

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
28 OCTOBER 2024**

LEARNING & SKILLS ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Members with an update on the performance of the Learning & Skills Service for academic year 2023/24.
2. To allow Scrutiny members oversight of, and an opportunity to challenge, the performance of this externally funded service

Summary

3. Learner numbers and performance remain high but the service faces a number of challenges going forward.
4. The service is growing provision whilst continuing to respond to employer and community need.
5. The service was inspected by Ofsted in June 2022, retaining its assessment of 'Good' overall.

Recommendation

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

Tony Murphy
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Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

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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
Addressing Inequalities	The service actively supports the diversity agenda
Tackling Climate Change	The service promotes sustainability
Efficient and effective use of resources	Scrutiny of performance is integral to optimising outcomes
Health and Wellbeing	The service actively promotes health and wellbeing
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
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
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	Looked After Children or Care Leavers may access the service offer

MAIN REPORT

The Learning & Skills Service

7. 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.
8. The service provides a range of training from Pre-entry Level to Level 5, including:
 - (a) 16-18 study programme and diploma courses
 - (b) Adult Education, including basic skills such as English, maths, ICT/Digital
 - (c) Learning for Inclusion
 - (d) Bespoke Employer Led Programmes (BELPs)
 - (e) Family Learning
 - (f) Intensive Support
 - (g) Distance Learning
 - (h) English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
 - (i) Apprenticeships
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. Apprenticeship provision includes Health and Social Care, Business Administration, Motor Vehicle, Site Joinery and Leadership and Management.

Learner Numbers

12. In 2023/24 the service had 1,501 (1,540) enrolments (previous year's numbers in brackets) across a wide range of programmes, including:
 - (a) 73 (46) 16–18-year-olds on Study Programme
 - (b) 1,370 (1,445) people on Adult Skills courses
 - (c) 58 (49) Apprenticeship starts

Funding

11. The service is totally externally funded. The overall funding generated from the ESFA and TVCA for the Learning & Skills Service in 2023/24 was £1,129,883 (£809,763). This was split as follows:
 - (a) £370,245 (£189,938) 16-18 Study Programme (ESFA)
 - (b) £398,632 (£324,590) - Adult and Community Education (TVCA)
 - (c) £33,849 (£37,234) - Adult and Community Education (ESFA)

(d) £300,140 (£242,294) - Apprenticeships (ESFA / Employers)

(e) £27,017 (£15,707) – Level 3 Funding (TVCA)

Performance

12. Due to the impact of the pandemic on post 16 providers no national or provider level achievement rates were published in 2020/21 or 2021/2. Final achievement rates for 2023/24, with national benchmarks will be published in March 2025.

Provision Type	Overall Achievement Rate		
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24 (Provisional)
16-18	68.9%	75.8%	69.4%
19-23	84.9%	92.3%	94.8%
24+	82.8%	93.3%	94.4%
Learning for Inclusion	97.2%	99.0%	99.8%
Apprenticeships	64.7%	63.2%	55.1%

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 learners who move into education, employment or training after completing a course with Learning & Skills. TVCA changes in the Learning for Inclusion (previously Community Learning) offer have resulted in a decrease in positive progressions following a shift from qualification led funding to funding for individuals.

Provision Type	Positive Destination Rate		
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24 (Provisional)
16-18	73.0%	97.8%	78.9%
Adult Skills	82.0%	85.8%	89.0%
Learning for Inclusion	87.5%	68.9%	64.0%
Apprenticeships	81.1%	87.9%	85.5%

Learner Satisfaction

15. Learner satisfaction (those rating the service good or above) has risen from 91% in 2022/23 to 98% in 2023/24.

Employer Satisfaction

16. Employer Satisfaction (those rating the service good or above) rose from 96.3% in 2022/23 to 100% in 2023/24.

Ofsted Inspection Outcome

17. The service was inspected in June 2022 and retained its overall grade of 'Good'. The inspectors looked at eight discrete areas;

(a) The quality of education	Good
(b) Behaviour and attitudes	Good
(c) Personal development	Good
(d) Leadership and management	Good
(e) Education programmes for young people	Good
(f) Adult learning programmes	Good
(g) Apprenticeships	Good
(h) Provision for learners with high needs	Good

18. Only three areas for improvement were identified, all of which have been addressed.

- (a) Ensure that all tutors use information about learners' starting points to effectively plan learning that meets individual needs
- (b) Ensure that all learners benefit from a range of work experience opportunities
- (c) Ensure that tutors receive appropriate training to enable them to continue to develop their teaching skills

19. The report highlighted the fact that the service is meeting the needs of the local community and local businesses, learners were well supported and that the service was well led.

Challenges Ahead

20. In 2023/24 TVCA allocated a budget of £503,889 for Learning & Skills delivery, as a result of over-performance in-year the service was awarded a further £153,328. That over-performance has not been recognised in the 2024/25 TVCA allocation and there has been no indication to date as to whether in-year growth will be available again. This will constrain delivery if additional funds cannot be released by TVCA.

21. TVCA are due to re-tender adult provision for academic year 2025/26, the service will have to submit a bid to continue to deliver adult education beyond this academic year.

22. Due to the devolution deals in the North-East the ESFA allocation reduced from £66,776 in 2023/24 to £27,540 in 2024/25. This means that the service will not be able to draw down funding for learners from County Durham. In 2025/26 we expect to lose the remaining £27,450 due to the North Yorkshire devolution deal. This will limit delivery to learners with Tees Valley postcodes.

23. Funding rates do not rise with inflation, and pay rises are unfunded, therefore unless the service can attract additional funding from TVCA the service will likely show an in-year deficit from 2025/26. To that end the service has already undertaken a review of expenditure and made the decision to withdraw delivery of the Motor Vehicle apprenticeship at the end of academic year 2023/24 due to lack of demand and the high costs associated with the delivery.

24. Proposed changes in government policy, such as relaxations of the apprenticeship levy may well impact on the service delivery.
25. At the end of academic year 2024/25 the service will vacate the Coleridge Centre and move to the new Adult Skills Centre in the old Northern Echo building. Impact on delivery is unknown at this point.