

# The ripple effect of adult learning

WEA impact report

**WEA**  
Adult Learning  
Within Reach



## **Our mission:**

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

### **In this report we share with you:**

- ▶ Why we do what we do
- ▶ How we do it
- ▶ Demonstrate the impact we have

**We invite you to meet our learners and their employers to understand the ripple effect that WEA learning has on them, their work and their communities where they live.**

It's the small class, highly tailored way we teach that makes the difference. It equips them for life and work. And, it connects them with their communities, so everyone benefits.

Join us in our ambition to make this life-changing learning available to the many that need it.



CEO and General Secretary, WEA

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# Ripple one - learning for life



With my new digital  
skills I've got my  
independence and  
social life back

**Jane**



## Why

We believe that open access to adult education creates a more equal and just society. It improves the home lives of our learners and their families.

**9 million**

adults have low literacy or numeracy

Learning for Work Institute 2022

**25%**

UK population are likely to struggle with online services

UK Consumer Digital Index 2023

**5.1 million**

UK residents cannot speak English well

ONS 2023

- ▶ Numbers
- ▶ Digital confidence
- ▶ Reading

- ▶ Confidence
- ▶ Wellbeing
- ▶ Communication
- ▶ Budgeting

- ▶ Exercise & healthy living
- ▶ Cooking
- ▶ Healthy eating

## How

We deliver a curriculum that develops essential skills, improves our learners' every-day life and gives them confidence to achieve their personal goals.

**51%**  
reported an increase in self-confidence

## Our impact

**83%**  
reported improved wellbeing

**48%** encouraged their children/grandchildren to learn more

**24%** reported improved confidence in helping children with reading, writing or maths

**31%** felt more resilient

## Meet Jane

Jane was really isolated and dealing with grief for her wife, Hilary. She felt left behind as everything, including accessing support for her grief, was only accessible online. This made things out of reach and only furthered her feelings of isolation.

Jane tried learning digital skills via another provider, but was left overwhelmed. A development support organisation pointed out the WEA and she's not looked back.

She was blown away by the class and loved learning and can now use her iPad to buy train tickets to visit her friends and book theatre tickets. She can also independently fill in all the necessary forms that come with life.





## Meet Oksana

Mum of two sons, Oksana, arrived in Evesham fleeing the war in Ukraine, and grateful for the generosity of her sponsors. Oksana knew very little English, but was determined to improve to help her get a job to support her sons.

For almost a year she had English lessons with the WEA three times a week whilst volunteering in a local charity shop where she got to practice her new-found vocabulary.

The hard work and dedication has paid off for Oksana. She now has a job working for Worcester City Council – a job she is very proud of.

Through her work, she is now helping other Ukrainian refugees with housing and job searches. She puts back into the community what she has learned through her courses.



**Helping the community is my mum's life credo.**

**In Ukraine she received an award for numerous developmental projects for children.**

**Now she helps Ukrainians step by step integrate into society and makes their life easier.**

**WEA courses help her a lot**

**Oksana's son**

## Ripple two - learning for work



When the opportunity to apply for the role of healthcare assistant arrived, my tutor gave me a lot of valuable advice. I was nervous, but I got the job first time

**Abdalazeez**



## Why

We believe that everyone deserves a fulfilling and sustainable place to work, where they are able to maximise their potential and contribution to society.

**57%**

16-64 year olds without qualifications are unemployed

Gov.UK 2023

**90%**

UK workforce (30 million) will need to re-skill by 2030

CBI/McKinsey 2021

**13 million**

were living in poverty in the UK in 2020/21

Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2023

- ▶ Health & social care
- ▶ Education & childcare
- ▶ Community interpreting

- ▶ Self-employment
- ▶ Volunteering
- ▶ Digital capabilities
- ▶ Functional skills

- ▶ ESOL for work
- ▶ Administration
- ▶ Management

## How

Our skills and employability offer matches local and national need. We proactively support learners, regardless of their starting point, by supporting them into work and to progress.

**43%**  
developed  
communication  
skills

## Our impact

**42%**

skills learners  
have got a job or  
gone on to further  
education

**24%** employed learners who did an adult skills course said their learning experience helped them to get a pay rise or a promotion

**34%** improved their critical thinking skills

# Meet Abdalazeez

Abdalazeez moved to the UK from Syria, where he had a good career as a nurse working for an NGO. For those first few months, he found it hard to communicate with people and was homesick and lost.

Then a friend told him about an WEA course in Employment Skills. The course taught him how to prepare for job interviews and Abdalazeez loved his tutor, "To be honest, she is just awesome. She's very good at her work."

He learnt that the secret to a good interview is building up your confidence and being prepared. The advice clearly worked as he landed a job on his first interview. Now he plans to study the qualifications the NHS needs for him to return to nursing in the UK.

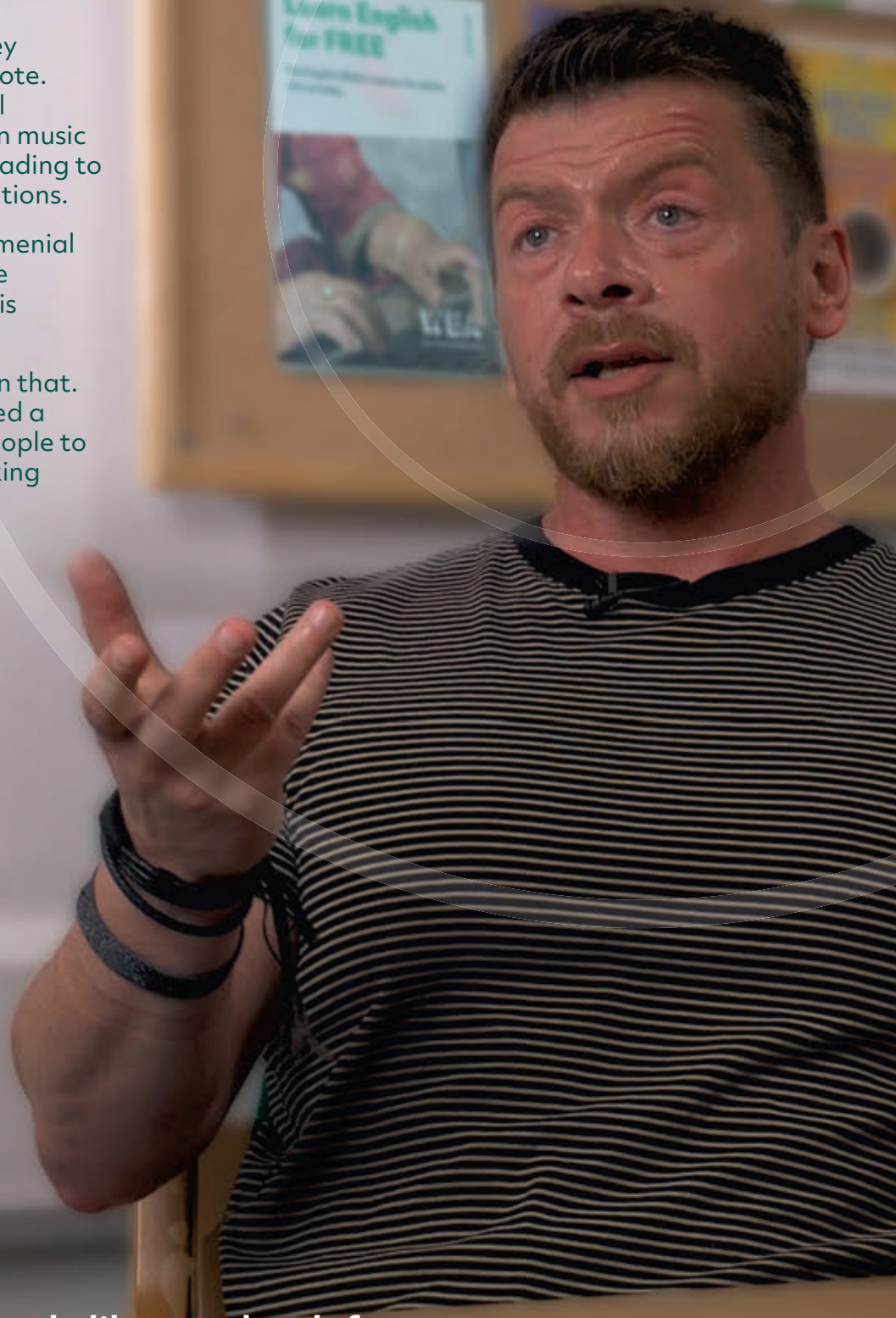


## Meet Jamie

Jamie's educational journey started on a challenging note. Uninterested in traditional subjects, he found solace in music and mischief, eventually leading to expulsion with no qualifications.

After navigating through menial jobs, Jamie found his stride in telecom sales, proving his competence.

But he was after more than that. Fifteen years later, he joined a charity that helps older people to embrace technology. Seeking continuous personal growth, Jamie has gained skills to help him perform his role through Step Into Care and volunteering courses.



**There's a lot of people like me that left school with little. The WEA gives people like me the skills and the confidence to have a second chance at life**

**Jamie**

# Find out more about how Bilstein benefited from partnering with the WEA

We offer a unique approach to help train, recruit and develop staff in partnership with employers. We also provide courses to support existing staff in skills development and wellbeing.

When Bilstein Group, a leader in the manufacturing industry, wanted to improve communication for maintaining a safe work environment they turned to the WEA for the solution. Many of their employees had English as a second language and we worked together to deliver an ESOL for Health and Safety course that met their needs.

Through this tailored program, Bilstein Group employees gained vital language skills, enabling them to understand and communicate health and safety procedures.

But it was more than just understanding to read signs. Learners grew in confidence and started to form stronger working relationships, overcoming the language barriers that had prevented them from communicating with their colleagues.

Partnering with the WEA opens doors to endless possibilities for your business. Equip your employees with the skills they need to excel in their roles, create a positive work environment, and become a driving force in your organisation's success.



Find out more about how we partnered with Bilstein in this video



**Their motivation has improved, their work has improved, they are so much more engaged as well. People have been promoted into other roles because they've got more confidence. It's helped us as workforce because we've got a wider pool of people for other roles, it's just been an win-win for us and them**

**Lisa**



# Ripple three - learning that builds communities



My WEA learning  
has given me a real  
feeling of freedom  
and connection  
with other people  
as well as the  
actual content that  
I learned

**Jayne**

## Why

We believe that vibrant and inclusive communities promote health, happiness, and success at both an individual and community level.

People who do cognitively stimulating activities may have a lower risk of cognitive decline

Alheimers Society 2023

**3.83 million**

endure chronic loneliness  
ONS 2023

**26%**

adults don't speak to their neighbours or members of the community on a regular/monthly basis.

UK Gov, 2021

- ▶ Arts & art history
- ▶ Crafts & textiles
- ▶ Creative writing & literature

- ▶ Photography & film
- ▶ Music
- ▶ Environment & geography

- ▶ History & sociology
- ▶ Philosophy
- ▶ Psychology

## How

We deliver learning networks which inspire passions, ignite friendships and bring communities together.

**91%**  
made fewer visits to the GP compared to the national average

## Our impact

**83%**  
reported improvements in their overall wellbeing

**39%** said their course helped them to make new friends

**74%** said their course helped to keep their mind active

**70%** met people they would not normally mix with on their course

**30%** are feeling a sense of belonging to your community as a result of their course

**28%** are now actively volunteering

**38%** became more understanding of other cultures

# Meet Jayne

Jayne started studying with the WEA during Covid and has kept going since. The connection and activity has helped her cope with lockdowns, her partner's illness and her transition to caring.

Jayne is committed to not only continuing to learn, but to onwards share her new skills – for example in stitching and beading.

She participated in a project called Portraits of Recovery sharing how to do sashiko and barrow and visible mending. Recovering from addiction herself, Jayne was keen to encourage others to share recovery stories and hope with other people.





# Meet Romeo

Romeo suffered a workplace injury meaning he was unable to continue his previous profession. He felt his life was flipped upside down.

Romeo began volunteering for a couple of organisations to give himself something to do and spotted a gap. Most support services were about jobs, but he just wanted to have someone to have a cup of tea/ coffee and help them with life. This is why he started the Ipswich Romanian Community Interest Company.

Romeo completed Level 2 and 3 in community interpreting so he could really make a difference. Now the CIC has established connections with the local police, NHS, and Ipswich Borough Council, gaining support to tackle the challenges service-users experience.



**Through the WEA course my English is better. I use everything I've learnt - how to present myself, interpret, be neutral or passionate where needed to help my entire community**

**Romeo**

# Make your impact and find out more

We can't imagine a time when the WEA could be more needed than today. The need for adult learning which is within reach, within every community, couldn't be greater. Each ripple of impact – life, work and community – is important for society.

Please support us by making policy and funding decision-makers aware of the work we do and the impact we deliver. Connect us with community groups and employers which we could partner with to extend our reach. Or, simply tell those who could benefit from the WEA about us.

## Want more detail?

If you would like to take a deeper dive into our impact statistics just email [internalcomms@wea.ac.uk](mailto:internalcomms@wea.ac.uk) and we will talk you through our detailed research report.

## Support our Access campaign

2024 is expected to be a General Election year. There will also be Mayoral elections in several Combined Authority areas. All the major parties and candidates are likely to speak about skills, productivity and education.

Here, we set out our Creating Opportunities manifesto - ideas for how Ministers and Mayors can improve access to lifechanging adult learning for those who need it most.

Hear our featured learners talk about their WEA learning experiences in our video



# Creating opportunities manifesto

## Create a national lifelong learning strategy:

This would set out a holistic definition, looking through all three lenses (health, culture and work). It would set the roles and responsibilities and provide a framework for regional priorities.

## Return adult education funding to 2010 levels by 2029:

Public finances are tight but support for adult learning would reap economic benefits in terms of productivity, as well as taking pressure off welfare benefits and also the NHS (through health and wellbeing outcomes).

## Prioritise funding for those who left school with no or few qualifications:

A lack of role models, aspiration and confidence can be tackled through community education. They provide important building blocks for Job Centres to work upon.

## Deliver a national campaign to drive up participation:

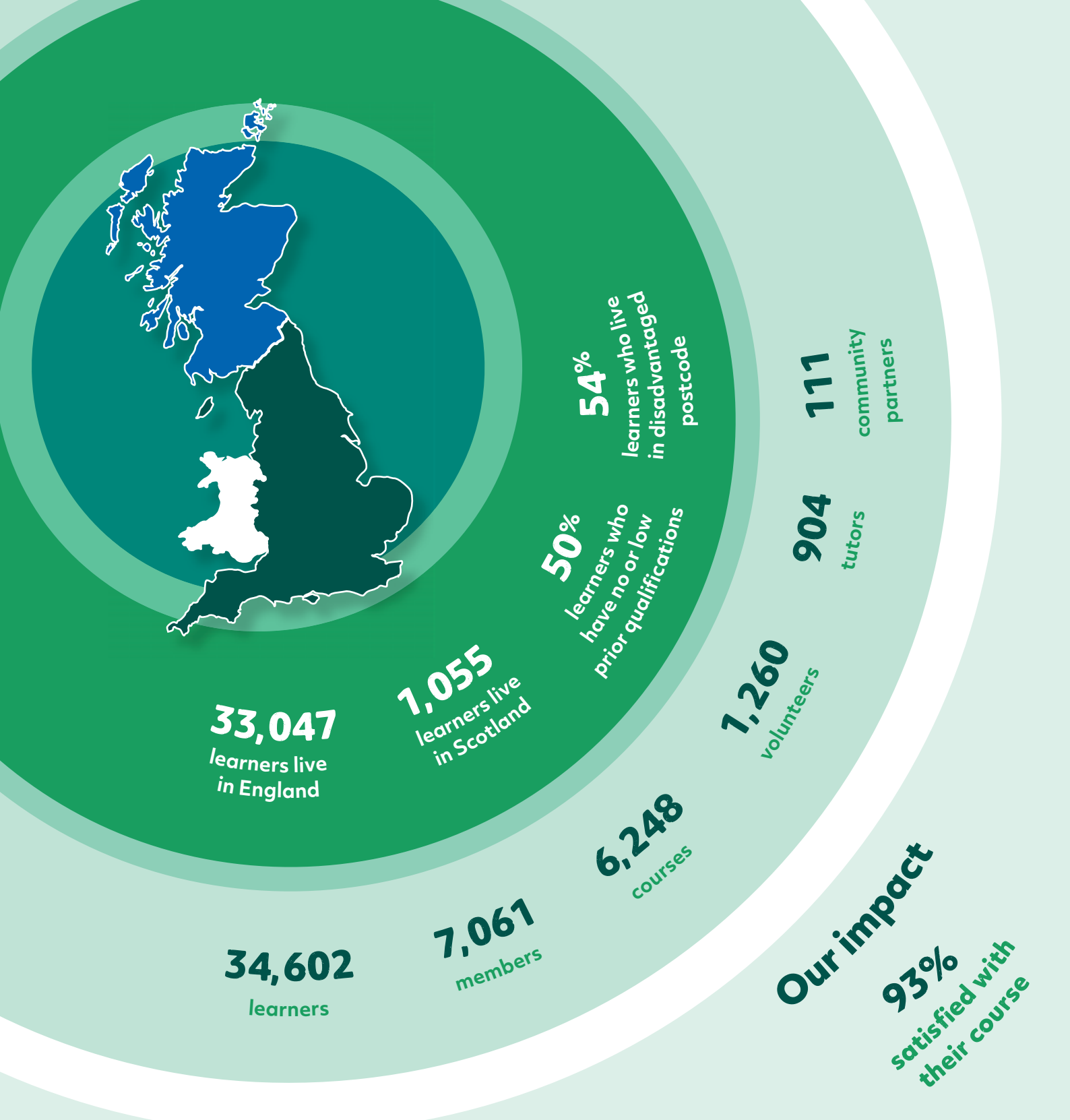
Less than 30% of the adult population is currently learning. There is an urgent need to reach the remaining 70%. This includes some of the most disadvantaged groups in society and many who would benefit the most.

## Protect the freedom to set broad curriculum:

Many adults are reluctant to return to learning and cultural education may be the only way to attract them back to study. Stop de-funding of "leisure learning". Valuable mental health and wellbeing outcomes will also be lost.

## Support the post-19 education workforce:

The WEA provides critical second chance education. It should not be doing it with less well-paid staff and struggling to recruit as a result.



The statistics on this back page are for the academic year 2022/23. This research was undertaken through two surveys, focussing on learners who had completed their study with the WEA within two academic years of June 2023. The sample included learners who completed single and multiple courses across a broad range of subject areas which were taught in an online and/or a face to face setting. The data was gathered using a combination of a quantitative online survey which was sent out to all WEA learners with email addresses and eligible permissions and telephone research where email addresses were unavailable. The destinations of leavers survey generated an effective sample of 3,682, and the Impact survey generated a sample of 3,199 on the wider impacts of learning.

The Impact survey data was weighted to account for unequal probabilities of selection and non-response to provide a representative sample of the entire WEA learner population within a margin of error of 1.2%. Impact on different learner groups was analysed by taking key demographic and course characteristics into account and have been reported where statistically significant. For further information on the research that underpins this report email: [research@wea.ac.uk](mailto:research@wea.ac.uk)

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