

Creating opportunities: the WEA strategy

wea.org.uk

WEA

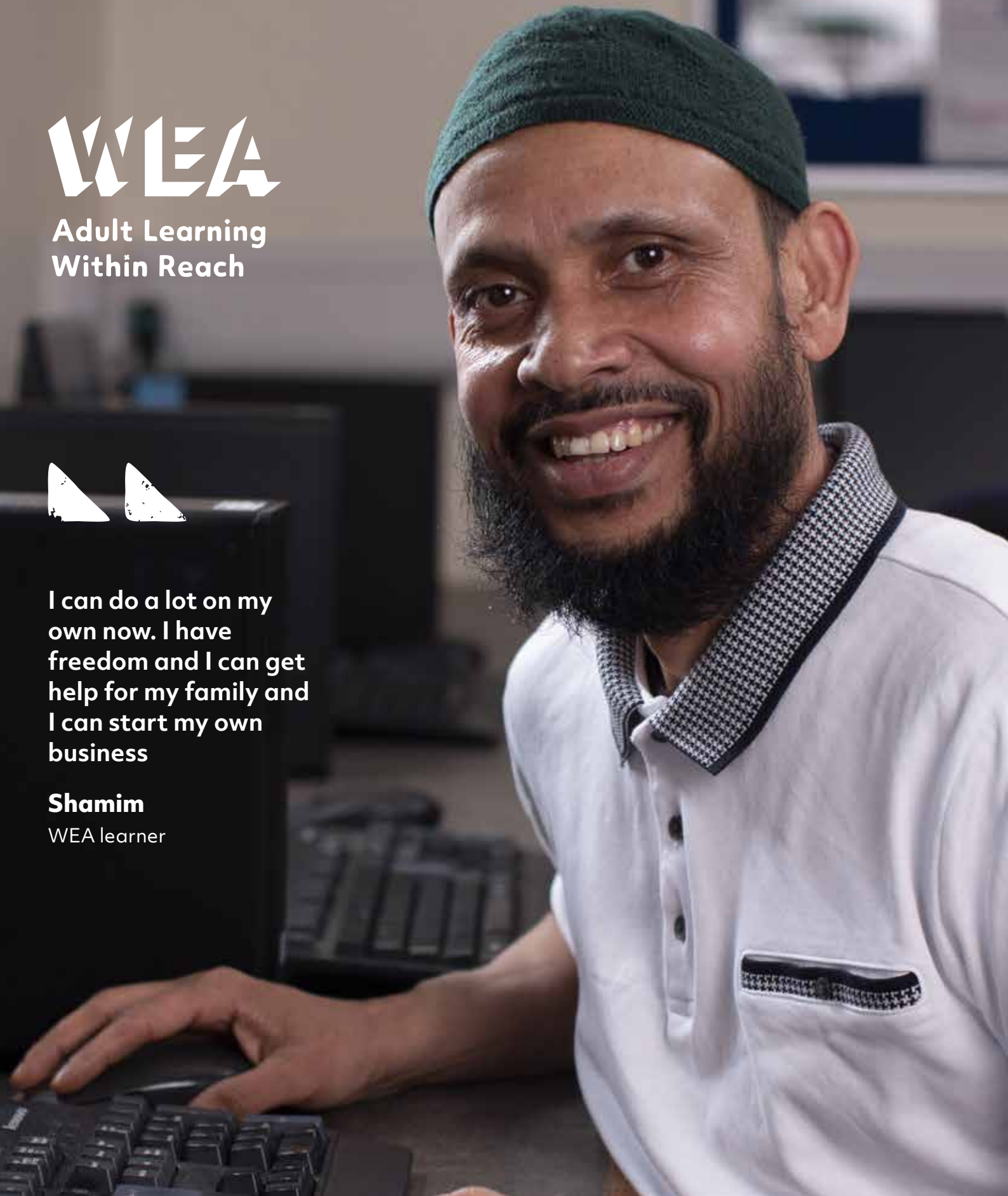
Adult Learning
Within Reach



I can do a lot on my own now. I have freedom and I can get help for my family and I can start my own business

Shamim

WEA learner



3.7million
people in the UK
are in low paid
and insecure work

(Living Wage
Foundation, 2021)

£388
million is the
weekly cost of
poor numeracy to
the UK economy

(National
Numeracy, 2019)

7.1
million people
have very poor
literacy skills

(National Literacy
Trust, 2021)

By 2030, over
30 million
people will need
to be re-skilled

(CBI/McKinsey, 2020)

**Nine
million**

people still can't
use the internet
without help

(Good Things Foundation, 2020)

The need

43%

of unemployed
people have poor
mental health

(Health Foundation, 2021)

5% of adults
say they
feel lonely
often or always

(ONS, 2021)

ONE IN
THREE

who have no
qualifications live
in poverty

(Joseph Rowntree
Foundation, 2019)

An extra
1.2 million
people would receive
training if those with
low qualifications
participated as much
as those with degrees

(Learning & Work
Institute, 2021)

61%

of local authority districts
contain a deprived
neighbourhood

(Ministry of Housing,
Communities, Local
Government, 2019)

Welcome from the Chair of Trustees and Chief Executive & General Secretary

We can't imagine a time when the WEA could be more needed than today as the UK adjusts to living with Covid-19 and recovers from the economic and social impact of lockdowns and the war in Ukraine. The need for adult learning which is within reach, within every community, couldn't be greater.

We are here for those adults to develop skills for life, skills for jobs and skills to cope with social isolation and improve physical and mental health. We want to give everyone opportunity, and make sure no one is left behind.

To do this, we need to be agile, responsive, and imaginative in the way we use the funds entrusted to us. The WEA receives and manages substantial public and charitable funding, from newly devolved combined authorities, from central government and via a range of other sources.

The priorities of our funders are changing. The UK Government is committed to lifelong learning and investing in education, but its focus is significantly on higher level skills for jobs, to the exclusion of anything else for reducing investment in other important outcomes. Devolved authorities and the Scottish Government are also focussing in this area.

We also know we need to seek and secure funding for the important courses we deliver which fall outside of those priorities. The critical role of more basic skills training, or the role other subjects play in building confidence, supporting mental health and enticing adults back into education, is not well understood.

We are confident that this strategy will help us navigate the next three years. And, we are determined to ensure

that we provide value for money, making every penny go as far as we can, so that as many people as possible benefit from the life-changing learning we provide.

The good news is, our century of history provides a solid base, which will allow us to adapt and change as the world around us changes.

In 2020 when the impact of the pandemic was first felt, we fast-tracked the conversion of the classroom teaching so valued by our learners to online delivery. Over 6000 courses were delivered online from a standing start and our membership increased. In 2021, we committed to a digital transformation, replacing legacy systems, and focussing on improving our learner experience. We are ready to deal with the challenges to come.

The opportunities are endless, and the need for what we offer even greater. An exciting future lies ahead.

We can't imagine a time when the WEA could be more needed than today as the UK redefines its position on the global stage post Brexit, adjusts to living with Covid-19, recovers from the economic and social impact of lockdowns and responds to the war in Ukraine. The need for adult learning which is within reach, within every community, nationally and internationally couldn't be greater.



John Widdowson CBE
WEA Chair



Simon Parkinson
CEO and General Secretary, WEA

In Scotland, the focus is on providing support and increasing education opportunities for disadvantaged people as we navigate a period of economic and COVID recovery. Two strategies - the National Strategy for Economic Transformation and the imminent Adult Learning Strategy - will drive action, underpinned by a new funding model, the creation of the Children, Families and Third Sector Fund and the promise of new money.

As outlined in this strategy, WEA Scotland will focus on creating access to education for underrepresented groups and those with low or no qualifications. We will deliver a lifetime upskilling and retraining offer, including for jobs in green industries, concentrating on working age

people living in poverty. We will also focus on readiness for employment, building confidence, enhancing social integration, mental health and wellbeing and civic involvement.



Ray McCowan
Director of Education: Scotland

Our charitable mission

To bring adult education within reach of everyone who needs it, fighting inequality and promoting social justice.

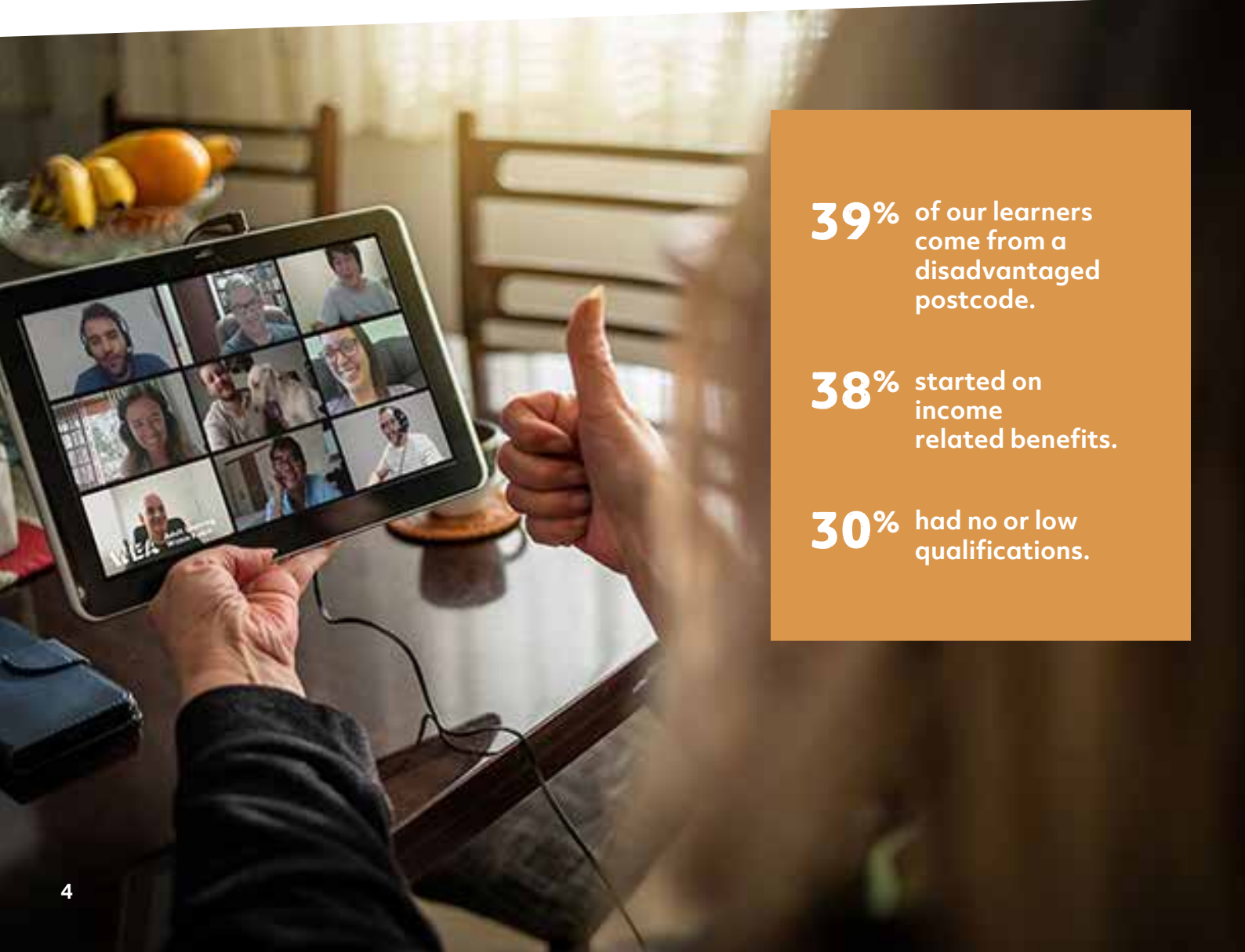
The WEA is a leading education charity with a legacy that stretches back over 115 years. We empower adults by bringing great teaching to local communities across England and Scotland, reaching tens of thousands of learners each year. The WEA is here to bring education to individuals for the benefit of the community. We believe every adult should have access to education and its benefits right on their doorstep. Currently,

the opportunity for a better future is too often made inaccessible for reasons including cost, location and a lack of information.

We are committed to removing any barriers so that individuals can improve their own life chances and have a positive impact on their communities and society as a whole.

We are different from further education colleges. We reach into communities where learners live and work to deliver learning in surroundings they are familiar with and comfortable in. Our smaller class sizes mean learners get more personal care, attention and support and we teach to a person, not to a qualification or an award.

We achieve this by working in partnership with over 100 community-based venues and local networks across the UK and with like minded partners internationally.



39% of our learners come from a disadvantaged postcode.

38% started on income related benefits.

30% had no or low qualifications.



Our approach

We focus on the learning needs of those who need education most. We are unique, both in how we choose our provision and how we engage and support our learners.

Why?

Because we need to reach learners who have often struggled with core subjects such as maths and English and have often left school with no or low qualifications and a lasting knock to their confidence. We also need to reach into communities where lack of fulfilment is the experience of generation after generation in the UK, as well as those integrating into our society from other countries as refugees and asylum-seekers who have no or little experience of formal education.

Because we listen to the needs of communities, employers and unions, who need employees with team-working skills, flexibility and problem solving, or a knowledge of sectors such as health and social care, customer service, for example, as well as those who need advanced technical skills or a knowledge of the sciences.

Because we listen to the interests, passions and skills needs of our learners, when we make our choices as to what we teach, and how we network with our series of community organisations and local employers to facilitate their desired learning outcomes.

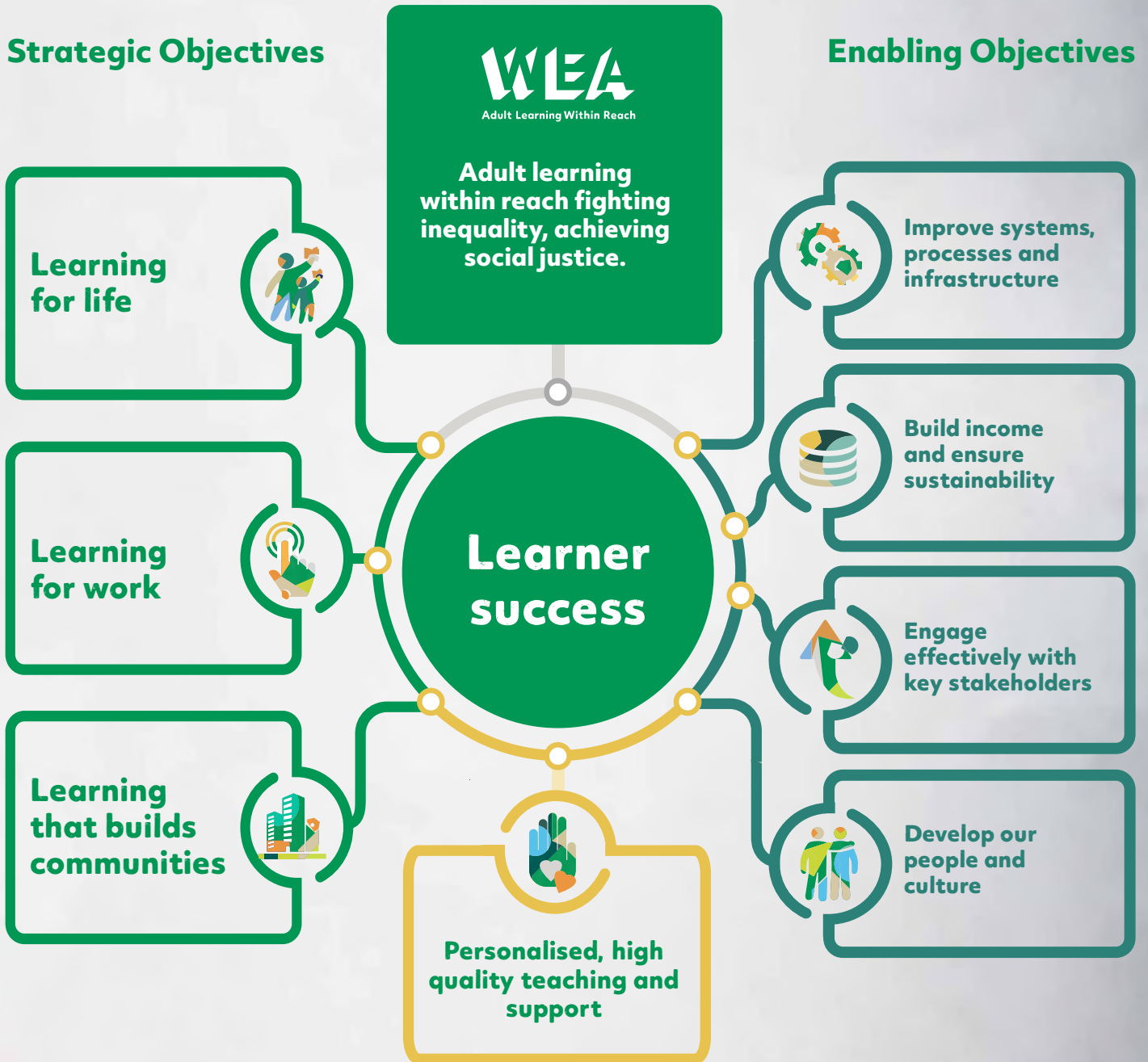
So, what does our teaching look like?

Both online and in-person, we believe in keeping group size down, making it easier for our learners to speak up, get to know their group and get actively involved in learning and sharing their own expertise.

This also allows our experienced tutors to tailor their approach to the exact needs and interests of their tutor group, both in the tutorials and in the complementary materials provided in our virtual learning centre.

Between the expert tutor and a friendly and integrated tutor group, each learner develops a fantastic learning network and informal support safety-net.

Creating opportunities: the WEA strategy 2022 - 2025





Strategic Objective 1: Learning for life



We believe that open access to adult education creates a more equal and just society and improves outcomes for our learners in terms of health, wellbeing and independence. It helps individuals meet challenges such as social isolation, lack of confidence and low self-esteem.


We will design and deliver a curriculum that will engage adults to develop essential skills, improve their every-day-life and the knowledge and confidence to achieve their personal goals and connect with their community.



For most of my life I was told by others I would not amount to anything. The WEA helped me turned myself around and I now run my own charity and act as an advisor to others

Jo
WEA learner





My WEA experience has brought me confidence and skills. Positivity is a big one for me

Kenny
WEA learner



In the next three years you will see that the WEA is:

- ▶ Using a granular understanding of need that targets local issues and produces a curriculum which is responsive. This will maximise our impact and improve the lives of learners.
- ▶ Working closely with new and existing partners to build on our successes and increase our reach to learners and communities.
- ▶ Making our learning even more accessible, when and how our learners need it.

To enable that work the WEA will be:

- ▶ Continuing to drive the case for public funding at national level and securing funding from new and current sources to complement our approach.
- ▶ Building and sharing a specific evidence-based case to convince policy and funding decision-makers at a national and local level.
- ▶ Making our offer more accessible on our website by enabling connection with translation and disability support apps.

Strategic Objective 2: Learning for work



We believe that that all people deserve good, sustainable work, and the opportunity to maximise their personal potential and their contribution to society. Through a needs-based curriculum, an innovative and learner-driven approach to teaching, learning and assessment, and individualised personalised support we can enable individuals to truly flourish.

We will design and deliver a dynamic skills and employability offer, matched to local and national need, and continually shaped by working in partnership with employers and employer groups.



If I hadn't gone to WEA classes to improve my English, there is no way I would have got my job

Rehana
WEA learner





My course built my confidence and prepared me for my role as a support worker for adults with mental and physical disabilities

Fatima
WEA learner



In the next three years you will see that the WEA is:

- ▶ Continuing to proactively support learners, regardless of their starting point, by supporting them into work and to progress at work.
- ▶ Offering clearer pathways for learners, from building firm foundation skills to progression into higher level skills learning.
- ▶ Targeting our curriculum around a selection of key employment sectors and partners which will provide good, sustainable careers to create job opportunities and work experience for our learners.

To enable that work the WEA will be:

- ▶ Developing new tutor recruitment and retention strategies to get the highest possible quality teachers and support staff, that also brings in the best and most up to date industry knowledge.
- ▶ Using technology to deliver education accessible to learners around work and life commitments, as well as removing all barriers to learning, as well as easing the transition into and out of learning.

Strategic Objective 3: Learning that builds communities



We believe that vibrant and inclusive communities promote health, happiness, and success at both an individual and community level. WEA learning networks bring communities together.

We will design and deliver learning networks which inspire passions, ignite friendships and bring communities together, enhancing their purpose and providing them with the skills and knowledge to make them self-sufficient. The creation of a WEA family with reciprocal benefits for the individual and their local community will deliver a social contract – creating a responsibility to others and a desire to promote social justice.



The WEA was a stepping stone to achieving my degree, but I'm looking forward to returning to my tutorial friends. I love the focus the tutorials every week bring. It's so important to keep the brain active!

Judith

WEA learner





I loved every moment of doing my course; I just love creating things. Every single person here is friendly. I was way nervous when I came, but I love everyone - good friends to have

Peter
WEA learner

In the next three years you will see that the WEA is:

- ▶ Supporting and developing self-funded, efficient, and effective learning communities.
- ▶ Building relations with partners and learner networks to enhance their communities and deliver our mission.
- ▶ Making our learning even more accessible, when and how our learners need it.

To enable that work the WEA will be:

- ▶ More effectively harnessing the support of volunteers and enabling their work to build and support their own networks and communities.
- ▶ Building awareness and evidence of the value and impact of community, and the role learning plays within it, creating campaigns which networks can support.

Enabler 1

Improve systems, processes & infrastructure



We believe the systems we use, the way we work and our estate should enable learner success. Every day the digital world finds solutions to help us improve the experience we can give our learners, and to make our back-office ways of working more efficient. Intelligent use of data, integration between systems and automation can simplify and smooth the way we work and improve the way we engage our learners. It will also free resources to deliver the human touch when it will be really impactful – our learners need us to go the extra mile.

We will deliver a digital transformation, replacing our legacy student record system and re-building our website. We will modernise our IT infrastructure, making it more reliable, resilient and future proofed. We will develop our in-house and outsourced capabilities, so our learners and staff will be able to engage on any device and receive expert advice, guidance and support if there are any problems. We will also review our estate, ensuring we have learning centres and office space where they are needed. Our learning centres and offices will be modern, fit for purpose and environmentally sustainable as we strive to become carbon neutral.



I can't wait until we've got new systems to help us work better so we can dedicate even more time to more effective learner support

Staff survey respondent



WEA online courses have been such a massive comfort. My wellbeing has improved and my family are convinced I'm easier to live with!

David
WEA learner



In the next three years you will see that the WEA is:

- ▶ Supported by a skilled IT team and best-in-class systems which provide an excellent learner experience and IT support service.
- ▶ Able to re-invest time and resource into supporting our learners in a more personalised way because the IT infrastructure enables cost and time-efficient ways of working.
- ▶ Offering modern, fit-for purpose and sustainable learning venues where our target learners, and funders, need them to be.

Enabler 2

Build income & ensure sustainability



We believe that it is essential to build a portfolio of income and a balance of expenditure that ensures the long-term sustainability of all three strategic objectives in an ever changing and more complex funding environment.

We believe that to remain true to our mission and charitable purpose we need to grow and diversify our income streams whilst controlling and monitoring our expenditure with the aim of delivering maximum impact in terms of reach and quality of learner experience.

We will build sustainable income streams, engaging with a variety of funders to meet their aims. We will effectively bid for contracts, retain grants, apply for charitable funding and fundraise. We will thoroughly understand the needs of funders, our strengths and track record to create strong proposals which secure funds that meet our learners needs and aspirations.

We will ensure that we have an achievable balance between direct and indirect operational costs and central overheads and an appropriate spread of resourcing across all three Strategic Objectives.



I am delighted to set up a scholarship to enable more people to carry on learning and I hope this will lead to more funding for the WEA

Ruth Spellman
WEA Fellow





I would recommend the WEA. The course prepared me for day-to-day work scenarios and opened my mind to different perspectives. The tutor helped me find my voice

Grace
WEA learner



In the next three years you will see that the WEA is:

- ▶ Delivering a sustainable, balanced budget and retains an ESFA health rating of good in every year.
- ▶ Maintaining free reserves in line with the current approved reserves policy.
- ▶ Retaining grant and contract income from the ESFA and MCAs.
- ▶ Building our network of like-minded organisations from across the public, voluntary and private sectors.
- ▶ Building income from Trusts and Foundations and individual philanthropists to support those adults who need the most support to study our Learning for Life and Learning that Builds Communities provision.
- ▶ Developing a range of learning experiences which will be attractive to learners who can afford to pay for learning that the state chooses not to fund. Surpluses from the delivery of this provision will be redeployed to deliver our charitable mission.

Enabler 3

Engage effectively with stakeholders



We believe that the WEA offers adults a life-changing opportunity. For Governments, the WEA is a solution to skills and employment, as well as health and wellbeing challenges. However, too few are aware of us and our impact.

We will build visibility, awareness and understanding of our offer among adults who could benefit from learning with us, and make a strong case for subsidy funding from public policy and funding decision-makers. We will embrace the passion of our members, branches, donors, fundraisers and volunteers to support the cause, and the full breadth of our charitable aims providing them with the assets, knowledge and guidance they need to do so. We will support our learners to plan and progress on learning journeys with us until they reach their personal goals.



I felt confident starting my job, knowing I had learnt so much from the WEA course, and I was able to put my news skills into practice

Morag
WEA learner





Organisations such as the WEA do an incredible job at bringing learning to disadvantaged communities

Robert Halfon MP

In the next three years you will see that the WEA is:

- ▶ More effectively communicating the benefits of our courses and making it easier to find a course which meets our learners needs.
- ▶ Continually improving the effectiveness of its Marketing activities, targeting learners that need us most.
- ▶ Championing the cause, making a clear, evidenced case for public funding which will reach learners that need education most.
- ▶ Enabling high profile friends, members, donors, fundraisers and volunteers and learners to advocate on our behalf and actively contribute to the WEA.
- ▶ Engaging its members and volunteers as it explores new, innovative ways of supporting the collective educational needs and aspirations of communities and of furthering the advancement of adult education generally.
- ▶ Growing its international partnerships, learning from and contributing to a global movement advocating for community based adult learning.

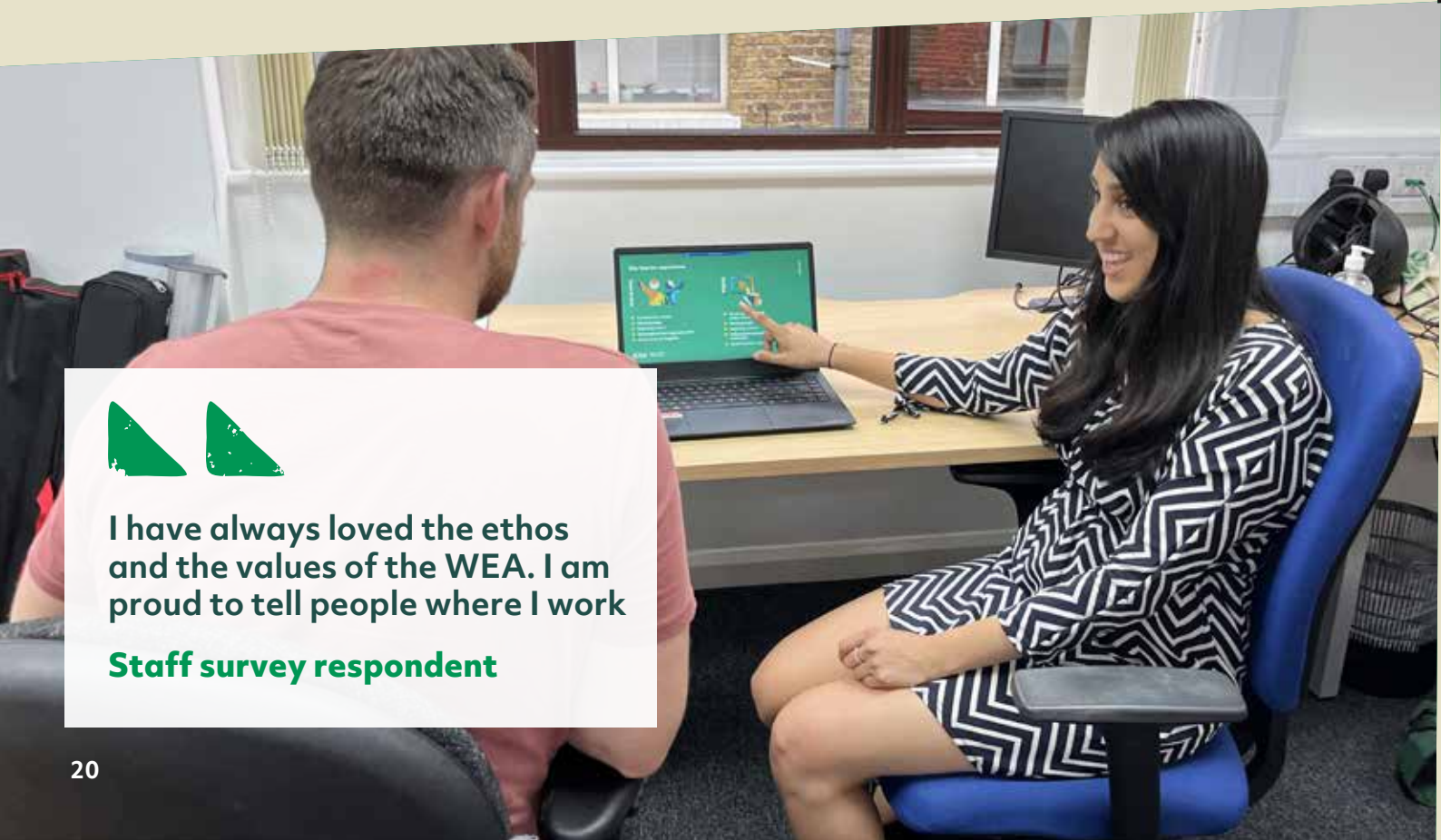
Enabler 4

Develop our people and culture



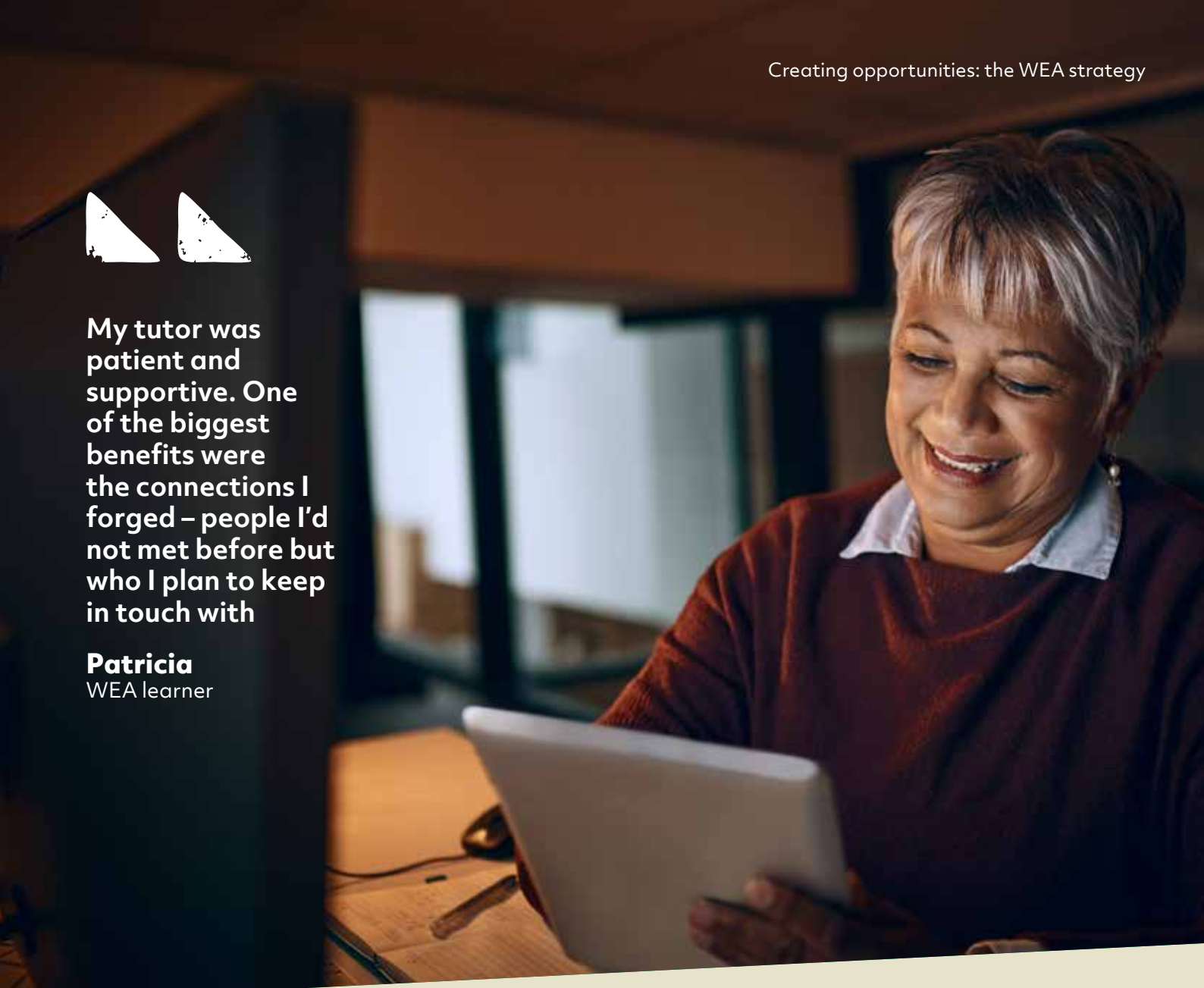
We believe that our mission can unite and motivate employees and volunteers to deliver life-changing learning to those who need it, in the most efficient and effective way to reach as many learners as we are able.

We will develop our people and build a proactive and responsive culture to embrace the opportunities and the challenges that lie ahead of the WEA. We will ensure our employees and volunteers are supported with training and development experiences which will enable them to deliver the strategy. We will strive to develop our culture by delivering change in a way which is representative of the caring, innovative and respectful culture we are striving for. We will reform and update our governance structures and practices, embrace best practice, and professionalise governance support to the Board and committees nationally and regionally to ensure that all are enabled to effectively guide the WEA in delivering its goals and mission. We will continue to work towards the 'good work plan reforms' ensuring greater transparency and protection for staff working under more flexible working arrangements.



I have always loved the ethos and the values of the WEA. I am proud to tell people where I work

Staff survey respondent



My tutor was patient and supportive. One of the biggest benefits were the connections I forged – people I'd not met before but who I plan to keep in touch with

Patricia
WEA learner

In the next three years you will see that the WEA is:

- ▶ Providing a culture which is inclusive, positive and fair; where opportunities are open to all, people can lead and are led effectively, and change is well managed.
- ▶ Committed to career pathways which join with recruitment succession planning and redeployment to improve workforce planning which is sustainable.
- ▶ Committed to an environment where health and wellbeing is actively promoted and people feel engaged and valued for their contribution.
- ▶ Rewarding people fairly within transparent and appropriate remuneration frameworks; remaining competitive and allowing for changing external pressures.
- ▶ Delivering by its Investors in People and Equality & Diversity action plans, maintaining or improving our Investors in People and Investors in Diversity accreditation and championing and supporting the living wage movement.
- ▶ Building expertise within its governance and governance support to enable the WEA to deliver the full range of its charitable aims.

Overarching priority - Quality and learner success



We believe that all WEA learners deserve an outstanding level of teaching and learning to maximise their chances of success and be provided with additional support to help them overcome their barriers to learning.

We will provide all learners with exceptional service, high professional standards resulting in an excellent quality learning experience which caters for their needs. Our aspirations surpass compliance, striving to continually improve our teaching. We will embrace technology to improve learner engagement and make learning more accessible wherever our learners live. We will improve our learners' understanding of the outcomes possible and support them to track and celebrate their achievements. We will provide tailored and timely advice, guidance and support for their learning.



My tutor Nusrat always believed in me and coached my development. Her positive impact on my life cannot be overstated

Selma
WEA learner





The change in me since getting involved with the WEA has been extraordinary. At the start I couldn't go to classes alone and now I'm doing part-time work. It has built my stability and resilience

Sara
WEA learner



In the next three years you will see that the WEA is:



- ▶ Recognised as a Good or Outstanding provider of education and skills.
- ▶ Recognised as visionary and innovative in our teaching of skills within the sector.
- ▶ Ensuring quality and performance improvement initiatives are applied to every element of the WEA's work in order to constantly review and improve upon the provision and the services it provides.

Our realistic targets, based on current performance, are:

- ▶ **98%** learners are satisfied with their WEA learning experience.
- ▶ **96%** learners who attend their first session go on to complete their course.
- ▶ **96%** teaching sessions meet or exceed learners' expectations.

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