Effective Practice in Adult Basic Skills in London

European Basic Skills Network
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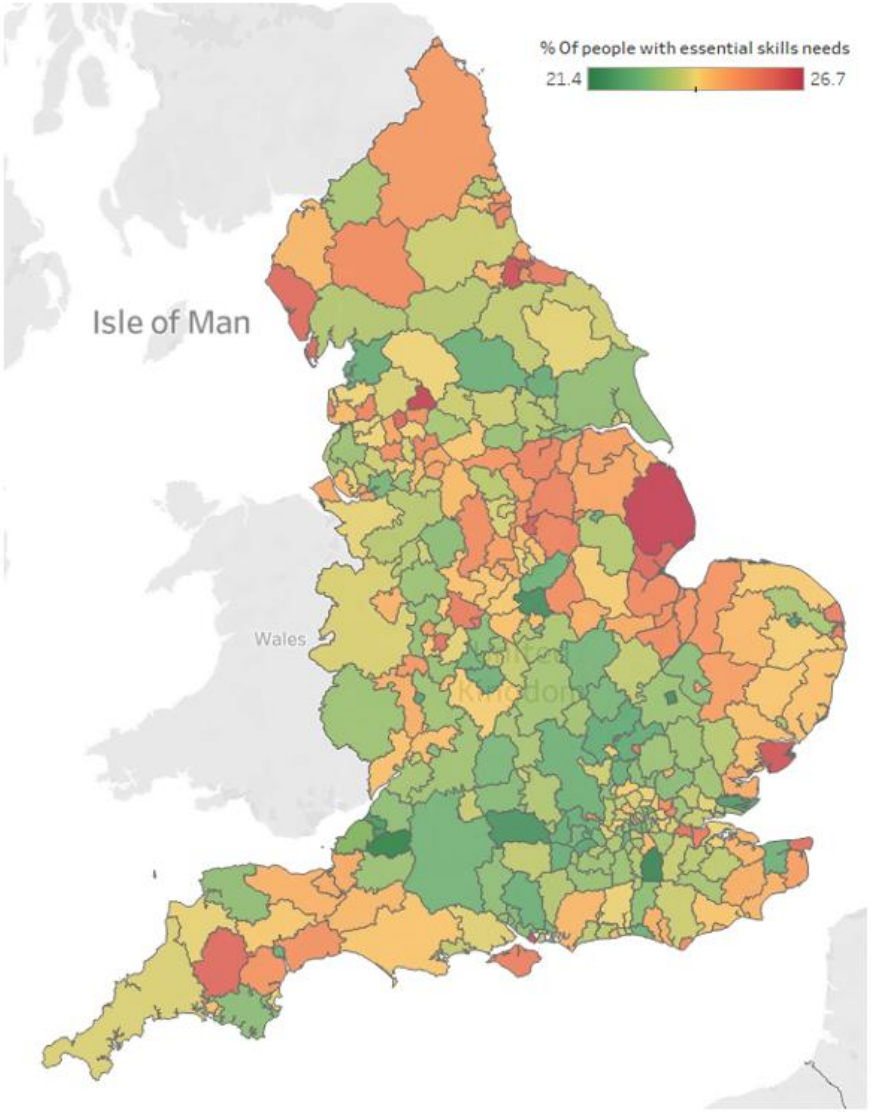
9m adults have low literacy and/or numeracy skills



- L&W's essential skills model shows substantial regional variation, nationally and within local areas.
- At the combined authority level, London has a lower percentage of people with essential skills needs (23.2%).
- However, as a result of its large population, London had the highest number of people with essential skills needs.

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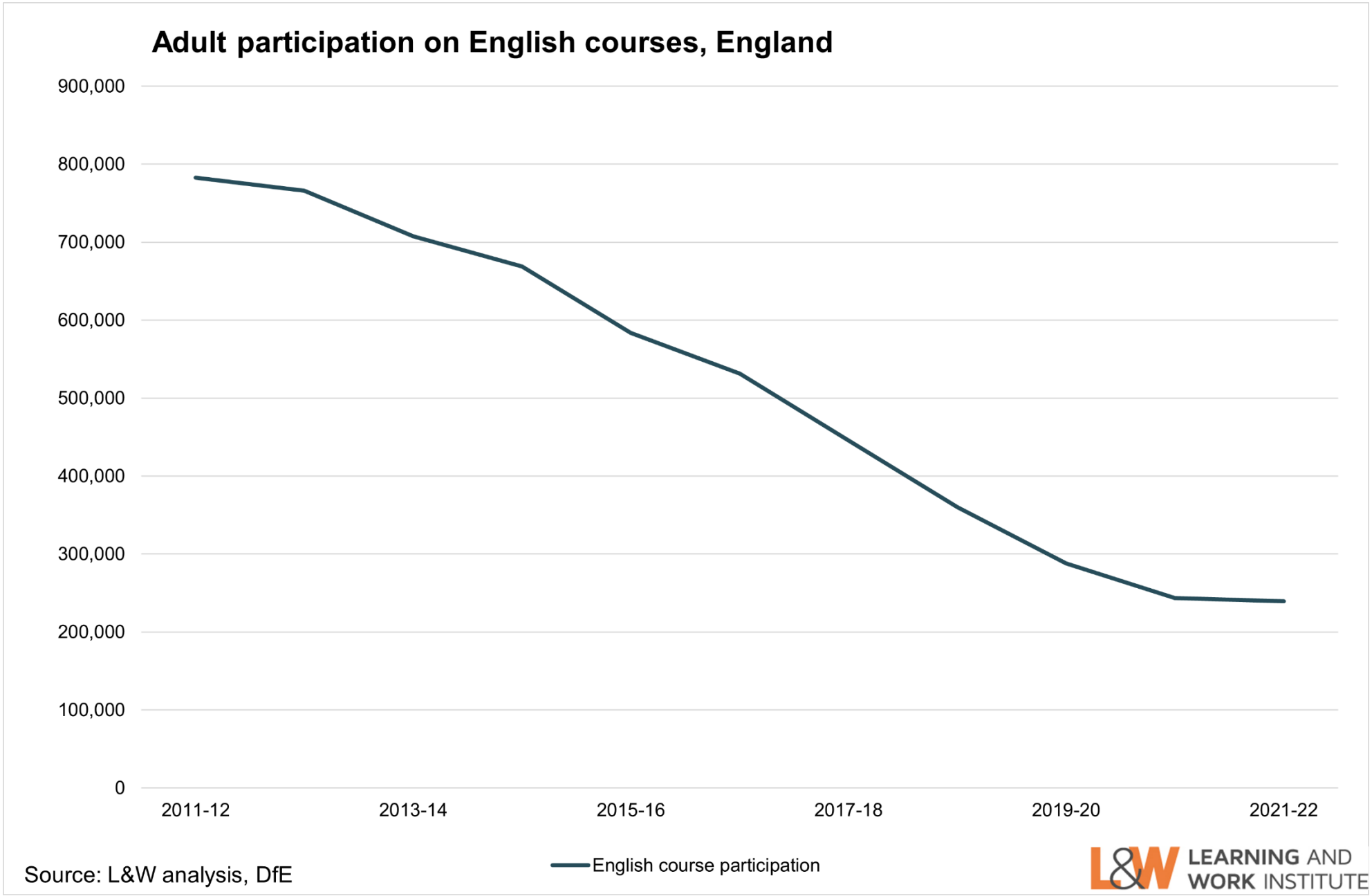
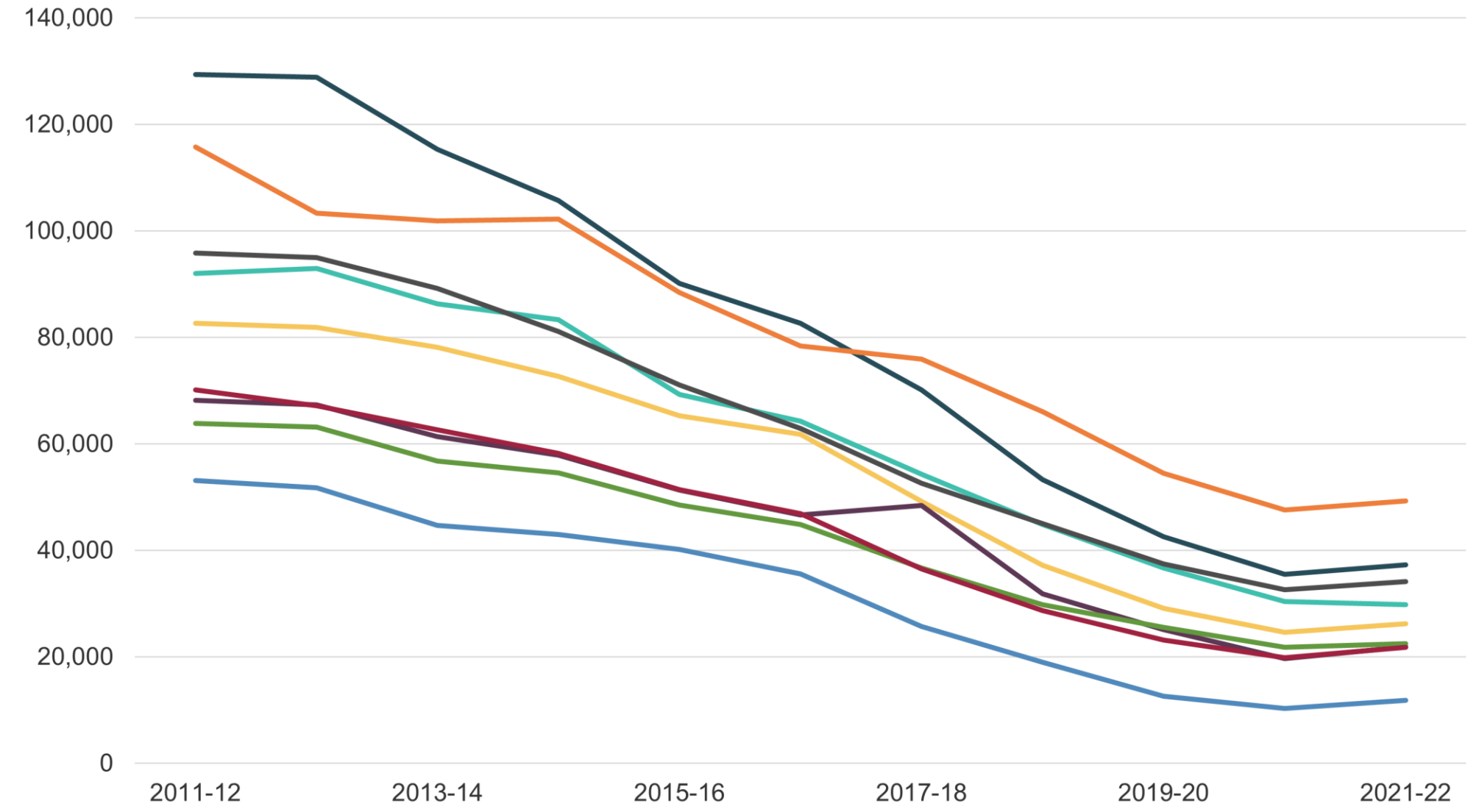
19+ participation in literacy has not recovered to pre-pandemic levels



Adult participation on English courses by region, England



Source: L&W analysis, DfE

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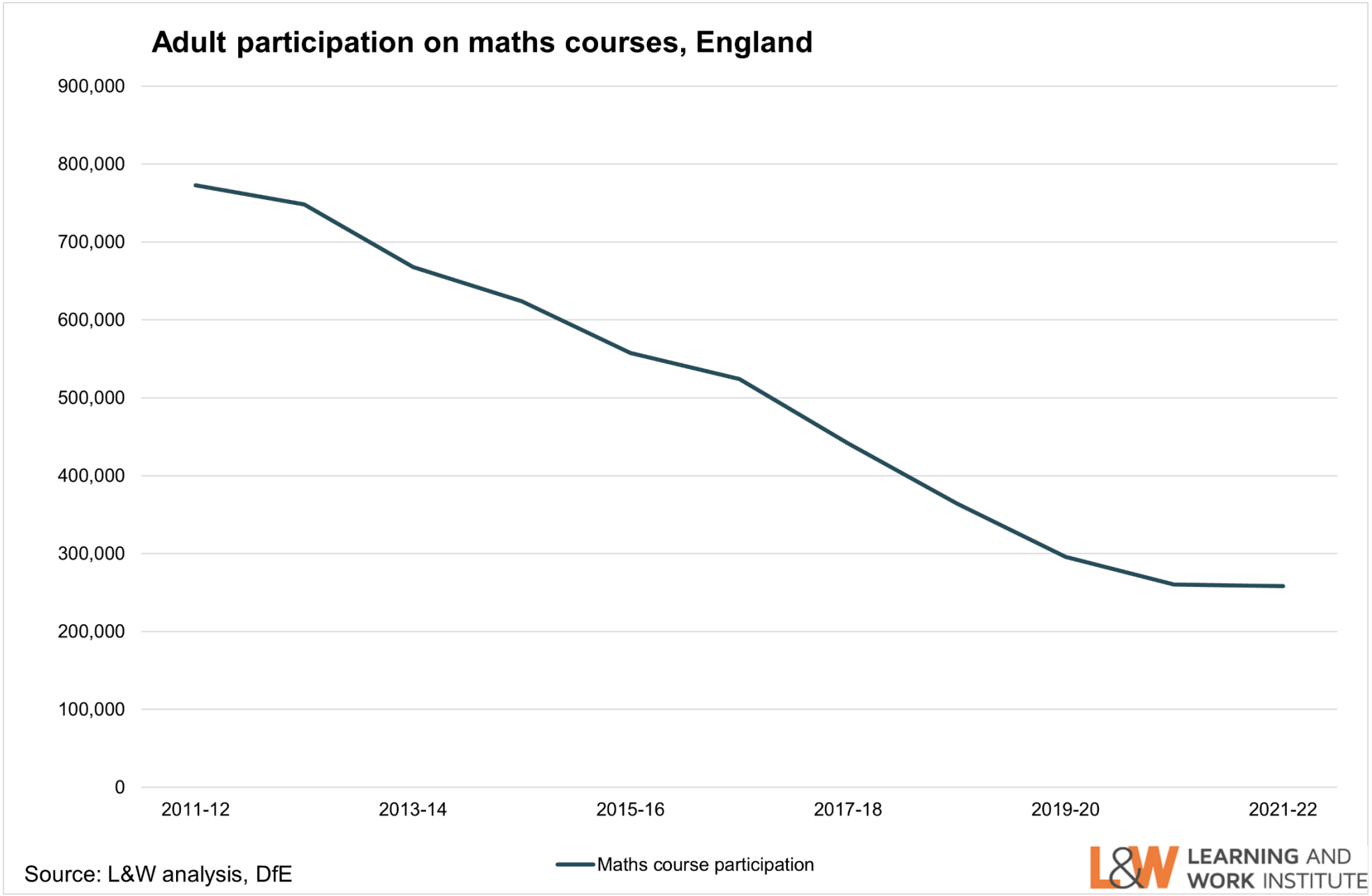
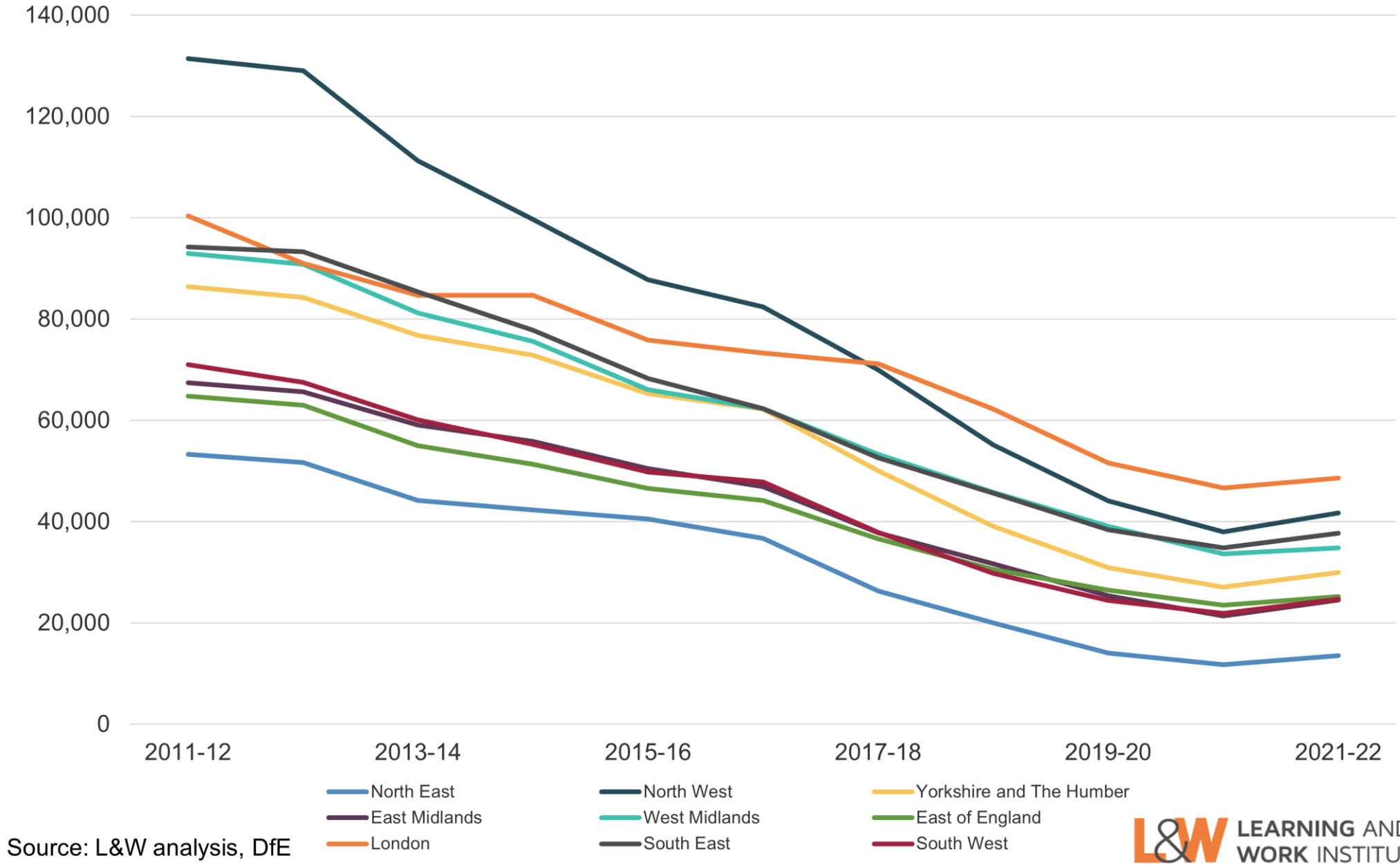
19+ participation in numeracy has not recovered to pre-pandemic levels



Adult participation on maths courses by region, England



Source: L&W analysis, DfE

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London policy context and project background

Key policy developments

- Adult Education Budget devolution since 2019 – control of basic skills funding at city region level.
- ‘London factor’ funding uplift introduced 2020/21; increased to 13.5% in 2022/23.
- London’s £41m Multiply programme – new UK-wide adult numeracy programme.

Research aims

1. To identify barriers to participation and achievement in English and maths.
2. To understand what works to support participation and achievement in English and maths.
3. To understand and build on effective practice and develop further insights to support London’s provider base to deliver improved outcomes.

Project Overview

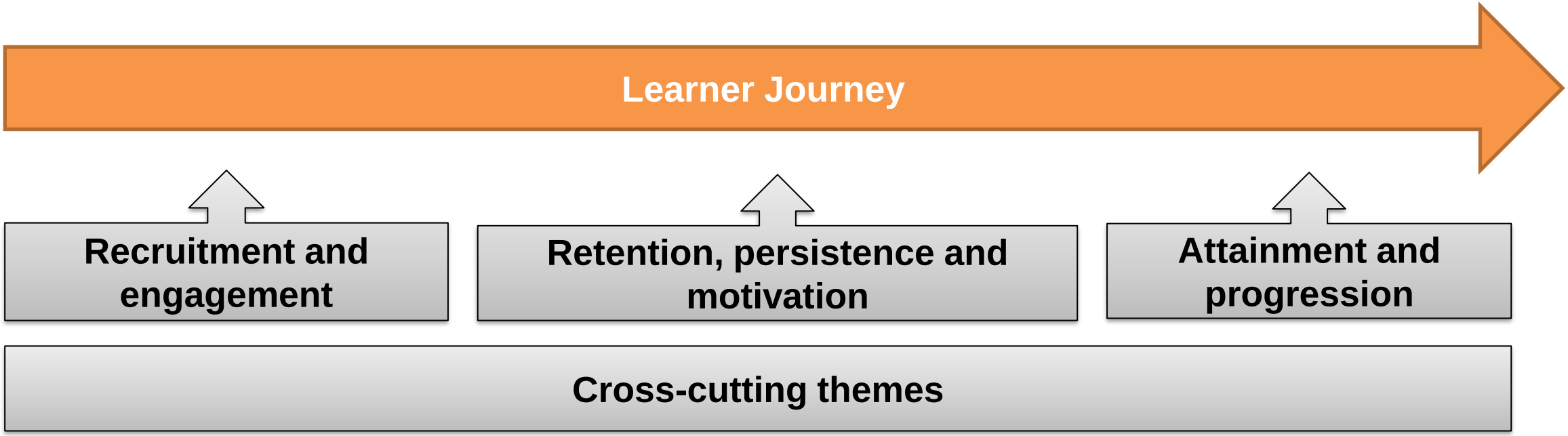
Research Advisory Group

Rapid evidence review – ‘what works’ focus

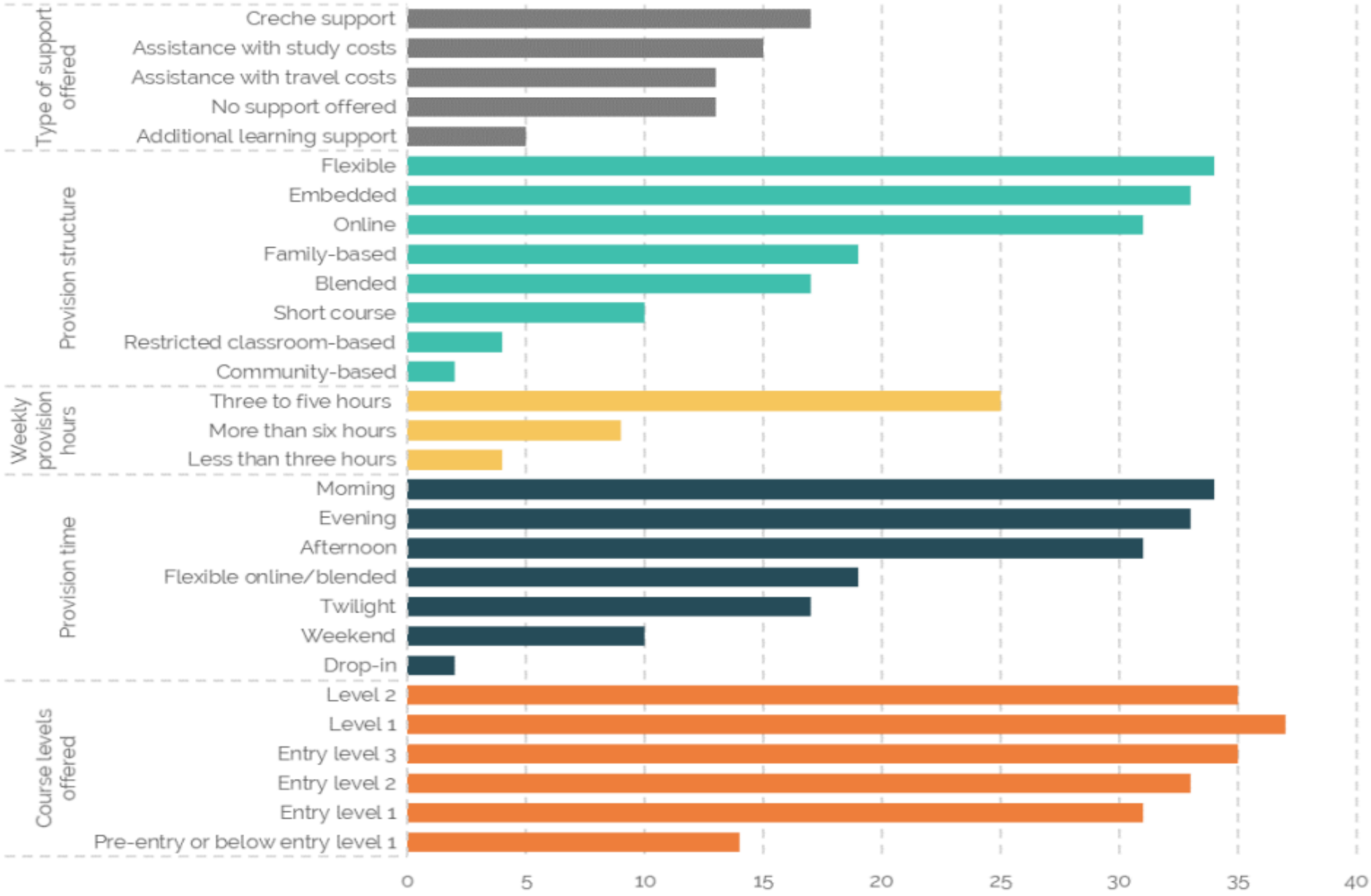
Quantitative ILR data analysis

Provider research
a) Survey – 38 responses
b) Provider interviews – 26 interviews

Learner research – 4 focus groups



Provision Landscape



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Key Cross-Cutting Findings

- Importance of **non-accredited learning** opportunities – e.g. taster and bridging courses
- **Community-based outreach and delivery**
- English and maths **learning contextualised** to community and workplace settings – partnerships are key
- **Embedding digital skills** can help motivation and progression. Online provision can benefit learners at the higher levels. In-person support is beneficial to learners working at lower levels and/or those who are digitally excluded.
- A lack of access to **childcare provision** is a key barrier for many learners.
- **Peer support** can help learners across the learning journey.

Key Findings: recruitment and engagement

- **Approaches to marketing are inconsistent** and may not reach some learners.
- Community **outreach activity and providers' local knowledge promote recruitment** – but not all providers offer community-based programmes.
- **Regular contact during enrolment and a supportive environment are key**. A comprehensive initial assessment, including learning and wider support needs, is a key tool.
- Providers identified that **employer support could be effective** to increase recruitment of learners. However, there were few examples of this in practice.

Key Findings: retention, persistence and motivation

- **Role of the tutor is key in supporting learners**. Providers cited the value of well-qualified practitioners experienced in working with adult learners; but recruitment and retention of staff identified as a sector-wide challenge.

- Key practitioner skills included: **differentiating approaches and activities** to meet different learning needs, and **providing high-quality feedback**. Access to relevant Continuing Professional Development and networking opportunities is crucial.

- **Flexible delivery models** are central to support learners to persist and stay motivated. This includes having a range of class times, delivery models and support to continue learning when personal circumstances affect their participation.

- Learners engage well when there is **a range of course content, activities and resources**, including group discussions and topics relevant to the learners.

Key Findings: attainment and progression

- Individual learner **starting points and challenges vary and must be taken into account**; the resulting individualised support is essential for progression.

- Different qualification types (e.g. Functional Skills, GCSE) present distinct opportunities and challenges for different cohorts. It is important to **ensure a good fit between learner needs and aspirations, and the accredited and non-accredited learning available**.

- Providers report that the increased demand placed on learners by **the new Functional Skills qualifications requires a more explicit focus on targeted revision and exam preparation**, and on supporting the needs of specific cohorts.

- Access to **information, advice and guidance** is important to support adult learners' further progression. This may be underdeveloped.

Recommendations: Providers

- Improve the **visibility of English and maths learning opportunities** to learners and stakeholders, to stimulate demand.
- Enhance **partnership working** between providers, community organisations and employers.
- Address **practical barriers to learning**, in particular childcare.
- Providers should maintain **comprehensive and supportive initial assessment** and induction processes that identify learning and wider support needs.

Recommendations: Providers

- Develop an **online English and maths offer**, building on the lessons learned during the coronavirus pandemic.

- Use the full flexibility of the Adult Education Budget funding, including to **provide non-accredited learning** where appropriate.

- Maintain and develop **a diverse, differentiated and flexible learning offer to meet learners' needs**, including community-based and workplace provision.

- Support **access to IAG** for learners

- Ensure **CPD opportunities for practitioners** are available.

Recommendations: Policy

- Increase strategic support to **raise awareness of opportunities for English and maths learning and stimulate demand**, among Londoners and key stakeholders.

- Support the development of **more effective partnership working between providers and key stakeholders, including employers and the National Careers Service**, to drive participation in English and maths learning.

- Ensure that wider work to improve the availability of accessible childcare in London includes **a focus on removing childcare as a barrier** to accessing learning.

Recommendations: Policy

- Consider the potential for **a pan-London online English and maths learning offer**.

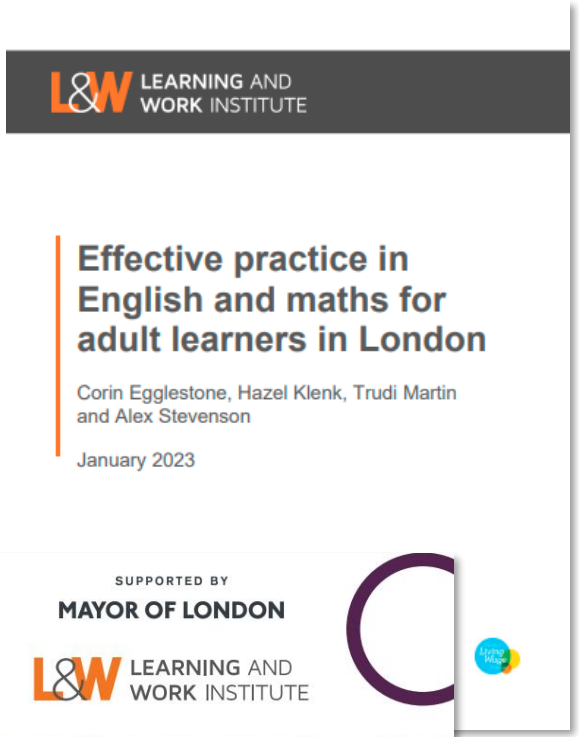
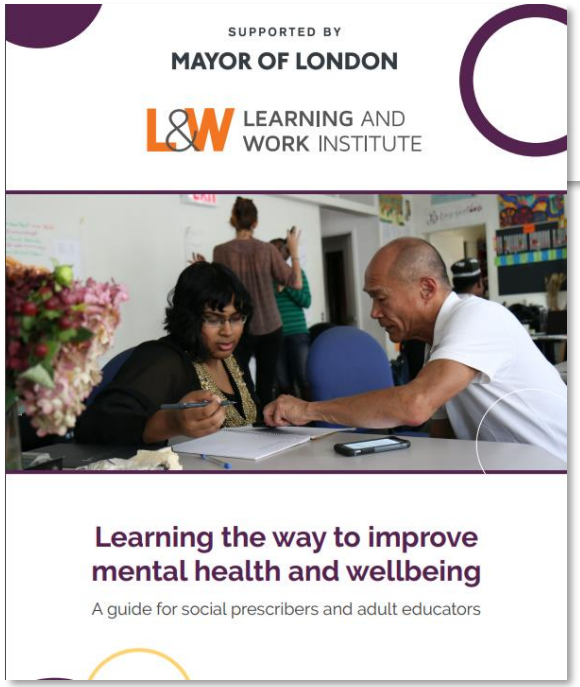
- Identify the **workforce development needs of English and maths practitioners in 19+ provision in London**, and ensure the availability and accessibility of a relevant offer.

- Ensure that **providers are supported to use funding flexibilities to develop responsive provision**, and that approaches to wider outcomes measurement are accessible to learners with low English and/or maths skills.

Further resources

Link to full English and Maths Report

https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/effective-practice-in-english-and-maths-for-adult-learners-in-london

You might also like: Social Prescribing to Adult Education in London

https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/social-prescribing-into-adult-education-in-london-research-and-toolkit