WEST OF ENGLAND | MAYORAL COMBINED AUTHORITY

ADULT SKILLS FUND:

COMMISSIONING PLAN: 2026/27

November 2025

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STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The Mayoral Combined Authority is preparing for the next stage of the Adult Skills Fund (ASF), laying the groundwork for a more strategic, long-term planning and commissioning programme. While progress continues, the reconfiguration of the ASF programme will be phased in rather than implemented all at once. This builds on the reforms set out in the 2025/26 Commissioning Plan, which marked the first step on the Adult Skills Fund Roadmap.

This commissioning cycle represents an opportunity to introduce further reforms by building on the progress implemented this year and earlier reforms. It places particular emphasis on investment that facilitates onward progression; enabling residents to move into, or closer towards, the positive destinations to which they aspire.

The Combined Authority will take a measured and sequenced approach, introducing reforms in step with national and regional change so that the programme evolves coherently as the post-16 system reforms. This reflects the pace and scale of reform nationally, as policy moves toward greater local accountability through the Single Settlement and simplification of post-16 funding. This measured approach also ensures that the region is well placed to manage future devolved budgets under the Single Settlement, with stronger local accountability for outcomes and impact.

Alongside this, the West of England Local Growth Strategy, the Get West of England Working plan, the Employment Skills Plan and the forthcoming Skills Strategy are reshaping priorities for inclusive growth, productivity and progression across the region. The Adult Skills Fund will also continue to align with complementary programmes such as Connect to Work, Skills Bootcamps, the Mayoral Priority Skills Fund and Skills Connect, ensuring a coherent local offer that maximises impact across funding streams.

Building on these developments, preparation for Established Authority status and eligibility for an Integrated Settlement further reinforces the importance of measurable impact and local accountability within the ASF.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. In this context of continued reform, the Mayoral Combined Authority began discussions with strategic partners and providers in October 2024. These early conversations set the direction for a future reset of the Adult Skills Fund, creating the conditions for a more strategic, longer-term programme.

1.2. Since those initial discussions, the national and regional landscape has continued to evolve. In response, the Combined Authority is adopting a phased approach to implementing the ASF reset, ensuring that future changes align with wider reforms across the post-16 system.

1.3. The ASF Roadmap provides the long-term framework through which each commissioning cycle will refine and strengthen the model, introducing periodic resets and multi-year planning to drive continuous improvement.

1.4. The full reset of the ASF, including the re-baselining of provider allocations and introduction of the proposed 80/20 model balancing protected and competitive commissioning, was originally planned for 2026/27. It will now be delivered in phases to enable purposeful change and achieve sustained long-term impact. This deliberate adjustment in timing allows implementation to align with wider national and regional reform.

1.5. This plan also responds directly to the wider architecture of regional strategies. The West of England Local Growth Strategy sets the economic vision; the Get West of England Working Plan translates that vision into labour market action; and the Employment and Skills Plan defines the long-term objectives for a simplified, progression-focussed skills system. The Adult Skills Fund Commissioning Plan sits beneath these as the delivery mechanism that translates strategy into provision.

1.6. The ASF Commissioning Plan sits within the wider framework of regional strategies shown below, connecting the region's long-term economic vision with the delivery of skills provision on the ground:

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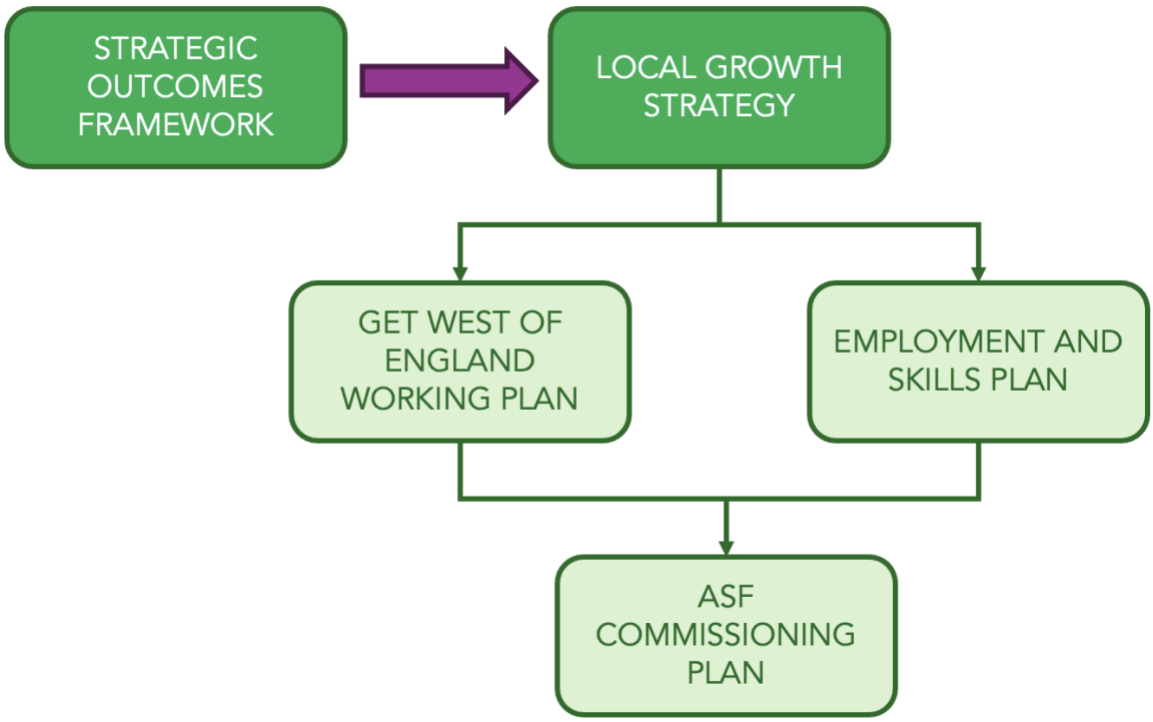
MCA Skills Plan Architecture



1.7. The West of England Local Growth Strategy identifies the sectors that will drive economic growth for the West of England. The Adult Skills Fund plays a central role in supporting this vision by maintaining a broad mix of skills interventions that create clear pathways into the roles most needed across the region. A key focus is on strengthening progression routes from entry level through to level three and beyond, ensuring residents can both contribute to and benefit from the region's growth.

1.8. In doing so, this plan aims to: equip residents with the right skills to access new and better paid jobs; respond to employer needs by addressing skills shortages and supporting productivity; and deliver inclusive growth by ensuring disadvantaged groups can access flexible, tailored learning pathways that build confidence, wellbeing and opportunity.

1.9. Within this commissioning cycle, the Adult Skills Fund will act as a lever for change, strengthening alignment with regional priorities, embedding digital and green skills as cross-cutting themes, and shifting the focus from inputs to outcomes by measuring real learner progression. This plan is designed to ensure that every investment contributes to the Combined Authority's shared ambitions: a stronger economy, a fairer labour market, and a more sustainable future for the West of England.

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1.10. During the 2026/27 transition year, we will implement targeted policy and delivery improvements that enhance coherence across the system, simplify funding where appropriate, and strengthen the measurement of learner destinations and progression. During this period, we will refine data collection on learner destinations and outcomes to demonstrate impact, inform investment decisions and build a stronger evidence base for future commissioning cycles.

1.11. Working with partners, we will consolidate progress, strengthen the evidence base, and co-design the next phase of delivery. This managed transition will maintain stability for providers and learners while laying the foundations for a more connected, outcomes-focussed skills system in the longer term.

1.12. In 2026/27 provision will be secured through a negotiated Curriculum and Delivery Plan for a single year, with, where appropriate, an agreed trajectory for how provision may evolve over the subsequent multi-year period.

1.13. Changes during this period will be introduced in a way that balances ambition with provider capacity, ensuring effective delivery and maintained quality. The Combined Authority will continue to work collaboratively with partners to ensure that adjustments are manageable and that quality and learner outcomes remain at the centre of delivery.

1.14. Over time, the ASF will continue to evolve towards an outcomes-focussed model that delivers long-term value for residents, employers and the regional economy. This approach will underpin the next iteration of the ASF Roadmap, aligning local delivery with national reform and providing greater stability across the region. This phased approach represents the next stage of the Adult Skills Fund Roadmap introduced in 2025/26.

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2. OBJECTIVES

2.1. The primary objectives for our devolved Adult Skills Fund programme are:

To support residents to maximise the degree to which they benefit from the economic and social opportunities available within the West of England through:

1. Identifying the specific barriers that hinder the individual learner's ability to realise their ambitions.
2. Equipping them with the knowledge, skills, experience and behaviours needed to address the barriers identified.
3. Supporting them to progress to a destination that is appropriate to them including:
    a. Into employment.
    b. Within employment.
    c. To further learning or support.

2.2. The Community and Employer focussed elements of Tailored Learning have additional specific objectives which are set out in detail in Annex C and Chapter 13 respectively.

2.3. The main aims of Community Focussed Tailored Learning are to:

- Support people who are disadvantaged and least likely to participate, to promote and incentivise their reengagement.
- Widen participation by supporting progression relevant to personal circumstances, including:
- Improve confidence and willingness to engage in learning.
- Facilitate the acquisition of skills preparing people for training, employment, or self-employment.
- Improve digital, financial literacy and/or communication skills.
- Equip parents/carers to support and encourage their children's learning or improved/maintained health and/or social well-being.
- Support people who are disadvantaged and least likely to participate, to promote and incentivise their reengagement.

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- Widen participation by supporting progression relevant to personal circumstances.
- Develop stronger communities, with more self-sufficient, connected, and proactive residents.

2.4. The main aim of Employer Focussed Tailored Learning is to:

Respond to emerging skills needs not currently addressed in an effective manner through existing regulated qualifications by supporting providers, employers and awarding bodies to work together to develop appropriate programmes of learning with the end goal being establishing the curriculum developed as a nationally recognised regulated qualification.

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3. STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Regional Growth Strategy (LGS)

3.1. The LGS sets the overarching ambition for the region: to drive inclusive, sustainable economic growth through innovation, sectoral strengths, and place-based development.

3.2. It identifies five priority sectors:

- Advanced Manufacturing
- Digital & Technologies
- Clean Energy Industries
- Creative Industries
- Everyday Economy

3.3. ASF will contribute by:

- Establishing pathways from entry-level through to Level 3 that enable residents to enter and progress within these priority sectors.
- Supporting the Everyday Economy (construction, health, education, retail and logistics) as a foundational driver of inclusive growth.
- Prioritising digital and AI literacy and green skills or clean energy.

Get West of England Working Plan (GWEWP)

3.4. The GWEWP sets out how the region will tackle economic inactivity, unemployment, and labour market inequalities.

3.5. Its core ambitions include:

- Raising employment rates towards the 80% target.
- Halving the disability employment gap and reducing long-term sickness inactivity.
- Getting more young people into education, employment, or training.
- Enabling progression into better-paid, more secure jobs.

3.6. ASF will contribute by:

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- Commissioning flexible, person-centred provision that supports individuals at different stages of their working lives.
- Funding tailored pathways (e.g. ESOL, employability, re-training) to re-engage economically inactive residents and support disadvantaged groups into work.
- Embedding employer engagement, ensuring commissioned provision directly links to local vacancies and skills shortages.
- Providing community-focused provision that acts as an accessible first step back into learning and work.
- Adopting a place-based approach commissioning delivery of skills training so delivery happens in the community where training is needed.

Employment & Skills Plan (ESP)

3.7. The ESP provides the strategic framework for skills delivery across the region.

3.8. Its objectives are:

- Strengthen and simplify the skills system.
- Enable all young people to achieve their potential.
- Support unemployed and inactive people into work.
- Support people to progress in work.
- Address employer needs and skills shortages.

3.9. ASF will contribute by:

- Simplifying the commissioning structure, with clear priority pathways (Digital, Clean Energy and Net Zero, ESOL, Employment, Growth).
- Supporting young adults (19–25) through tailored learning and employability provision.
- Focusing on progression measures to ensure funded provision leads to tangible outcomes (employment, further learning, or career advancement).
- Working with employers to co-design provision that addresses immediate vacancies and builds longer-term sector resilience

ASF Outcomes Aligned to LGS Outcomes Framework

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3.10. By aligning to the three strategic plans, ASF commissioning will expect providers to report against the following regional outcomes:

ASF Commissioning Outcomes	Relevant Local Growth Strategy Outcomes Framework
Residents gain skills for priority sectors (Advanced Manufacturing, Digital, Clean Energy, Creative, Everyday Economy).	**Priority 4:** Equipping residents with the skills to access the jobs that will shape our future. • Improve educational outcomes and skills for life, further learning, good work and progression (focus on priority growth and enabling sectors). • Reduce the skills gaps and vacancy rates for priority sectors.
Economic inactivity is reduced, with more residents supported into work.	**Priority 4:** Reduce employment inequalities for target groups (disabled residents, long-term health conditions, carers, women, care leavers, families in poverty). **Priority 6:** Lifting children and families out of poverty in the West of England.
In-work progression is increased, with learners moving into better-paid, more secure employment.	**Priority 4:** Improve progression to further learning, apprenticeships, and sustained employment. • Employment rates and pay gaps (e.g. for women, disabled residents, disadvantaged groups).
Digital & AI Literacy and green skills are embedded across the curriculum.	**Priority 4:** Focus on skills for life and progression in priority sectors, including Digital & Technologies. **Priority 5:** Making the West of England the home for green jobs and green growth (increase green innovation and skills).
Employers report improved access to talent and reduced vacancy rates.	**Priority 1:** Contributing to national economic growth by helping businesses succeed and creating jobs. **Priority 4:** Reduce the skills gaps and vacancy rates in priority growth and enabling sectors.
Inequalities are narrowed, with targeted support for under-represented groups (disabled residents, women returners, ethnic minorities, older workers).	**Priority 4:** Reduce employment inequalities for target groups. **Priority 6:** Reduce child poverty and improve life chances; reduce inequality; improve quality of life, health and wellbeing for children and families.

Benefits of strategy alignment

3.11. When implemented (from 2027/28) the ASF 4-Year Commissioning Plan provides a clear and stable framework for aligning adult skills investment with the wider ambitions of the West of England. By embedding the commissioning reset within the

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architecture of the Local Growth Strategy, the Get West of England Working Plan, and the Employment and Skills Plan, it ensures that provision is not designed in isolation but as an integral part of the region's long-term growth and inclusion agenda. This alignment means that every funding decision, learning pathway, and partnership is directly connected to the shared vision of a stronger economy, a fairer labour market, and a more resilient region.

3.12. Through this plan, residents will be better prepared to contribute to and benefit from economic growth. The focus on progression pathways into advanced manufacturing, digital and technology, clean energy, creative industries, and the everyday economy will ensure that learners are not only equipped with the skills that employers demand today but are also supported to adapt to the jobs of the future. At the same time, the commissioning plan will strengthen support for those furthest from the labour market by funding flexible, community-based provision that builds confidence and removes barriers to participation. This dual focus - on high-growth sectors and inclusive access - reflects the Combined Authority's ambition to deliver growth that is both dynamic and fair.

3.13. Employers across the region will also see the benefit of this plan. By working more closely with providers to shape provision, vacancy rates can be reduced, skills shortages addressed, and workforce resilience improved. The commissioning approach recognises that sustainable growth depends not only on creating new jobs but also on ensuring that residents have the right skills to step into them. It also acknowledges the importance of progression in work: supporting people to move into better-paid, more secure jobs strengthens household incomes, reduces poverty, and builds long-term economic resilience.

3.14. Finally, the commissioning plan positions the Adult Skills Fund as a strategic instrument rather than a standalone programme. When implemented, the four-year cycle provides stability for providers, transparency for stakeholders, and flexibility to adapt to emerging challenges. By embedding digital and green skills across all commissioning priorities, by ensuring progression outcomes are measured and evidenced, and by focusing on inclusive growth, this plan ensures that the Adult Skills Fund will play a pivotal role in shaping the region's future. The ASF will not only deliver skills but will also drive the wider ambitions of the West of England - helping more residents into work, supporting progression, and building a stronger, fairer, and more sustainable regional economy.

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ASF Commissioning Priorities Mapped to Strategic Plans

ASF Priority Pathway	Alignment with Local Growth Strategy (LGS)	Alignment with Get West of England Working Plan (GWEWP)	Alignment with Employment & Skills Plan (ESP)
Clean Energy & Net Zero	Supports *Clean Energy Industries* and *Green Growth* objectives; contributes to net zero transition.	Tackles economic inactivity by creating new entry points into green jobs; helps residents access sustainable, better-paid work.	Cross-cutting theme of *delivering green skills* to support low-carbon transition.
Digital	Underpins *Digital & Technologies* sector and AI Supercluster; accelerates regional innovation and competitiveness.	Provides digital skills for disadvantaged residents, reducing barriers to participation in a digital labour market.	Cross-cutting theme of *improving digital skills at all levels*; essential to productivity and progression.
ESOL	Supports the *Everyday Economy* by enabling migrants and non-native speakers to participate fully in work, community, and growth sectors.	Removes barriers to employment for those furthest from labour market, supporting inclusive participation and tackling inequalities.	Contributes to priorities of *supporting unemployed/inactive people into work* and *enabling young people to achieve their potential*.
Employment	Builds the foundation for residents to access new jobs created across priority sectors; links skills to transport, housing, and growth zones.	Directly supports target to raise employment to 80%, halve disability gap, and reduce long-term sickness inactivity.	Responds to objectives *support unemployed/inactive people into work* and *strengthen skills system*.
Growth	Supports *Advanced Manufacturing, Creative Industries, Digital, Clean Energy* growth ambitions; provides workforce pipelines.	Ensures residents progress into *better-paid, more secure work* by creating career pathways in growth sectors.	Aligns with *supporting people to progress in work* and *addressing employer needs and skills shortages*.

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ASF Funding Model	Alignment with Local Growth Strategy (LGS)	Alignment with Get West of England Working Plan (GWEWP)	Alignment with Employment & Skills Plan (ESP)
Adult Skills	Strengthens the *Everyday and Foundational Economy*, ensuring inclusive growth across all places in the region.	Helps disadvantaged groups and inactive residents progress in learning and work.	Addresses *employer needs and skills shortages*; Contributes to *simplifying the skills system* and providing clear access routes for residents.
Community-Focused Tailored Learning	Supports the foundations for residents to engage in learning and start a pathway towards growth.	Helps disadvantaged groups and inactive residents build confidence and re-enter learning and work.	Contributes to *simplifying the skills system* and providing clear access routes for residents.
Employer-Focused Tailored Learning	Enhances productivity in *priority sectors* by shaping provision to meet employer demand and address vacancy rates.	Supports employers to provide good jobs and inclusive recruitment practices, preventing churn.	Addresses *employer needs and skills shortages*; fosters employer co-design of training.

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4. THE ADULT SKILLS FUND IN THE WEST OF ENGLAND

4.1. Since the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority assumed the devolved responsibility for the management of the Adult Skills Fund within our region, we have sought to enhance the effectiveness and responsiveness of the programme through a number of reforms to the funding system. As a result of these reforms, although we remain largely aligned with the system applied by central government in non-devolved areas, there are some significant differences within the West of England.

4.2. These differences reflect our intent to position ASF as a strategic tool that responds to local economic needs, improve learner progression, and shape a more inclusive skills ecosystem.

FOUR-YEAR FUNDING CYCLE

4.3. The MCA had originally planned to introduce a four-year planning, commissioning, and delivery cycle from the 2026/27 academic year. However, several regional and national changes have since emerged, and it is felt that pausing this shift will provide a better opportunity to realign priorities once these changes are clearer. It remains our firm intention to move to a four-year cycle from 2027/28.

4.4. The four-year cycle will be preceded by a reset process which may be used to refocus priorities, redistribute funding and reshape provision to better align with regional need. Within the reset process existing and new providers will be invited to propose provision which responds to our commissioning priorities.

4.5. We acknowledge that significant change is unlikely to be effectively realised within a single academic year, and so when discussing Curriculum and Delivery Plans, we will want to understand longer-term plans where they are relevant, in particular plans to establish high-priority provision.

GRANT FUNDING

4.6. In contrast to DfE and some other MCAs, the West of England MCA has opted to fund 100% of ASF provision through a grant rather than a procured contract for services. This approach affords us flexibility to effectively manage the programme whilst minimising administrative burdens allowing us to maximise the proportion of funding utilised to support delivery rather than back-office functions.

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FUNDING STRUCTURE: PATHWAYS OF PRIORITY PROVISION

4.7. We have created a priority structure within our programme to improve the alignment between the provision delivered and our regional priorities. This approach aims to anticipate emerging priorities and accommodate new priorities without the need to fundamentally restructure the funding system.

4.8. The structure which will apply to the 2026/27 to 2029/30 Planning and Delivery Cycle is as follows:

- PATHWAYS TO CLEAN ENERGY & NET ZERO
- PATHWAYS TO DIGITAL
- PATHWAYS TO ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESOL)
- PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT
- PATHWAYS TO GROWTH
- LOW PRIORITY

4.9. The individual elements above (other than low priority provision) are then further sub-divided into high and medium priority provision. All other forms of provision are deemed to be low priority.

4.10. Three layers cut across the structure above. I.e. the individual funding models through which ASF provision is funded:

- ADULT SKILLS
- COMMUNITY FOCUSSED TAILORED LEARNING
- EMPLOYER FOCUSSED TAILORED LEARNING

LEARNER EXPERIENCE

4.11. We afford a higher level of priority to the following essential components of a learning programme. The individual learners benefit from a clear plan which facilitates progression towards an identified destination which is both ambitious and realistic. Helping to ensure they are enrolled onto the right course at the right level facilitates this progression.

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- Pre-Enrolment Career Education Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG)
- Pre-Enrolment Initial Assessment (IA) / Diagnostic Testing
- Effective utilisation of Learner and Learning Support
- Personal Progression Plan detailing the barriers preventing or hindering progression towards the destination sought and the individual interventions through which these barriers will be addressed within a coherent learning programme.
- Guided Learning and assessment of a regulated or unregulated learning aim, or aims as part of a wider programme
- Progress Reviews
- Ongoing CEIAG
- Exit Interview
- Progression Support

FUNDING RATE CHANGES

4.12. We have previously applied a number of significant changes to ASF Funding Rates including:

- Applied a general 5% funding rate uplift to all ASF Adult Skills Provision
- Matched the 20% funding rate uplift applied by DfE to provision in the following sectors from 2023/24:
    - Engineering
    - Manufacturing Technologies
    - ICT for Practitioners
    - Transport Operations and Maintenance
    - Building and Construction
    - Mathematics and Statistics
- In recognition of the Regional Growth Strategy focus on media we will also apply the 20% uplift to the Art, Media and Publishing sector subject area.
- Applied a 50% uplift to literacy, numeracy and ESOL qualifications delivered at Level 2.
- Willingness to negotiate bespoke funding rates for the most important elements of high-priority provision where the normal funding rate represents

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a significant barrier to delivery. E.g. where significant staff recruitment challenges exist as the normal funding rate is insufficient to offer a competitive salary to potential tutors in comparison to what they would be able to earn in industry.

- Adopted a variable approach to co-funding rates based on the level of priority associated with the provision.
    - High Priority = 20% Contribution
    - Medium Priority = 50% Contribution
    - Low Priority = 80% Contribution

NEW LEARNING AIMS

4.13. We have also created a number of new learning aims to encourage delivery (or enhanced delivery) of elements of learning which we consider to be particularly effective in terms of promoting positive progression. These include:

- Funded learning aims to support the delivery of Work Experience.
- New Learning aims to support the delivery of Enhanced Initial Assessment.
- New Learning aims to support the delivery of Enhanced CEIAG.

4.14. Our enhanced initial assessment and CEIAG learning aims are intended to support the delivery of additional initial assessment and CEIAG to the learners who would most benefit from this. It is therefore intended to support intervention that goes above and beyond the standard offer that applies to all learners which is supported through core funding.

INCREASED FLEXIBILITY

4.15. We encourage Community Focussed Tailored Learning to be used to support the existence of staffing resource required to undertake the following activities:

- Local Intelligence Gathering and Sharing
- The Active Engagement of Learners
- Supporting and Tracking Progression to Positive Destinations

4.16. In a similar manner, Employer Focussed Tailored Learning may be used to fund teams to deliver the following functions:

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- Employer Engagement
- Supporting and Tracking Progression to Positive Destinations

INCREASED INVESTMENT PER LEARNER

4.17. We recognise the extreme level of funding pressure that has been faced by the sector over recent years which has been exacerbated by a system which expects learner number growth within real-terms funding cuts. We do not accept that this is a sustainable model and are concerned that efficiencies necessary to manage within this context serve to have a detrimental impact on learners and undermine our efforts to support them to progress to a positive destination.

4.18. We also acknowledge that many of the reforms that we have introduced are intended to increase the level of funding available to support an individual learner to progress to a positive destination. This would serve to increase funding pressure if we maintained an expectation for learner numbers to continue to increase even though total funding has declined significantly in real terms.

4.19. We therefore feel that it is important to confirm as clearly as we are able that our priority is not to seek learner number growth, our priority is to support learner progression growth. We will judge the effectiveness of the programme on the basis of the outcomes it realises.

4.20. We anticipate that the budget available to us is likely to be relatively static and therefore our aim is to:

- Plan on the assumption that overall funding levels will be maintained
- Increase investment per learner
- Deliver increased levels of positive progression
- Be willing to see overall learner numbers decrease if this is necessary to realise the increased level of positive progression sought.

OTHER KEY REFORMS: TRADE UNION PROVISION

4.21. We grant full funding to all approved Trade Union provision.

OTHER KEY REFORMS: BLENDED AND DISTANCE LEARNING

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4.22. Blended learning refers to provision that is a combination of face-to-face learning and online digital learning that can be undertaken at any time or location used to enhance the learning experience and achieve learning outcomes. Distance learning refers to delivery involving activities that happen away from the physical site of a provider with learners using digital means to engage with a programme.

4.23. The Combined Authority values distance learning where it serves the following purposes:

- To provide access to learning, and support for, priority residents who would not otherwise be able to participate.
- To broaden the local curriculum offer so that is most effectively supports our local employers and the local economy

4.24. However, we draw an important distinction between effective blended learning and distance learning which is wholly or substantially delivered via software where there is little or no meaningful interaction between a learner and their tutor.

4.25. The Adult Skills Fund pays for the delivery of 'guided learning' which is defined by Ofqual as:

> The time a learner spends being taught or instructed by or participating in education or training under the immediate guidance or supervision of a lecturer, tutor, supervisor, or other appropriate provider.
>
> This includes time spent being assessed if the assessment takes place under the guidance of an authorized individual.
>
> It does not include time spent on unsupervised study or preparation.

4.26. We are not satisfied that software driven distance learning satisfies this definition due to the lack of tutor involvement in delivery.

4.27. We have already worked with providers to address this issue, and existing providers report that there is no existing software driven distance learning within our Adult Skills Provision.

4.28. We have therefore decided that we will not commission any software driven distance learning as part of this Commissioning Plan and remove such provision from ASF funding eligibility.

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OTHER KEY REFORMS: NON-REGULATED ADULT SKILLS

4.29. In line with changes introduced by the Department for Education, from the start of the 2026/27 academic year, the MCA will no longer fund non-regulated provision as part of the Adult Skills component of the overall Adult Skills Fund. We will continue to fund non-regulated provision as part of Tailored Learning for learners who are appropriate for these parts of the programme.

OTHER KEY REFORMS: THIRD PARTY DELIVERY

4.30. We adopt a slightly different position to DfE in relation to subcontracting.

4.31. The first difference is that we focus on 'third-party delivery' as opposed to simply subcontracting. I.e. any arrangement wherein any element of ASF programme delivery is undertaken by a person not directly employed by the prime provider with whom we contract must be agreed by the MCA in advance of delivery.

4.32. The second difference is that we do not place a cap on the proportion of an ASF programme which may be delivered through a third party, provided that permission is secured pre-delivery.

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5. POSITIVE PROGRESSION

5.1. Improving learner progression and destination outcomes is central to demonstrating the impact of the Adult Skills Fund and its contribution to inclusive regional growth.

5.2. One of the most important reforms that the MCA wishes to achieve through this Commissioning Plan is to realise a substantial improvement in relation to the number of learners who progress to a positive destination as a result of an ASF intervention and a substantial improvement in the ability of the programme to accurately record and report on such positive progression.

5.3. This is necessary to demonstrate the value and impact of the programme, especially in comparison to other MCA and DfE programmes where the reporting of destinations is already consequential within their respective funding systems.

5.4. Learner progression is shaped by the combined actions of providers, employers and wider partners across the skills and employment system. The Combined Authority will lead a system wide approach to improvement, working collaboratively with providers to drive sustained improvement in progression outcomes and ensuring that accountability for delivery and impact is clearly defined and consistently applied.

5.5. To support this, the Combined Authority will establish a consistent regional approach to tracking learner destinations. Providers will be expected to record self-declared destinations as part of the exit process, supported where appropriate by proportionate follow up activity to confirm sustained progression. The Combined Authority will enhance this evidence through learner surveys, data matching and other appropriate mechanisms to ensure that destination data is robust, comparable and reflective of learner impact across the region.

5.6. The evidence generated will be used to strengthen performance monitoring and inform commissioning priorities. Destination and progression data will form a central measure of programme success and provide a transparent basis for assessing value for money, evidencing impact and directing future investment. Progression outcomes will therefore directly inform future commissioning decisions and the allocation of funding, ensuring that delivery and investment remain focused on demonstrable impact.

5.7. The primary purpose of the Adult Skills Fund is to facilitate positive and sustained learner progression across all priority areas. The Combined Authority will continue to prioritise outcomes over inputs, recognising that enabling a smaller number of residents to achieve lasting progression delivers greater public value than higher volumes with limited impact.

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5.8. Progress will be monitored annually through the Combined Authority's performance and data monitoring arrangements. Incremental improvement targets will be agreed collaboratively with providers, supporting continuous enhancement across the system while maintaining clear expectations for performance and accountability. The Combined Authority will expect to see year on year improvement in progression outcomes across all priority areas.

5.9. In addition to significantly improving the delivery and accurate reporting of positive progression we will also explore the introduction of other tools to demonstrate the impact of our investment such as the HACT too which may be of particular relevance to our Community Focussed Tailored Learning provision.

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6. LEARNER SUPPORT

6.1. In order to ensure our ASF investment is targeted on the groups of residents most likely to benefit, it is essential to make effective use of both Learner Support and Learning Support funds within the Adults Skills funding model. This is especially important within Pathways to Employment and ESOL that are intended to support our most disadvantaged and disengaged residents. Without this support many residents are effectively excluded from participating in learning.

6.2. Levels of investment in Learner Support and Learning Support have declined in recent years, and as highlighted within previous Commissioning Plans and funding rules we have now reached the point where we feel that intervention is necessary.

6.3. We will therefore set expectations regarding the proportion of funding which should be normally dedicated to Learner / Learning support within a provider's allocation.

6.4. We appreciate that there are likely to be different levels of demand across priority elements so our expectations will be:

- CLEAN ENERGY & NET-ZERO 2.5%
- DIGITAL 2.5%
- ESOL 5.0%
- PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT 5.0%
- PATHWAYS TO GROWTH 2.5%

6.5. Following further exploration, we may seek to increase these expectations incrementally over time.

6.6. We are referring to these thresholds as normal expectations rather than absolute requirements. Where a provider has a compelling reason why such investment is not desirable / necessary in relation to the learners they support we will consider agreeing to variance, provided this is agreed in advance of delivery.

6.7. We recognise that some providers report that the administrative costs associated with the Learner / Learning support system can be burdensome, but it is critical that we are able to confirm that residents with support needs are being properly supported. The ASF funding system already permits providers to utilise up-to 5% of learner / learning support funds to support administrative costs. We will increase this threshold to 10% as standard and will be willing to negotiate higher-admin costs if needed on a case-by-case basis before delivery commences.

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7. ADDRESSING REDUCED GUIDED LEARNING HOUR DELIVERY

7.1. Over recent years we have become increasingly concerned by the incidence of provision being delivered in significantly fewer guided learning hours than those recommended by Ofqual as part of the qualification approval process.

7.2. Whilst some learners are able to pass through a programme of learning at a higher pace than others, when this becomes the norm rather than the exception this is an indication that the system is not functioning as intended and this is potentially to the detriment of learners. This trend may reflect efficiency, but it can also signal inappropriate enrolment, narrow assessment preparation or missed learning opportunities.

7.3. If the majority of learners are able to achieve a qualification in significantly reduced guided learning hours it is an indication that the learners have been enrolled on the wrong qualification at the wrong level, usually as they already possessed the knowledge, skills and experience necessary to pass the qualification at the point of enrolment.

7.4. Such learners would arguably benefit more from enrolment on a different or higher-level qualification. However, our primary concern relates to the learners who are not enrolled. If a provider routinely delivers a qualification in significantly reduced guided learning hours, we question what happens to learners who require all of the recommended guided learning hours to successfully complete a qualification. Our concern is that they are not enrolled at all or are enrolled at an artificially lower level than they are capable of achieving had all recommended guided learning hours been delivered. This risks entrenching disadvantage especially for residents with low confidence or complex barriers.

7.5. We recognise that the practice of reduced guided learning hour delivery has increased in response to real funding pressure. We do not believe that reduced guided learning hour delivery is the appropriate way to respond to this pressure.

7.6. We are willing to negotiate improved funding rates to meet the true cost of delivering elements of high-priority provision and encourage providers to make use of this flexibility as the solution to funding pressure is to make funding rates commensurate with delivery costs.

7.7. We will reinstate our previous funding rule to address this concern with an amendment. This rule intends to ensure that learners received the full quota of learning to which they are entitled and embody the principle that ASF pays for the delivery of guided learning rather than the delivery of a qualification.

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7.8. Where the actual number of guided learning hours delivered within an Adult Skills qualification falls below 70% of those recommended by Ofqual the provider should reduce the level of funding claimed for the qualification.

7.9. In recognition of truly exceptional circumstances, we will consider waiving this funding rule for individual learners on a case-by-case basis if reasonable justification is submitted and agreed prior to any reduction being implemented for the individual learner.

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8. GREENING THE ADULT SKILLS FUND

8.1. The reset process will update the manner in which we embed the green agenda within the Adult Skills Fund.

8.2. The element of ASF funding previously referred to as 'Green Skills' will now be referred to as 'Pathways to Clean Energy & Net Zero'. It will focus on the delivery of High Priority qualifications likely to equip learners with the skills needed to gain direct employment within a job that offers a significant contribution towards the regions accelerated progress towards clean energy and net zero. It will also focus on Medium Priority qualifications which may not provide all of the skills required but contain a significant element of 'green' and thereby offer a potential stepping stone into the High Priority qualifications. Qualifications which only raise general awareness about the green agenda and do not provide specific skills focused on progression towards green employment will no longer be funded as part of Pathways to Net Zero but will be funded elsewhere.

8.3. Given the importance of the green agenda, we are creating two new funding rules:

- The content which raises awareness of the green agenda in general should be embedded within all provision supported by the Adult Skills Fund by the end of the four-year cycle at the latest (and earlier where possible).
- Specific green skills content should be embedded within all appropriate provision supported by the Adult Skills Fund by the end of the four-year cycle (and earlier where possible).

8.4. We will require providers to agree a plan detailing how these expectations will be realised, which we will monitor throughout the duration of the four-year cycle. Some providers have already begun this work and so if existing plans meet our requirements and allow effective monitoring, we will be happy to accept these as satisfying the new funding rules.

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9. WORK ACADEMIES

9.1. For residents who are unemployed, we consider the DWP Sector Based Work Academy Programme (SWAP) model to be amongst the most effective interventions supporting progression into work.

9.2. To compliment the DWP SWAP model we will also create our own Regional Work Academies, which mirror the DWP model but include a more substantial programme of learning.

9.3. The difference between the DWP SWAP and the Regional Work Academy is predominantly based on the duration of the programme:

- The maximum duration for the DWP SWAP programme is 6 weeks.
- A Regional Work Academy programme may have a duration which is longer than 6 weeks in order to equip the learner with more substantial skills.

9.4. In addition to this all SWAPs must be approved by DWP prior to delivery. Similarly, all Regional Work Academy programmes must be approved by the MCA prior to delivery.

9.5. A Work Academy (sector-based or Regional) is a programme that combines:

- A partnership with an employer (or group of employers) with vacancies to fill
- A programme of learning
- A work experience placement
- A guaranteed interview for a real job.

9.6. Our expectations for Work Academies funded by the MCA are as follows:

- The employer or group of employers must have enough vacancies to theoretically enable no less than 50% of learners enrolled to progress into employment with the employer or within the group of employers. Ideally there should be sufficient vacancies to allow 100% of learners to potentially secure employment.
- The work experience placement must take place in a real working environment and focus on undertaking real work as opposed to a simulated environment or content that is not real work such as guided tours.
- The programme must incorporate sufficient interaction between learners and those taking recruitment decisions within the employer or group of employers to allow the learners competence / skills to be demonstrated.

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10.FLEXIBLE DELIVERY

10.1. We recognise that it can be challenging to combine learning with other commitments in life, especially those that relate to work or caring responsibilities which frequently makes participation within traditional 'weekday daytime' hours of learning impossible for many of our residents. Therefore, in order to make the provision we fund accessible to as many eligible residents as possible we need to ensure that sufficient opportunities to participate exist beyond traditional learning hours.

10.2. We also recognise the challenges faced by providers to realise this vision, we will therefore plan to move closer to the mix and balance of flexibly accessible provision that we seek, increasing the amount we commission over this time.

BLENDED LEARNING / DISTANCE LEARNING

10.3. As detailed above, the MCA values the significant role that blended and distance learning plays in relation to making provision more accessible to more learners and encourage greater use of these delivery methods. We will not however fund distance learning which is wholly or substantially driven by software with little or no interaction between learner and tutor.

10.4. As blended and distance learning already exists at a significant scale within ASF provision we do not propose to commission this type of learning separately but encourage providers to make effective use of blended learning to increase accessibility and participation.

DELIVERY IN NON-TRADITIONAL HOURS

10.5. In the past, Adult Education was primarily delivered through evening classes, but this has declined significantly over the years, and the majority of delivery now takes place during the daytime on weekdays.

10.6. Although this may be appropriate for unemployed and economically inactive residents who seek our support to return to work, such hours represent a significant barrier to participation for residents who work during such hours or have caring responsibilities. We therefore need to redress the balance and establish a portfolio of provision accessible during evenings and weekends so that more of our residents are able to participate, especially within the elements of priority provision which are most likely to support employed residents.

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DELIVERY IN THE WORKPLACE

10.7. Perhaps the best way to make provision accessible to employed learners is to deliver ASF in the workplace in partnership with employers. Our funding rules make this possible and although some examples now exist the scale of delivery in the workplace is not yet significant and we look to providers to make effective use of this regional flexibility.

10.8. In particular, where providers face challenges concerning the delivery of provision which relate to access to equipment, delivery in the workplace has the potential to provide access to equipment and resource which would otherwise be unavailable.

COMMISSIONING

10.9. We will use the opportunity that the reset process presents to specifically direct investment towards flexible delivery within the following elements of priority provision:

- PATHWAYS TO NET ZERO
- DIGITAL
- ESOL
- PATHWAYS TO GROWTH

10.10. In recognition of the challenges faced by providers to make this happen we will begin modestly and seek to grow such flexible delivery over the duration of the four-year cycle. Increasing flexible access is central to our ambition to make ASF delivery more inclusive especially for those in low paid work with caring responsibilities or facing complex life circumstances.

11.PRIORITY ELEMENTS AND THE BASIS FOR PRIORITISATION

11.1. The following sections of the plan go on to set our commissioning priorities in more detail.

11.2. In order to focus investment, we have subdivided the Adult Skills Fund into a number of priority elements based on the nature of the provision sought. These priority elements are further sub-divided into high-priority provision and medium priority provision. All provision which does not fall within a priority element is considered to be low priority.

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11.3. The basis for our relative levels of priority is as follows:

- HIGH PRIORITY PROVISION: represents the highest commissioning priority of the MCA. I.e. types of provision which we have struggled to secure to date and therefore need to use our commissioning mechanisms to direct investment towards.
- MEDIUM PRIORITY PROVISION: represents provision which we value and have not struggled to secure in the past.

11.4. This scale of relative priority should not be taken to indicate that some forms of provision are more important than others in absolute terms, only that certain types of provision represent a particular commissioning priority. I.e. largely the new areas or provision that we need to create and grow.

11.5. Equally, it is not our intention that over time medium priority provision will be wholly replaced by high priority provision. Our expectation is that the bulk of ASF provision will always be medium priority. Indeed, as and when we secure as much high priority provision as we need to meet demand, we expect that such provision will become medium priority and be replaced by emerging elements which require a commissioning focus.

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12. ELEMENT OF PRIORITY PROVISION: PATHWAYS TO CLEAN ENERGY & NET ZERO [Adult Skills Funding Model only]

OBJECTIVE:

1. To accelerate regional access to clean energy and progress towards realising net-zero through equipping residents with the knowledge, skills and experience required to secure employment or progress within employment in the regional 'green' sector.

12.1. Previously referred to as 'Green Skills'. As detailed above, our primary intention for this priority is to equip residents with the qualifications, skills and experience needed to either secure employment opportunities which will help the region to accelerate progress towards our clean energy and net-zero ambitions or progress within such employment.

12.2. We will also include qualifications which support employment within Nature Recovery as part of this priority element.

12.3. Previously interventions which raised awareness of the green agenda in general were included within the 'Green Skills' priority. Given its strategic importance, we now expect all ASF funded provision to embed general green awareness.

12.4. Community focussed Tailored learning is not expected to progress learners immediately into employment. We encourage community focussed provision that raises awareness of the green agenda; however this will sit within a different priority pathway.

12.5. The Mayoral Combined Authority has developed and adopted the following categorisation for green skills in general:

IN-DEPTH GREEN

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The content of these courses is wholly focused on equipping learners with specialised, in-depth Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSB's) to apply in roles where some or all aspects of the job would be wholly dedicated to supporting net zero and/or nature recovery.

Examples of In-Depth Green Courses include:

- Ecology and Wildlife Conservation
- Retrofit Coordination and Risk Management
- Solar Photovoltaic Installation
- Heat Pump Installation
- Climate Science
- Environmental Management
- Low Carbon Heating Technician
- Organisational Sustainability

INTERMEDIATE GREEN

These courses integrate green knowledge, skills and behaviors (KSBs) into several areas of course content, but it is not the primary focus of the course. These courses equip learners with some of the relevant fundamental green KSBs related to the subject or industry. However, learners are likely to require further upskilling to progress onto specialist green roles. Examples include:

- A plumbing or electrotechnical course with additional content on different renewable technologies, and industry specific green careers information.
- Engineering courses that embed green KSBs throughout the course. An example would be the inclusion of green engineering principles and life cycle analysis

INTRODUCTORY GREEN

These courses provide green content that offers learners an introductory level understanding of net zero, nature recovery and/or environmental sustainability. These courses do not necessarily offer specific skills but do raise green awareness and knowledge. Examples of how this could be achieved include:

- Content on basic awareness of sustainability principles
- Introductory knowledge of how your industry is responding to the green transition
- Green careers information, advice and guidance

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12.6. We will therefore apply this categorisation to our High / Medium priority Adult Skills Fund provision as follows:

HIGH PRIORITY:

- Specific learning aims considered to be either In-Depth Green or at the higher end of Intermediate Green and are listed in this commissioning plan. These are the qualifications which will directly equip learners with the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to secure employment within or progress within jobs which directly contribute towards realising net-zero.
- Any provision delivered as part of Employer Focussed Tailored Learning which focusses on the development of new qualifications which offer skills needed to accelerate progress towards net zero.

MEDIUM PRIORITY:

- All aims which satisfy the definition of intermediate green which are not already defined as High Priority. i.e. skills which may fall short of what is necessary to directly secure employment with a net zero employer but does provide a stepping stone to progress to provision which would offer such skills.

12.7. We are conscious that clean energy & net-zero is a rapidly growing area of learning with new qualifications being developed constantly yet suffers from an absence of precise coding / classification within the ILR. Given this, we are open to proposals for additional new qualifications to be added to the lists we adopt to define Pathways to Clean Energy & Net Zero provision. Such proposals should ideally be submitted and approved before the academic year commences and certainly before delivery begins.

12.8. Across all priority elements the direction of the MCA is to move away from interventions based on the delivery of a single learning aim towards a focus on pathways which promote progression through multiple areas of learning towards a defined final progression destination (for example, a job). To this end the MCA has developed multiple defined pathways relating to domestic retrofit and nature recovery.

- Domestic Retrofit Pathways
- Nature Recovery Pathways

12.9. The elements of these pathways which are specifically focussed on net-zero will be funded from within this priority area, the more general qualifications which may be applied in other contexts (including those which are potentially harmful to net-zero) will be funded elsewhere.

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12.10. The West of England Combined Authority is also conscious that where delivery is limited to 'traditional' daytime delivery hours, this can represent a significant and potentially unsurmountable barrier to participation amongst employed residents. We will therefore encourage and / or specifically commission flexible delivery such as:

- Delivery in non-traditional hours such as evenings and weekends
- Delivery in the Workplace
- Blended Learning

12.11. Given the priorities within this element of priority learning, we expect all provision delivered as part of Pathways to Net Zero to take the form of regulated qualifications other than those delivered as part of Employer Focussed Tailored Learning.

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13. ELEMENT OF PRIORITY PROVISION: DIGITAL

OBJECTIVE:

1. To equip residents with the knowledge, skills and experience required to secure employment or progress within employment in digital roles, especially those which focus on emerging technologies.
2. To promote digital inclusion through equipping residents with the digital knowledge, skills and experience required to function effectively in everyday life and the modern workplace.

13.1. Digital skills are already an essential element of both working life and life in general and a lack of such skills may place an individual at a significant disadvantage.

13.2. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, robotics and quantum computing are also expected to revolutionise the way we live and work over the coming decades. It is therefore important that the region is more than simply prepared but leading the way in this area.

13.3. Given this, in 2026/27 we will consider the following digital provision to be a priority:

HIGH PRIORITY:

- All regulated learning aims delivered within sector subject area 6.1 (Digital Technology - Practitioners)
- Any provision delivered as part of Employer Focussed Tailored Learning which focusses on the development of new Digital qualifications.

MEDIUM PRIORITY:

- All regulated learning aims that fall within sector subject area 6.2 (Digital Technology – Users)
- Non-regulated digital provision delivered through Tailored Learning interventions

13.4. In addition to the regulated qualifications which satisfy the definitions above, we will consider adding specific regulated qualifications from other sector subject areas on a case-by-case basis where the content of the course is primarily digital in nature. For

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example, qualifications from the creative SSA which focus on the production of digital content or gaming.

13.5. We are particularly keen to see digital qualifications routinely packaged with other courses where learners lack appropriate digital skills.

13.6. The West of England Combined Authority is conscious that where delivery is limited to 'traditional' daytime delivery hours, this can represent a significant and potentially unsurmountable barrier to participation amongst employed residents. We will therefore encourage and / or specifically commission flexible delivery such as:

- Delivery in non-traditional hours such as evenings and weekends
- Delivery in the Workplace
- Blended Learning

13.7. We will specifically commission delivery in non-traditional hours and delivery in the workplace. Providers may incorporate blended learning as part of their general offer.

13.8. Given the priorities within this element of priority learning, we expect all high priority provision delivered as part of Digital to take the form of regulated qualifications other than those delivered as part of Employer Focussed Tailored Learning. Medium priority provision may be delivered through non-regulated approaches as part of community focussed tailored learning.

13.9. The Combined Authority will use the reset process to set a clear expectation: all ASF provision must embed relevant digital skills, tools or content into delivery and/or assessment proportionate to learner level and sector context by the end of the four-year cycle.

13.10. This reflects OECD guidance that digital skills are now foundational alongside literacy and numeracy, and Employer Skills Survey data showing demand across all sectors. Embedding may include digital tools, platforms, or content that supports learner progression or sector-specific outcomes.

13.11. We recognise that meaningful embedding may look different across provision types. For example, a lighter or phased approach may be appropriate for pre-entry ESOL or certain community learning. However, any provision without digital embedding must include a clear, evidenced rationale in the Curriculum and Delivery Plan.

13.12. All providers must outline their digital embedding approach from 2026/27 onwards, with annual improvements expected across the cycle. This forms part of our wider

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digital inclusion strategy and supports learner progression, employer responsiveness and regional productivity.

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14.ELEMENT OF PRIORITY PROVISION: ESOL

OBJECTIVE:

1. To equip residents with the English language communication skills required to function within the West of England
2. To support such residents to secure employment

14.1. ESOL represents a significant challenge for the region as reported demand for provision often exceeds capacity, or even the level that could ever be supported through ASF alone without having a detrimental impact on other areas of provision. We have therefore opted to stabilise investment in ESOL over the duration of this four-year cycle and therefore any increase in ESOL learner numbers must be realised through making ESOL programmes more efficient and progressing learners through the system to a positive destination at a more appropriate pace.

14.2. Our most significant challenge appears to be that learners enter the ESOL system at a far higher rate than they are exiting it because learners appear to become 'stuck' in the system, drawing upon the limited resource available rather than progressing through the system at a reasonable pace and onwards to an appropriate positive destination.

14.3. The Combined Authority has concluded that in order to effectively face the challenges presented by ESOL demand it is important that we encourage a more cohesive and structured approach that better supports learners to progress through the system into appropriate positive destinations. This includes a greater focus on pathways which incorporate the following elements (as appropriate to the learner):

- Intensive regulated ESOL delivery
- Reinforcement of regulated delivery through non-regulated Tailored Learning Interventions
- Vocationally contextualised delivery
- Employability support
- Skills training
- Digital inclusion
- Work Experience

14.4. We therefore expect all providers to enrol most ESOL learners onto regulated qualifications as the primary component within their learning plan. The exception to this are learners with assessed needs that indicate that they are clearly not yet

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capable of being enrolled onto a regulated qualification and require support via a non-regulated route before this would be possible. Where this exception is the case we would expect the learner to be supported to enrol on a regulated qualification as quickly as they are able (though we recognise that this may be an extended period for some learners).

14.5. We consider the primary role of non-regulated learning (other than within the exception detailed above) to be reinforcing regulated ESOL deliver as opposed to replacing it, and we therefore encourage valuable reinforcement such conservation clubs.

14.6. We also place great emphasis on the role robust initial assessment and careers information, advice and guidance play in relation to ESOL and are exploring means through which to enhance this in parallel to this commissioning process.

14.7. We will therefore define High and Medium Priority ESOL as follows:

- HIGH PRIORITY:
  - All ESOL delivered as part of a cohesive programme combining:
    - Intensive regulated ESOL delivery
    - Reinforcement of regulated delivery through non-regulated Tailored Learning Interventions
    - Vocationally contextualised delivery
    - Employability support
    - Skills training
    - Digital inclusion
    - Work Experience
- MEDIUM PRIORITY
  - All ESOL delivery which does not include the elements detailed above.

14.8. We also wish to explore how Sector Based Work Academy (SWAP) provision may be utilised in support of ESOL learners as we believe that the opportunity to combine ESOL delivery with work experience placements leading to real interviews for actual jobs may prove to be extremely effective for residents who may be very able to demonstrate their competence in a work environment but may be placed at a disadvantage if required to secure employment through communicating this in a

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traditional interview process. We will therefore seek to specifically commission ESOL SWAP provision within the reset process.

14.9. The West of England Combined Authority is conscious that where delivery is limited to 'traditional' daytime delivery hours, this can represent a significant and potentially unsurmountable barrier to participation amongst employed residents. We will therefore encourage and / or specifically commission flexible delivery such as:

- Delivery in non-traditional hours such as evenings and weekends
- Delivery in the Workplace
- Blended Learning

14.10. We will specifically commission delivery in non-traditional hours and delivery in the workplace. Providers may incorporate blended learning as part of their general offer.

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15. ELEMENT OF PRIORITY PROVISION: PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT

OBJECTIVE:

1. To support residents who are unemployed or economically inactive to progress into work through identifying the specific barriers which prevent the individual from doing this and delivering a programme of learning and support to remove such barriers.

15.1. This element of priority provision in intended to support residents who are either unemployed or economically inactive through equipping them with the knowledge, skills and experience required to progress into or closer to work.

15.2. We refer to this as 'pathways to employment' in recognition of the fact that for many learners (especially those furthest from work) it is unlikely that employment may be secured through a single isolated intervention. We therefore afford highest priority to programmes which combine multiple elements of learning and support which effectively address the specific barriers that hinder the learner's progression into employment. This includes:

- Robust ongoing CEIAG to effectively understand and guide the realistic aspirations of the learner.
- Robust and ongoing initial assessment and progress review to effectively identify the specific barriers which prevent the learner's realistic aspirations from being realised.
- An individually tailored package of learning aims intended to address each barrier to employment identified, especially:
    - Literacy
    - Numeracy
    - Communication Skills
    - Digital Inclusion
    - Specific Skills Training
- A significant package of work-tasters and work experience
- Where possible, guaranteed interviews for actual jobs.

15.3. We therefore define high and medium priority provision within Pathways to employment as follows:

HIGH PRIORITY

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- Any pathways which incorporate the elements detailed above and agreed with the Combined Authority through the Curriculum and Delivery Planning process
- All accredited literacy and numeracy qualifications up to and including level 2 (ESOL and Digital equivalents are supported through other elements of priority provision)
- All Sector Based Work Academy Provision

MEDIUM PRIORITY

- Residents who are not undertaking courses that satisfy the above but fall within the following definitions:
  - Have been unemployed or economically inactive for 6 months or more prior to enrolment.
  - Have prior attainment below full level 2.
  - Are aged 50 or above
  - Learners with diagnosed learning difficulties and or disabilities
  - All Access to Higher Education provision
- Residents participating in key Community Focussed Tailored Learning provision such as Family Learning

15.4. The MCA considers the Department of Work and Pensions Sector Based Work Academy Programme (SWAP) to be amongst the most effective means through which to support residents to find work. Given this, and in support of the government intention to expand SWAP provision we will specifically commission SWAPs as part of the reset process as a key element within this element of priority provision.

15.5. Given the priorities within this element of priority learning, we expect provision delivered as part of Pathways to Employment to effectively combine both regulated qualifications delivered as part of the Adult Skills element of the programme and non-regulated interventions delivered as part of Community Focussed Tailored Learning.

15.6. Where a learner faces a barrier to employment where an employer is likely to seek a certain level of qualification (such as literacy and numeracy), we expect learners to be enrolled on regulated qualifications at an appropriate point within their programme to address such barriers (e.g. enrolment on functional skills qualifications). Non-regulated qualifications may be delivered in parallel to such interventions to reinforce and embed learning, but they should not be used as an alternative to regulated delivery.

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16. ELEMENT OF PRIORITY PROVISION: PATHWAYS TO GROWTH

OBJECTIVE:

1. To support residents who are employed to progress within work or secure better work through equipping them with enhanced knowledge, skills and experience.
2. To support residents to progress into Higher Education opportunities which support the Regional Growth Strategy through the delivery of qualifications which satisfy entry requirements for such qualifications

16.1. This element of priority provision is intended to support residents who are in work and wish to progress within their employment.

16.2. It is anticipated that many of the skills that are likely to directly drive growth in the region will be at levels higher than that which can be funded as ASF provision and will therefore be supported through other programmes such as higher education provision and Skills Bootcamps.

16.3. A key role for ASF is therefore to equip residents with the skills that act as a precursor or entry requirement for such courses. The MCA believes that the most effective means through which ASF can support this effort is through focussing on the delivery of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects.

16.4. We also recognise the key importance of progression to transformational courses at levels 2 and 3 which unlock employment opportunities in non-STEM sectors, and of course the prime importance of literacy and numeracy. We therefore prioritise the following Pathways to Growth:

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HIGH PRIORITY

- All learning aims from the following sector subject areas:
  - 2.1. Science
  - 2.2. Mathematics and Statistics
  - 4.1. Engineering
- Diplomas and Certificates (or equivalent) from non-STEM sector subject areas delivered at levels 2 and 3
- Any regulated literacy and numeracy qualifications up to and including level 2 (digital and ESOL are already prioritised elsewhere)
- Any provision delivered as part of Employer Focussed Tailored Learning, other than that which focusses on the development of new green or digital qualifications
- Any Access to Higher Education qualification

MEDIUM PRIORITY

- Any learning aim undertaken by employed residents who satisfy one or more of the following criteria:
  - Have an income that falls below the Real Living Wage
  - Have prior attainment below full level 2
  - Are aged 50 or above
  - Are Learners with diagnosed learning difficulties and or disabilities
- Residents participating in key Community Focussed Tailored Learning provision such as Family Learning

16.5. The West of England Combined Authority is conscious that where delivery is limited to 'traditional' daytime delivery hours, this can represent a significant and potentially unsurmountable barrier to participation amongst employed residents. We will therefore encourage and / or specifically commission flexible deliver such as:

- Delivery in non-traditional hours such as evenings and weekends
- Delivery in the Workplace
- Blended Learning

16.6. We will specifically commission delivery in non-traditional hours and delivery in the workplace. Providers may incorporate blended learning as part of their general offer.

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16.7. Given the priorities within this element of priority learning, we expect all provision delivered as part of Pathways to Growth to take the form of regulated qualifications other than those delivered as part of Employer Focussed Tailored Learning.

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17.LOW PRIORITY PROVISION

17.1. The MCA will consider any element of provision which does not satisfy any of the definitions of elements of priority provision as set out above to be low priority provision.

17.2. Existing providers have responded exceptionally well over previous years to minimise the incidence of low priority provision within their portfolios, and we will continue to do this over the four-year cycle.

17.3. Given this we will not commission any low-priority provision through the ASF process, but existing providers will be granted a small and decreasing element of funding to support any residual provision as they work to remove this.

18.FUNDING RATES

IMPROVED FUNDING RATES FOR HIGH PRIORITY PROVISION

18.1. We acknowledge that the level of funding available per learner can present a significant barrier to delivering priority provision, especially where funding rates are insufficient to offer a competitive salary. We are keen to explore ways of addressing this, while acknowledging that some barriers are not entirely within our powers to resolve.

18.2. One potential solution which does fall within our powers is the setting of funding rates. We are willing to consider offering improved funding rates for the delivery of high-priority provision where affordability of delivery presents a significant barrier to delivery. We will aim to ensure that the reasonable costs associated with delivery are fully covered within the level of funding offered.

18.3. We are conscious that within a finite budget, any increase to funding rates will lead to a commensurate reduction to learner numbers. We believe this is an appropriate exchange if it results in more learners undertaking our highest priority provision and more learners progressing to appropriate positive destinations.

18.4. Any negotiation of improved funding rates for high priority provision will be focussed on covering the actual costs associated with delivering the provision plus whatever is necessary to cover reasonable organisational overheads. Negotiations will be conducted as part of the Curriculum and Delivery Planning Process and will be targeted to ensure an appropriate balance between the level of investment in individual learners and total learner numbers.

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18.5. This flexibility will not be available where provision could potentially be funded as either community focussed or employer focussed tailored learning which is already funded in line with actual costs as opposed to fixed funding rates per qualification.

VARIABLE CO-FUNDING RATES

18.6. We have also reformed the co-funding mechanism to align with our three tiers of priority. Rather than applying a flat 50% co funding fee to all learners who don't qualify for full funding, we will expect lower fees for those wishing to undertake high priority provision balanced by greater fees for those undertaking low priority provision.

- High Priority Provision: **20%** Co-Funding Fee
- Medium Priority Provision: **50%** Co-funding Fee
- Low Priority Provision: **80%** Co-funding Fee

18.7. As is already the case, we expect co-funding fees to be collected from all learners who do not qualify for full funding. Providers may adopt fee remission policies which allow fees to be waived in specific circumstances. Such policies must be agreed by the Combined Authority in advance of delivery through the Curriculum and Delivery Planning Process and a record of any evidence / decision to waive fees in a relation to an individual learner must be retained on the individual learner file.

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19.COMMUNITY FOCUSSED TAILORED LEARNING

19.1. The Community Focussed element of Tailored Learning will continue to be of significant importance to the Combined Authority, especially where this facilitates critical interventions which would not be possible under the Adult Skills funding mechanism due to a lack of appropriate learning aims, or an inability to deliver an important service effectively in a financially viable way under fixed rates associated with regulated learning aims.

19.2. All Community Focussed Tailored Learning shall be considered to be at least medium priority to the MCA.

19.3. Combined Authority Funding Rules set out our general objectives for the Community Focussed Element of Tailored Learning. These are set out in Annex C

19.4. The specific objectives for Community Focussed Tailored Learning (CFTL) sit underneath and supplement the general objectives for the ASF programme as a whole and the priorities for each individual element of priority learning as detailed above.

19.5. Community-Focussed Tailored Learning may also be designated High or Medium within each pathway where it directly contributes to the stated objectives.

19.6. In recent years we have also encouraged providers to use the Community Focussed Tailored Learning funding mechanism to create and fill roles that add significant value to the Adult Skills Fund provision for the types of residents who fall within our general objectives. To the existing functions we encourage, this commissioning plan will add a further role. These roles are:

LOCAL INTELLIGENCE GATHERING: Individuals or Teams tasked with directly engaging with our most disadvantaged communities (including organisations present within or serving the communities) in order to determine what the specific learning and skills needs of the community are:

- What positive progression opportunities are available?
- What barriers hinder the ability of residents to access these opportunities?
- What type of curriculum and support offer would best address these barriers?

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ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: Individuals or teams tasked with directly engaging with the residents of our most disadvantaged communities and encouraging / supporting / facilitating their transition into appropriate learning pathways (ideally those considered to be High Priority)

PROGRESSION SUPPORT: Individuals or teams tasked with managing the successful transition of learners completing ASF programmes to their intended positive progression destination, ensuring that the progression is secure and properly recorded.

19.7. Any learner supported by the roles described above must be the type of learner who could be legitimately enrolled on Community Focussed Tailored Learning provision (even if actually enrolled on Adult Skills Provision).

19.8. As has been the case in previous years, we are happy for providers to propose whatever balance they feel is appropriate between the Adult Skills and Community Focussed Tailored Learning elements of their overall allocation. Our priority is to enable providers to utilise the most appropriate budget for whatever task they are undertaking. Where the balance is planned to change significantly between years or in-year this should be discussed and agreed with the Combined Authority before delivery commences.

19.9. We will introduce new approaches to enable effective monitoring of how community focussed tailored learning funding is utilised.

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20.EMPLOYER FOCUSSED TAILORED LEARNING

20.1. The MCA will use Employer Focussed Tailored Learning (EFTL) to respond to emerging skills needs, especially those which relate to our growth sectors, digital and net zero where the current portfolio of regulated qualifications available to providers are unable to adequately respond to the needs of employers. For example, in relation to a new form of technology with significant capacity to drive growth or accelerate progress towards net zero.

20.2. For clarity, this is not intended to provide bespoke training for employers where existing regulated qualifications are available and capable of delivering everything the employer needs (and potentially more thereby also benefitting the learner).

20.3. Our expectation is that in addition to supporting individual employers, the end product of our investment in Employer Focussed Tailored Learning will be a regulated qualification which will eventually be available to be funded through the Adult Skills component of ASF and thereby of benefit to all employers / providers.

20.4. Employer Focussed Tailored Learning functions in a manner analogous to Community Focussed Tailored Learning, i.e. funding will not be linked to specific rates for individual learning aims but will instead be made available to cover the actual costs associated with delivering a service. I.e. the salaries and reasonable costs associated with delivering a service. In the case of Employer Focussed Tailored Learning the 'service' is the development of a new qualification (which may include cohorts of learners used to test approaches and content).

20.5. Provision that builds readiness for employability programmes will continue as Medium-priority provision supporting progression into High-priority employment pathways.

20.6. Employer Focussed Tailored Learning may be approved through the submission of a costed business case or through the Curriculum and Delivery Planning Process.

20.7. Our primary objective for Employer Focussed Tailored Learning will be to:

> Respond to emerging skills needs not currently addressed in an effective manner through existing regulated qualifications. Supporting providers, employers and awarding bodies to work together to develop appropriate programmes of learning with the end goal being establishing the curriculum developed as a nationally recognised regulated qualification.

20.8. Our secondary objective for Employer Focussed Tailored Learning will be to establish / support the following functions:

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EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT: Individuals or Teams tasked with engaging employers to support the delivery of work-tasters, work experience and positive progression opportunities for Adult Skills Fund Learners.

PROGRESSION SUPPORT: Individuals or teams tasked with managing the successful transition of learners completing ASF programmes to their intended positive progression destination, ensuring that the progression is secure and properly recorded (complimenting the function which sits within the Community Focussed element of Tailored Learning for learners who are not appropriately supported by that element

20.9. Utilisation of Employer Focussed Tailored Learning must be agreed in advance of delivery as part of the Curriculum and Delivery planning process. The proposals most likely to be approved will be the ones which best support our priorities / fill the most pressing gaps in provision.

20.10. We will initially limit utilisation of Employer Focussed Tailored Learning to no more than 5% of your total allocation (but may be willing to increase this in subsequent years, subject to evidence of progress and effectiveness).

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ANNEX A: PATHWAYS TO CLEAN ENERGY AND NET-ZERO

This annex sets out the qualifications which will be considered to be either high-priority or medium priority within Pathways to Clean Energy and Net-Zero.

Note that qualifications which focus on 'green awareness' and those which do not equip learners with the skills required to secure employment within green industries have been removed from this priority element but remain potentially fundable elsewhere within ASF. We are also creating new funding rules which aim to 'green the curriculum' over a period of time. This is expected to reduce the need for bespoke 'green awareness' qualifications as such awareness will be embedded within all courses.

The qualifications detailed below are those which we are able to confirm will be considered to be high or medium priority at the time of publishing. However, this is a rapidly evolving sector within which new qualifications are introduced and old qualifications removed quite regularly. Given this the published list will quickly go out of date over time.

We therefore anticipate change and invite providers to suggest any additional qualifications that they wish to deliver to be added to the list. This must however be done in advance of delivery so we are in a position to decide whether or not the qualification should be included, and if so at which priority level.

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HIGH PRIORITY

LEARNING AIM REFERENCE	AWARDING BODY	LEARNING AIM TITLE	AWARD / CERT / DIPLOMA	LEVEL	GLH
61022512	CG	RETROFIT	CERTIFICATE	2	120
60376879	CG	NVQ IN INSULATION AND BUILDING TREATMENTS (CONSTRUCTION)	DIPLOMA	2	264
60337266	PROQUAL	NVQ DIPLOMA IN INSULATION AND BUILDING TREATMENTS (CONSTRUCTION)	DIPLOMA	2	154
60372060	NOCN	NVQ DIPLOMA IN INSULATION AND BUILDING TREATMENTS (CONSTRUCTION)	DIPLOMA	2	234
60323280	PROQUAL	NVQ DIPLOMA IN THERMAL INSULATION (CONSTRUCTION)	DIPLOMA	2	427
60018884	BPECT	SMART METERING - DUAL FUEL	DIPLOMA	2	322
60012705	CG	SMART METERING - POWER	DIPLOMA	2	148
60018902	BPECT	SMART METERING - POWER	DIPLOMA	2	148
60325914	SQA	THERMAL INSULATION	DIPLOMA	2	406
61033613	NOCN	APPLYING SURFACE FINISH TO INTERNAL WALL INSULATION	CERTIFICATE	3	180
61004960	AIMAWARD	CERTIFICATE IN DOMESTIC RETROFIT ADVICE	CERTIFICATE	3	90
60057397	CG	DOMESTIC ENERGY ASSESSMENT	CERTIFICATE	3	120
61022627	CG	DOMESTIC ENERGY ASSESSMENT	CERTIFICATE	3	120
61033686	NOCN	INTALLING EXTERNAL WALL INSULATION	CERTIFICATE	3	180
60368536	ABBE	RETROFIT ASSESSORS	CERTIFICATE	3	27
60372072	NOCN	NVQ DIPLOMA IN INSULATION AND BUILDING TREATMENTS (CONSTRUCTION)	DIPLOMA	3	396
60325902	SQA	THERMAL INSULATION	DIPLOMA	3	457

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MEDIUM PRIORITY

LEARNING AIM REFERENCE	AWARDING BODY	LEARNING AIM TITLE	AWARD / CERT / DIPLOMA	LEVEL	GLH
61000720	NOCN	ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY	AWARD	1	60
60125068	PROQUAL	UNDERSTANDING CARBON AWARENESS AND ENERGY MANAGEMENT	AWARD	1	10
61003888	SQA	NVQ THERMAL INSULATION - FIT PROTECTION	AWARD	2	60
60134823	LCL	PRINCIPLES OF METERING FOR RENEWABLE HEAT INSRALLATIONS	AWARD	2	5
6101199X	CG	RETROFIT	AWARD	2	30
60125056	PROQUAL	UNDERSTANDING CARBON AWARENESS AND ENERGY MANAGEMENT	AWARD	2	10
60371237	NOCN	UNDERSTANDING DOMESTIC RETROFIT	AWARD	2	21
60371237	NOCN	UNDERSTANDING DOMESTIC RETROFIT	AWARD	2	21
61005071	ETCAL	UNDERSTANDING DOMESTIC RETROFIT	AWARD	2	32
61022500	AIMAWARD	UNDERSTANDING DOMESTIC RETROFIT	AWARD	2	30
61022500	AIMAWARD	UNDERSTANDING DOMESTIC RETROFIT	AWARD	2	30
61008175	BPECT	AIR SOURCE HEAT PUMP SYSTEMS (NON-REFIGERANT CIRCUITS)	AWARD	3	20
60057750	LCL	AWARD IN THE INSTALLATION AND MAINTAINANCE OF SMALL SCALE SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC SYSTEMS	AWARD	3	35
61014977	GC	DESIGN AND QUALITY ASSURANCE OF LARGE-SCALE ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING INSTALLATIONS	AWARD	3	24
61020916	EAL	DESIGN, INSTALLATION AND COMMISSIONING OF ELECRICAL ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEMS	AWARD	3	23
61048409	CG	DESIGN, INSTALLATION AND COMMISSIONING OF ELECRICAL ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEMS	AWARD	3	15
61015933	AIMAWARD	DOMESTIC RETROFIT ADVICE	AWARD	3	30
6101607X	NOCN	ENERGY EFFICIENCY MEASURES FOR OLDER AND TRADITIONAL BUILDINGS	AWARD	3	21
61032839	IMI	HYDROGEN FUEL CELL ELECTRIC VEHICLE SYSTEM REPAIR AND REPLACEMENT	AWARD	3	34
60377902	LCL	INSTALLATION AND MAINTAINANCE OF AIR SOURCE HEAT PUMP SYSTEMS (NON-REFRIDGERANT CIRCUITS)	AWARD	3	30
60377914	LCL	INSTALLATION AND MAINTAINANCE OF GROUND SOURCE HEAT PUMPS SYSTEMS (NON-REFRIGERANT CIRCUITS)	AWARD	3	30
61048410	CG	INSTALLATION AND MAINTAINANCE OF SMALL PHOTOVOLTAIC SYSTEMS	AWARD	3	22
60051759	EAL	INSTALLATION AND MAINTAINANCE OF SMALL SCALE SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC SYSTEMS	AWARD	3	50
60074395	LCL	INSTALLATION AND MAINTAINANCE OF SOLAR THERMAL HOT WATER SYSTEMS	AWARD	3	28
61046401	CG	REQUIREMENTS FOR DESIGN AND INSTALLATION OF DOMESTIC AND SMALL COMMERCIAL ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING INSTALLATION	AWARD	3	15
60339299	EAL	REQUIREMENTS FOR THE INSTALLATION OF ELECTRICAL VEHICLE CHARGING POINTS	AWARD	3	7
61039081	EAL	TECHNICAL SPECIALIST INSTALLATION OF ELECTRICAL VEHICLE CHARGING EQUIPMENT	AWARD	3	10

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ANNEX C:

OBJECTIVES FOR COMMUNITY FOCUSSED TAILORED LEARNING

A. Focus public funding on people who are disadvantaged and least likely to participate, including in rural areas and people on low incomes with low skills

B. Collect fee income from people who can afford to pay and use where possible to extend provision to those who cannot

C. Widen participation and transform people's destinies by supporting progression relevant to personal circumstances, including:

    1. improved confidence and willingness to engage in learning
    2. acquisition of skills preparing people for training, employment, or self-employment
    3. improved digital, financial literacy and/or communication skills
    4. parents/carers better equipped to support and encourage their children's learning or improved/maintained health and/or social well-being

D. Develop stronger communities, with more self-sufficient, connected, and proactive citizens, leading to:

    1. increased volunteering, civic engagement, and social integration
    2. reduced costs on welfare, health, and anti-social behaviour
    3. increased online learning and self-organised learning
    4. the lives of our most troubled families being turned around

E. Commission, deliver and support learning in ways that contribute directly to these objectives, including:

    1. bringing together people from backgrounds, cultures, and income groups, including people who can/cannot afford to pay
    2. using effective local partnerships to bring together key providers and relevant local agencies and services
    3. devolving planning and accountability to neighbourhood/parish level, with local people involved in decisions about the learning offer
    4. involving volunteers and Voluntary and Community Sector groups, shifting long term, 'blocked' classes into learning clubs, growing self- organised learning groups, and encouraging employers to support informal learning in the workplace

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5. supporting the wide use of online information and learning resources minimising overheads, bureaucracy & administration

F. The Combined Authority expects providers accessing tailored learning funding to engage with smaller community-based organisations and partly deliver adult skills funding provision through them in order to widen participation (especially amongst under-represented groups) and develop the capacity and enhance the resilience of the community-based organisation.

G. Directly engage with disadvantaged communities (either geographic or communities of interest) to establish a robust understanding of the specific barriers that prevent residents from engaging in learning and / or progressing into employment.

H. Work directly with disadvantaged residents to promote and incentivise their reengagement and recruit them onto appropriate adult skills provision.

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