at various times and days throughout the week, and offering drop-in sessions. Providers should take steps to capture learners' withdrawal reasons to ensure that any implications for future delivery are identified.

- **Support progression by ensuring that learners have access to high-quality information, advice and guidance.**

In order to meet learners' progression needs, and to support outcomes such as entering employment, securing better work or progression to further learning, providers should ensure adults have access to high-quality information, advice and guidance. Currently, support for progression available to adults in English and maths provision may be limited. The majority of providers discussed progression in terms of internal progression to further learning within their own institution. This may suggest that developing relationships with careers and other support services, and embedding access to these in provision, could support improved outcomes for learners. Boosting partnership working, as described above, could also support opportunities to link up progression support between organisations.

- **Ensure professional learning and development (PLD) opportunities are available and accessible to London's English and maths workforce.**

To support high quality delivery of English and maths provision, providers should engage with existing sector PLD resources and opportunities, in particular those offered by Education and Training Foundation (ETF), and ensure that tutors are able to access relevant training, courses and other provision.

Policy

To support quality, the GLA could consider how providers' commitment to professional development for English and maths teachers can be supported through the commissioning process. The GLA should work with the ETF to identify workforce development needs in relation to adult English and maths provision specifically. This could include a focus on the professional skills needed to support different kinds of delivery for adults, such as community or workplace-based provision. Subsequent development and delivery of a PLD offer for London could be supported by the GLA, if unavailable via existing ETF provision.

Additionally, London has considerable specialist expertise in English and maths for adult learners, including within Higher Education Institutions and teacher development organisations**.** To complement and boost the general sector-wide PLD offer, the GLA should consider actions to harness this expertise for the benefit of London's English and maths providers and practitioners. This could include supporting networking events and capacity building activities for providers and practitioners on English and maths for adults, working with sector representative bodies to ensure activities and content are tailored to the London context and widely promoted.

Providers recognise a range of important wider, social outcomes from adult English and maths learning. The GLA's London Learner Survey[18] will measure the social and economic outcomes of basic skills provision with a survey sent to learners shortly after their course commences, and a follow-up survey five months after course completion. Results will be available in March 2023.

The GLA and AEB providers should work collaboratively to ensure that the survey is accessible to adult English and maths learners, and that participation rates are high, addressing any challenges as they arise. This will contribute to the development of a robust evidence base on the outcomes of adult English and maths learning. However, there is also scope to learn more about what works in relation to specific aspects of adult English and maths delivery, including learner recruitment and employer engagement. The

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[18] See London Learner Survey

GLA could support areas of particular interest by commissioning further piloting and evaluation, involving London's AEB providers.

ANNEX A: ILR ANALYSIS

This annex provides detailed findings from the ILR analysis undertaken for the project. It provides analysis of ILR data on adult (19+) participation in AEB English and maths learning (including adult skills and community learning funding models) for the academic years 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19 to provide a London-wide picture[19] of recent trends in participation and programme completion rates in the period prior to AEB delegation to the Mayor of London.

Participation in English

The ILR analysis shows that the number of English learners in London rose by 10% between 2016/17 and 2018/19. Overall participation was 33,414 in 2016/17, rising to 39,445 in 2017/18 and then dropping to 36,622 in 2018/19. However, these figures should be treated with caution given the long-term decline in English learner numbers in England identified in DfE participation data.[20] To provide some context for these levels of participation, in 2016 there were 1,216,000 Londoners aged 19-64 whose highest qualification was below Level 2, dropping slightly to 1,186,600 in 2019.[21]

Figure 5 below shows that there has been a larger increase in male learners (16%) than female learners (6%).

Participation in English has increased most for learners with no qualifications (36%) and other qualifications (15%). It has also increased by 6% for learners with Entry level qualifications. However, it has fallen for learners at all other qualification levels, with the largest drops for Level 3 (17%), Level 2 (16%) and Level 5 and above (14%).

Participation has increased for each age group with the exception of 19-24 year olds, where it decreased by 13%.

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[19] The ILR analysis used learner postcode data to include only learners resident in London.

[20] Gov.uk, 2022. Explore Education Statistics. It is important to note that the analysis presented here is not directly comparable to other sources of data, including DfE published data, due to differences in population coverage. For example, the analysis includes learners at training providers who no longer have delivery contracts with GLA. In addition, the analysis considers each year in isolation rather than tracking learners across years, and is therefore conducted on a slightly different basis to other available datasets.

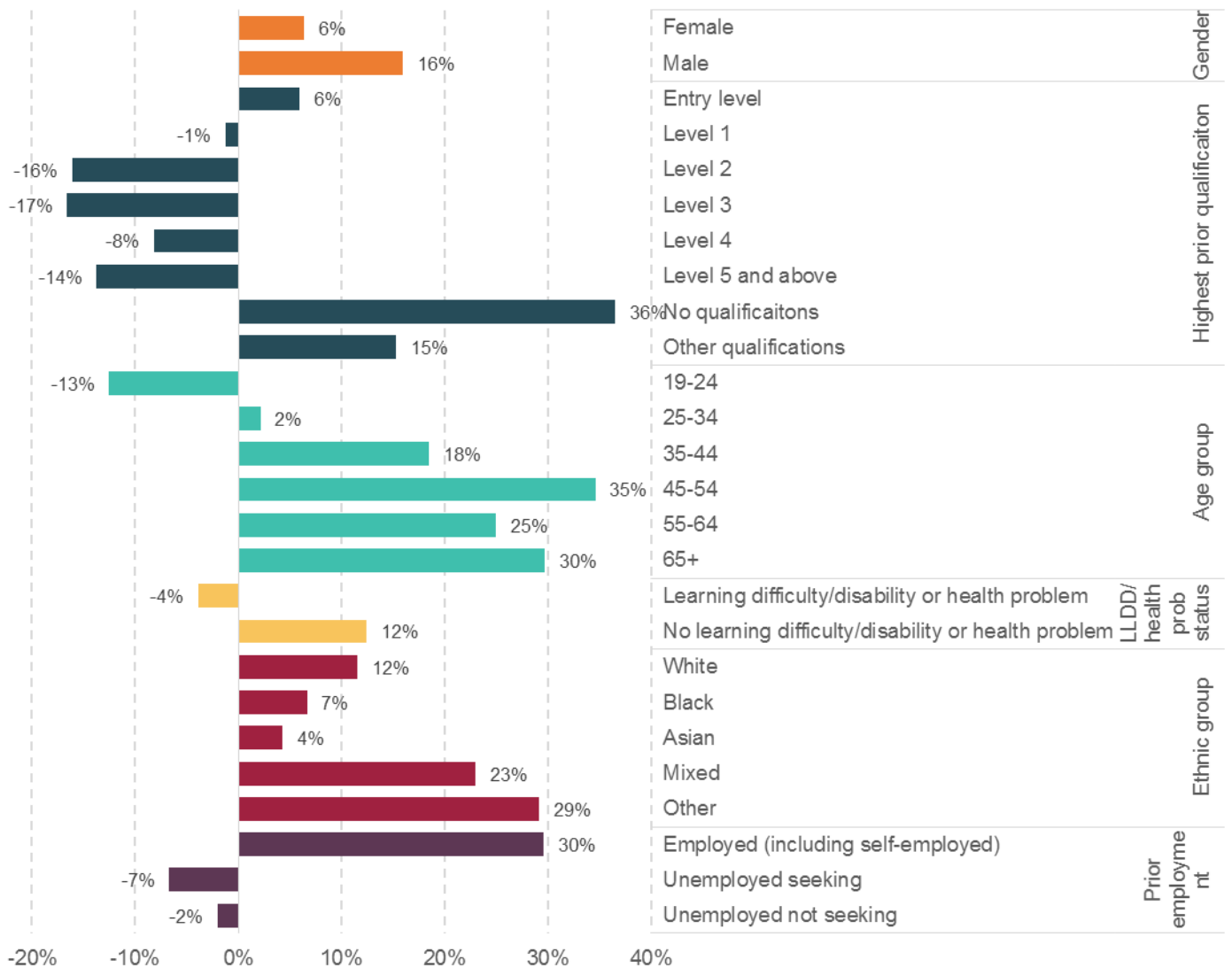[21] Annual Population Survey, Jan-Dec 2016 & 2019. 'Other' qualifications were counted as below Level 2.

Participation in English has decreased for individuals with a learning difficulty/disability or health problem (-4%), but increased for those without one (12%).

The number of English learners rose for each ethnic group, albeit with some differences. The largest increases were for learners from other (29%) and mixed (23%) ethnic groups. This was followed by white learners (12%), and learners from black (7%) and Asian groups (4%).

Looking at prior employment status,[22] there was a 30% increase in participation for learners in employment (including self-employed). However, there was a drop in learning for those unemployed and seeking work (-7%) and those unemployed and not seeking work (-2%).

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[22] It should be noted that prior employment status is based on learner self-declaration, as reported in ILR. Therefore, although it can be considered as indicative of employment status it is not sufficiently robust to be considered as definitive. These findings should therefore be treated with caution.

Figure 5: Percentage change in English learners from 2016-17 to 2018-19, by demographic characteristics

Gender	Female	6%
	Male	16%
Highest prior qualification	Entry level	6%
	Level 1	-1%
	Level 2	-16%
	Level 3	-17%
	Level 4	-8%
	Level 5 and above	-14%
	No qualifications	36%
	Other qualifications	15%
Age group	19-24	-13%
	25-34	2%
	35-44	18%
	45-54	35%
	55-64	25%
	65+	30%
LLDD/health prob status	Learning difficulty/disability or health problem	-4%
	No learning difficulty/disability or health problem	12%
Ethnic group	White	12%
	Black	7%
	Asian	4%
	Mixed	23%
	Other	29%
Prior employment	Employed (including self-employed)	30%
	Unemployed seeking	-7%
	Unemployed not seeking	-2%

Source: ILR data 2016-17 (n=33,414), 2017-18 (n=39,445), and 2018-19 (n=36,622)

Participation in maths

The ILR analysis shows that the number of maths learners in London rose by 13% between 2016/17 and 2018/19. Overall participation was 28,401 in 2016/17, rising to 34,574 in 2017/18 and then dropping to 32,118 in 2018/19. However, these figures should again be treated with caution given the long-term decline in maths learner numbers in England identified in DfE participation data.[23] To provide some context for these levels of

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[23] Gov.uk, 2022. Explore Education Statistics. It is important to note that the analysis presented here is not directly comparable to other sources of data, including DfE published data, due to differences in population

participation, in 2016 there were 1,216,000 Londoners aged 19-64 whose highest qualification was below Level 2, dropping slightly to 1,186,600 in 2019.[24]

Figure 6 below shows that there has been a larger increase in male learners (23%) than female learners (8%).

Out of prior qualification levels, participation in maths has increased for learners with no qualifications (41%), Entry level qualifications (23%) and other qualifications (9%). However, it has fallen for learners at most other qualification levels, with the largest drops for Level 3 (14%), Level 5 and above (13%) and Level 2 (12%). It has remained stable (0% change) for learners with Level 4 qualifications.

Participation has increased for each age group with the exception of 19-24 year olds, where it decreased by 10%.

Participation in maths has increased less for individuals with a learning difficulty/disability or health problem (5%) than those without one (14%).

The number of maths learners rose for each ethnic group, albeit with some differences. The largest increases were for learners from other (42%) and mixed (24%) ethnic groups. This was followed by learners from Asian (17%), white (11%) and black (5%) backgrounds.

Looking at prior employment status,[25] there was a 43% increase in participation for learners in employment (including self-employed). However, there was a drop in learning for those unemployed and seeking work (-6%) and those unemployed and not seeking work (-1%).

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coverage. For example, the analysis includes learners at training providers who no longer have delivery contracts with GLA. In addition, the analysis considers each year in isolation rather than tracking learners across years, and is therefore conducted on a slightly different basis to other available datasets.

[24] Annual Population Survey, Jan-Dec 2016 & 2019. 'Other' qualifications were counted as below Level 2.

[25] It should be noted that prior employment status is based on learner self-declaration, as reported in ILR. Therefore, although it can be considered as indicative of employment status it is not sufficiently robust to be considered as definitive. These findings should therefore be treated with caution.

Figure 6: Percentage change in maths learners from 2016-17 to 2018-19, by demographic characteristics
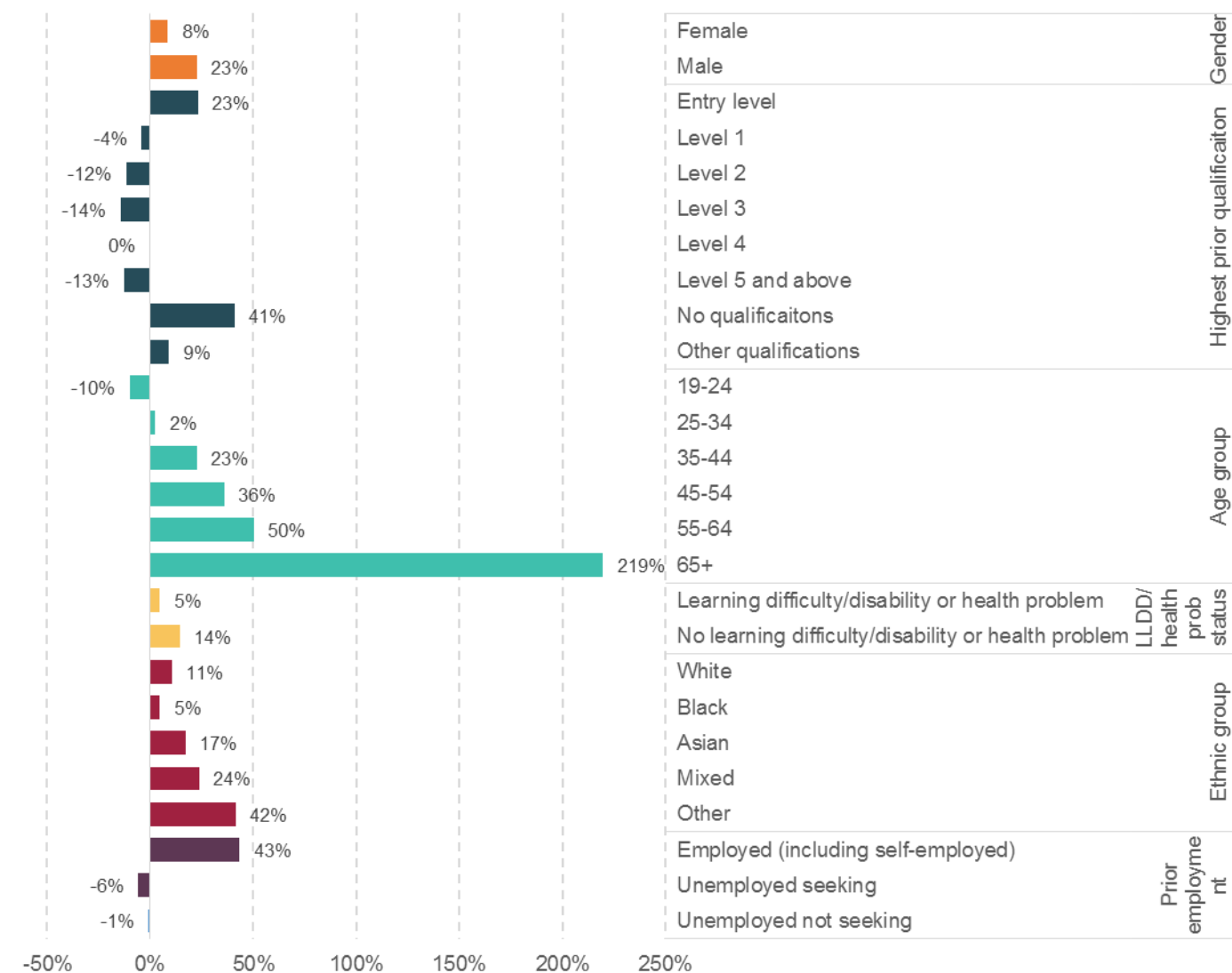
Source: ILR data 2016-17 (n=28,401), 2017-18 (n=34,574), and 2018-19 (n=32,118)

Completion rates in English

Overall, out of all English learners who started their course in 2016/17, there was a completion rate of 85%. This figure remained relatively stable across subsequent years, with a rate of 88% in 2017/18 and 87% in 2018/19.

Figure 7 below shows that men and women have broadly similar completion rates. In 2018/19, women had slightly higher rates (88% compared to 86%), with a slight increase for both groups since 2016/17 (86% compared to 84% respectively).

There is no clear pattern of completion rates by prior qualification level. In 2018/19, the highest completion rates were for learners with Entry level qualifications (90%) or no qualifications (89%). Learners with Level 4 qualifications had the lowest completion rate (81%). The largest changes since 2016/17 are an increase in the completion rate of learners with no qualifications (from 86% to 89%) and Level 2 (81% to 84%), and a decrease for learners with Level 4 qualifications (84% to 81%).

Learners with a learning difficulty/disability or health problem have slightly lower completion rates to those without, with respective rates of 85% and 88% in 2018/19.

Analysis by age group shows that, in general, completion rate increases with age. In 2018/19, 19-24 year olds had the lowest completion rate of 82%. This increased to 86% among 25-34 year olds and 90% among 35-44 year olds. Learners aged 45-54 (89%) and 55-64 (90%) had similar rates. The highest completion rates are among learners aged 65 and above, with a rate of 91%. Completion rates have increased slightly across all age groups since 2016/17.

There are broadly similar completion rates across ethnic groups. In 2018/19, learners from Asian backgrounds had the highest completion rates (89%). White learners had the lowest completion rates (86%). A comparison with 2016/17 shows Asian learners to have consistently had the highest completion rate (87% in 2016/17), with little difference across most other groups ('other', black and white learners each had rates of 85%). Learners from mixed backgrounds had the lowest completion rates in 2016/17 (83%).

Analysis by prior employment status[26] shows little difference between groups. For example, in 2018/19 employed learners (including self-employed) and unemployed learners had rates of 88%, and unemployed learners who were seeking work had a rate of 87%. In 2016/17 the respective rates were 85% for employed learners (including self-employed) and unemployed learners who were seeking work, and 86% for unemployed learners not seeking work.

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[26] It should be noted that prior employment status is based on learner self-declaration, as reported in ILR. Therefore, although it can be considered as indicative of employment status it is not sufficiently robust to be considered as definitive. These findings should therefore be treated with caution.

Figure 7: Programme completion rate for English learners in 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19, by demographic characteristics
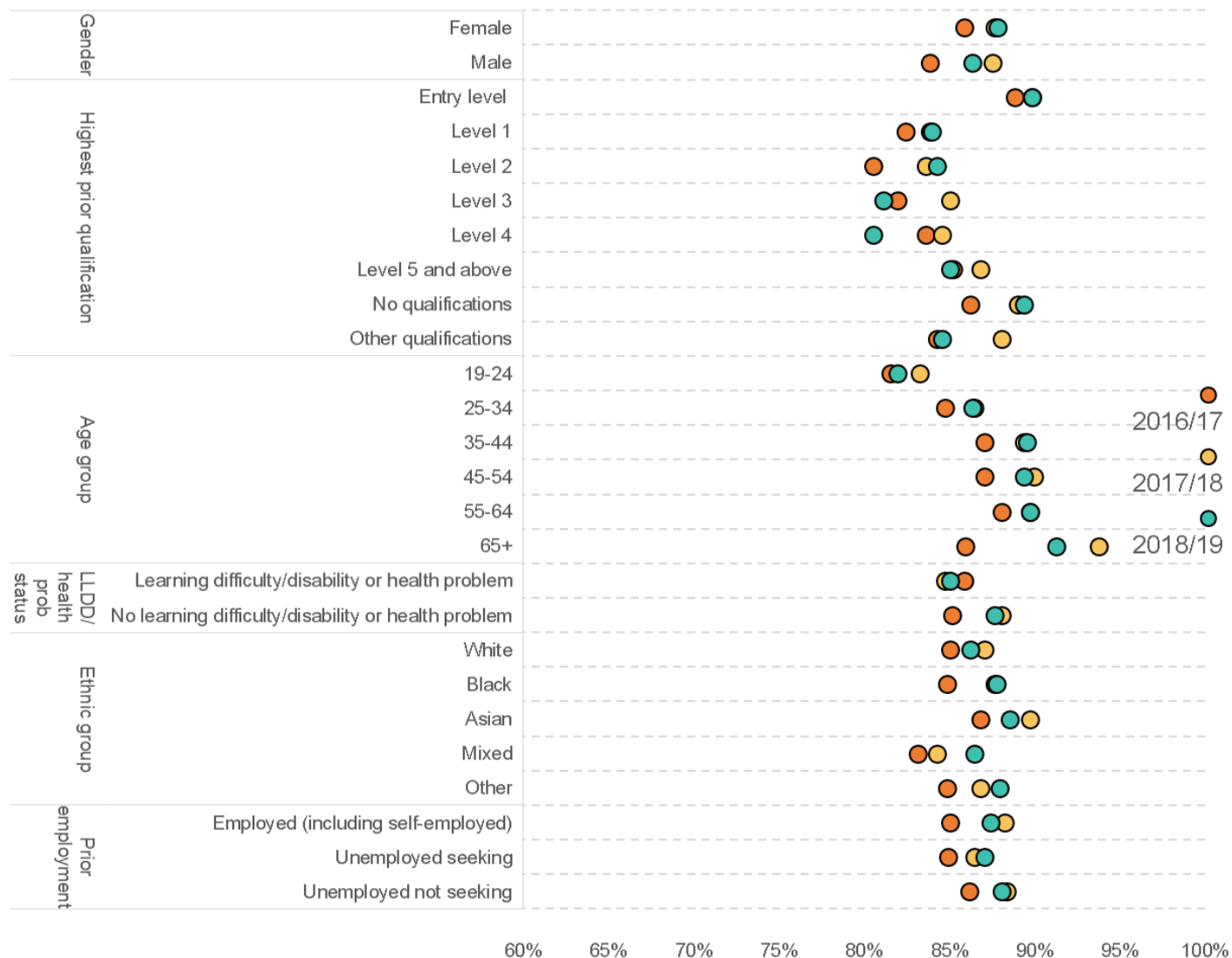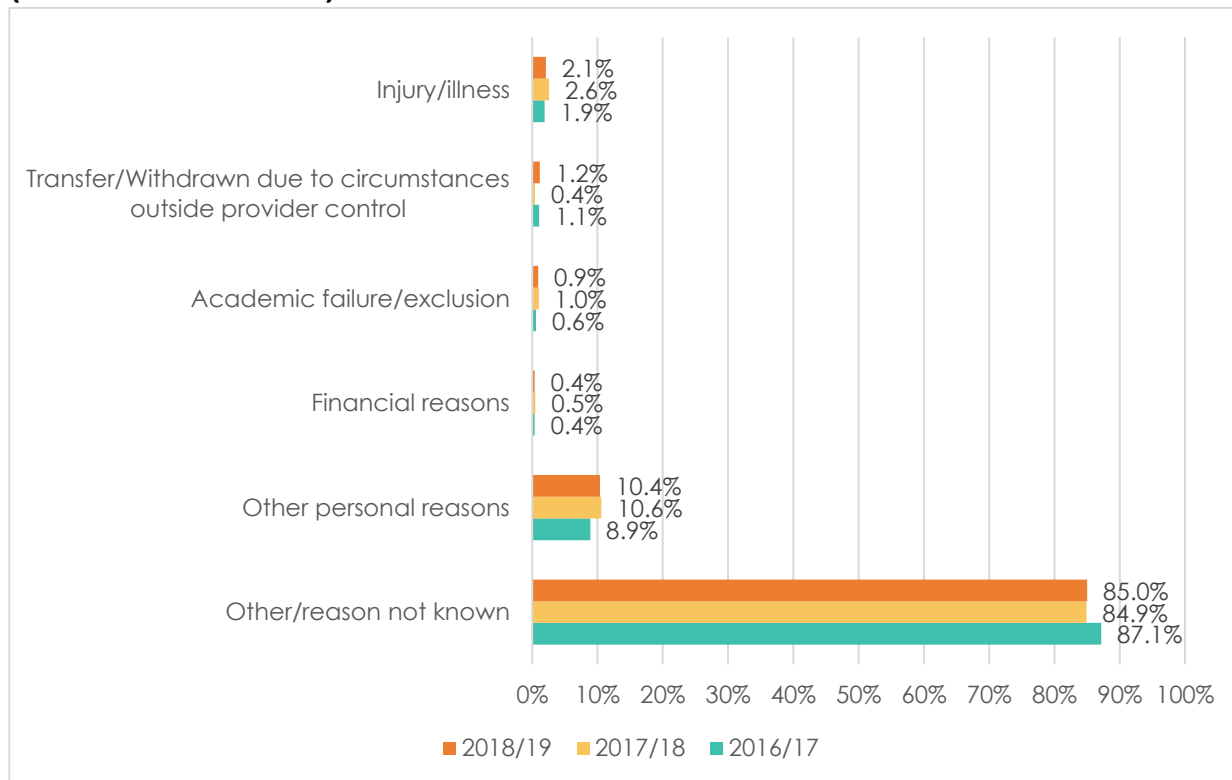

Source: ILR data (those who either completed or withdraw from a course) 2016-17 (n=30,638), 2017-18 (n=35,424), and 2018-19 (n=33,901)

Figure 8 below analyses reasons for withdrawal from English courses. By far the most common entry is 'other/reason not known', accounting for 87% of withdrawals in 2016/17, 85% in 2017/18 and 85% in 2018/19. This is followed by 'other personal reasons', which accounts for roughly a tenth of withdrawals (9% in 2016/17, 11% in 2017/18 and 10% in 2018/19). Relatively few learners withdrew from their courses for explicit reasons relating

to injury/illness (2% in 2018/19), transfer or circumstances outside of providers' control (1%), academic failure or exclusion (1%) or financial reasons (0.4%).

Figure 8: Withdrawal reasons for English learners in 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19 (those who withdrew)

Performance (learner completion rates) in English varies across providers, ranging from below 10% to 100% programme completion. Average (mean) completion rate is 81%. Figure 9 shows the distribution of completion rate for providers of English courses.[27] Performance is generally high, with more than three in five providers (61%) with programme completion rates of at least 80%, and over three quarters of providers (76%) with completion rates of at least 60%. Notably, just 10% of providers had programme completion rates of below 50%.

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[27] For confidentiality reasons, providers with a completion rate of under 50% have been grouped together.

Figure 9: Distribution of completion rate (all providers of English courses from 2016-17 to 2018-19)
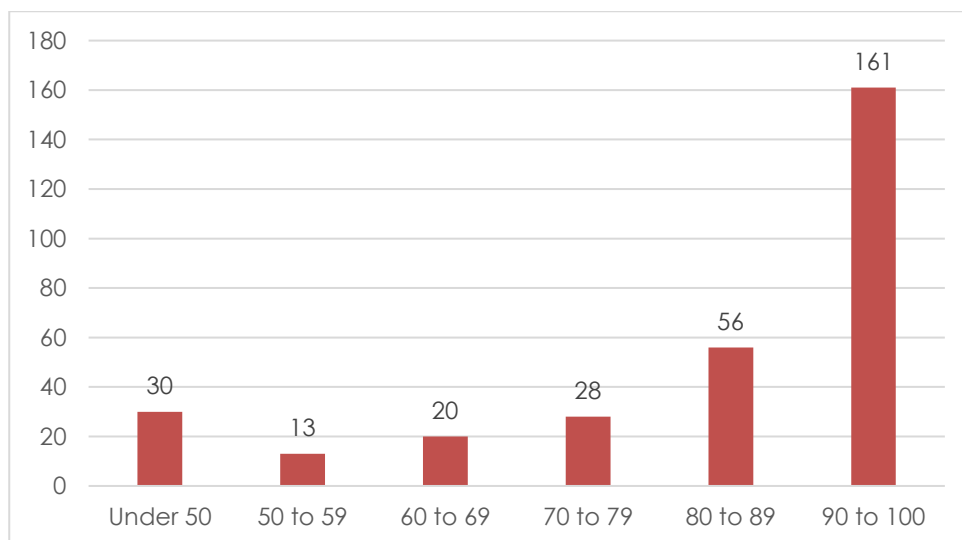
Source: ILR data (2016-17 to 2018-19), n=308

Completion rates in maths

Overall, out of all maths learners who either completed or withdrew from their course in 2016/17, there was a completion rate of 85%. This figure remained relatively stable across subsequent years, with a slight increase to rates of 89% in 2017/18 and 2018/19.

Figure 10 below shows that men and women have broadly similar completion rates. In 2018/19, men had slightly higher rates than women (89% compared to 88%), with a slight increase for both groups since 2016/17 (86% compared to 85% respectively).

There is no clear pattern of completion rates by prior qualification level. In 2018/19, the highest completion rates were for learners with no qualifications (91%) followed by Entry level qualifications (90%). This was followed by learners with 'other' qualifications (89%) and learners with Level 4 qualifications (87%). Learners with Level 3 qualifications had the lowest completion rate (82%). There has been a slight increase in the completion rates for most qualification levels since 2016/17, with the largest increase for 'other' qualifications (83% to 89%), followed by Level 2 (81% to 84%).

Learners with a learning difficulty/disability or health problem have slightly lower completion rates to those without, with respective rates of 86% and 89% in 2018/19. The rate for both groups increased slightly from 83% and 86% respectively in 2016/17.

Analysis by age group shows that, in general, completion rate increases with age. In 2018/19, 19-24 year olds had the lowest completion rate of 82%. This increased to 88%

among 25-34 year olds and 91% among 35-44 year olds and 45-54 year olds. It increased further to a rate of 93% for 55-64 year olds, with the highest completion rates among learners aged 65 and above (95%). Completion rates have increased across all age groups since 2016/17, with the exception of 19-24 year olds where they have remained the same.

There are broadly similar completion rates across ethnic groups. In 2018/19, learners from Asian backgrounds had the highest completion rates (90%), followed by learners from 'other' (89%), white (89%) and black (88%) backgrounds. Learners from a mixed ethnic group had the lowest completion rates (87%). A comparison with 2016/17 shows Asian learners to have consistently had the highest completion rate (88% in 2016/17), and learners from mixed backgrounds the lowest (82% in 2016/17).

Analysis by prior employment status[28] shows little difference between groups. For example, in 2018/19 employed learners (including self-employed) had a completion rate of 89%, unemployed learners who were seeking work and unemployed learners who were not seeking work each had a rate of 88%. In 2016/17 the respective rates were 85% for employed learners (including self-employed) and unemployed learners who were not seeking work and 86% for unemployed learners seeking work.

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[28] It should be noted that prior employment status is based on learner self-declaration, as reported in ILR. Therefore, although it can be considered as indicative of employment status it is not sufficiently robust to be considered as definitive. These findings should therefore be treated with caution.

Figure 10: Programme completion rate for maths learners in 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19, by demographic characteristics
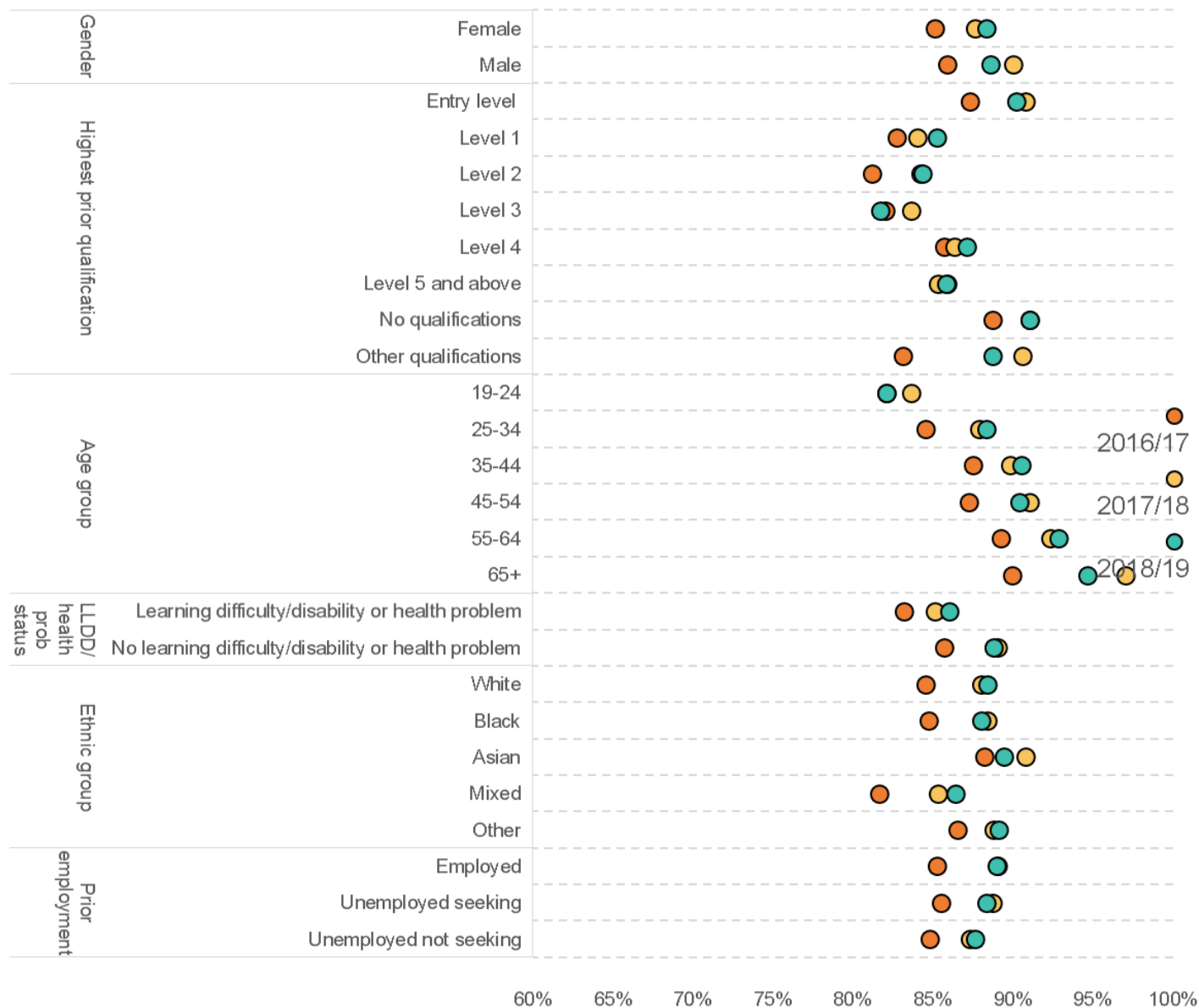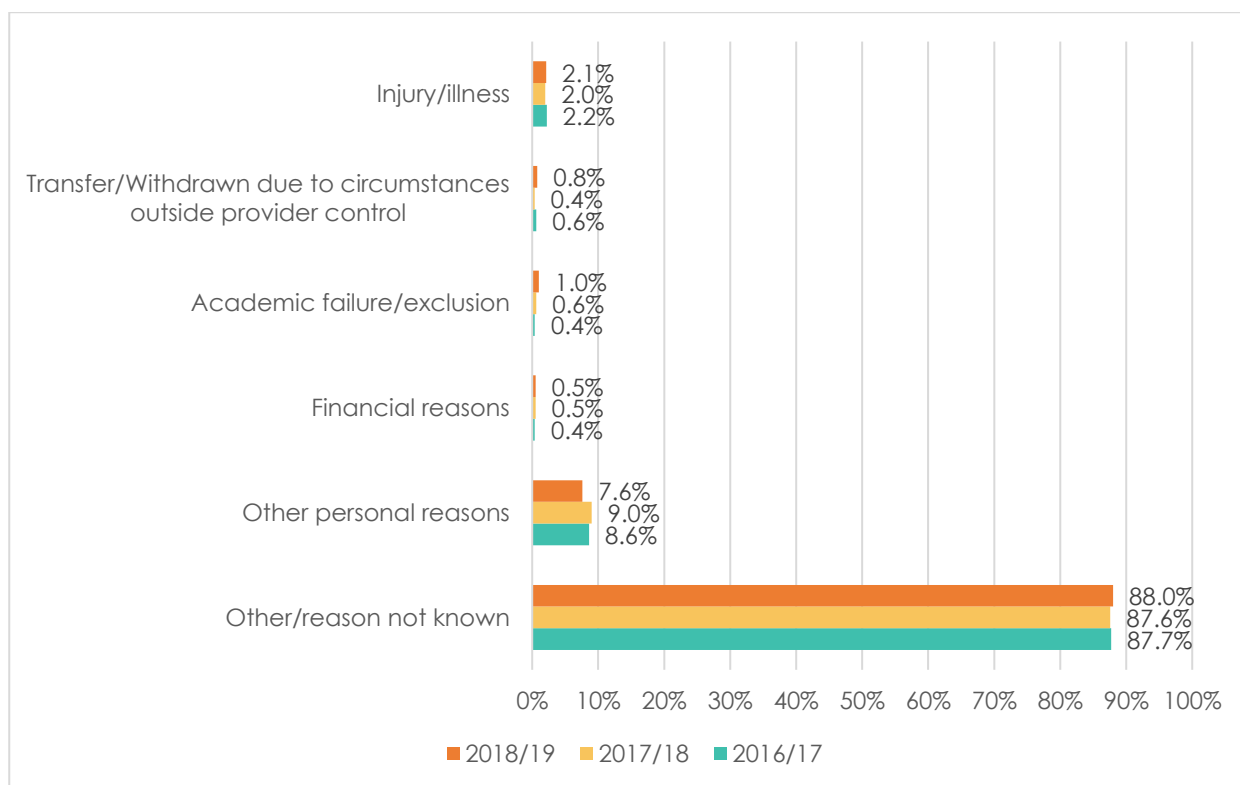

Source: ILR data (those who either completed or withdraw from a course) 2016-17 (n=26,193), 2017-18 (n=31,128), and 2018-19 (n=30,082)

Figure 11 below analyses reasons for withdrawal from maths courses. By far the most common entry is 'other/reason not known', accounting for 88% of withdrawals in each year. This is followed by 'other personal reasons', which accounts for just under a tenth of

withdrawals (9% in 2016/17, 9% in 2017/18 and 8% in 2018/19). Relatively few learners withdrew from their courses for explicit reasons relating to injury/illness (2% in 2018/19), academic failure or exclusion (1%), transfer or circumstances outside of providers' control (1%), or financial reasons (0.5%).
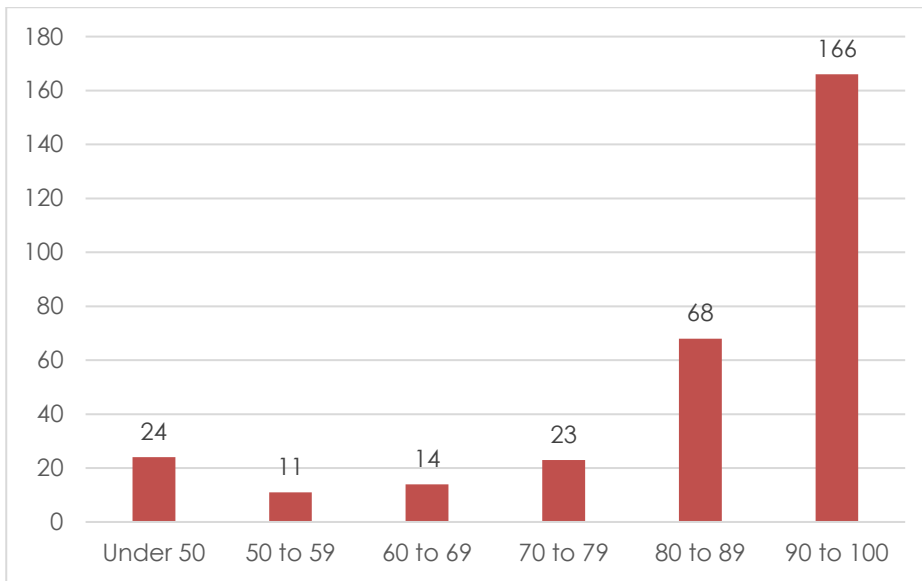
Figure 11: Withdrawal reasons for maths learners in 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19 (those who withdrew)

Source: ILR data (those who withdrew and provided a reason) 2016-17, (n= 2,818), 2017-18 (n= 3,530), and 2018-19 (n= 3,455)

Performance (learner completion rates) in maths varies across providers, ranging from below 10% to 100% programme completion. Average (mean) completion rate is 83%. Figure 12 shows the distribution of completion rate for providers of maths courses. For confidentiality reasons, providers with a completion rate of under 50% have been grouped together. Performance is generally high, with almost seven in 10 providers (69%) facilitating programme completion from at least 80% of their learners, and almost nine in 10 providers (89%) facilitating completion from at least 60% of their learners. Notably, just 8% of providers facilitated programme completion rates of below 50%.

Figure 12: Distribution of completion rate (all providers of maths courses from 2016-17 to 2018-19)

Source: ILR data (2016-17 to 2018-19), n=306