

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
25 October 2021

LEARNING & SKILLS ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Members with an update on the performance of the Learning & Skills Service for academic year 2020/21.
2. To allow Scrutiny members oversight of, and an opportunity to challenge, the performance of this externally funded service

Summary

3. The pandemic has impacted on the Learning & Skills service and delivery in a number of ways over the last two academic years. However, the staff have responded magnificently and continued to deliver throughout that time, making a very successful transition to online teaching and learning.
4. The service is aiming to grow provision whilst continuing to respond to employer and community need, however there are a number of challenges ahead, not least an impending Ofsted inspection and funding reforms.

Recommendation

5. It is recommended that Members note the content of this report

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Group Director of People

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report

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S17 Crime and Disorder	The service supports the Council's crime and disorder responsibilities, young people engaged in learning are less likely to engage in anti-social behaviour
Health and Wellbeing	The service actively promotes health and wellbeing
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	The service promotes sustainability
Diversity	The service actively supports the diversity agenda
Wards Affected	The service offers provision across all of Darlington
Groups Affected	The service offers learning for 16-18 year olds and adults
Budget and Policy Framework	The service is externally funded. This report does not impact on the budget and policy framework
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Council Plan	The service contributes to the priorities in the Council Plan allowing people to develop their potential, improve their skills and help improve their employment opportunities
Efficiency	Scrutiny of performance is integral to optimising outcomes
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

The Learning & Skills Service

6. The Learning & Skills Service is the external training arm of the Council and is funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) to provide learning and skills provision for the local community. The service has been an Ofsted 'Good' provider since 2004.
7. The service provides a range of training from Pre-entry Level to Level 5, including:
 - 16-18 study programme and diploma courses
 - Adult education, including basic skills such as English, maths and ICT
 - Community Learning, including employability
 - Family Learning
 - Intensive Support
 - Distance Learning
 - English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
 - Apprenticeships
8. Learning & Skills supports some of the most disadvantaged adults, young people and families in Darlington and contributes to the priorities of both the Children and Young People's Plan and the Council Plan. Often the provision delivered provides a stepping-stone to those taking their first steps back into learning and a number of past learners have moved on to higher level learning at Darlington College and other providers.
9. Teaching takes place across three main sites: the Coleridge Centre, Bennet House and the units at Lingfield Way, as well as in a number of school and community settings.
10. Apprenticeship provision includes Early Years, Health and Social Care and Healthcare Support, Business Administration, Customer Service, Motor Vehicle, Site Joinery and Leadership and Management.

Learner Numbers

11. In 2020/21 the service supported 958 (902) learners (previous year's numbers in brackets) across a wide ranges of programmes, including:
 - 51 (54) 16-18 year olds on study programme
 - 406 (420) people on Adult Skills courses
 - 454 (388) people on Community Learning
 - 47 (40) Apprenticeship starts

Funding

11. The overall funding generated from the ESFA and TVCA for the Learning & Skills Service in 2020/21 was £993,206 (£963,757). This was split as follows:
 - £195,663 (£183,901) - 16-18 Study Programme (ESFA)
 - £416,150 (£442,710) - Adult and Community Education (TVCA)

- £53,928 (£48,607) - Adult and Community Education (ESFA)
- £232,340 (£247,489) - Apprenticeships (ESFA / Employers)
- £12,901 (£14,567) - Adult Learning Loans (ESFA / SLC)
- £82,224 (£26,483) – Other projects

Performance

12. Due to the impact of the pandemic on post 16 providers no achievement rates were published nationally in 2019/20 and none will be published for 2020/21 therefore there will be no national benchmarks for comparison. However locally produced performance data shows:

Provision Type	Overall Achievement Rate		
	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21 (Provisional)
16-18	79.70%	69.91%	78.4%
Adult Skills	89.86%	84.31%	86.8%
Community Learning	98.69%	95.05%	98.5%
Apprenticeships	81.13%	87.23%	88.9%

13. The achievement rate percentage is calculated by multiplying the number of learners who complete their course by the percentage of those that sat their exams / assessments and passed

Learner Progression

14. Learner progression, or the positive destination rate, measures the percentage of learner who move into education, employment or training after completing a course with Learning & Skills. The pandemic has impacted on some areas more than others, particularly those seeking to go into employment.

Provision Type	Positive Destination Rate		
	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21 (Provisional)
16-18	70%	54%	90%
Adult Skills	85%	78%	76%
Community Learning	75%	80%	75%
Apprenticeships	93%	81%	83%

Learner Satisfaction

15. Learner satisfaction (those rating the service good or above) dropped from 95.75% in 2019/20 to 91% in 2020/21. This was largely due to the fact that a number of learners were unhappy that they were unable to access face to face support due to Covid restrictions.

Employer Satisfaction

16. Employer Satisfaction dipped from 98.2% in 2018/19 to 92.5% in 2019/20. However, in 2020/21 100% of employer responses rated the service good or above.

Observation of Learning, Teaching and Assessment

17. Over the last two years with the restrictions on face to face teaching it has been challenging to undertake observations of learning, teaching and assessment. However, of those observations undertaken in both 2019/20 (4) and 2020/21 (10) all were rated Good or above.

Impact of Covid

18. The service responded very quickly to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic and made a very successful transition to online learning via Google Classroom and Equal, a distance learning platform. Unfortunately, in some instances it has proved very difficult to recruit learners onto courses, particularly those people who struggle with IT or who needed face-to-face support on courses like basic English and maths. This was also the case with apprenticeship provision due to a national lack of applications across all sectors proving it difficult to meet employer demand. The pandemic also impacted in some areas on performance, destination outcomes and learner satisfaction despite the best efforts of the staff.
19. These difficulties highlighted above and the lack of access to external delivery settings caused by Covid meant the service could not achieve the growth in learners and funding it had planned for. Funding is generated by the number of learners / qualifications delivered. It is hoped that the easing of restrictions will allow the service to grow learner numbers from September 2021.
20. Delivery and qualification outcomes have also been impacted upon by the need for some qualification awarding bodies having to move their exams online and the time that this took. It was also impacted by the introduction of calculated grades for some areas meaning that evidence justification was required to support outcomes and the time this took awarding bodies to process.

Challenges Ahead

21. The service is now overdue for an Ofsted inspection due to the delays caused by the pandemic. Staff continue to make preparations for the impending inspection, and it is hoped that the service can retain its Good grading. However, there are a great deal of unknowns around how much inspectors will take account of the impact of the pandemic.
22. The service has recently been awarded a further three-year funding contract by TVCA for Adult Skills and continues to respond to the demands of local skills needs. However, there are also potential uncertainties if the TVCA devolved funding model starts to diverge from what the rules and requirements were under the ESFA.
23. The government have proposed a review of the further education funding system in their white paper 'Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth' which was published in January 2021. A part of the proposals in the white paper a consultation on a 'New Further Education Funding and Accountability System' was launched on 15 July 2021. At present the service has no indication of the likely impact any funding reforms will have on Learning & Skills or the TVCA devolved funding.