

Transferable Skills: Understanding effective delivery through adult skills provision



May 2024

ASK
researchpartners

Executive Summary

The mayor is committed to making London a place where all residents get the skills they need to have happy, healthy lives. Provision of transferable skills through adult education is crucial for both learners and employers. These skills can improve employability prospects, support further learning, increase learner self-efficacy and lead to improved social integration, while also giving employers access to a more productive and adaptable workforce

The GLA¹ defines transferable skills as:

“the skills that are needed for, and can be applied across, almost all jobs and sectors, that support people as they move from school to work, from entry level to management roles, and change careers or sectors.”

The London Local Skills Improvement Plan² and previous research with employers have identified that businesses in London feel there is a shortage of candidates with these skills.

The GLA commissioned ASK Research Partners to conduct research to:

- understand which transferable skills learners get from adult education funded through the adult education budget, what makes this work and the benefits this leads to
- identify features of effective practice in the delivery of transferable skills to adult learners in London
- explore what barriers exist to the effective delivery of transferable skills and suggest ways to overcome these.

The report is based on the views and experiences of employers, education providers, and learners from across London collected through 38 in-depth interviews.

Skill needs

This research showed employers and adult education providers believe transferable skills are crucial for entering and progressing in work for Londoners. The key transferable skills they were looking to develop were:

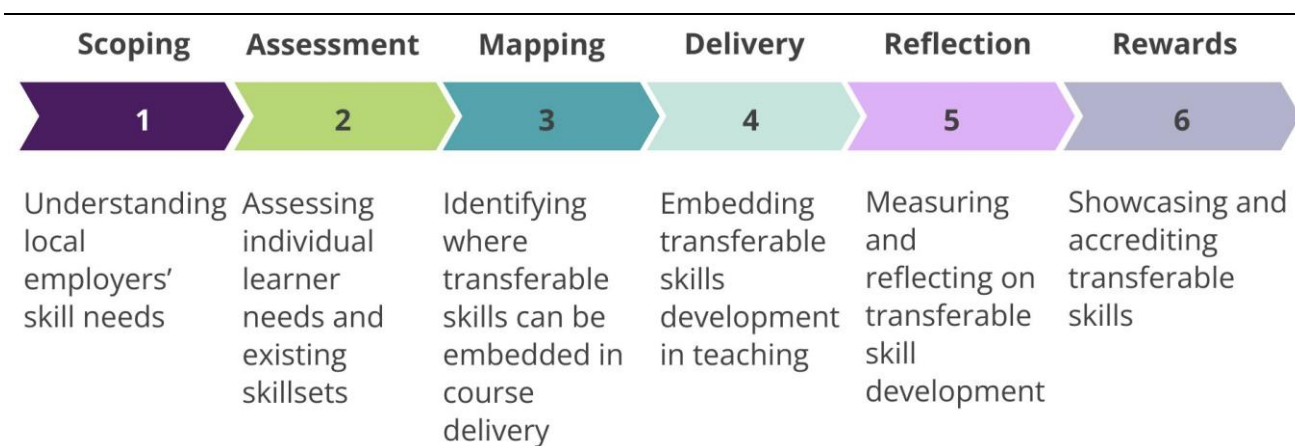
Key transferable skills (as highlighted by research respondents)	
English	Maths
Problem-solving	Adaptability/flexibility
Digital skills/digital literacy	Team working and interpersonal skills
Confidence and self-efficacy	Motivation
Communication	Customer service
Resilience	Money management
Appropriate workplace behaviours (attendance, punctuality, dress etc.)	Employability skills (self-presentation and promotion, interview techniques, CV writing)
Presentation	Using initiative
British values/citizenship	Navigating UK life (GP and health services, local authorities, education system, etc)

¹ This definition was tested with Business LDN

²The London Local Skills Improvement Plan, available [here](#).

Effective approaches to transferable skills development

The research identified effective providers' six steps to embed transferable skills development into their curriculum delivery. These are:



Benefits and impacts of transferable skills

Most learners reported that through their courses they had developed their transferable skills in:

- the use of digital technologies
- oral communication
- written communication
- teamwork
- working with others
- independent living
- resilience

A smaller number of learners suggested that they had also developed skills in time management, customer service, problem-solving, creativity, leadership and becoming more adaptable.

There were wider impacts from the development of these transferable skills as learners also reported:

- increased levels of confidence
- better self-efficacy and skills for life
- more developed digital skills
- increased levels of motivation
- enhanced employment aspirations.

Learner case study

A learner reported how her provider's approach to developing transferable skills throughout her course had affected her life by giving her:

- Enhanced Confidence: *"I have cultivated a sense of self-assurance that infiltrates various aspects of my life. This newfound confidence stems from my ability to effectively communicate my ideas, collaborate with others, think critically, and continuously improve my knowledge base."*
- Enhanced Organisation: *"It has instilled a strong sense of organisation in me. My approach to tasks with a methodical mindset, ensuring that everything is planned, prioritised, and executed efficiently. This organisational skill extends to my personal life, allowing me to manage my time, responsibilities, and goals effectively."*

- Enhanced Motivation: *“The pursuit of knowledge and personal growth has become a key motivation for me. My dedication to self-improvement drives me to explore online courses, engage with YouTube tutorials, and actively seek out learning opportunities. This insatiable thirst for knowledge fuels my advancement in various fields.”*
- Enhanced Happiness: *“The act of sharing my knowledge and supporting others through volunteering has brought immense joy to my life. I find fulfilment in helping others navigate challenges and achieve their own learning goals. This sense of purpose and contribution to the community has enriched my overall well-being.”*

Leading to, overall: *“The integration of transferable skills into my educational journey and daily life has transformed me into a confident, organised, motivated, and happy individual. My willingness to learn, collaborate, and contribute to the learning of others is a testament to my personal growth and the positive impact of the college’s approach to transferable skills.”*

In addition, education providers felt that there were impacts from learners developing their transferable skills on employers – who had access to a more diverse group of potential recruits and London’s communities, from increased levels of community cohesion and raised aspirations amongst community members.

Factors that support the effective delivery of transferable skills

So that providers are best equipped to support learners with transferable skills development, this research suggests they need to:

- Continue to be learner-centred: tailoring offers and course delivery to meet learners’ needs.
- Be employer-focused and responsive to business needs: scoping employers’ needs, working with employers on course development and embedding transferable skills, and using them and the ‘employer voice’ to make learning relevant.
- Establish centralised resources to support the delivery and development of transferable skills.
- Support the holistic needs of learners: including supporting the development of their wider life skills and providing wraparound care to support their ability to learn.

Delivery challenges

The key challenges to effective delivery of transferable skills were identified as:

- A lack of consistency in messaging around transferable skills in London including a lack of agreed terminology, limited focus on the key skills needed in London and agreement on how providers can best meet the needs of London’s employers.
- Balancing the delivery of transferable skills development with course-specific content – funding only being available for specific courses.
- Providers and employers have different priorities and can struggle to develop effective collaborative relationships. SMEs especially found it difficult to justify the time and resources to support providers and see the direct benefits for themselves.
- Funding the support that learners need to help them with their essential life skills and wider support needs (including mental well-being and finding and moving into work)
- A lack of consistency and leadership in the delivery of an effective approach (involving: scoping, assessment, mapping, delivery and rewarding progress with transferable skills). Providers and employers had developed approaches, but lessons learnt were not being shared. For example, some thought that SkillsBuilder could be a useful measurement tool, with some tweaks for adult learners; some thought that Awarding Bodies should accredit transferable skills development; some were developing their own tools to measure skills progress, whereas others thought this could only be achieved qualitatively.

Recommendations

From these findings, we have set out a series of recommendations for adult education providers, employers in London and the GLA.

For London’s Training Providers

Recommendations	Objectives	Actions
Embed transferable skills development in courses	Ensure focus on development of the transferable skills of London’s workforce in response to employers’ needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with local employers, the GLA and awarding bodies. • Be employer-focused, scoping their needs and working together in course development and delivery.
Engage in an effective process of transferable skills development	Ensure consistency in transferable skills development and how providers deliver to London’s learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be learner-focused, tailoring courses and support to meet learners’ needs. • Use agreed tools to assess, measure, and reflect on transferable skills development. • Develop learner’s skills in presenting their development and skills to employers. • Establish centralised resources to support effective delivery of skills development. • Upskill staff to support learners with complex needs • Engage with London employer networks, with awarding bodies, the GLA, and wider stakeholders.

For London’s Employers

Recommendations	Objectives	Actions
Value transferable skills in current and potential employees	Engage London’s business community with training providers and upskilling Londoners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate transferable skill presentations into the selection process. • Collaborate with London’s training providers to shape courses and the skills learners develop so they become work ready. • Offer work experiences to those developing transferable skills.

For GLA

Recommendations	Objectives	Actions
Take a lead on developing a strategy and common language on transferable skills for London	<p>Ensure clarity and consistency across the sector and city</p> <p>Align focus and message within the GLA and London's business and learning sectors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a strategy for transferable skills development. • Use GLA's influence to align and focus on a consistent message about the value of transferable skills and their importance to London's future growth and success. • Support communities of practice which bring together training providers, employers and awarding bodies. • Promote using SkillsBuilder as a potential framework for understanding and measuring transferable skills. • Create resources to share effective transferable skills delivery methods across different contexts and for various learners.
Increase funding for transferable skills development	Greater funding flexibility to enhance the delivery of transferable skills, support employer engagement, and offer holistic support to learners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make learning aims around transferable skills essential so that they can have the funding uplift applied. • Fund the time needed for providers to engage with employers, assess learners and map and deliver transferable skills development. • Create protected time for adult learners similar to the current provision for 16-18 age group to focus on transferable skills. • Ensure funding rates allow providers to focus more on non-accredited provision, especially innovative and responsive programmes addressing mental health, money management, and other essential life skills. • Set up the tailored learning funding stream to support wraparound care for learners, including pre-employment development and support for the transition into work.
Continue to lobby national government	Shape the learning and training sector to meet London's needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lobby for devolution of Apprenticeships, levy funding and unallocated funds. • Influence the 16-18 learning content to embed transferable skills development in young people.
Align funding streams	Focus devolved funding streams to prioritise the development of transferable skills in London's workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidate and streamline various funding pots to work coherently towards a common goal. • Flex Apprenticeship rules to better support the needs of London businesses, providers, and learners. • Explicitly incorporate transferable skills training for those who need them, leading to a stronger talent pipeline for London's businesses.

1. Introduction

The Mayor of London is committed to making the Capital a place where all residents can get the skills they need to secure good jobs and lead happy, healthy lives. As part of this, powers over the Adult Education Budget (AEB) have been delegated to the Mayor of London since 2019 resulting in him being able to shape education provision for adults with around £320 million a year. The aim is to provide residents with [locally relevant learning opportunities](#) and educational support to equip them with skills required for the London labour market both now and in future. The Mayor's ambition is for skills provision to make a positive difference in the lives of learners, be tailored to the local context, and meet the needs of London's businesses and communities.

The [London Local Skills Improvement Plan](#) (LLSIP)³ highlights several key skills challenges for London, including that:

- Even though qualifications are higher in London than in any other UK region, or any major world city, the in-work poverty rate is one of the UK's highest.
- There are more jobs in London than ever before, but unemployment is high compared to other UK regions.
- Economic inactivity is higher than in other regions and employers face acute labour shortages.
- London's skills challenges have intensified post-pandemic, with almost 7 in 10 businesses reporting at least one skills shortage in 2022, compared to 6 in 10 in 2021⁴ despite firms spending around £8 billion a year on training.

The LSIP concluded that work being done by providers, employers, GLA, boroughs and others to address the identified skills gaps could be strengthened by being better streamlined and coordinated, with local actors empowered to respond in a more agile way to emerging skills needs. The plan proposed that this work include preserving and expanding locally determined flexible funding sources, such as the AEB⁵.

The AEB has been delegated to the Mayor of London from 2019 and, since taking responsibility, the Mayor has introduced changes to the funding rules designed to make London's AEB the most accessible in the country and given providers flexibility to deliver more learner-centred and innovative provision. This includes (but is not limited to):

- Enabling AEB grant providers to use 10% of their AEB formula-funded allocation for non-formula funded provision, for example, to respond to local skills needs, or provide wrap-around and employment support. With the change to the funding model from the start of the 2024/25 academic year, any non-formula-funded provision previously delivered under the flexibility will form part of a provider's Tailored Learning allocation.
- The London Factor - a 13.5% funding uplift for all provision at level 2 and below, unlocking more funding per learner to increase the quality of provision and reflect the higher delivery costs in London, whilst also supporting the FE workforce to manage rising costs.
- Supporting more Londoners in low-paid work by extending the financial eligibility threshold for AEB learners to London's Living Wage (£11.95 per hour)
- Funding for Londoners not in employment who are unable to evidence state benefits.

The AEB programme supports a large and increasing number of Londoners in their efforts to upskill. In the academic year 2022/23, there were 230,060 AEB-funded learners in London⁶. This

³ The London Local Skills Improvement Plan, BusinessLDN, May 2023

⁴ London Assembly question on skills shortages, June 2023 <https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/skills-shortages>,

⁵ The London Local Skills Improvement Plan, BusinessLDN, May 2023

⁶ GLA Adult Education Budget Academic Year 2022-23, published December 2023

represented an increase in total learner participation by 4 per cent compared to 221,280 in the same period in 2021/22. AEB funding is also supporting a diverse group of learners. Amongst those participating in the AEB programme in 2022/23:

- 69 per cent were female.
- 59 per cent were from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background (including Mixed, Asian, Black and Other Ethnic Group learners).
- The majority were aged 24-49 (62%).
- 15 per cent consider themselves to have a learning difficulty and/or disability and/or health problem.
- 49 per cent of learner participants were eligible for the disadvantage uplift funding
- 6 per cent of the total number of learners received learner support to enrol in 44,070 courses.

Transferable skills are seen as an important part of London's skills agenda. The GLA defines transferable skills as: 'skills that are needed for and can be applied across almost all jobs and sectors, that support people as they move from school to work, from entry level to management roles, and change careers or sectors.' These are distinct from technical or role-specific skills or basic skills, such as maths and English. Examples include personal resilience, time management, customer service, problem-solving, teamwork, creativity, and interpersonal skills. AEB provision includes courses that support the development of transferable skills, largely through non-regulated provision, adult community learning and learning delivered through Sector Subject Area 14.2 - preparation for work.

The terminology in this area is varied, and transferable skills can also be known by other names, or different terms used to describe aspects of the full skills set covered by the term. Transferable skills are also referred to by such terms as 'portable', 'essential', 'fusion' or 'people' skills. Some transferable skills are considered 'soft' skills, for example, when they are associated with aspects of working with and interacting with others, but there are other aspects of transferable skills, such as the use of communication technologies, with a more technical element which do not precisely fit within this definition. Traditionally transferable skills have not been easily measurable, but more recently tools like the [Skills Builder](#) have attempted to set out a framework, initially for children and young people, by which transferable skills can be taught, learnt, and measured across providers.

Transferable skills are important because they improve employability prospects, support further learning, increase learner self-efficacy and lead to improved social integration, while also giving employers access to a more productive and adaptable workforce.⁷ The LSIP states that 'it is critical that cross-cutting transferable, green and digital skills are more embedded in how we educate new entrants into the workforce and in upskilling existing staff⁸.

The GLA's own engagement with London-based businesses has revealed a need for employees with transferable skills that allow them to adapt and respond to work situations beyond technical understanding. These types of skills are essential for business operations and are also highly valued in emerging industries such as technology and green energy⁹. The 2022 Employer Skills Survey¹⁰ shows that transferable skills have been in consistently high demand since 2019 and that

⁷ UK Commission for Employment and Skills. (2016). Skills for life, skills for growth https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/584708/Skills_for_Life_Skills_for_Growth_2016.pdf

⁸ The London Local Skills Improvement Plan, BusinessLDN, May 2023

⁹ Greater London Authority. (2019). Skills for Londoners Framework https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/skills_for_londoners_framework.pdf

¹⁰ Evidence from the Employer Skills Survey, published April 2024: <https://data.london.gov.uk/blog/evidence-from-the-employer-skills-survey-2022/>

the most common skills reported to be lacking in London were linked to managing time and task prioritisation. Soft skills gaps in London were also linked by the survey to a need for:

- management and leadership skills (cited by around 55% of employers in London who anticipated a need for new skills in the next 12 months, vs. 46% nationally)
- self-management skills (54% in London vs. 48% nationally)
- sales and customer service skills (46% in London vs. 40% nationally).

It is therefore crucial that Londoners can gain key transferable skills through adult learning to better support them find and progress in work within London's competitive labour market. Adult education programmes that focus on developing transferable skills can greatly benefit London's workforce and support the city's economic growth.

2. Research Approach

Aims

The GLA commissioned ASK Research Partners to conduct small-scale qualitative research with a range of stakeholders to explore transferable skills provision for adults in London within the AEB. The aims of this research were to:

- Identify features underpinning effective practice in embedding delivery of transferable skills to adult learners in London.
- Explore the barriers to effective delivery and suggest ways to overcome these.
- Understand which transferable skills learners get from adult education, what makes this work and the benefits this leads to.

Methodology

The methodology chosen for this research was in-depth interviews with a range of key stakeholders: adult education providers in London, learners, and employers. This was to understand the details of delivery, the issues stakeholders faced in providing effective delivery, and proposed solutions from these key participants' viewpoints, to inform the future policy and practical approach.

Interviews lasted between 20 and 60 minutes and were, with participants' permission, audio recorded with full notes taken. A thematic analysis was conducted on the resulting transcripts and this then used to generate the structure and content of this report.

Participants

Between November 2023 to January 2024, in-depth interviews were conducted with:

- 8 representatives of London-based employers, including 6 from individual employers and 2 from employer representative bodies.
 - Of the individual employers:
 - 2 were large national employers
 - 2 were medium-sized London-based employers
 - 2 were SMEs.
 - The employer bodies consulted were the London Chamber of Commerce (with around 8,000 business members as well as borough affiliates) and Business LDN (representing 140 of the largest businesses in London as well as around 30 university and college providers).
- 18 professionals working in 14 different London-based adult education providers.
 - These included:
 - 6 further education (FE) providers
 - 5 local authority-based providers
 - 3 Independent Training Providers.
- 12 learners from 4 different London-based adult education providers.

- Learners were between 21 to 62 years of age and were studying on one or more of the following programmes: employability for over 50s, ESOL, digital skills, AAT bookkeeping, or supporting Teaching and Learning in Schools.

Recruitment channels

Provider representatives were recruited using a GLA-administered online survey. Providers opting into the research were contacted by email and interviews were arranged with those who responded. Learners were accessed through a sample of these providers. Individual employers were also identified by participating providers and through suggestions by the GLA team.

Limitations

The research relied on an opt-in methodology and respondents were self-selecting. Research respondents were not selected to be representative, although they do reflect a range of different characteristics and experiences.

Reporting

Where quotes are given in the report we have identified the type of respondent this came from – either an employer, business representative, learner or the type of education provider the respondent works in (i.e. FE provider, local authority provider or Independent Training Provider).

3. Research findings

The research findings are presented under five key headings:

1. The need for transferable skills.
2. Approaches to the delivery of transferable skills.
3. Success factors in the delivery of transferable skills.
4. Benefits and impacts of transferable skills provision.
5. Challenges to the delivery of transferable skills.

The need for transferable skills

This section presents the views of research respondents on which transferable skills are currently needed most and which ones can be developed through adult education. Interviews revealed a range of opinions on the skills that employers in London most need.

Employer views

All employers strongly emphasised the need for transferable skills in London's workforce, considering it a critical issue for the city's labour market. They identified that a range of staff from outside the UK who were working, or seeking work, in London, are now, post-Brexit, not available, changing the pool of potential recruits for many jobs.

“It's the number one issue for businesses, in fact, we'd say there is a London skills crisis. We've got hospitality businesses once thriving in the capital now closing early as they have insufficient staff post-Brexit.” (Business representative)

“This was not an issue before – how to turn up for work on time, how to dress and interact with people - because EU workers had those fundamental skills.” (Employer)

In attempts to address this, some employers described how they are now collaborating more with applicants who have been long-term unemployed from the UK's disadvantaged communities and/or young individuals transitioning from college to their initial employment roles. Both groups, according to employers, are less likely to have developed their soft, people, work, or transferable skills (across the sample of employers spoken to, all these terms were used) compared to the more experienced overseas workers who have now left the capital.

In terms of the transferable skills currently required in London, employers variously identified:

- interpersonal skills such as listening, teamwork, and resilience. Some employers felt that the need for these skills had become more pronounced since the pandemic.
- customer service and presentational skills. Several employers identified the loss of experienced overseas staff post-Brexit as intensifying the need for these skills.
- critical thinking, management, and leadership skills. Most employers saw these skills as important for future workforce development and their ability to respond to increasing digitisation and use of technology (e.g. AI).

“AI and automation will be a disruptor which means people will be shifting jobs more often, making transferable rather than specific skills more valuable” (Employer)

Other skills employers described when talking about transferable skills included communication skills, time management, appropriate behaviours for work, confidence, and functional life skills (such as organising work, managing caregiving responsibilities, and handling personal finances). Additionally, many suggested that potential employees require support during the recruitment process. Applicants often lacked self-presentation skills in written or online applications or during job interviews.

Some employers raised the issue of English and maths abilities within the context of transferable skills because these are among the basic skills required for work in many jobs. The lack of these skills can therefore function as a significant barrier for many individuals seeking to enter the workplace or change roles. These employers highlighted how potential applicants could be discouraged from applying for roles perceived as requiring a certain level of maths or English skills. Also, even when individuals possess other transferable skills required for a role, a lack of basic English or maths can mean they are unable to make it through the recruitment stage. Several employers, therefore, emphasised the importance of adult education in enhancing functional literacy and numeracy along with other softer skills, as these transferable skills alone may be insufficient to help individuals successfully enter or advance in the workforce.

There was some mention of digital skills by employers, but this was mainly in the context of the need for individuals to be able to use technology to complete work tasks (e.g. using online communication methods).

“We are prepared to train people on the specific things that we need them to do for our jobs, what we get frustrated about is having to teach people how to send an email and how to log on and look at your pay and systems and processes and that sort of stuff. So it is about the wider skills that we need them to walk in with.” (SME employer)

Provider views

When asked to identify what skills potential workers in London need, the providers involved in the research collectively identified a similar list of transferable skills to those mentioned by employers and employer representatives. They agreed with employers that skills such as communication, time management, appropriate work behaviours, digital, and organisational skills were all important.

“Employability skills are quite generic to be honest, because [at the point learners join the college] they don't necessarily know what jobs they would be going into. So they would be things like digital skills, but also working with others and team skills and a lot of the work that's done with those students is about building up their confidence and to speak in front of other people and to present to people they don't know, the ability to work with other people in a group, that that kind of stuff.” (FE Provider)

Although providers discussed a similar set of skills to employers, the language providers used differed from that used by employers. Providers were more familiar with a range of additional umbrella terms to refer to transferable skills. These included ‘universal skills’, ‘fusion skills’, and ‘skills for employment’. All the providers interviewed believed that the development of transferable

skills was key to all of their provision and referred to 'core' transferable skills which they delivered through their courses.

"Our purpose statement in universal skills is to enable adults to develop the skills they need to participate, make progress, and express themselves in a modern 21st-century democracy." (FE provider)

Providers were more likely than employers to identify wider life skills that they felt were important for learners to develop to support them more holistically in work and life, although the type of skills mentioned concerning this was, again, like those discussed by employers. These life skills included: self-confidence, problem-solving, motivation, resilience and money management. It was also common for providers involved in the research (possibly given the high proportion of ESOL providers involved in the research) to highlight the importance of British values and citizenship for those looking to work in London.

"It's the communication skills and it's the team working and it's the British values actually that we embed in there, all around that respect for everybody." (FE provider)

Many providers interviewed also talked about employability-related transferable skills which assisted their learners' employment potential and prospects. This type of skill was felt to be particularly relevant to the provider's vocational and Level 1 and 2 provision and associated with how individuals were able to present themselves to employers. Working with learners on this type of skill was therefore felt to give them the best chance of success when entering or moving within the labour market.

"We will pick a qualification and probably it's awarding employability and tends to be more of the front end of transferable skills in the sense of we will be preparing people for interviews or preparing people for entering the workplace, which might be as simple as attending, punctuality and timekeeping." (FE provider)

A range of additional skills were mentioned during interviews but only by one or two providers in each case. Whilst the providers in question felt that these skills were important, this was not a widespread view across the research sample. Additional skills highlighted by a small number of providers included awareness of:

- diversity and inclusion issues
- sustainability and the green agenda
- safeguarding and e-safety
- health and safety in the workplace.

To support their work on transferable skills, one provider had established a skills framework in which they had condensed the skills needed for work into five main topics (which they call 'The 5 C's' – see Table 1). This provider had found the approach to be effective in capturing all the transferable skills their learners would need to improve their employability and their everyday lives. The framework had also been useful for them in focussing their activities within and across the five areas and this in turn, in their opinion, had supported a more effective coverage of skills development across their courses. The transferable skills identified in the framework are embedded in the teaching and content of each lesson.

Table 1: Framework of transferable skills

Cohesion (self)	Communication	Collaboration	Creativity	Critical thinking
Attend	Relate	Negotiate	Adapt	Solve
Produce	Listen	Encourage	Inventa	Evaluate
Research	Explain/inform	Co-operate	Imagine	Reflect
Improve	Respond	Co-produce	Expand	Analyse
	Persuade/influence	Respect	Explore	Question

Source: internal example produced by a London adult education provider

Learner views

Interviewed learners were asked about a range of transferable skills and whether they felt their course or time with their current provider had helped them develop these. Most learners felt they had developed: digital skills, oral communication skills, written communication skills, teamwork skills, interpersonal skills, independent living skills, and resilience. Other areas which learners felt that they had developed, but which fewer learners mentioned, were: time management, customer service, problem-solving, creativity, leadership, and adaptability.

Learners interviewed had mixed views on whether their skill development had been due to explicit transferable skills training or as a result of such skills being embedded into the course content. Learners most commonly reported the most supportive ways of developing their transferable skills as being when tutors had been clear about what was expected of them in a workplace or had guided them through ways to deal with different situations that may arise at work and then having a chance to practice the skills (either through tasks in lessons, homework or assignments, or through placements and work experiences).

Summary

Table 2 provides an overview of the transferable skills which respondents to this research – employers, providers, and individuals collectively – felt were important.

Table 2: Summary of what respondents see as key transferable skills

Key transferable skills
English
Maths
Digital skills/digital literacy
Team working and interpersonal skills
Resilience
Communication
Using initiative
Presentation
Problem-solving
Adaptability/flexibility
Confidence and self-efficacy
Motivation

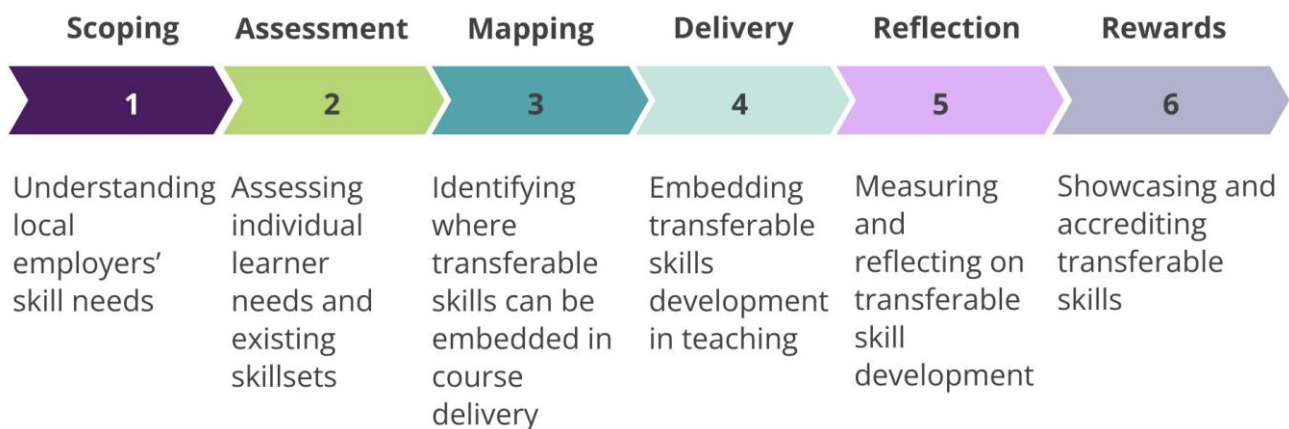
Key transferable skills
Customer service
Appropriate workplace behaviours (attendance, punctuality, dress etc.)
Employability skills (self-presentation and promotion, interview techniques, CV writing)
Navigating UK life (GP and health services, local authorities, education system, etc)
Money management
British values/citizenship

Source: skills highlighted by research respondents as being important (across all categories of respondents)

Approaches to the delivery of transferable skills

An analysis of the views of providers collected during interviews has been summarised into six stages that they are going through to deliver transferable skills (see Figure 1), each of which is discussed in detail below.

Figure 1: Summary of the six steps identified as key to effective delivery of transferable skills (based on provider responses)



Scoping

All provider respondents referred to the importance of transferable skills for employability and were in contact, to a greater or lesser extent, with employers. Providers were using a range of methods to scope transferable skill needs and gaps with local employers, including:

- Designing and delivering courses in collaboration with employers.** Providers were using interactions with employers to inform what skills were currently needed. Independent Training Providers were the most likely out of the providers interviewed to say that their courses were co-designed with employers and employer-led. This scoping and collaboration with employers aimed to ensure courses enabled learners to develop the types of skills that local employers (i.e. those likely to be offering roles to learners) were looking for amongst potential candidates.
- Analysing local skills needs.** One provider worked with a data consultancy company to explore the skills required by employers. This involved analysing local job adverts and distinguishing between specialist skills asked for, such as coding or plumbing and general, or transferable, skills. Their analysis showed locally relevant transferable skills including

communication, problem-solving, analysing, decision-making, and collaborating. The provider then moved to embed the development of these skills into the courses they offered.

- **Establishing an employer engagement role.** Many providers, most often the larger ones, had well-established employer engagement teams or staff responsible for scoping business needs. This enabled them to use input from employers in their courses, albeit to varying degrees. Some providers had close relationships with several employers and were delivering bespoke 'feeder' courses for them while other providers had more sporadic or ad hoc employer relationships. Providers highlighted the time it took to make and sustain these types of relationships effectively. One provider had recruited an employee engagement manager to develop their employer links more fully and had found this useful in developing their offer and minimising the burden on individual course tutors.
- **Supporting teaching staff's links with industry.** Some providers had devised programmes for their staff to encourage them to keep up-to-date links with the 'outside world'. This helped staff keep their teaching relevant by ensuring that their course content and background knowledge stayed up to date but also that they were more closely meeting employers' needs for potential employees.

"We have an employee engagement team who work with employers and there's been a big move even with our ESOL programs to try and make sure that our students are engaging with employers.... and we're building our pool of employers who are working with our lecturing staff to make sure that what they're teaching is going to be relevant to the workplace." (FE Provider)

Provider case study 1: Changing the vocational curriculum in line with employer needs

A local authority provider has a dedicated employer relationship manager who liaises with internal management and teaching staff to agree on the sectors to approach locally. They then engage with employers in that sector to identify their needs. Based on the insights collected the provider (sometimes together with employers) amends the curriculum so that it better reflects what employers have requested.

For example, employers had fed back that they did not necessarily require their employees to have maths qualifications, but rather, to have a good understanding of how maths worked in their sector, and of the specific requirements of that industry. To support their work with employers on numeracy issues, this provider brought in the [Multiply London programme](#).

Provider case study 2: Developing short bespoke courses to help get learners into employment

One Independent Training Provider has a comprehensive network of employers across London and works with DWP Jobcentre Plus (JCP) offices. They combine the insights from these networks in the design and delivery of short courses which often link directly to employers.

"The courses are employer-led and focus on developing skills that are relevant to specific employment opportunities. Transferable skills are incorporated through group sessions and activities that promote teamwork, decision-making, and other key skills." (Independent Training Provider)

This provider has found the approach to be successful in securing good outcomes for their learners whilst also targeting the skills which employers need.

"We will always do an organisational needs analysis with employers to ensure that we identify what their needs are, where they may have a high turnover of staff, and what's missing for them. What would they need, what sort of skills? Which then allows us to sort of bespoke (sic) develop the programme for that employer. But we have to be mindful, that not everybody will get a job with that employer. So it may well be that we focus on the transferable skills themselves, ones that can transfer over into sort of any employment." (Independent Training Provider)

This provider also offers [sector-based work academy programmes \(SWAPs\)](#) for JCP in hospitality, retail, and construction, primarily into entry-level roles.

"And so, as with any sector-based work Academy, most isn't skill-based. It is transferable skill based, so it's if you're going into hospitality expectations of customer service expectations of the job so that when they start, they're not moaning about something they understand, they're going to get a uniform, they get lunch paid for." (Independent Training Provider)

Provider case study 3: Helping learners prepare for work at the local council through collaborative digital skills provision

One local authority provider reported that many of their learners wanted to work for the council because it is one of the largest employers in their borough. In response, and working together with colleagues in the Council's employment and skills team, they have developed a specific digital skills programme. The content is based on the skills that the Council requires from new employees. However, this training is also felt to develop other valuable transferable skills as well.

"We set up a specific programme for those people who were ready to go for interview but weren't quite 100% confident with the digital skills. It's mainly a Google Suite programme, but it's aimed at those learners who are just ready to go into work. So it's got loads of transferable skills in there because although it's a digital programme, it's about specifically getting ready for a job, so what expectations are, how to behave, what people act like in a workplace, and so on" (Local authority provider)

"It's not just Google, but it's about how to manage a calendar, how to do all these things that employers really need you to be able to be strong in, spreadsheets... it covers quite a lot, it's very broad. So... even though it's got a digital focus, [it also covers] getting there on time, presentation, employability skills." (Local authority provider)

Initial learner assessment

During interviews, providers highlighted that whilst learners come to them already in possession of a range of transferable skills individuals are not always aware of having these skills or how they fit a workplace. As a result, learners do not always promote themselves effectively to employers. All providers felt that it was important to have clarity regarding the baseline skill level of learners when they started a course as well as an understanding of what learners hoped to gain from their learning. This understanding ensures that providers can tailor their course delivery and support learners' transferable skill development appropriately (by focusing on common deficits/needs, on areas where learners feel they have the greatest needs and by setting up tasks differently to support specific skills development).

"You can't just create something that's going to be perfect for everybody. They're all going to have different levels and different skills.... So it can't be a one-size-fits-all approach. It's got to pick up on what they're doing naturally and develop them at their own level." (Local authority provider)

Interviewed providers most often conducted this assessment of learners' existing and required transferable skills in sessions before the start of courses. These were conducted either by a central skills team or a course tutor. These sessions generally included running through educational and employment histories with learners to identify existing transferable skills and then finding ways to transfer these to and build on them during the course. Independent training providers generally felt that they were highly capable of making assessments of an individual's employability skills due to the employability focus of all of their provision.

"We are looking at previous education, at other jobs they've done; did you use a computer? Did you do administration? And the learner will then say yes, I will say, well, there's a skill that you can transfer because you're used to managing this or you've got skills in terms of ICT." (Independent Training Provider)

"I think it's about helping somebody to identify their own transferable skills through the activities we do... It can be life-changing." (Independent Training Provider)

Several providers highlighted how it would be useful to have consistent assessment measures in place which were used across providers (versus the current situation where they are focussing on those they believe are key). This would ensure all providers were providing a similar set and level of transferable skills development in their learners and that all providers were consistently focusing on the skills that London employers need.

Provider case study 4: Assessing Learners' Skillsets

A large independent training provider described how they invite all course candidates to a one-to-one session once they have enrolled on a specific course. The sessions are run by their skills team and involve a discussion with learners about why they have applied for a particular course, what the provider hopes to offer them and then a brief history of the learner's learning and work history. This conversation provides further detail for course tutors on the skills learners may need extra support with, but also helps to identify learner strengths and the transferability of their existing skills.

"If someone has worked in a café in the past we might talk about how they have customer service skills, the ability to talk to customers; their teamwork experience; whether they had strategies for getting to work on time, planning their journey; how they dealt with taking instructions and learning how to do the job; and how these are all important things that employers will be looking for. We run through what else they think they might need for the jobs they want to get."
(Independent Training Provider)

The skills teams then discuss skills gaps identified during assessments with course tutors, so that tutors can factor this into the content and delivery of courses.

"They get to see what they can do and they get to develop their confidence. One of the things that we try to develop is task-based targets, based on where they are now and where we need them to be." (Independent Training Provider)

Mapping

All providers were in some way mapping transferable skills development opportunities within their curriculum. This included identifying both where transferable skills are already being delivered and opportunities for further integration, in line with their learners' needs. This approach ensures transferable skills development is made integral to learning and that teaching provides both technical and transferable skill development side-by-side.

"When we introduced [our approach to transferable skills] in September to 50 of my staff, there wasn't one of those skills that they weren't already covering in their classes."
(Independent Training Provider)

"We embed different functional skills in all our courses. So even if they are doing ESOL, and even if their maths ability is good in their first language, we put maths into our ESOL courses because we think it's an important skill for all learners to have" (FE provider)

"All of our Level 1 and some Level 2 study programmes consist of the vocational element, English, Maths and what we call 'enrichment' which is really transferable skills. We develop our offer into a package which is wider than just the chosen course, to improve their chances of employability" (FE provider)

Some providers felt that transferable skills development might need more "selling" to students on vocational courses. The primary focus of learners tends to be achieving the sector-specific qualification attached to their course, rather than developing wider skills which can be applied across different sectors. Learners also, therefore, need to develop an appreciation of why they need to develop transferable skills.

“There is always a primary purpose which is not the skills themselves, and that primary purpose has to be met and met well. Fusion [another term for transferable] skills only really work if it's not a shoehorn in but if it is a natural fit and if learners feel a need for them.”
(Independent Training Provider)

Delivery

Implicit delivery

Transferable skills are commonly delivered implicitly. They are typically embedded into courses so that learners acquire these skills through experience and practice whilst explicitly being taught other course content (e.g. sector-specific topics). Providers described taking this approach partly because they felt that learners would not engage in standalone transferable skills-based sessions and because course funding was insufficient to cover the time and costs involved in explicit delivery (which would require more contact time with students).

It was felt to be important that transferable skills were not being ‘bolted on’ but were embedded in routine lesson delivery. This level of embeddedness may explain why learners reported developing very few transferable skills in their courses (despite learning in settings that were delivering them).

“We see the power of implicit provision of transferable skills. Art courses, health and well-being courses, what is often called leisure learning. Rather than this being an add-on, it can be central or core to developing somebody’s skills, helping them to grow and improve. On humanities courses, across the levels people are developing comprehension skills, speaking and listening. They’re developing ways of working with each other, teamworking, rather than just developing their understanding of some concepts. They’re developing much more than that and they’re able to articulate themselves outside of the classroom.” (Local authority provider)

Many providers who stated *the development of their transferable skills* was implicit suggested that using task-based learning approaches helped with this. They also described exposing learners to situations which would mean using transferable skills during lessons – for example, having to give a presentation in front of others, or needing to have digital skills to log on to college systems.

“Whatever we are teaching we try to link it with in practical context tasks because they're adults. And then they realise where they are able to use it. For example, we talk about borrowing money, saving money, stuff like that.” (FE provider)

“Our task-based learning approach allows learners to discover and develop relevant skills. Transferable skills are the ones that were trying to develop. And what we try to do is do that through a certain type of pedagogy, which we call task-based learning. So, in other words, people are doing tasks which then require them to develop problem-solving or communicating skills or analytical skills and those skills emerge from the task itself. This caters to different learning styles and promotes practical applications” (FE provider)

“The tutor really embeds [transferable skills] as she's teaching the learners. Basically she gives them a topic to focus on and then a task, such as create a learning resource. They would all sit together and discuss the topic, so in a team and then they would collaborate and then think critically on how to design this particular resource and delegate task deadlines for everyone and then do research. All key skills for work” (FE Provider)

Provider case study 5: Examples of embedded transferable skills delivery

Providers explained how they were embedding transferable skills into various courses they deliver:

“The tutor on a Level 2 English course for deaf students had a project of raising money for children in need. They needed to create posters, they did a chat show format where two of the tutors led as chat show hosts and they interviewed the other participants about the project. They

knew they were developing this task-based learning - identifying what they found, what they enjoyed about it, what they found difficult They were developing transferable skills through the demands of the project and then could reflect on that and what they'd learned and give it a name, such as the communicative skills that they were developing without being taught them as such." (FE provider)

"We might not be offering a direct digital outcome that we do courses in, but we know that that's a transferable skill that would be needed in lots and lots of different areas. We've done a lot to develop the digital skills of our ESOL learners, even from the lowest levels. Even our beginner classes, they use Teams and they learn how to log in and understand expressions like "you're muted". (FE provider)

"This week we're talking about housing. We're including the current political economic situation and managing your money. So they're on an ESOL course to learn English but we're also giving them knowledge, life skills and transferable skills to help them in the future. For the majority, it's so embedded that the learners probably wouldn't notice." (FE provider)

"We're part of the London [Multiply initiative](#) [part of the Skills for Life programme, delivering numeracy training through daily life]. So this means we integrate maths into our subjects, so writing about maths issues in English, or talking through how to work out finances in spoken language lessons." (Local authority Provider)

"In some of the vocational areas, graphics, hair, childcare, floristry, fashion... Sometimes it wasn't teaching maths, it was just explaining how maths works in the area. We'll talk about the finances of running a hairdressers or being self-employed." (Local authority provider)

"Take, for example, warehousing. We will set activities with the learners in groups and obviously we will ensure that it isn't just about how to pick and pack. A key aspect of that activity will be around team building, teamwork, how they work together as a team. And obviously, at the end of it, they feed back. It's peer feedback, so they'll feed back to each other. It really is about developing the transferable skills and the tutor will feed back the strengths and areas for improvement." (Independent Training Provider)

"On our full-time programmes, you're often in a group of learners, so they are all doing lots around employability and how to behave in a London work environment." (Local authority provider)

Provider case study 6: Embedding transferable skills into course-specific tasks

Example of how transferable skills are integrated into classes through various activities and projects.

Project: Create a learning resource.

Aim: learners work in small groups to research and create a learning resource for the class.

Skills required to complete the task:

- Communication - discuss the topic.
- Teamwork - evaluate skill sets and decide how to work as a team
- Collaboration and creative thinking - agree on design
- Organise and produce - delegate tasks and work to a deadline
- Research and critical thinking - research information online, evaluate and collaborate to explain topics in their own words.

The providers interviewed varied in how much they identified to learners that transferable skills were being developed. Some providers felt this was important to help learners see and appreciate their development in these areas.

“Throughout the courses we try to get them to see the other things that they're developing, which will help them to become employable in the future, but also to make them decent citizens as well.” (FE provider)

Explicit delivery

There were fewer examples of transferable skills being taught explicitly; none of the providers interviewed described offering standalone sessions on transferable skills. Some courses did involve sessions with a specific and visible focus on transferable skill development, however. At pre-entry, entry level 1 and entry level 2, the teaching of transferable skills was commonly seen as embedded and largely implicit, i.e. learners develop these skills as part of their courses. For learners at level 2 and above, especially those taking vocational courses, the transferable skills being developed seemed to be made much more explicit to learners.

“Whatever course we're delivering, whether that be construction, warehousing, whatever, we will always utilise group sessions. This means developing things like teamworking, decision-making. So these sessions that are undertaken support the development of those transferable skills and we sort of gear them towards the employer as well.” (Independent Training Provider)

“So, with vocational it's still embedded... but it's more overt because we want to say more clearly and carefully what we're doing and we want them to understand that this is going to help them.” (Local authority provider)

Employability and employer-readiness

A common theme from provider interviews was the importance of developing learners' transferable skills to better prepare them for the workplace. Providers varied in the amount of time and resources they did, or could, put into getting learners to display these skills and be better positioned for moving into the world of work. In practice, focussing on the real world of work included preparing learners for interviews, working closely with employers to match learners to job opportunities and, in some cases, supporting learners throughout their journey beyond qualification-based training, into employment.

“I think what works well is those programs that are completely employer-led, getting employers involved right at the beginning in the sense of interviewing individuals to actually go into those programs. So, they actually see this as an opportunity that they need to make a success of to make it into a permanent job or traineeship.” (FE provider)

It was not clear to many providers, mainly non-Independent Training Providers, how much of this pre-employment work they should, or could, carry out within the existing flexibilities. Some local authorities and FE providers, for example, felt that more resource was needed for the 'preparation' phase of transition to work, including supporting learners as they first moved into the workplace. Although they felt they were giving learners transferable skills there was still felt to be a gap in terms of how these were made appropriate for the world of work, how to best display these skills to potential employers and how to implement them when employed in actual jobs.

Reflection

No consistent measures were used to capture the development of transferable skills in adult learners across the providers involved in this research. Existing tools were not felt to be appropriate – either in the skills they covered or their use for adults looking to progress in the world of work. Providers felt a need for longer-term learner tracking to illustrate the real impact of what had been taught.

Providers commonly identified that they needed a robust and consistent way to measure learners' progress. All providers gathered data on learner outcomes, including numbers and proportions of

learners finishing their courses, as well as progression and destination data. However, most found measuring progress made on transferable skills and ultimately the impact of this, to be challenging.

Skills Builder, the Fusion Skills Model¹¹ and the [London learner survey](#) were all cited as potential ways of assessing progress, but only in part. Providers varied in the extent to which they were using these tools or had tried to track skills development in their learners. Most described how they felt existing tools did not capture the data on adults' development of transferable skills sufficiently and that more qualitative measures were being used instead. Overall, qualitative data collection was felt more successful in displaying the distance travelled by learners.

"We use Skills Builder which is kind of aimed at young people. So it's not quite where we need to be for adults, but it's fine. It looks like the most proficient. This is the wider outcome stuff, all the wider outcomes of adult learning. There's still a bit of work to be done on transferable skills, but I think it's so important to adult education providers showing that they're relevant to productivity" (FE provider)

"The GLA have the learner survey, which is one measure we use. We know we get some of that data released this year and I think that's been really positive around results. I think probably because of the way the funding model works, it's probably not been measured as in-depth as I would like. It's also been measured by achievement rates, where it probably has much more work done or have some sort of conduit that actually measures where it progressed people into jobs and were they increasing their earning potential and so on. So I think it's been quite limited in terms of how measured." (FE provider)

Provider case study 7: capturing data on transferable skills development

Several providers said they had developed surveys of satisfaction with their course which included soft skill development such as confidence gained and skills they had now which they had not had before the course.

"I've created a well-being survey that I do at the end of the course, where I'm not asking about academic development. I'm asking 'How has this impacted on you?' So what stud my learners are telling me is really within the scope of well-being, which covers things like self-efficacy and then confidence and what they think the wider impact of the course has been." (FE provider)

"I built the survey because one of the GLA outcomes it is about measuring the social outcomes as much as the profile outcomes and we're all doing it in our own way. We ask them to set goals and targets about themselves. We ask them again at the end of the learner journey. The learners will tell us how far they've come and how things have improved for them and not just understanding of the subject. They reflect about their own self-development." (Independent Training Provider)

However, the overriding feedback about how to adequately reflect on and quantitatively measure the development of transferable skills in learners, was that this type of activity cannot capture the detail of everything that has been developed or the impact of these new skills. Destination data did not, in the views of providers, reflect the impact of transferable skills or the in-work progression which should result from having more enhanced transferable skills. Education providers felt this was a gap that needed addressing. They acknowledged that long-term learner tracking would be complex, potentially resource intensive, and challenging and therefore beyond the scope of most individual providers.

"Measuring progress in universal skills is challenging but involves qualitative data collection on student experiences. We look for examples and whether they're developing those skills because we have that as relatively clearly demarcated. We're able to determine what type of progress our learners are making. How measurable, and all of that stuff, is another question"

¹¹ <https://findfusion.org.uk/fusion-skills/> presents an overview of this model and the skills incorporated.

and that's trickier. We collect quite a lot of qualitative data about students' experiences and how people do or don't find jobs and so on." (FE provider)

"The outcomes survey is inappropriate for our [ESOL] learners - not least as it's online which won't be accessible for many of them. But they also distrust Government surveys etc, which they think might affect their benefits etc." (Local authority provider)

"I wonder if we should stop trying to quantitatively measure the impact of learning because it is so difficult to capture the subtleties of this. I'd more support case study work and learner journeys. These can capture the complexities of students' lives and the impact of self-esteem and improved sense of direction, the things that people need to power them into the future. There is also a question around what is the best outcome to pick. Is it going into work? is it having a good life? is it feeling more confident? I really, really wish I could say to those in charge, 'stop doing [learner surveys] because it doesn't work. Let people tell stories. Let people tell their story... we'd get a richness and a real picture of what was going on. I understand people want the stats and the data but stop doing what just doesn't work." (FE provider)

Rewards

Providers interviewed all expressed a desire for some way of consistently reflecting learner achievements in the acquisition of transferable skills during their studies. Ideally, most providers felt that this development would be accredited in some way.

Some providers had explored ways to accredit transferable skills, either within existing qualifications or with separate awards. This was driven by the desire to highlight the role of transferable skills in the workplace to learners and to allow them to showcase these skills to potential employers.

"Our ESOL learners ... They've now got an employability qualification embedded into their course." (Local authority provider)

"So, for example, with ESOL, we're trying a new qualification which includes citizenship and a lot of that is embedded in the coursework anyway, but it means that they have another qualification." (FE provider)

Some providers cited examples of Awarding Bodies starting to consider offering discreet qualifications for transferable skills. However, none of the providers interviewed had, as yet, engaged with these bodies on such qualifications. Several providers suggested involving employers in the accreditation process. This, they felt, would help make qualifications and transferable skills development more directly tailored to helping learners secure jobs.

"Any programmes we deliver, I want them to be endorsed and approved by employers and actually then use the employer's logo to kite mark those programmes and make employers part of the assessment process about how successful people are on those programmes. So with that sort of framework and that sort of methodology, that's how I propose to embed it." (FE provider)

Benefits and impacts of transferable skills provision

As discussed, measuring learner impacts was not being carried out by providers involved in this research in a quantitative, systematic way. This section, therefore, highlights the individual experiences of learners and the impacts they reported from gaining transferable skills, combined with the types of impacts that some providers had observed in their learners.

Impacts on learners

The impact of transferable skills delivery on the learners interviewed was wide-ranging but the benefits most frequently cited were:

- Increased confidence

- Better self-efficacy and skills for life
- Developed digital skills and access
- Increased motivation and employment aspirations.

Increased confidence

Many providers had said that confidence was a pivotal skill that helped learners to develop, because a lack of confidence was often the greatest barrier to learning, progressing and securing employment. Increased confidence was reported to underpin other key transferable skills such as giving presentations, expressing opinions, leading teams, and being an effective decision-maker. Gaining confidence was also seen as a key benefit from learning as it often helped learners to continue further with their learning journey. Strong learner support and tailored teaching approaches were considered crucial for this, as were providing opportunities for learners to try new things and be gently challenged.

“So just giving them the ESOL gives them independence and confidence. They’ll come off an ESOL course and go on to a vocational program which gives them the confidence to go out and get even more.” (FE provider)

Learner case study 1: Confidence, communication skills, time management, digital skills

A 32-year single parent with four children completed a Supporting Teaching and Learning in Schools Level 2 course after having been at home with her children for four years. One of her children has special educational needs and she wanted to be able to help other children who, like her son, needed additional support at school. Being available for the course was difficult due to her childcare commitments, but she was determined to make it work.

She volunteered at the school where she had her placement and applied when a job came up. Her employer was so pleased with the volunteering work that she got the job and is now working full-time and financially independent. She plans to continue taking her Level 3 qualification from January whilst working full-time.

The confidence she has gained because of completing the course and finding work has had a substantial impact on her independence. She also has a newly found financial independence and enhanced teamwork skills due to speaking to and presenting in front of her peers. Her time management has also improved as she has been able to juggle her course and her family. She has also gained digital skills through completing her assignments.

“I am financially independent. It has opened doors for me in life and in the end has really benefited me. It has made me feel proud of myself I have much more confidence. Doing the course has given me a life outside of being a mum. It has improved my mental health and allows me to feel like my own person again. I have found my identity again.” (Learner)

Having a tutor available to give her individualised support was important for her when she had a problem or a question and had helped her to complete the course.

“I am proud of what I have achieved, and I have shown my kids that hard work really pays off.” (Learner)

Better self-efficacy and skills for life

Providers and learners felt that developing learners’ with skills which supported their day-to-day lives was important. This was both in terms of the transferability of these tasks to work-related tasks and because they allowed individuals to function more effectively in general. Providers used varying definitions of what constituted ‘life skills’ and saw different types of skills as important to different groups of learners.

What this meant in practice was individuals gaining skills through their courses to, for example, understand how to book a doctor’s appointment, manage family finances, seek advice and support when needed, and attend school parents’ evenings. The benefits of developing these transferable

skills, especially for those looking to build a new life in the UK, were seen by providers and learners as particularly important. These life skills were often developed through practice, with tasks and assignments based on real-world experiences.

Learner case study 2: Building a life in the UK

A woman aged 44 had moved from Ukraine to the UK with her two children 18 months ago. She had been a technologist for a dairy company in her home country but there were no similar jobs available in London. She has been studying ESOL L2 and a bookkeeping L1 course at a local FE provider. This has helped her to learn English and communicate confidently in her daily life, as well as work collaboratively with her fellow students on the courses.

She found that talking to others and group work was the best way to learn because she can see body language which helps her to understand what somebody is saying. Having phone conversations is still a challenge for her at the moment but she hopes to become more confident as she continues her studies and her English improves.

“The skills have given me independence... Having conversations with others with different levels in English has helped me... It is very good for people like me to have courses in the UK, to get independent and a chance to get new career.” (Learner)

Providers detailed the impact on the self-efficacy of learners that came from them developing their transferable skills. Learners also acknowledge this and felt they had been empowered, improved their interaction skills, gained knowledge of the world around them and learnt how to manage everyday life more effectively by developing their transferable skills. For some this had opened up new possibilities and options, including increasing their employment aspirations and giving them hope for more positive prospects for their, and their families', futures.

Learner case study 3: Self-efficacy, confidence, communication skills, teamworking

A 38-year old woman from Ukraine who had worked as an accountant came to the UK with her husband. She had not been able to speak any English and had got pregnant quite soon after arriving. She had stayed at home for a year, before taking an ESOL course. As well as learning English, she explained how much more confident and independent she was because of the course. The self-efficacy skills she had gained were not specifically taught, but were implicit in the ESOL provision. She explained the huge impact the provision had on her life and her outlook.

“Before, I couldn't talk in English. I was not confident. I couldn't ask somebody to repeat themselves or help if I didn't understand what they said. The London accent was especially hard. I was not independent and had to take my husband with me as my interpreter if I needed to talk to anybody. I couldn't go to hospital or doctor's appointments with my pregnancies, or take my daughter to the doctor or even make an appointment because I couldn't speak well enough. I couldn't describe what the problem was. Now I can go to the doctors on my own, I can speak to my children's teacher at nursery without needing my husband to translate for me, I can manage parents evenings. It has allowed me to become independent, my quality-of-life is improved.” (Learner)

She had found the support of her tutor important in had been important in helping her to learn. They had always given clear instructions to promote her understanding of the course content and direction. She also valued the support and friendships she received from peers taking the course with her. She plans to continue with her ESOL, take a bookkeeping course and eventually an accountancy course, while volunteering to gain more experience.

Developed digital skills and access

Digital literacy and confidence were felt, by both providers and learners interviewed, to be crucial skills for Londoners. Many providers reported having embedded digital skills in their provision. Learners were being supported to be able to use technology (e.g. computers and tablets) to access learning resources and engage fully with their course. This meant that learners on all courses

naturally became more familiar with these technologies and could then expand their use in their everyday lives, making them feel more able to engage and function in everyday life in London.

Learner case study 4: Digital skills, confidence, motivation

A man in his 60s spoke of the difference learning digital skills had made to his outlook, his confidence, and his employment prospects. He had worked in many jobs over the years including being a chef and in the British army. . Due to his age he needed to retrain to find less physically demanding work. His JCP work coach suggested an employability course for people over the age of fifty. He benefitted from the digital skills aspect the most, although he had also learnt to write a CV and present himself and his skills more effectively to employers.

“It has made a huge difference to me... the IT training skills have improved my confidence and allowed me to try things that I wouldn't have tried otherwise so I am gaining more knowledge by playing around. It has opened other channels and other future career paths that I haven't considered. ... The course gave me an opportunity and has opened up the job market much wider than I thought it could be... it gives you the confidence to try applying for things that you wouldn't have done before.” (Learner)

After a work placement with a council, he now has a paid job there and feels positive about his future, whether he stays working for this employer or needs to find work elsewhere.

“Having worked in this placement it has opened a larger area of the admin job market so I could get a job somewhere else if necessary... I don't think my next step is going to be a problem... I have loved working at the Council and the networking opportunities I have had, so I hope it continues.” (Learner)

Increased motivation and employment aspirations

Many providers reported having witnessed learners increase their motivation to work and raise their employment aspirations through the development of their transferable skills as they progressed through their courses. Some learners highlighted how they hoped to achieve good work outcomes for themselves or how they had already secured work as a result of their skills development. Others were undertaking more training and education to raise their prospects even further.

For many learners, realising the skills they have developed and how they can now demonstrate these was important. So too was them having a better understanding of why these skills are important to employers and what employers are looking for. Increasing their understanding of these areas was cited by many learners as having a positive effect on their aspirations and expected next steps.

Learner case study 5: Putting transferable skills into practice

A learner reported how her provider's approach to developing transferable skills throughout her course had affected her life by giving her:

Enhanced Confidence: *“I have cultivated a sense of self-assurance that infiltrates various aspects of my life. This newfound confidence stems from my ability to effectively communicate my ideas, collaborate with others, think critically, and continuously improve my knowledge base.”* (Learner)

Enhanced Organisation: *“It has instilled a strong sense of organisation in me. My approach to tasks with a methodical mindset, ensuring that everything is planned, prioritised, and executed efficiently. This organisational skill extends to my personal life, allowing me to manage my time, responsibilities, and goals effectively.”* (Learner)

Enhanced Motivation: *“The pursuit of knowledge and personal growth has become a key motivation for me. My dedication to self-improvement drives me to explore online courses, engage with YouTube tutorials, and actively seek out learning opportunities. This insatiable thirst for knowledge fuels my advancement in various fields.”* (Learner)

Enhanced Happiness: *“The act of sharing my knowledge and supporting others through volunteering has brought immense joy to my life. I find fulfilment in helping others navigate challenges and achieve their own learning goals. This sense of purpose and contribution to the community has enriched my overall well-being.”* (Learner)

Leading to, overall: *“The integration of transferable skills into my educational journey and daily life has transformed me into a confident, organised, motivated, and happy individual. My willingness to learn, collaborate, and contribute to the learning of others is a testament to my personal growth and the positive impact of the college’s approach to transferable skills.”* (Learner)

Wider benefits

Providers were asked what they thought were the key wider benefits of delivering transferable skills provision. Answers focussed on:

- increased community cohesion
- raised aspirations for communities
- a more diverse pool of potential employees.

Providers referred to the critical importance of ESOL courses and self-efficacy skills in assisting community cohesion and raising community aspirations. These improvements were felt, in turn, to help increase the quality of life of people/families living in some of the most deprived areas of London.

“People feeling part of that community, I think raising aspirations... It’s about social mobility and people recognising you haven’t always got to have a degree or come from a middle-class background to be a success.” (FE provider)

Providers also saw transferable skills as an important lever for creating a more diverse workforce. Raising these skill levels means that employers can confidently recruit from their local communities, knowing that applicants have the transferable skills that they need.

“The feedback from employers is that they are very happy to interview our learners and to continue that relationship because they are happy that the pipeline of learners coming through are learners, that have the skills and training that they need.” (Independent Training Provider)

Success factors in the delivery of transferable skills

The adult education providers involved in this research identified a range of specific requirements necessary to support the successful delivery of transferable skills provision.

Being learner-centred

Providers spoke of the need to tailor learning and transferable skills development specifically to meet the needs of individual learners. Adult learners can be more vulnerable, have multiple commitments, and have complex lives (for example combining work with caring responsibilities whilst managing financial instability) and providers felt there was value in spending time getting to know and understand learners, their circumstances and the motivation behind their participation in education.

They felt it was important therefore for funders of adult education to recognise that learners needing transferable skills development will not necessarily have linear journeys and may take a while to progress. Funding also needs to acknowledge the importance of individualised input, and the costs involved in providing this, as well as the need for additional and wraparound support for these learners.

Provider case study 8: Using funding flexibilities to address learner needs

An FE provider highlighted that due to the economies of scale available to them as a large multi-site provider, as well as the GLA funding flexibilities, they had been better able to deliver courses in a way which meets the complexity of the adults they serve.

"We're allowed to spend 10% of our funding flexibly to meet the needs of business and that sort of thing. So we try to use that as well as we can to target where there might be specific needs. When we can give more time to something within the funding flexibilities, then we'll use that to cover those transferable skills as well." (FE provider)

However, they felt that more flexibility would help them to continue to develop their wraparound support offer. They would like to see more trust placed on providers to use funding flexibility in appropriate, effective, impactful ways. They were happy to be held to account on this and commented that good providers will do the right things with additional funding.

"The flexibility they've given us in the last few years has been really impactful. So I think it's key to trust us more to give us more of that flexibility and then hold us to account, ask us to demonstrate the impact of what we've done with that flexibility." (FE provider)

Their most recent Ofsted inspection report showed that they were strong in meeting employer needs by providing the learners from their local community with employability skills. There is a general willingness amongst staff at the college to make a real difference to the local community that the provider serves.

"We want to have that impact on the local community because we're not working in the posh bits of London, we're working in the most deprived bits of London; people don't have carpets on their floors, they don't have curtains at the windows, they're using the neighbour's Wi-Fi and things like that. So anything we can do to improve that quality of life for people, that's where we have the impact and the fact that people keep coming back to us [shows that] having that local anchor for people is really key to what we do." (FE provider)

Being employer-focused and responsive to business needs

Several providers highlighted the importance of employer-focused provision which could adapt and flex to employer needs. Short courses co-designed with employers so that they responded to local needs, were felt to be excellent examples. Independent Training Providers felt especially well-placed to deliver these due to their size (making it possible for them to adapt their provision quickly and relatively easily compared to larger providers) and their track record of working closely with employers and other organisations in their communities. Building these types of relationships with employers could enable other types of providers, over time, to move to a more informed and responsive way of working.

"We're doing what a lot of the colleges probably can't do. We're proactive, we've created lots of opportunity.... We're quick, we're agile, we're proactive. We can do what colleges can't. Colleges are much longer term. They've got better pathways, but neither is better [overall]... I used to work at a college, so I have an insight." (Independent Training Provider)

Providers also generally felt that when learners hear the employer's voice this is powerful because it helps to emphasise why transferable skills are important. However, it is important to engage employers in recognising the value of transferable skills and their significance in the recruitment process so that they acknowledge this.

Making provision practical and relevant for learners

Many providers discussed how important it was to make embedded transferable skills training practical and relevant to learners' lives. Examples of this included ensuring adult learning provision:

- covers money management (e.g. the potential hazards of loans and getting into debt) in ESOL classes
- embeds British values into ESOL classes (e.g. by taking learners to Big Ben, Parliament, and other famous landmarks to bring these values to life)

- embeds entrepreneurship and marketing skills into programmes, especially into vocational courses and courses which are naturally linked to self-employment opportunities (e.g. in creative industries)
- builds up to debates about relevant issues. One provider even involved their local MP:

“It brings everything together, so they’re using all their skills, but they’re also having to perform in front of each other with an audience, with myself and the MP watching, the teacher is standing behind them, cheering them on. This year’s debate was about the sugar tax and whether it was a good thing... It gets them politically active. It gets them linking the outside college with inside college... they’ve got the critical thinking, they’ve got the analytical skills. They have to look at data and one of them is chairing it.” (Local authority provider)

Similarly, employers felt that skills training should be as ‘real world’ as possible. To support this, employers urged providers to use more innovative and creative teaching methods and to provide experiences of actual workplaces during training. Suggestions were that this could be both by including more work experience opportunities alongside ensuring that learning tasks were more reflective of real-world work tasks.

Supporting delivery

One of the challenges identified in delivering transferable skills is the lack of tutor time to embed this development into schemes of work (see later section for further details). To address this, some providers have started to develop centralised, shared resources to offer staff a framework for delivering transferable skills to their students. Examples developed by staff are quality assured and then added to the resource bank for all staff to access. This can reduce staff development time and ensure greater consistency of approach across tutors.

“The whole set of resources that we’ve developed centrally are in place... The teacher doesn’t have to go and think about how they are going to create the resources they need. We just give it to them and the resources are really good quality.... That’s been really, really well received by staff and students through our second year of doing it.” (FE provider)

Providers felt that they would need additional funding to deliver more transferable skills provision. This was both to offer more transferable skills provision within courses which already have some of this content and to work with learners taking a broader range of courses (i.e. beyond their existing work with entry-level courses). The additional funding would be necessary to support adequate tutor planning and preparation, particularly if future provision is to be more creative and innovative. The availability of additional resources would also help providers set aside the time necessary to generate and develop linkages with employers and identify and support opportunities for experiences of the working world. Both providers and employers felt that to maximise the effectiveness of efforts in this area, an increase in the 10% flexibility would be required. It was suggested that a centralised resource and support facility for this could ease the burden on provider staff.

Challenges to the delivery of transferable skills

There were several key challenges which providers identified that can affect their delivery of transferable skills.

Balancing delivery of transferable skills with the rest of the curriculum

The most common issue raised by providers about the delivery of transferable skills development was the time required to deliver this within lessons. Delivering transferable skills training within the allocated time for the course, alongside the core course and qualification requirements (i.e. bricklaying competency, being able to converse in English, etc) was often challenging.

“For adult education, there is no protected time and so everything has to be embedded. That involves us very much looking at the qualifications that are out there and adapting them. We

do try to do our best and to ensure our learners have some transferable skills that are wider than just the qualification. What else can you bolt onto that qualification? And the staff don't always have the time to do that as well as covering everything in the scheme of work." (FE provider)

"I know some other providers will say 'Yeah, but we have to deal with outcomes and we've got a course to deliver'. But for us, it's embedded. It is a balance, but it's a balance that is necessary and you have to embed it and you have to have tutors that embrace it".
(Independent Training Provider)

Many of the providers interviewed also raised the issue of course funding which, they felt, needs to be sufficient to not just cover the specified hours to deliver the specific course content but also the work involved in embedding transferable skills. Although the contact time with students may be the same (if delivery is embedded), the assessments of need and planning required to support delivery require additional staff time/resources and therefore funding. Many of the FE providers, local authority providers, and Institutes of Adult Learning cited a tension between delivering subject matter as well as transferable skills.

"It's the typical one will be the balance of how much do you do on transferable skills and how much do you do on technical content." (Local authority provider)

However, this was seen as an issue which could be resolved with sufficient funding for protected time in adult learning programmes. The central issue is that if a course is currently funded for a set number of hours, with content which already takes this amount of time to deliver, providers can find it difficult to then add additional content, tasks, or approaches, in a way that increases the focus on or priority given to transferable skills.

FE providers therefore commonly cited the difficulty of delivering transferable skills as part of the curriculum in the absence of funded time to do this. They contrasted the position for 16-18-year-olds where Study Programmes provided tutorial time. Without the lack of protected time, it is harder for providers to deliver transferable and wraparound support to their adult learners.

"So for 16 to 18s it's a little bit easier because they have things like tutorials and it's funded and it's part of that study program.... For adults, there is no protected time and so everything has to be embedded." (FE provider)

"I do feel conscious that we are putting an increasing amount of pressure and expectations on staff to deliver." (FE provider)

In contrast, the two Independent Training Providers interviewed did not see this as a challenge for them as all their courses were already built around the delivery of transferable and employability skills.

We've never had to add in transferable skills activities. I think it's always been part of our delivery. (Independent Training Provider)

The extent of challenge providers face partly depends on the level of course. Most providers felt that there was more scope to include transferable skills delivery in lower accreditation levels – for example, up to Level 2 – than for Level 3 and above.

"When you get to the much lower levels and the course content isn't so rich, you start to actually look at the bones of what your educational strategy is about and why you're delivering it. Your end goal is really about looking at those individual learners much more than just the skill sets.... And it's probably easier for us, more obvious for us than, say a sixth form college." (Local authority provider)

Supporting learners with higher and more complex needs

Many providers identified the provision of support for learners with higher and complex needs something which requires additional funding. Providers reflected that learners' support needs had increased since the pandemic and particularly that learners presented with greater needs in areas

such as their self-esteem, confidence, teamwork, and knowing what is now appropriate in the workplace. The additional demands that this has placed on providers, they feel, have not been reflected in the resources available to them.

"I think as the world develops there's an increasingly complex group of learners with increasingly complex barriers and I think the teachers are very much in tune with that.... It does however put a lot of pressure on staff because increasingly we're asking them to do a lot of things in the same timeframe and with the same amount of resources." (FE provider)

No respondents mentioned the flexibility in the funding rules which covers training for tutors who support for people with disabilities during their interviews. One Independent Training Provider, however, suggested that funding key worker staff would benefit learners' mental health and overall success. They cited funding which their organisation had received in Greater Manchester from the [UK Shared Prosperity Fund](#) to provide this. This fund aims to 'improve pride in place and increase life chances by investing in communities, supporting local business, people and skills'. Providers believe a similar initiative could benefit London learners, but acknowledge that the Mayor's investment of this allocation in the 'Better Futures UKSPF' project is an important part of achieving net zero.

"It's a totally different contract and it is very much focused for those further from the job market. They are funding a key support worker model, so it's the wraparound support.... We know it's had an impact in Manchester. At the moment we're recruiting to pilot into other areas. We're recruiting key support workers to see and measure the impact that will have. One of the challenges is it's not funded in other regions, it's not funded in GLA... If we have a wish list, it would be that they would fund that." (Independent Training Provider)

Other London providers have found that wraparound support can be crucial in helping learners through the challenges they encounter in their lives. These challenges can occur during learning and offering the right support can ensure that learners can make a transition into work or further training. Most providers felt that they faced an ongoing challenge in providing sufficient and appropriate levels of support to their learners.

Resourcing effective employer engagement

Some providers found it challenging to resource the activities necessary to engage employers. However, many providers felt that it was even more difficult for them to maintain employer contacts over time. This was particularly true amongst providers who did not have a staff post, or ringfenced time, dedicated to this type of work.

"From my experience of working with employers their biggest frustration is when they say 'Yes' nobody takes them up on the offer... they're left in limbo and they don't know what to do or they come in once and then that's it the relationship doesn't keep going... it's something education doesn't do very well but that's not its primary focus and there's only so much money for it." (Local authority provider)

In this respect, Independent Training Providers felt better placed than FE providers and Local Authorities, as employer co-design and engagement is a core part of their model and therefore prioritised and resourced accordingly.

A lack of consistency across the sector

Several providers described how a lack of consistency concerning transferable skills had hampered their progress. This was in terms of the language used to describe transferable skills and the available methods used to measure them. Both these issues affect how easy it is to engage employers with the topic. It was also felt to be difficult for individual learners to communicate their achievements to employers and providers to talk to employers about these types of skills because of a lack of consistent language across providers.

Many of the providers interviewed highlighted the need for employers to recognise and value transferable skills more. An important part of this was ensuring that employers understand what

these skills are and their workplace value. This would help efforts to encourage employers to support transferable skills delivery, including to their existing workforce (for example supporting those choosing to undertake further study) and enhance the way that employers factor transferable skills into their recruitment processes. Employers interviewed can see the benefit of moving towards more skills-based recruitment but felt that a clear strategy was necessary to achieve this. In particular, SMEs faced challenges engaging with training and education provision and could be reluctant to dedicate resources to developing the skills of new recruits.

Having a clear and consistent accreditation system for transferable skills would serve several purposes. It could: identify the skills people have that can benefit employers and consistently inform and assure employers about a broad range of learner skills. Skills Builder was identified as one way of introducing consistency in this area, whilst the London LSIP was seen as a base for a future strategy. The LLSIP was seen to have strong employer buy-in and already included suggestions about the use of Skills Builder.

A lack of clear messaging and roles

All research participants felt that it would be beneficial to promote stronger messages about transferable skills. These messages should focus in particular on providing a clear definition of what providers mean when they talk about transferable skills. Unfortunately, this is complicated by the wide range of terminology used in different contexts by different players to describe work in this area. A consistent way of talking about skills which work for providers and employers is therefore needed. This should focus on:

- a clear outline of what transferable skills are
- explaining why these skills play an important role in employment
- identifying how different stakeholders can play a role in helping Londoners develop these skills.

There was a strong suggestion that the GLA need to integrate their 'learning' and 'work' strands. At present the two arms appear to those working with them to have competing needs. Instead, both teams should prioritise joining up and working together, aligning their focus and messaging. Messaging from the GLA should be used consistently to educate employers about skills development. Most employers interviewed knew that engaging with the skills agenda was the right thing to do but felt that they lacked understanding of how to do this in practice. There is a need to set out the benefits for employers (e.g. through return on investment illustrations) and for their role in this agenda to be clear and achievable. The GLA could be well placed to support providers with their efforts to clarify things for employers because they have existing and extensive employer contacts beyond the scope of any individual provider.

Most employers interviewed had limited awareness of private sector training provision (as these tend to be smaller outlets with fewer recruits). There is, therefore, scope for employers to be better informed about the full range of adult education provision available in the capital. Employers mainly knew about large FE providers with which several had been in contact through 'business outreach teams' or via Council/Borough links. Employers felt that a more straightforward way of finding education providers they could work with would be useful. Ideally, this would assure them of the relevance and quality of training provided and not involve a significant time/cost burden. The LLSIP suggests that there is a readiness amongst employers to engage with providers, but interviews for this project show that employers are less clear on *how* they can engage.

Blending transferable skills development into apprenticeships

Throughout this research, the links between transferable skills development and Apprenticeships, as a recognised pathway to work, were identified. Apprenticeships were seen as rigid in their rules and uses. They are for specific courses, excluding pre-employment training or skills-based learning. It was seen that there may be a possibility to extend these to include transferable skills development. For example, some of the employers interviewed also highlighted that Apprenticeships could be a way to get more people who are long-term unemployed work-ready.

However, in their experience, JCP did not generally suggest these types of opportunities to this cohort. This could be a missed opportunity because Apprenticeships are well-known to employers and many will already be offering them.

However, there were reports that some employers find Apprenticeships less than satisfactory. The SMEs interviewed with experience of Apprenticeships had found them time-consuming and complex. These and other employers also highlighted other aspects of the Apprenticeship system as difficult for employers to manage. For example, the rigid one-day-a-week training requirement, Apprentices not being paid for release time, the entry requirements for English and Maths Level 2 (when this may not help with the actual job), and the use of endpoint assessments. Several employers felt that if Apprenticeships were devolved to the Mayor of London, the rules around them could be altered to better meet London's skills needs and work better for employers. In addition, they felt that unallocated funding from the Apprenticeship levy (currently at £600 million UK-wide) could be used as a funding stream for transferable skills development training.

Apprenticeships were the only type of training programme specifically mentioned by employers in interviews, however, it is possible that other vocational training programmes (such as T levels or BTECs) could potentially also benefit from the suggestions raised.

Employers' views of transferable skills development

Employers were asked to discuss how they saw transferable skills in terms of the application to their business, and more widely to employers and employment within London.

The role of transferable skills in business

All employers interviewed spoke strongly about the need for transferable skills both in terms of potential new recruits to their companies and for their existing staff. They all expressed the view that it was becoming more common for candidates or new staff to present with limited transferable skills. They felt this was true amongst those who have been out of the workforce for a while but also in young people leaving (school?) and trying to transition into work. Several employers described a gap, as they saw it, in the national curriculum (i.e. what children are taught in school around transferable skills). These businesses felt that developing transferable skills earlier in young people's educational journey could be more effective than trying to address them later in life.

Employers all identified how critical transferable skills are for their businesses, as well as the career progression of those in work. Employers, like providers, highlighted the importance of finding a common language to describe transferable skills and a consistent way to measure and demonstrate these skills.

Several employers were investing in training for existing staff, including in transferable skills, especially digital skills, customer service and leadership and management skills. However, there were fewer examples of employers working regularly with adult education providers to develop or deliver skills training. Generally, employers interviewed did not feel it was clear whose responsibility it was to lead on skills training, as this could be education providers (both school level and in further and adult education), employers or skill sector leads.

Some employers felt that more resource was needed for the 'preparation' phase of transition to work, including supporting the person as they first moved into the workplace. Although they felt providers were developing learners' transferable skills there was still felt to be a gap in terms of how these were appropriate for the world of work and how to best display these skills to potential employers.

Employer case study 1: Investing in transferable skills and engaging fully with providers

NatWest Group (NWG) has been running their CareerSense programme for young people aged 13 to 24 since 2021. CareerSense provides tools, resources, skills workshops, and work experience opportunities tailored to different age groups who are at different stages in their journey from school to work.

CareerSense Find Your Path¹² is part of the programme specifically designed to help young people aged 16-24 not currently in education, employment or training discover their potential. The programme is delivered with regional youth engagement partners in major cities, including London, who also identify the individuals most in need in their areas to join the programme.

NWG describe this as “an exciting opportunity for young people to develop key transferable skills and gain a rare insight into financial services.” Participants complete a 12-week programme, made up of an 8-week skills programme, followed by a 4-week paid work experience placement within NWG. Find Your Path aims to give participants the tools and experience they need to enter sustained employment or further education.

Participants complete the skills sessions in their local communities in a safe and supportive environment. Tutors from the youth engagement partners deliver content such as CV preparation, mock interviews, individual brand building, online networking, teamwork, and general preparation for work. Course materials are standardised across the providers in different regions ensuring a consistency of approach.

NWG staff are an integral part of the programme. They work with young people in two ways. Firstly, a mentor is assigned to each participant. Mentors are volunteers from NWG working in a range of roles and departments who support young people throughout their skills programme and work experience. Another staff member then hosts the work experience placement. In London, participants have gained cashier experience in high street banks and worked in a range of roles within the company’s head offices.

Course tutors describe the improvements that the programme has made to participants’ behaviour, confidence, teamwork, communication and the extent to which they can see a future for themselves in employment. Programme graduates have used the experience to help them identify and apply for Apprenticeships, with some moving straight into full-time work either within NWG or elsewhere.

Employer case study 2: How limited funding is preventing transitions into work

A business representative body in London worked with a local borough to test out ways of providers and employers to work effectively together to develop suitable local recruits for the workplace.

The model adopted involved:

- The employer works with the provider to agree their skills needs.
- The provider gets learners ‘employer ready’ by developing skills through the taught curriculum.
- The employer guarantees that they will give all learners who have undertaken the courses an interview.

The issue that the trial faced was that the learners developed the required skills to a degree but it became clear to employers that they would have still needed additional support once they moved into the role. It was not clear who – the employer or provider? - should be responsible for providing that. The employers had no capacity within their businesses to provide it. The provider looks more suitably placed to provide this support but this would be highly resource-intensive without any funding. The employers therefore did not make any recruitments.

Some often larger, employers identified that there are benefits from developing transferable skills for those at an early stage in their career but that there is also a continuing need to develop transferable skills for all workers. Early career/pre-employment was an obvious point of focus for employers, but several also felt that limited transferable skills also impacted individuals and businesses when staff moved into management and leadership roles. More support for staff to

¹² <https://www.mycareersense.com/pages/find-your-path>

develop the skills they need at this next stage in their careers would be welcomed by employers, alongside interventions which support people with the skills they need to move into work. Employers would also value support from education providers with this later stage development but recognise that adult education provision, with limited resources, is currently more focussed, understandably, on pre-employment needs.

Employers' role in transferable skills development

Larger employers interviewed were aware they need to “lean in” to the process more such as through the co-design of course content to ensure provision meets their transferable skills needs. Smaller employers saw this as an activity that could take valuable time away from their company's priority work and therefore potentially negatively impact their business. Business leaders knew that getting more involved with transferable skills delivery was something that could help employers in the longer term, but also felt that, at the moment, most employers would find it difficult to invest the time required or not prioritise it in the short-term given other more immediate demands. Employers generally saw the Mayor and GLA as having an important role in presenting this work to businesses. Not only was there an opportunity to present the skills issues in a way that resonated with businesses but also to highlight how addressing transferable skills now was a crucial part of developing London's future talent pipeline.

The views collated through this research suggest there is a slight disconnect between employers and adult education providers. Many business representatives felt that education providers needed to be more up-to-speed with the business world. They felt learning should be made agile and flexible, mixing experiences on campus, online and ‘on the shop floor’, to reflect the modern workplace more closely. They also reported being unsure about which education providers to work with, who provided high-quality training, who was offering courses aligned to their business, or what the process was for feeding into course development. Few employers reported having been asked by adult education providers what transferable skills their business needed, or getting requests to work with providers on the development of course materials to support this.

Where businesses had worked with education providers it had tended to be with individual tutors, or on sector-related courses and their interactions based on personal relationships. Generally, employers interviewed felt that there was no consistent approach to getting businesses to work with education and despite ‘employer relationship management teams’ there was a lack of understanding about how, why and for what purposes employers should engage.

Several employers highlighted that they would like to move towards more skills-based recruitment, rather than a qualifications-led process. This meant that they were ideally looking for candidates with the basic skills a job requires, but were then prepared to train them in role-specific skills; rather than looking to take on people who are already trained in the sector. However, they identified that a consistent approach and ways of evidencing skills development would be required to support this change. Many employers felt that potential recruits were not good at reflecting on and presenting their transferable skills and that this might mean more pre-employment support is required (around CV writing, interview skills and presenting to employers) for those looking to enter the workplace and/or a way of accrediting skills development within existing courses.

Few employers have used the Skills Builder tool. However, those who had used it generally saw the tool as a useful approach. It was seen as a comprehensive, standard list of skills that businesses could adapt to fit their business and culture. Education providers and larger businesses both felt it was a tool that they could use. SMEs, however, tended to feel that Skills Builder was outside of their realm of knowledge. As a result, they were concerned that it could be time-consuming for them to both acquaint themselves with it and then work through it with new employees. Some smaller employers did not see upskilling recruits as ‘their job’ and resented the time it would take to do this, despite needing employees with transferable skills and recognising a gap in these skills amongst employees and applicants.

There was a suggestion from some employers that Awarding Bodies could offer qualifications in transferable skills. They saw it as important for learners to be clear about what transferable skills

they had developed from undertaking their course and how to present these to potential employers. Employers also felt that learners needed to be able to identify the basic skills that, in their opinion, everyone looking to work in London should have.

Very few employers reported that they had yet seen any progress in the transferable skills of those seeking work, despite the emphasis providers have placed on this in recent years. Some employers more engaged in this issue and with experience working with the GLA did acknowledge that, although in their early stages, the Mayor's Academy Hubs could make a difference in this area. It was generally felt that transferable skills development should be at the heart of what the GLA and other key London stakeholders do and say. This consistency would help to 'drive home' the message to the many businesses in London, making it clear what the strategy is and how employers can help support this London-wide initiative.

Recommendations

The findings of this research were presented to the commissioning team in the GLA. From this, a set of recommendations for adult education providers, employers and the GLA were developed. These are:

For Providers

1. **Embed transferable skills and the results of work with local employers into their training.**
2. **Engage in the 5-stage process** effective adult education providers have identified here:
 - a) Scope employers' needs
 - b) Assess learner needs
 - c) Map how transferable skills are or can be embedded in all courses
 - d) Deliver transferable skills (most commonly embedded within specific courses)
 - e) Measure and reflect on transferable skills development
 - f) Reward the development of transferable skills (alongside specific course qualifications).

In addition, learn from factors leading to success:

4. **Be learner-centred:** tailor offers and course delivery to meet learner needs.
5. **Be employer-focused** and respond to business needs: work with them on course development and embedding transferable skills, and use their resources/experiences and the 'employer's voice' to make learning relevant.
6. **Establish centralised resources** within each provider to support the delivery and development of transferable skills.
7. **Share effective practice** within and across training providers, and with employers and stakeholders including Awarding Bodies and the GLA.
8. **Use funding allocations to upskill staff** to support people with complex needs.

For Employers

1. **Recognise and value transferable skills** and use these as part of the recruitment process.
2. **Become more aware of adult education providers in London** and how to work with them.
3. **'Lean into' the process of supporting transferable skills development.** Work with adult education providers and learners in co-designing and delivering transferable skills sessions that meet employers' needs.
4. **Offer real-world work experiences** – the nature of these experiences can be flexed to the ability of employers to provide. Talks to learners, workplace visits and work experience placements, for example, are all useful offers.

For the GLA

Providers have found the GLA to be a supportive and progressive authority which has struck a good balance in its funding flexibilities. However, there are some emerging recommendations for potential future changes:

1. **Align the focus and messaging of the mayor of London's work with employers and businesses and on economic growth, learning, skills and London's future success, around the importance of the development of transferable skills.** The GLA is ideally positioned to take the lead on developing a strategy for the future of transferable skills as well as a common language for transferable skills and the need for it in London's learners.
2. **Coordinate the development and consistent use of measures of progress on transferable skills development.** SkillsBuilder offers a possible route towards consistency in which skills should be focussed on, and how progress on these skills should be measured. The tool has strong recognition amongst providers and is seen by them and employers as providing a comprehensive way of setting out the transferable skills required in London. Recognition amongst employers is lower and they would need to be encouraged to use it and understand how to use it and the benefits of doing so. This is likely to be particularly true for SMEs. The existing tool would also need in-depth consideration to determine how well-suited the skills and use of it are for adult learners.
3. **Support training providers, employers and Awarding Bodies to learn from each other and develop collaborative solutions (potentially through Communities of Practice for transferable skills development).** Employers identified that the Mayor of London has a range of links with London's businesses and has structures and relationships which could be leveraged to engage more employers in the skills agenda. These links include:

- GLA jobs and skills business partnerships
- Mayoral Academy Hubs (who could have transferable skills designated as an essential skill, for example)
- Anchor Institutions' network
- London & Partners/Grow London local

The Mayor of London can bring greater visibility to these partnerships and encourage positive actions by encouraging them and major London businesses to sign up for this agenda.

4. **Provide more funding flexibility.** The current flexibilities from GLA were appreciated and thought to work well. Given the way funding is likely to change shortly, the GLA should ensure they continue to support providers to develop these skills in learners and innovate with their provision. Learning aims around transferable skills should be seen as essential (along with English, Maths, digital and ESOL) and moved from tailored learning funding so they can have the uplift applied. To effectively deliver transferable skills development in learners, even if it is embedded in other courses, this learning needs to be funded to:
 - **Enable specific delivery focus on transferable skills.** This should reduce the 'squeeze' that providers often feel on other areas of the curriculum. Providers have to allocate some of their funding for delivering specific courses to cover the need to address transferable skills. Currently 16-18 provision has protected time for enrichment which can include transferable skills, but there is no equivalent protected time for adults. Funding should cover tutorial time (or similar) in which explicit work on transferable skill development can be carried out. Additional resources would allow more time and resources for transferable skills delivery, help to highlight the importance of these skills and enable more effective delivery of them.
 - **Support employer engagement.** Education providers need to build relationships with a range of suitable employers and collaborate on skills mapping and course development. All of this takes time and resources and requires funding.
 - **Develop more innovative non-accredited provision.** This is currently less well funded than accredited provision but is seen to deliver and reward transferable skills. Innovative provision would better suit the needs of learners on these courses.

- *“If the funding rate could be adjusted for non-accredited to match accredited, that would enable more providers to be able to deliver that... What tends to happen is the non-accredited provision that's really innovative, we need to put it all together at the last minute and it's often the most expensive as it's specialist.”* (FE provider)
 - Providers said that if they had the flexibility, they would like to be able to offer non-accredited provision to support learners with their mental health and well-being. This is a response to so many more learners finding this difficult since the pandemic. Providers would also like to offer non-accredited provision around money management and budgeting to support their learners during the cost-of-living crisis. The Multiply programme could be an effective tool for this, with some providers already engaged with it.
 - *“So, for example, we're working with [community organisation], which is really crucial at the moment... on two classes about money management. So that partnership, setting things up, finding the right location, took a bit of time, but the benefits of it are great because we're doing something that's really responsive and important at the moment and it doesn't need to be accredited. It enables us to be a bit more creative and get those better outcomes for priority learners.”* (Local authority provider)
 - **Provide more support and wraparound care for learners**, particularly through the tailored learning funding element, as these adults tend to have more complex lives and high support needs. As noted above, for example, mental health issues amongst their learners have increased since the pandemic.
 - *“The wraparound support, where the learner is there on the course, it's ensuring that they're in a good place... So, it's not just transferable skills, it's about identifying and supporting that whole learner.”* (Independent Training Provider)
 - **Provide pre-employment support and support for the transition into work**, as this was seen as beneficial but employers noted that due to the complex nature of people's lives and the fact that many new recruits have been economically inactive for significant periods, they often needed support to move into work.
5. **Foster more collaboration between education providers and employers on transferable skills development.** The GLA was felt to be well-placed to co-ordinate this, better matching education providers with London's employers.
- “More collaboration between all of the different providers coming together because we've all got different provision and different ways of doing it... Let's get something a bit more centralised that we can all agree to and work together on.”* (Local authority provider)
6. **Continue to lobby the national government on devolving Apprenticeships, levy funding and unallocated funds. Devolved funding streams should be aligned to focus on the development of transferable skills in London's workforce.** It was identified that multiple 'pots' of funding are available to support businesses in London and to train staff, whether these are in-house training budgets, ESFA funds or local financial support to support training and getting people into work. However, these funding streams are not all necessarily working in the same direction or focused on the same priority. By devolving funding for support for those out of work and employer training (such as Apprenticeships) the GLA could “get more bang for its buck”. With control over this unallocated levy funding, Apprenticeship rules could be flexed to support the needs of London businesses, providers and learners better. There is also a belief that moving people into sustainable good work could be better supported as a result.
7. **Lobby for more influence over the delivery of 16-18 education, to ensure children and young people are suitably equipped to enter London's businesses to work, with their transferable skills developed and ready to contribute to London's future growth and success.** Transferable skills could be taught explicitly to those who need them the most,

through London's children, young people and adult funding, leading to a stronger talent pipeline for London's businesses.