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Policy paper

# Adult education devolution

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**Applies to England**

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## Overview

The primary purpose of adult education is to equip learners aged 19 and over with the skills they need to progress into or within work, or to take up an apprenticeship or other learning opportunity.

Between 2015 and 2018, the government agreed a series of [devolution deals](#) with regional authorities in England. These deals included devolving certain adult education functions set out in the [Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009](#). The authorities in question are now responsible for allocating the adult education budget (AEB) to providers and ensuring that learners in their region who are eligible for funding have access to appropriate education and training.

In regions where the Department for Education (DfE) has devolved AEB funding, an authority is responsible for providing education and training to develop the skills that local employers need. It determines what those skills are using analysis and by referring to the priorities set out in its [local skills improvement plan](#) drawn up by [designated employer representative bodies](#).

Determining local skills needs has several benefits for communities. It:

- reduces skills shortages
- boosts productivity and economic prosperity
- improves wellbeing

## Initial devolution deals

Between 2018 and 2019, adult education functions were:

- [transferred to certain mayoral combined authorities \(MCAs\)](#) by orders made under the [Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009](#)
- [delegated to the Mayor of London](#) (acting, where appropriate, through the Greater London Authority) under section 39A of the [Greater London Authority Act 1999](#)

Between 2019 and 2021, the devolved authorities became responsible for the exercise of these functions and the associated budget.

During 2022 to 2023, DfE has devolved approximately 60% of the AEB to 9 MCAs and the Mayor of London.

The regional authorities with devolved AEB funding are:

- [Cambridgeshire and Peterborough](#)
- [Greater London Authority](#)

- [Greater Manchester](#)
- [Liverpool City Region](#)
- [North of Tyne](#)
- [South Yorkshire](#)
- [Tees Valley](#)
- [West Midlands](#)
- [West of England](#)
- [West Yorkshire](#)

## ‘Trailblazer’ devolution deals

The [Levelling-up white paper](#) (LUWP), published in February 2022, announced that there would be ‘trailblazer’ devolution deals with 2 MCAs.

DfE published policy papers about these deeper deals, which were made with [Greater Manchester](#) and the [West Midlands](#) in March 2023 as part of the spring budget.

The ‘trailblazer’ devolution deals will allow:

- greater flexibility with regard to skills bootcamps and free courses for jobs, from the 2023 to 2024 financial year
- the devolution of non-apprenticeship adult skills funding in the next spending review, from the 2024 to 2025 financial year

A new joint governance board will:

- oversee post-16 technical education and skills
- evaluate local careers services

The LUWP also made a commitment that every county and unitary authority seeking a devolution deal would have one by 2030.

## Wider devolution deals

Between August and December 2022, DfE also secured county-wide deals with:

- Cornwall
- East Midlands
- Norfolk
- the North East

- Suffolk
- York and North Yorkshire

The skills element of the deal for the North East will begin in May 2024. The other wider devolution deals will begin in August 2025.

## Further information

[Statutory guidance](#) on exercising devolved functions, [operational guidance](#) on budgetary devolution, and [memoranda of understanding](#) on devolution are available.

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