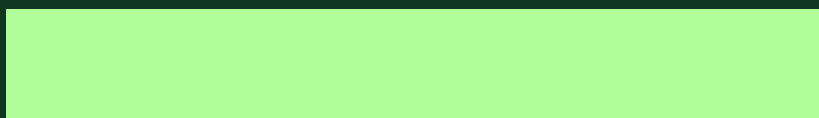


Produced by the Education Training Foundation
and authored by Matilda Gosling



DATA SUMMARY: SOCIAL VALUE IN FURTHER EDUCATION AND SKILLS



CONTENTS

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT 03

EVIDENCE FROM THE SECTOR 04

Individual social value	10
Community social value	21
Wider societal social value	26

NEXT STEPS 27

APPENDICES 28

Appendix 1. Research approach and limitations	28
Appendix 2. List of contributors	29
Appendix 3. Provider demographics	32
Theory of change	33

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT



This data summary is a companion to the 'Achieving Social Value in Further Education and Skills' report produced by the Education Training Foundation (ETF) and authored by Matilda Gosling. The data summary provides a thematic overview of the 175 submissions to ETF's call for evidence from across the further education (FE) and skills sector, which was commissioned to explore the definition of social value, its meaning in the context of FE and skills in England, and ETF's role in promoting social value. The separate report explores the implications of these findings and next steps in further detail.

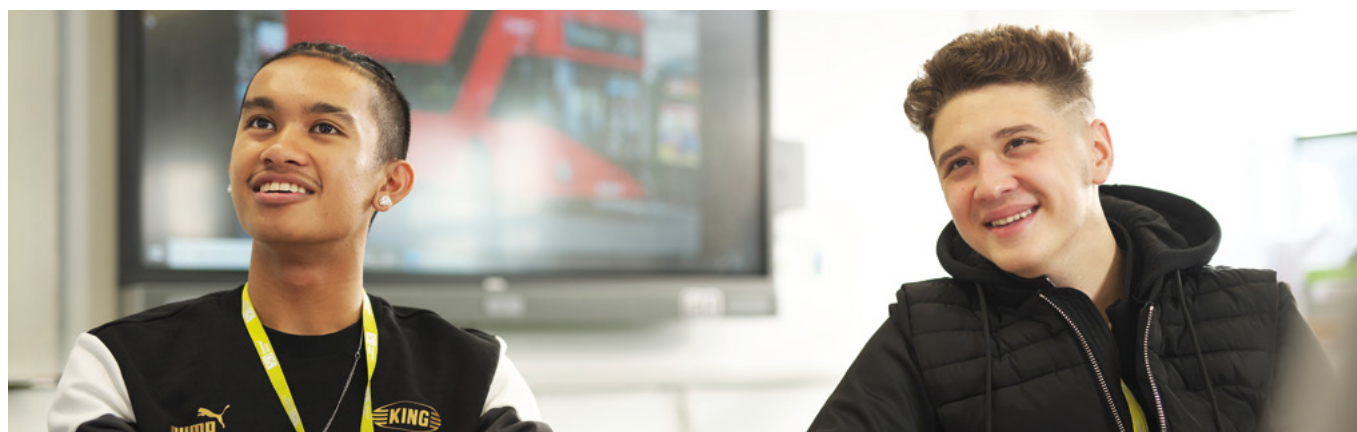
EVIDENCE FROM THE SECTOR

This document summarises insights from ETF's call for evidence, drawing on 175 survey responses and qualitative submissions from providers across England. For ease of reading, much of the evidence is reported as fact – for example, that learners have developed a range of character attributes. It should be noted, however, that most of the evidence provided was anecdotal. These are, for the most part, subjective assessments.

Conceptions of social value

Many providers are motivated by the social value they perceive accruing in their learners and local communities. Ilidia Schools for Life, for example, provides ESOL, functional skills and other education to adult learners. A representative said, 'The only things that reward us are their successful results [in] personal improvements, social integration and better job performance.' Some providers included a financial assessment of their social value. Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust, for example, estimated that it created £1.9 million of social value between 2023 and 2024 through its widening participation programmes, while Learning Curve Group estimates an annual economic benefit of £206 million and an annual wellbeing benefit of £12 million.

Others have key performance indicators relating to social value against which they benchmark and measure progress. Runshaw College assesses its local supplier ratio, with the aim of supporting the local economy; its community sports lettings, with the aim of creating trust and strengthened local community bonds; adult literacy and numeracy outcomes, with the aim of supporting social mobility; and charitable fundraising, which aims to build the 'social conscience' of staff and students. East Berkshire Community Learning and Skills Service produces a destination and impact report that demonstrates value in areas including social connections and progression.



Social value aspects as a proportion of all codes given to evidence submissions¹

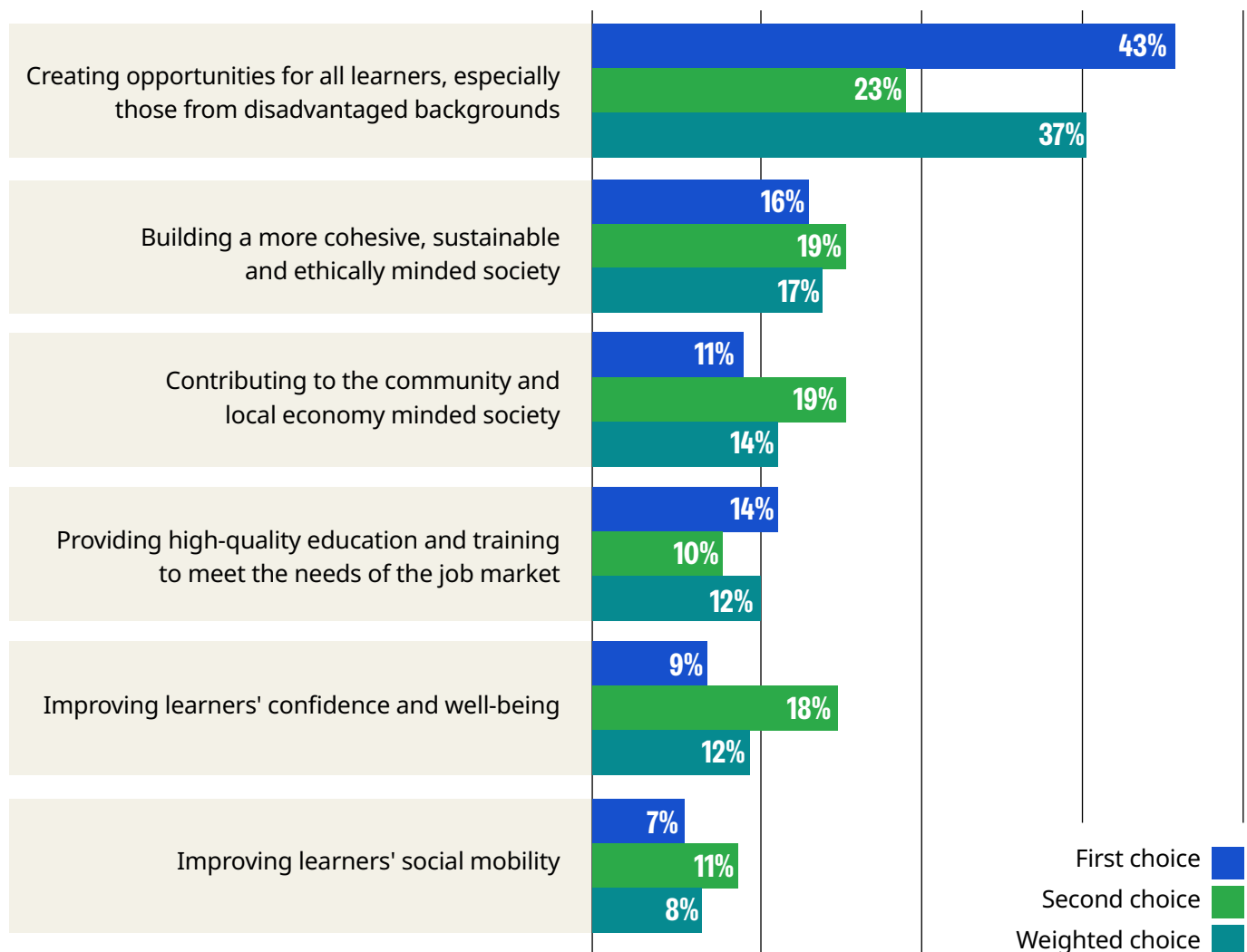
Individual social value		
Personal attributes	Character and values	2.9%
	Confidence and self-esteem	5.5%
	Skills and knowledge	6.7%
Health and wellbeing	Helping manage personal difficulties	2.4%
	Mental health and wellbeing	4.3%
	Physical health	2.4%
	Social connections	2.6%
Opportunity	Cultural capital and networks	2.1%
	Employment/better employment	9.8%
	Progression	8.4%
	Raising aspirations/expectations	2.9%
	Second chances	1.9%
	Social inclusion/widening participation	12.2%
	Social mobility	1.9%
FE and skills staff	Building value/satisfaction for employees	2.6%
	Providing employment	0.7%
Community social value		
Local people and groups	Civic engagement/citizenship	1.0%
	Community outreach, partnerships, projects and volunteering	9.8%
	Local employment and prosperity	2.6%
	Social cohesion/integration	5.5%
	Other community outcomes, eg trust and pride	1.2%
Local environment	Green investment and schemes	0.7%
	Green skills and sustainability programmes/awareness	1.9%

¹Note that each evidence submission could be coded more than once.

Employers	Connections	4.1%
	Meeting skills shortages/countering low-quality training	2.1%
Wider societal social value		
Society	Jobs linked to public good	0.2%
	Ethical/fair society	0.7%
	International development	0.2%
	Less inequality	0.7%

The greatest proportion of evidence submitted by providers was in the area of social inclusion and widening participation, followed by employment/better employment as well as community outreach, partnerships, projects and volunteering. Progression followed closely behind.



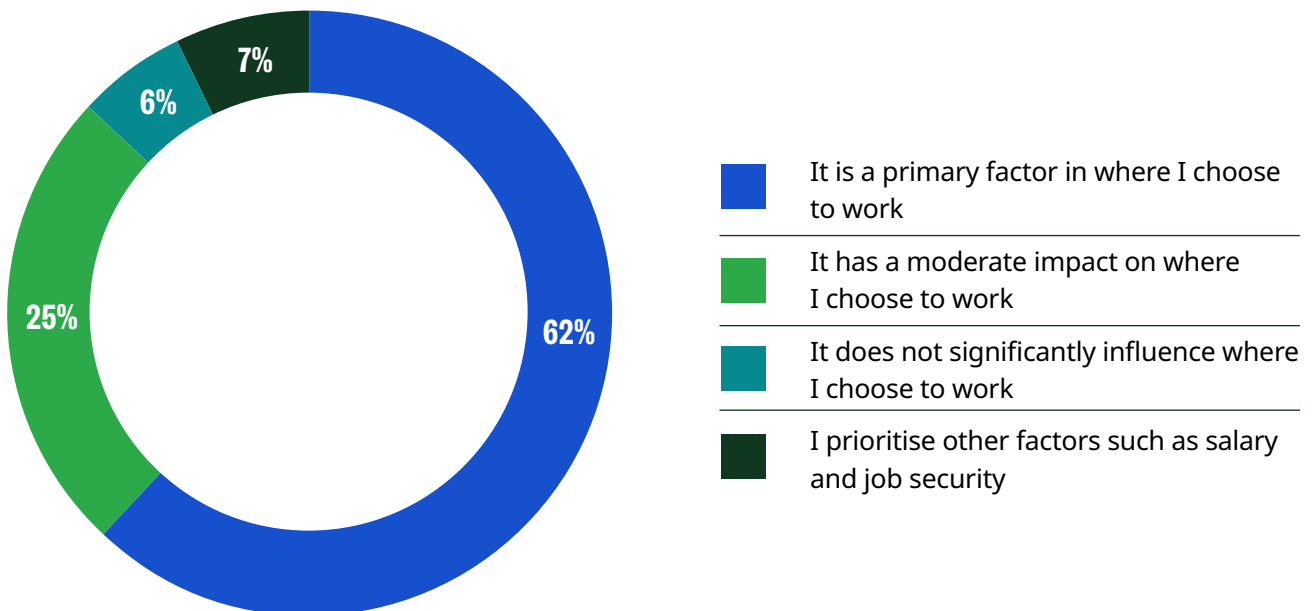
Figure 1. Providers' understanding of social value

Providers were asked to select which of six definitions is closest to their understanding of social value; Figure 1 above shows the results. The **blue bars show contributors' first choice** and the **green bars show their second**. The **teal bars show a weighted combination**; the first choice is given a weight of two and their second choice a weight of one. Creating opportunities for all learners, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds was the most popular definition, with a weighted score of 37% of contributors aligning with this definition. The second most popular was building a more cohesive, sustainable and ethically minded society (17%), followed by contributing to the community and local economy (14%).





Figure 2. Importance of organisational contribution to social value



As Figure 2 shows, it is important to FE and skills staff that their employers contribute to social value – it affects the career choice of almost nine in ten of the contributors to the call for evidence to some degree, and is a primary factor for more than six in ten. This implies that being able to evidence social value helps individual organisations to attract skilled, experienced staff.

Some of the examples provided in the sections that follow are striking in the extent to which their social value cuts across different areas, as is the case with a garden regeneration project that involves cultural capital and local food distribution, as well as the anticipated accrual of skills

Current and future evidence challenges

The vast majority of evidence submitted was descriptive. Ninety per cent of relevant submissions were categorised as anecdotal, with only 10% including some level of data or evidence of impact assessment. Some responses imply there may be a need to communicate to the sector what evidence of social value entails, as many discussed process with no consideration of the intended outcomes or impact – they lacked a reflection of why certain processes might be important to social value (seeing the process itself, such as certification, as being the ambition) and what might be appropriate evidence that social value has been achieved.

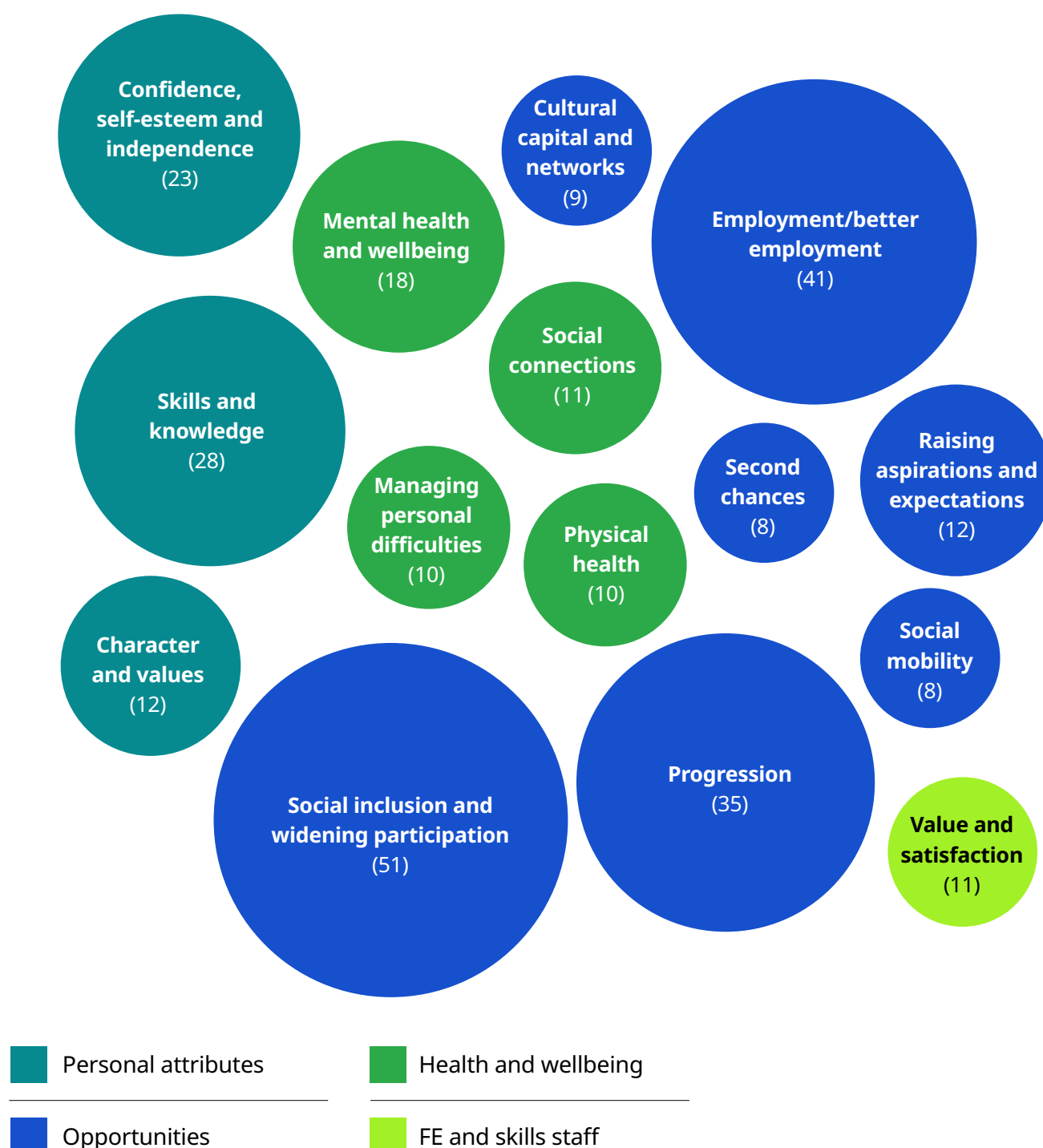
Furthermore, the lack of comprehensive evidence and understanding of cause-and-effect to date means that most examples provided are assumed to drive social value, but there is no cross-cutting understanding of which activities create most value or interrogation of the assumptions that activity X leads to impact Y. As a result, there is a tension between the high proportion of people who believe their organisations' commitment to social value informs their career choice and the practical implications of what that means. FE and skills providers need to consider what success looks like for them when it comes to positive social value, and to track back to the strengths and activities that have the biggest impact on this (for example, staff skills and background; the extent and quality of local partnerships; individual projects and programmes; evidence-informed practice, etc).

A few respondents were critical of the execution of social value in the FE and skills sector. One commented, 'I have found that the concept of social value is only given "lip service". As long as there are "bums on seats" and the boxes are ticked, very little else matters.' Someone else suggested that there may be underlying systemic factors linked to an 'increasing malaise' among learners, implying that Covid-19 and policy issues may share blame for many being 'stuck in a rut'. These issues are potentially limiting the amount of social value that FE and skills providers can realise.



INDIVIDUAL SOCIAL VALUE

Figure 3. Perceptions of the sector's social value to individuals²



The greatest social value for individuals is seen in opportunity – in social inclusion and widening participation, access to employment or progression to better employment, and progression to further and higher education. FE and skills-driven social value is also seen by the sector through the lens of personal attributes – learners' skills and knowledge, as well as their confidence, self-esteem and independence. While there is also value in learners' health and wellbeing and value for FE and skills staff, these received less attention in the call for evidence.

² Areas are included in the diagram where more than five people identified them.

Learners

Personal attributes



Character and values



Learners transformed into inquisitive and enthusiastic students who wanted to expand their knowledge by creating their own home labs.'

South Essex College

Learners have developed a range of character attributes, including respect and tolerance for other people, resilience and a sense of motivation. This development is supported by their courses and through the wider FE and skills environment, including enrichment activities. Chesterfield College, for example, had developed an ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) human library; according to a representative, 'Their stories of survival and messages home to loved ones was a clear message to our 16- to 18-year-olds about life experiences and overcoming tragedy.' Four providers also mentioned the development of British values in their learners which, according to one provider, support learners to understand the society in which they live.



Confidence, self-esteem and independences



Many of our clients have complex needs in relation to homelessness, mental health problems, drug/alcohol dependency and offending behaviour. We pride ourselves on our non-judgemental, person-centred approach in our work with clients that builds their confidence, motivation and helps to inspire change in their lives.'

The Restore Trust

Providers often explicitly set out to support their learners to develop confidence and self-esteem. The development of these attributes was often mentioned in the context of barriers faced by learners – Islington Council, for example, supports women from disadvantaged backgrounds to learn sewing skills that build their confidence and help them to earn money. Empowerment can be a byproduct of confidence, as learners become more secure in their ability to learn and to make effective decisions about their futures.



We offer basic managing money courses for adults with learning disabilities. One learner commented that she is no longer afraid to use cash, as she can count her change.'

City College Peterborough



Skills and knowledge



We place a high priority on developing soft skills... as well as life skills and citizenship to complement our skills provision.'

Martec Training

The development of skills and knowledge in learners is perceived as being a key element of the sector's social value, as well as being its core function. Skills and knowledge provide the necessary foundations to which other elements of social value can accrue in future, including wellbeing, better life chances and social mobility, as well as broader value such as the development of the skills needed for a well-functioning economy and society.

ESOL received particular attention from providers as an area of value. There is an overlap between ESOL outcomes and the section below on social cohesion and integration; one person from Stockport Continuing Education Service said, for example, 'Being able to learn English allows my students to integrate into their new community and deal with everyday issues as well as building confidence.' According to another provider, the role of FE and skills in supporting the development of English skills in those who need them is 'hugely important for helping them to progress in their lives and careers, as well as their feeling of belonging'. Someone else submitted a testimony from a local student from Pakistan, who had been living in the UK for nine months. This learner said, 'I am educated, but before this course it was difficult for me to speak English. This course has helped me a lot.'

Examples of personal attribute-related social value

- **Confidence linked to motivation and outcomes:** one student at Calderdale Adult Learning has been studying English and maths for three years, working his way through the levels. According to a provider representative, 'He has become a confident speaker, which is evident in his presentations and support for others in his peer group. He no longer doubts his ability, and this has been a tremendous shift in his motivation to complete his tasks and achieve the pass grade he deserves.'
- **Shift from requiring intensive support to greater independence:** one learner joined Blackpool and The Fylde College to study construction and functional skills at level 1. At the time, he was living in residential care with extensive additional needs that included needing an escort to travel to campus. He developed an interest in plumbing and switched to it at level 2, receiving comprehensive support from the college and from his care home throughout his studies. He developed the ability to travel independently, as well as a love of cycling and photography, and eventually secured a plumbing apprenticeship. He is a volunteer gardener for a charity and will soon be moving to adult-supported accommodation.
- **Refugee integration following ESOL classes:** according to a representative of West Sussex County Council, one learner, 'a Ukrainian who settled in the UK when war broke out, has struggled with confidence, but her attendance in the ESOL classes has brought so many positive changes. She has made really close friends in the class, and she has trained as a barista. She is now working in Starbucks, and she says that maybe she'll open a franchise in Kyiv, if she can return to Ukraine. She has found community in our ESOL group, which has had a really positive impact on her.'
- **Confidence and skills following social prescribing:** according to a contributor from West Nottinghamshire College, a 70-year-old woman was prescribed attendance at its Demystifying Digital course. She was a recent widow and was finding it challenging to use her mobile phone. The representative said, 'She became a much more confident user of her mobile phone. She has continued to study with us and is now developing skills to be able to shop online and contact her relations via video chat, both of which she had never done.'

Health and wellbeing



Physical health



We deliver adult education where active participation is valued more than academic achievement, which we hope leads to a reduction in social isolation and its associated health and wellbeing problems.'

The Guild for Lifelong Learning

The sector contributes to physical health directly, through links between learning, social connections and good health, and indirectly, through links into better-quality jobs and pay that support good health over the life course. For Slough Borough Council, their East Berkshire Community Learning and Skills Service empowers learners to close the healthy life expectancy gap. According to the WEA, adult learning has a ripple effect that builds communities, an offshoot of which is the promotion of individual and community health. Learner surveys at MI Skills Development Centre show that 98% believe their courses have helped them to increase their personal health or wellbeing.



Mental health and wellbeing



We try to break down barriers to improving learners' wellbeing and mental health.'

Momentum Recruitment Training

As with physical health, the sector supports mental health and wellbeing in direct and indirect ways. Providers affect learners' mental health through programmes that support wellbeing, and less directly through the opportunities afforded by learners' connections to their providers. Support is sometimes targeted at learners with pre-existing poor mental health. The WELLIES Project, for example, provides volunteering opportunities for learners recovering from mental ill-health. These opportunities build confidence and reduce stigma, as learners are seen through the lens of their actions, not their labels.

Wellbeing does not just represent value for its own sake: it can also affect other elements of social value. According to a representative of Morley College, for example, 'Incorporating wellbeing and emotional resilience into the scheme of work appears to support retention and achievement. It breaks down barriers and stigma in the classroom, familiarises mental health struggles, and encourages learners to persevere with their studies through times of personal challenge.'



Social connections



The college provides a social hub that incubates social interaction and wellbeing.'

Newcastle College Group

Social connections are part of the web of social value that can be an end in themselves or link to other benefits, such as health. They can also facilitate better outcomes, as social isolation can be a barrier to learning. Connections in the community can also facilitate aspects of personal development, such as respect and tolerance of difference. Opportunities to form social connections may be particularly important for older learners.



Helping manage personal difficulties



The old research that highlights adult education as important support through an adult's "difficult transitions" in their lives is central to our work. Unemployment, migration, health recovery, divorce/family break-up, illness are all possibles here... but it is not an exhaustive list.'

Derby Adult Learning Service

FE and skills providers often give learners the ongoing support needed to continue with their studies when they are encountering difficulties and, from there, they are supported to progress into further education or employment. A representative of The Restore Trust, for example, said, 'It is not uncommon within our cohorts to have learners that have developed issues outside of the classroom in their personal life that can be a barrier to continuing their studies. In these instances, we work closely with the learner to create an individual learning plan that may involve them attending on a future occurrence of a course to undertake the learning they have missed or one-to-one sessions with tutors at agreed times.' Breakfast clubs are one means of providing support for those who find themselves in challenging circumstances; providers may also offer food parcels to those most in need.



Students benefit from being part of a community and knowing that they have someone who can support, advise and signpost them with issues such as housing, schooling, medical issues, family problems, dealing with the council, etc. One of our volunteers, who is a trained counsellor, said "I didn't realise teachers were so much on the front line."

Stockport Continuing Education Service

Examples of health- and wellbeing-related social value

- **Better outcomes for learners who have experienced drug addiction:** Thurrock Adult Community College supports a small number of learners to become volunteers at the college, who then support others into FE and skills. One of its learners, who had been addicted to drugs, believes that the college 'saved her'. She is now working with friends who have similar addiction struggles to try to help them.
- **Outreach activities for disadvantaged children focusing on physical activity:** East Norfolk Sixth Form College offers holiday schemes for children on free school meals that include sports and dance activities, and free after-school street dance and cheerleading clubs. The college has an explicit focus on health due to local prevalence of childhood obesity.

Opportunity



Cultural capital and networks



We have taken students on these visits who have never flown before, never owned a passport or even ever left Norfolk, so these are transformational and confidence-building experiences. We have data showing the massive improvement between our young people before and after their travel placements, and we believe these experiences are transformational for the students but also their families and the wider community.'

East Norfolk Sixth Form College

Learners are able to develop cultural capital through international exchange programmes such as the Turing Scheme, as well as through exposure to cultural events and other phenomena that form part of their courses. Skills competitions are another aspect of cultural capital and network-building. According to an Oldham College representative, 'We are enabling local talent to reach national platforms and, along the way, using local skills competitions to turn learning into a positive motivational influencer for thousands of young people.'

Cultural capital is also built through exposing learners to workplace environments and forming connections with people who might be useful to their future careers. Activate Learning, for example, offers some of its students (presumably those studying horticulture-related subjects) opportunities to build a show garden for BBC Gardener's World Spring Fair and to contribute to gardens at Chelsea Flower Show. A representative of Pine College, a specialist college for creative subjects, commented, 'Students learn skills related to planning and promoting a public exhibition, curating, guiding and discussing their artwork in public spaces. Many students experience commissions and requests to purchase their artwork, opening further learning opportunities in costing and pricing their creations commercially.'



Raising aspirations and expectations



[A music production student] turned her passion into a career... She left school being convinced she was the 'thick' kid and would never amount to much. This is what she had been told by teachers at school. When she arrived here at 16, her first teacher sent her immediately to the support team for a dyslexia assessment, and she was diagnosed with dyslexia. With support in place for this, she soon realised she was very capable and just hadn't had her needs noticed elsewhere.'

Newcastle College Group

Raising aspirations and expectations involves exposing learners to what is possible. Sheffield City Council runs a campaign called See It Be It, which provides learners with an opportunity to have what it terms 'meaningful' employer encounters. According to a representative, 'Research tells us that just four of these opportunities can help to increase attendance and attainment, increase earnings and reduce the likelihood of a young person becoming NEET [not in education, employment or training] by 84%.' The council matches several hundred business volunteers with schools across the city for activities that include career talks and fairs, mock interviews, employability skills workshops and workplace visits.

Cross-generational aspiration represents a further element of value. According to a contributor from Stoke-on-Trent College, 'The area has one of the highest rates of deprivation within the country... For me, helping to get these adults into higher-paid jobs within industry, meeting industry shortages in the process, means that learners are in a better place to provide for their families, in turn supporting the next generation to have more aspirations.'



Progression



We integrate references to employment, apprenticeship and HE options through their learning. Many of our learners wish to become nurses and either enter then NHS as apprentices or go on to university or to the BBC.'

Leeds City College

Progression to ongoing training or university was mentioned in almost a fifth of the submitted evidence examples. A representative of Newcastle College Group said, 'We see so many FE learners join us at the University Centre that I am certain would never have applied for university without [specialist on-site] support, and without the ethos of valuing non-traditional academic subjects.' Providers highlighted progression routes for those who might otherwise face barriers; someone from Activate Learning, for example, said their Access to Higher Education course enables learners who have refugee status and/or English as a second language to study nursing at university.

Some providers reported progression data. The Restore Trust, for example, reported that 74% of their learners progress to employment; 6% go on to higher education or more further education; and the remainder are looking for work. All learners believe their course has developed skills that will help in their next steps.



Employment/better employment



College is a stepping stone from school to a career.'

Stockton Riverside College

A substantial minority of providers mentioned employment or better employment (through, for example, meaningful work, high pay or high-quality jobs) in the examples they gave of social value. In some cases, support into employment may be indirect. A representative of Bristol City Council's apprenticeship delivery function, for example, pointed to a three-year construction programme that had enabled the lead developer to sponsor two schools in deprived areas; this led to around 20 students gaining learning and employment opportunities, including apprenticeships and work experience. Value may also be seen through longer-term pay-back – 34 graduates of the same council's apprenticeship scheme now employ their own apprentices.



Successful completion of apprenticeship schemes and functional schemes means that learners have enhanced job opportunities.'

Northern Care Alliance

Social value is found not just in the traditional studying-to-employment pipeline, but also in less traditional routes and the detail of individual stories. A maths tutor from Chesterfield College gave the example of a learner, referred from the local job centre, who attended a practical lesson calculating how much carpet and tracking rods would be needed to re-carpet a room. 'This person absolutely loved this activity and went the next day to get a full-time job at the local big carpet fitting shop,' said the tutor. 'I never saw him again.' This kind of story shows why nuance is important when calculating social value – the tutor's retention figures were negatively affected, but the result was a positive one.



Second chances



FE is the safety net of our community. We help students achieve what seemed impossible to them at school.'

Reaseheath College

FE and skills providers offer a second chance at education to people who have under-achieved in the past, as well as to those who need a second chance in other ways – for example, those who have struggled with debilitating mental health difficulties or spent time in prison. For example, The Restore Trust, which works with ex-offenders, takes account of the complex needs of the people who use its services. An employee said, 'A number of these learners often need additional support and time before they are ready to enter the workplace, so our courses also aim to build confidence and prepare them for when they are able to take on employment.'



We have worked with UK residents that have struggled with maths for most of their life, and are desperate to gain level 2 maths as an equivalent qualification to GCSE in order to take on apprenticeships in the NHS, gain promotion in the management of children's nurseries or take up teacher training.'

Milton Keynes Community Learning



Social inclusion and widening participation



Our learners complete Employability and Personal Development Curriculum courses, which develop their social inclusion and semi-independent living skills. Our courses prepare our learners for life beyond education, and the community-based aspect of our curriculum helps to integrate them into their local communities.'

Navigators College

Providers often support learners in deprived areas who face multiple barriers to learning, as well as wider poverty and poor mental and physical health. Most learners attending East Norfolk Sixth Form College, for example, live in households with the lowest levels of participation in further and higher education. Household incomes tend to be low. Many learners are in receipt of free school meals, have low aspirations and additional educational needs. According to a college representative, 'We are in a desert for dentistry and have obesity and smoking/vaping levels, which mean that life expectancy is much lower (up to eight years less) in our poorest wards.'

Respondents to the call for evidence mentioned the provision of access, opportunities and support to groups of learners whom they perceived to face particular barriers, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, and/or neurodivergence; those not in employment, education or training; those who are socially isolated; and those living in poverty. Providers assess local requirements and ensure their provision meets the long-term needs of those who might otherwise struggle to access it. They sometimes run targeted campaigns to get under-represented groups into particular programmes and remove barriers in a similar way – The Restore Trust has managed to double its female participation, for example, through initiatives that include Women in Construction and delivering training at family-friendly hours.

Provision is sometimes tailored to particular groups or organisations; according to a Learning Curve Group representative, for example, 'We have started working with the RNIB (Royal National Institute for the Blind) after no other provider would. They are delighted with us after we adapted all of our learning for their teams.' In other cases, it might be tailored according to the needs of specific sectors – the Cornwall College Group offers condensed contact hours to learners who are working on farms – or by skills gaps, such as the provision of digital training to older workers or job-seekers who lack digital skills.



Social mobility



We believe that transformative learning experiences and strong support systems are essential for fostering social mobility.'

Travis Perkins plc

While social mobility and related concepts were only mentioned by nine of the people who responded to the call for evidence, there is an overlap between social mobility and the previous category of social inclusion and widening participation – the latter is about short-term outcomes, while social mobility is more about longer-term societal shifts. According to someone from MI Skills Development Centre, 'By promoting learning and skills through an ethos of lifelong learning, we build social value for disadvantaged, disengaged and hard-to-reach adults through access to funded education so learners can gain skills and recognised qualifications that help them to develop opportunities to reduce inequality and improve their earning potential and long-term career prospects.'



Examples of opportunity-related social value

- **Progression of learners with poor mental health:** the Adult Education service within Gloucestershire County Council partners with Gloucestershire Health and Wellbeing College to support learners with mental-health conditions to progress onto teacher training courses and to become peer tutors. A representative commented, 'We have supported many learners with poor mental health to achieve a qualification that enables them to work as 'experts-by-experience', using their lived experience and skills gained on the course to deliver sessions within the Gloucestershire Health and Wellbeing College, and/or to progress on to further work.'
- **Exposure to music-related cultural capital:** Blackpool and The Fylde College offers learners studying courses related to the music industry 'some unique industry experiences such as national arts festivals, technical tours with key industry professionals and international opportunities such as a month research residency in Venice. This has led to students from disadvantaged, deprived backgrounds gaining work with touring musicians on their technical teams.'
- **Provision of apprenticeships to those traditionally less likely to access them:** London South Bank University (LSBU) is the second-largest provider of degree apprenticeships. While most apprentices elsewhere are white, around half of LSBU apprentices are from ethnic minorities, and while only 28% of apprentices nationally are under the age of 21, the percentage at LSBU is 45%.
- **Employment assistance for current and former learners:** every Friday, Forward Step Learning helps people to build their CVs, apply for jobs and prepare for interviews. It provides additional resources to support attendees: as well as free hot drinks, there is a food bank, clothes bank and a book exchange.
- **Army-sponsored Combined Cadet Force (CCF):** East Norfolk Sixth Form college established this scheme to counter some of the social deprivation (highlighted above) faced by its learners and to provide social value. It involves students from year 10 up to year 13. A college representative said, 'The CCF offers high levels of social mobility as it builds discipline, offers camping opportunities, and we hold formal parades and dinners to help our young people know how to behave at formal dinners... For our students wishing to go into the military, they are now aiming higher and seeking to join as officers, whereas before, this would have been out of the question due to a lack of knowledge and confidence.'



FE and skills staff



Employment



As a large employer and college group, we provide employment for hundreds of staff across the country.'

Newcastle College Group

A small number of providers mentioned the employment of FE and skills staff as an element of social value to which their organisations contribute, sometimes overlapping with other elements of perceived social value such as social inclusion. A representative of Learning Curve Group, for example, said, 'We employed staff within the area of the contract in line with social value to ensure that there are greater employment opportunities within deprived areas.'



Value and satisfaction for employees



All our staff members are valued for their individual contribution and competencies they bring to the classroom... to develop social and life skills to all our learners.'

Momentum Recruitment Training

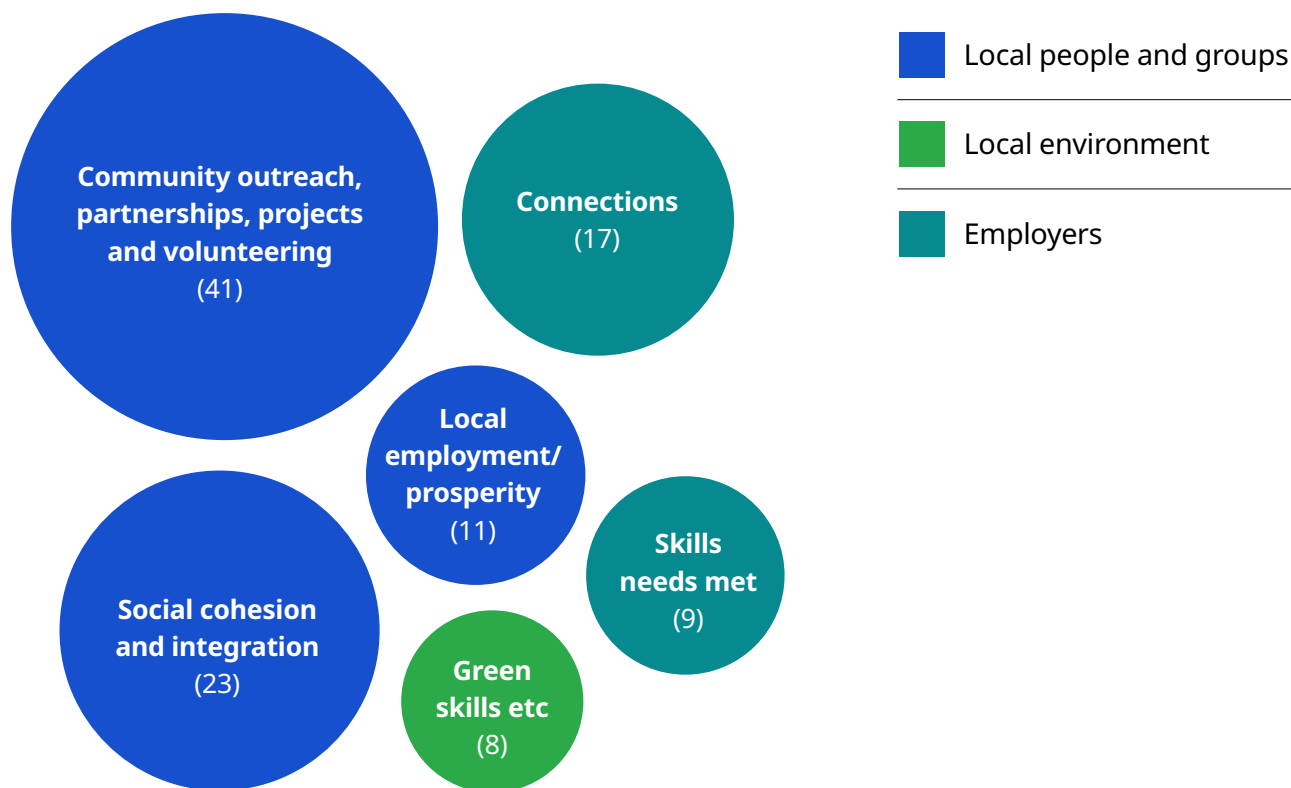
Offering value and satisfaction to employees was more of a focus for providers than staff employment. This is valuable both for staff themselves in terms of job satisfaction and career progression, and also in terms of the wider impact towards which providers contribute – well-trained, invested staff are better able to support learners. A report from Waltham Forest College submitted as part of this evidence call states, for example, 'The investment in CPD at all levels has been pivotal in supporting career progression, raising aspirations and ensuring the college has the right skills, experience and expertise at all levels to continue to be able to meet local and national skills needs.'

Examples of social value relating to FE and skills staff

- **Employee value:** Learning Curve Group offered accreditations as evidence of being a good employer – it is a Times Top 100 company and has Investors in People Gold. Social value is achieved, too, through offering employees paid time off to do charitable work.
- **Professional status:** Thomas Rotherham College has ensured that all teaching staff have either Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) or Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) status to enable them to work across different educational settings. At the same time, they develop members of staff to become coaches and mentors for the development of professional statuses.

COMMUNITY SOCIAL VALUE

Figure 4. Perceptions of the sector's social value to communities³



Community social value is less of a focus for providers than individual social value, but it is important nevertheless. The greatest value is seen through community outreach, partnerships, projects and volunteering. Social cohesion and integration are important, as are connections with employers.

Local people and groups



Civic engagement and citizenship

Our classes for Adults with Learning Disabilities have supported learners to engage with [the 2024] general election. After a tutor discovered that it is possible to download a form that someone with low literacy skills can take to a polling station, seven ALD students went and voted by themselves for the first time (without a carer or family member present).'

West Sussex County Council

³ Areas are included in the diagram where more than five people identified them.

Providers help to build civic engagement and citizenship through the development of these skills in their learners. Thomas Rotherham College, for example, explicitly works to develop civic responsibility and global citizenship in its students, and expects staff to model these attributes. Activities that contribute towards this development include student leadership of World Culture Day celebrations, an expectation that all learners will engage in third-sector work and fundraising, an event relating to the UK Youth Parliament, a Festival of Democracy and a mock election linked to the UK General Election. Stansted Airport College, which is part of Harlow College, has targeted civic responsibility in its learners by inviting the leader of the local council to talk about the importance of democratic representation and by visiting the Houses of Parliament to look at UK policy-making.



Community outreach, partnerships, projects and volunteering



I delivered computer classes at a range of community venues. This encouraged some learners to engage and attend college, and go on to gain employment.'

Leeds City College

Community outreach appears to be a significant part of FE and skills providers' social value proposition. Provider representatives sometimes go out into local communities to explore any barriers to education and employment, and to offer training in areas such as CV-writing and interviewing; some also offer courses and workshops on campus for community members to attend. Charity work, sponsorship and volunteering are also significant elements. Sutton Coldfield Training, for example, works with cancer and mental health charities and sponsors a local school; it also has plans to sponsor a youth football team, which it has linked to exercise and social connection. Community partnerships often involve voluntary-sector organisations or local authorities and focus on wider social value, including social cohesion (see below) and local employment.



Local employment and prosperity



We always contract to hire local community centres to ensure that room hire supports the local economy.'

Learning Curve Group

When providers help learners to find employment in the local area through skills development and filling gaps locally, it helps to drive prosperity. Providers also contribute to local prosperity more directly through procurement and employment. A representative of Rotunda College, for example, said, 'We are the largest community-led social enterprise operating in North Liverpool, with a local supply chain of 17 community businesses, growing the local economy and community wealth-building.'



Social cohesion and integration



Across our campus we have over 60 different languages spoken, and it has been commented that nowhere else in the town or wider borough will such a disparate range of people all come together, let alone learn together and create new positive shared experiences together.'

Oldham College

Providers contribute to social cohesion and integration by bringing together learners from diverse backgrounds, contributing to community partnerships and helping individuals overcome barriers that have hindered them from connecting with other people locally. Social cohesion and community belonging sometimes forms part of providers' stated purpose. Odils Learning Foundation, for example, was 'set up to provide ESOL for asylum seekers, refugees, migrant workers and all those isolated by language and culture'. Cohesion and integration can also take place at a classroom level. A representative of Blackburn with Darwen Adult Learning said they have a 'mix of learners in all classes with different ages, ethnicities, social and cultural backgrounds in every group, who learn to work together as a cohesive group providing mutual support'.



Our college is often the first place ESOL students come to integrate into society.'

Activate Learning

Other community outcomes

Providers mentioned other elements of community social value to which FE and skills providers contribute: community trust and a sense of pride. Realise Training, for example, has put on local award ceremonies to celebrate the achievements of learners and community members, and to boost a sense of local pride.



Examples of social value related to local people and groups

- **Learning activities with community benefits:** Scholars School System offers service-learning projects, through which students apply the skills they have developed to problems in local communities.
- **Training that equips learners to study in areas of high social value and low supply:** Chesterfield College offers an Access to Higher Education course with a focus on nursing, which trains around 100 people a year. Learners often lack GCSE maths when they start the course, which they need to progress onto the next stage. 'Most of them get through the qualifications and go on to the local universities at Nottingham, Derby and Sheffield to study nursing,' said a representative. 'We have helped supply hundreds of nurses through this system, in addition to social workers, teachers and teaching assistants.'
- **Courses delivered through social hubs for those experiencing loneliness and other difficulties:** the Mary Ward Centre, an adult education college, provides courses at local community centres through its outreach work. These community centres support people whose challenges include domestic abuse, addiction and loneliness; the courses offer these individuals the chance to try something new, and their involvement potentially supports physical and mental health.
- **Charitable donations:** the training provider Realise has donated 10 computers to a community centre in Liverpool, which has provided the technical capacity to allow community members to write CVs and apply for jobs.



Local environment



Green skills and sustainability programmes/awareness



We run sustainability programmes during our enrichment time so students understand the value of looking after their own environment.'

Stansted Airport College

Green investment and schemes

Green investment and schemes were mentioned by a small number of providers. Rochdale Training has invested £120,000 in solar panels, which it expects will pay for themselves within five years, and Learning Curve Group has reduced the need for staff who live outside the immediate area to travel to work in an effort to attain net zero carbon emissions. Runshaw College produces an annual report on sustainable development that outlines its environmental impact along with efforts made to mitigate this, through, for example, reducing the annual usage of single-use plastic bottles and procuring goods from local suppliers to avoid the environmental impact of long-distance transport services. Its strategic plan includes an objective to 'agree and mobilise a Net Zero action plan, with measurable KPIs'.

Examples of local environment-related social value

- **Green Changemakers:** Fircroft College has been involved in the Green Changemakers cascade training model. Individuals from different colleges are trained in green change-making skills; trainees are then expected to pass these skills on within their own organisations. A representative has commented, 'At the moment, the social value is for teachers and other staff in FE, as they step into their power (potential) as Green Changemakers, influencing systems, culture and mindsets in their organisations and collectively. As they work with others, they are developing community cohesion, trust and workforce satisfaction.' Positive social value is also anticipated in learners over the longer term, although this has yet to be measured.
- **Garden regeneration project:** Leeds College of Building have been involved in a restoration of a Victorian walled garden in partnership with the charity Living Potential Care Farm. When it is finished, it will enable food to be produced and distributed locally. According to a representative, 'This partnership allows us to take students of different construction disciplines to the site and provide supervised labour, whilst at the same time accruing employability and social skills for our students.'

Employers



Connections



We work with local employers to provide sustainable employment opportunities for those furthest away from the job market.'

Rotunda College

Connections with local employers are perceived by providers to represent one element of FE and skills-driven social value. Two-way social value is sometimes part of these employer-provider connections. Newcastle College works with local partners, including building contractors, to help them to meet their own social value targets like the number of work placements they offer. Employers also offer masterclasses to its students. In the other direction, students and staff add value to employers by spending money with local businesses, and some providers take account of their local purchasing power. According to a representative of Sheffield City Council, employers are often well-connected with providers containing learners who are already socially mobile. This means that providers with more disadvantaged intakes may need to work harder to secure connections.



Meeting skills shortages and countering low-quality training



We work with employers to develop programmes that prepare learners for their live vacancies and careers in their business. We gain an understanding from the employers of the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours that learners need to best prepare and to thrive in their companies.'

The Restore Trust

FE and skills providers can help employers to fill skills gaps. In some cases, they work closely with local employers to identify skills needs and other requirements so that courses can be designed around local priorities, creating a pipeline from training into employment. Some sectors lack good-quality training provision, offering a gap that providers can plug.

Examples of employer-related social value

- **Maximising purchasing power:** The Growth Company works to diversify its supply chains and purchase more from local small- and medium-sized enterprises, as well as voluntary and community sector organisations.
- **Identifying gaps:** Skills Edge Training commented, 'We have moved recently from hairdressing to financial and insurance services, as we found there was a lack of availability in these sectors of good-quality training, and it is a fast-growing industry that suits office-based and home-based workers.'

WIDER SOCIETAL SOCIAL VALUE



We recruit apprentices for some of the most socially disadvantaged in society and create a meaningful career in a sector that, for many years, failed to get the recognition it deserves – who, in turn, receive high-quality meaningful training and experiences to ensure our youngest children are cared for and educated to give them the best start in life.'

Kids Planet Day Nurseries

There were few responses to the Call for Evidence that focused on wider societal value – in other words, value that extends beyond local communities. The areas of wider societal impact that a small number of providers perceived were jobs linked to the public good; an ethical and/or fair society; international development; and less inequality. The low number of mentions implies that FE and skills stakeholders perceive their providers' main value to be located in their immediate environments; alternatively, they did not provide examples as wider social value is harder to evidence. If this boundary at the level of community is extended to a future FE and skills social value model, it will make measurement easier than the version suggested by the literature review. Societal impact is further down the causal impact chain, so it is much harder to demonstrate.

Some providers have visions and missions linked to wider society. The Restore Trust, for example, envisages 'a fair society where socially excluded people are supported to obtain skills, qualifications and employment to build sustainable, independent lives contributing positively to society'. In some cases, their missions are sector-specific: the mission of the Big Creative Academy is for its learners to have a powerful impact in the creative arts, which it ties into social-mobility objectives, saying, 'The majority [of our learners] are from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds, and we believe we are providing an experience for our students to access an industry that is 90% white and middle class.'



NEXT STEPS

As laid out in the main report, we now need a shared framework that enables all providers to evidence social value in ways that are rigorous, consistent, and aligned to national priorities.

This includes:

- ✓ developing a common measurement approach, co-designed with sector leaders, practitioners, and government
- ✓ improving data collection across the sector to build a stronger, longitudinal evidence base
- ✓ embedding social value into institutional planning, workforce development and funding decisions, to ensure it is a deliberate outcome of how we operate, not just a welcome consequence
- ✓ establishing a national knowledge base to evaluate what works, for whom, and under what circumstances, with a view to scaling impact.



APPENDICES



Appendix 1. Research approach and limitations

Call for evidence: a sector-wide call for evidence was made to discover how providers believe the concept of social value applies to their own activities, and to source examples of programmes and initiatives (including, but not limited to, those facilitated by ETF) that have demonstrated an element of social value. The call for evidence was disseminated as an online survey by ETF, with an option to append supporting evidence in other formats. It was run throughout July 2024.

211 responses were received in total, of which 175 were usable once the data had been cleaned and prepared. The dataset was cleaned to remove the responses of those who did not give consent, duplicates, non-providers and those not located in England; errors specifying region were corrected; and cells were recoded numerically where possible to aid analysis. Quantitative findings were then summarised. The qualitative information received through evidence submissions was coded inductively into different areas and categories. A summary of codes was accompanied by a high-level thematic analysis of submitted evidence; quotes from the call for evidence have, occasionally, been lightly edited for grammar and length.

Conclusions and recommendations: findings from the call for evidence and the summary of ETF's contribution were reviewed and analysed to determine (a) conclusions and (b) appropriate next steps for the sector when it comes to assessing and articulating its social value.

Limitations:

- The call for evidence involved a non-random, non-representative sample. Contributors' views may not represent the views of their employers. While cells were cleaned, searches were not run on the locations of individual providers due to available time, so it is possible a small number of non-English ones have slipped through the net.
 - Question 6 ('Please provide one or more specific examples of how your institution/employer has helped to build social value for your learners, staff and/or wider communities') forms the backbone of the qualitative analysis, but does not necessarily capture the full extent of how social value is perceived. The length of providers' responses determined their level of input to the evidence analysis – more codes were possible for longer responses.
 - In order to be sufficiently broad for meaningful analysis, some of the codes do not capture the granular detail of what providers said – 'confidence', for example, includes feeling prepared for work. Some codes were drawn from an assessment of implicit meaning.
 - To some extent, the evidence provided here depends on whether individuals involved in relevant FE and skills initiatives have thought to attach the label 'social value' to them.
-

Appendix 2. List of contributors

ETF and the report's author would like to thank those who contributed to the call for evidence for their time and insights (including those non-providers and those from other geographic areas whose views were not included; they are not listed below, but we are grateful for their contributions):

- Academies Enterprise Trust
- Accxel
- Activate Learning (three contributors)
- Adult Education in Gloucestershire (three contributors)
- Aspens Services Ltd (two contributors)
- Aspworks Ltd
- Association of Colleges
- Babcock International Group
- Barnet and Southgate College
- Big Creative Academy (two contributors)
- Birmingham Metropolitan College
- Blackburn with Darwen Adult Learning
- Blackpool and The Fylde College (three contributors)
- Blackpool Council
- Bradford College
- Bristol City Council
- Bucks Adult Learning
- Buildskill Plus
- Calderdale Adult Learning
- Carlisle College
- Central Bedfordshire College
- CHAWREC
- Cheshire West Council
- Chesterfield College
- Chesterfield College/Sheffield Hallam University
- Cirencester college
- City College
- City College Peterborough
- City Of Liverpool College
- City of Portsmouth College
- Colchester Institute
- Cornwall Marine Network
- Croydon Adult Learning and Training, Croydon Council
- Darlington Learning & Skills
- Derby Adult Learning Service
- East Norfolk Sixth Form College (two contributors)
- East Riding College
- Exeter College
- Fairfield School of Business
- Fircroft College
- Forward Step Training Ltd
- Gateway College
- GK Training Services Ltd
- Gloucestershire Adult Education
- Hereford and Ludlow College
- Homefield College
- HSDC College
- HWGTA/Real Time Education
- Ilidia Schools for Life Ltd
- IPS International
- Islington Council

-
- Kendal College
 - Kent Adult Education
 - Kids Planet Day Nurseries
 - Kirklees College (two contributors)
 - Lancaster & Morecambe College
 - Learning Curve Group (two contributors)
 - Leeds City College (two contributors)
 - Leeds College of Building
 - Little Gate Supported Employment
 - London South Bank University Group
 - Luton Adult Learning
 - Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust
 - Martec Training
 - Mary Ward Centre
 - MI Skills Development Centre
 - Milton Keynes College
 - Milton Keynes Community Learning
 - Momentum Recruitment Training
 - Morley College London
 - Moy Park
 - Myerscough College (two contributors)
 - Navigators College
 - New College Durham
 - New Meaning Training
 - Newcastle College Group (four contributors)
 - Newcastle under Lyme College
 - NHS NBT Southmead Hospital
 - North Somerset Council
 - Northampton College (two contributors)
 - Northern Care Alliance NHS Foundation Trust
 - Nottingham College
 - Odils Learning Foundation (two contributors)
 - Oldham College
 - Oldham Training Centre
 - Our Newham Learning & Skills
 - Pinc College
 - Realise
 - Reaseheath College
 - RNN Group
 - Rochdale Training
 - Rotunda Ltd
 - Runshaw College (three contributors)
 - Rutland Adult Learning & Skills Service
 - Scholars School System
 - Sheffield City Council
 - Shrewsbury Colleges Group (two contributors)
 - Skills & Learning Adult Community Education (Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council)
 - Skills Edge Training
 - Skills for Work
 - Slough Borough Council
 - South Essex College
 - South Thames College (two contributors)
 - Southend Adult Community College
 - St George's SEN School
 - St Vincent College
 - Stansted Airport College (part of Harlow College)
 - Stockport Continuing Education Service
 - Stockton Riverside College
 - Stoke On Trent College
 - Supplytrain CIC
 - Sutton Coldfield Training
 - Sutton College
 - The Cornwall College Group
-

- The Four Stones MAT
- The Growth Company
- The Guild for Lifelong learning
- The Restore Trust
- The WEA
- The WEA
- The WELLIES Project
- Thomas Rotherham College
- Thurrock Adult Community College
- TLC live and BEACON
- Trafford and Stockport College Group
- Travis Perkins Plc
- Trinity Specialist College
- United Colleges Group
- University and College Union
- University College Birmingham
- Uxbridge College
- Waltham Forest College (two contributors)
- Wandsworth Council Lifelong Learning
- Warrington & Vale Royal College
- Warwickshire College Group
- WEA
- West Herts College
- West Nottinghamshire College
- West Suffolk College
- West Sussex County Council
- Westminster Adult Education Service
- Why? Change Limited
- Wirral Metropolitan College
- Wyke Sixth Form College
- Youth Moves

Seven other contributors did not offer their providers' names.

Appendix 3. Provider demographics

Figure 5. Provider demographics

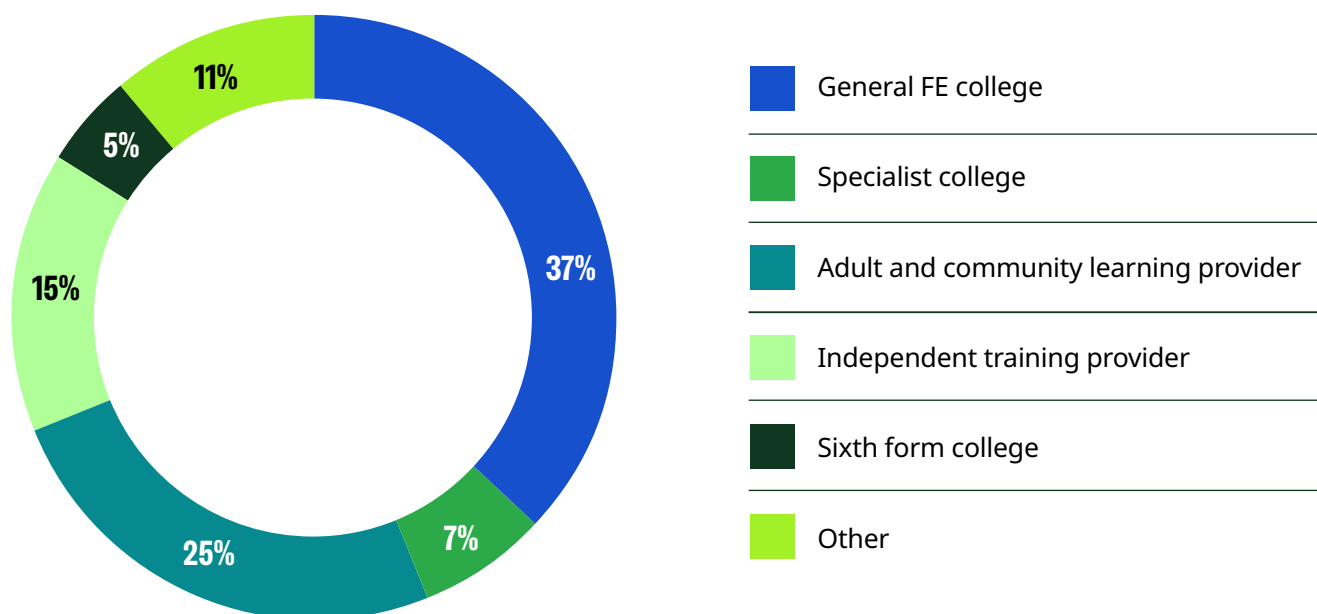
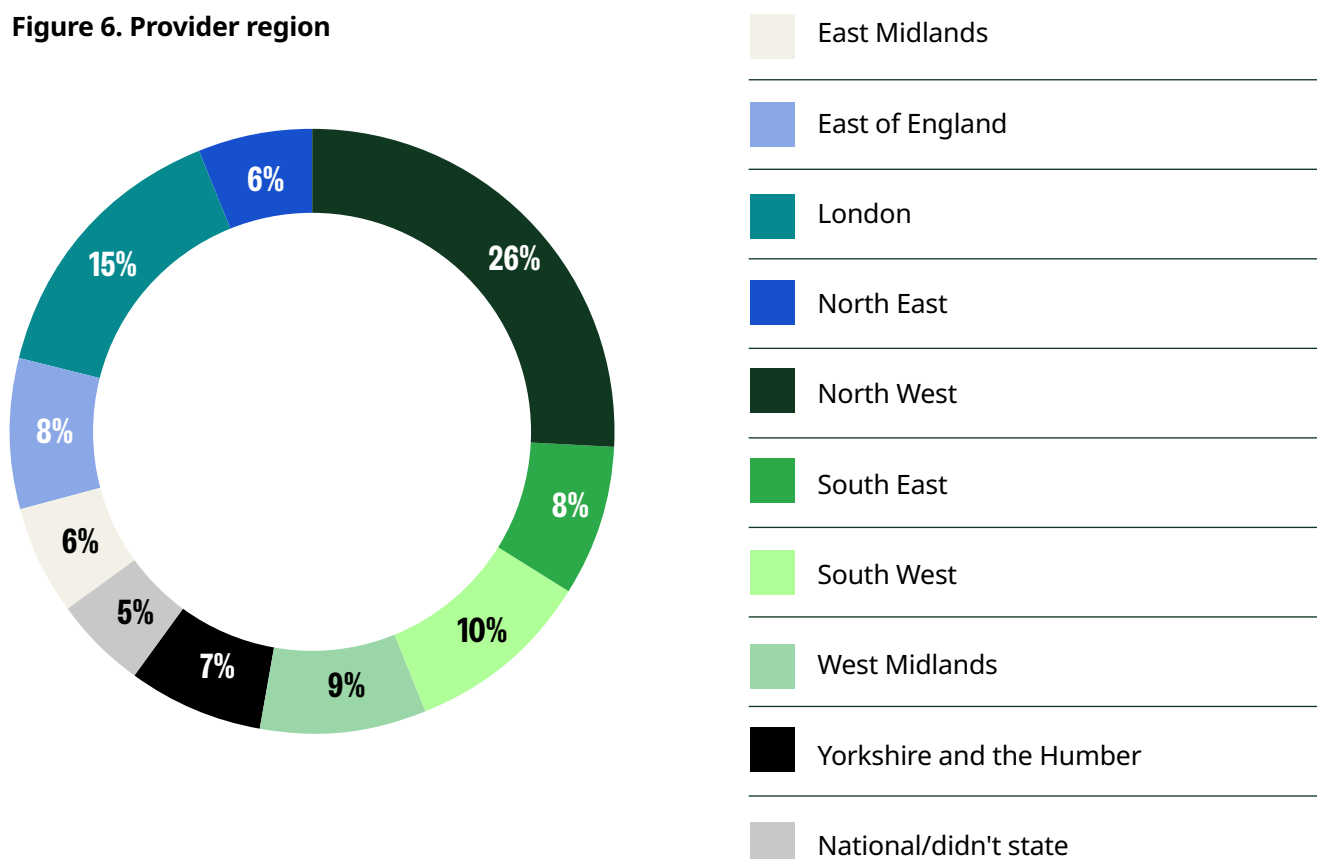
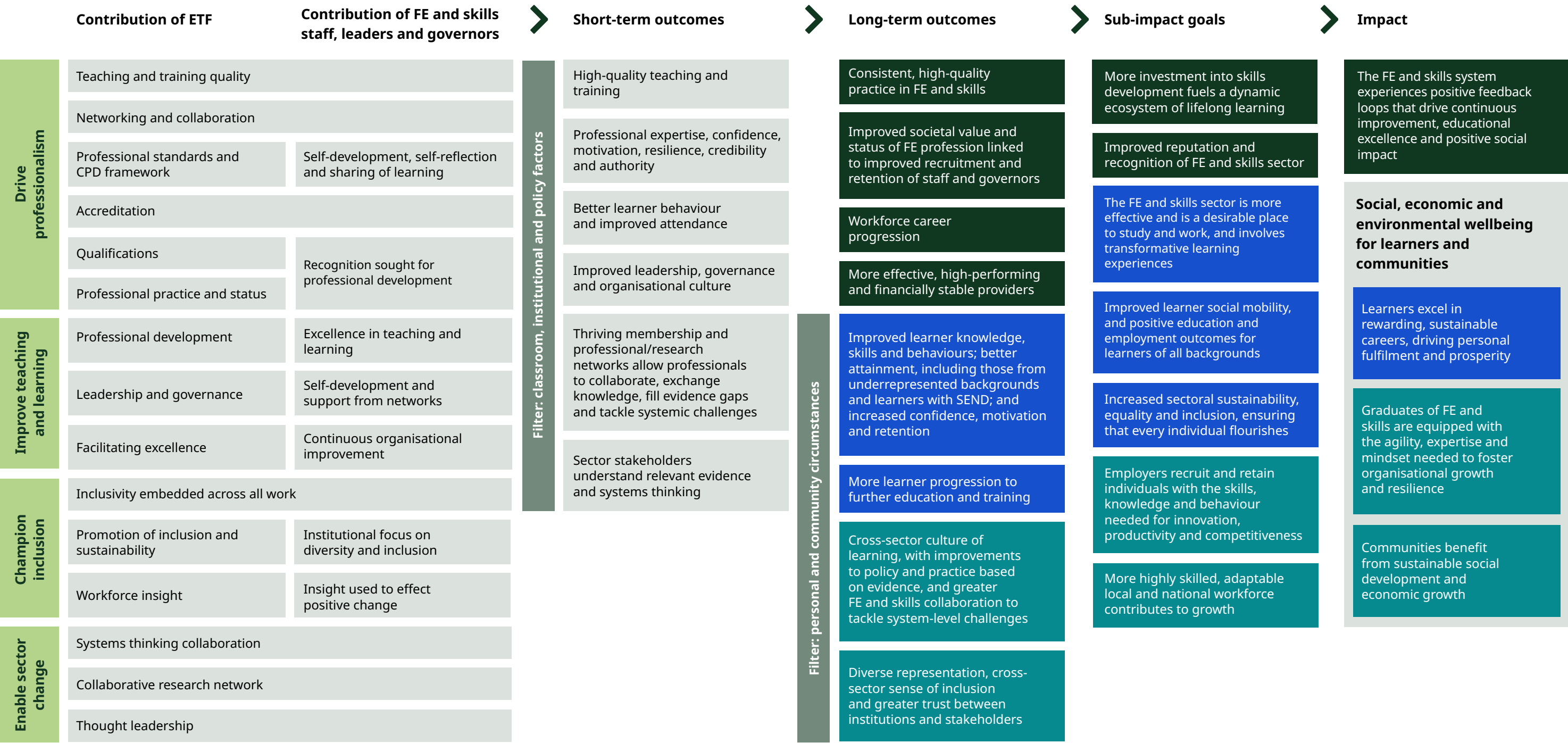


Figure 6. Provider region



Social value in further education and skills: theory of change



Enabler of continuous sector improvements

Individual social value

Community social value

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