

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
20 OCTOBER 2025**

LEARNING & SKILLS ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Members with an update on the performance of the Learning & Skills Service for academic year 2024/25.
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 continues to face 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. Providers rated Good normally receive an Ofsted inspection every five years

Recommendation

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

**James Stroyan
Executive Director People**

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 Department for Education (DfE) 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:
 - 16-18 Study Programme and diploma courses
 - Adult Education, including basic skills such as English, maths, ICT/Digital
 - Learning for Inclusion
 - Bespoke Employer Led Programmes (BELPs)
 - Family Learning
 - Intensive Support
 - Distance Learning
 - English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
 - 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 places 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, Site Joinery and Leadership and Management.

Learner Numbers

12. In 2024/25 the service had 1,334 (1,537) enrolments (previous year's numbers in brackets) across a wide range of programmes, including:
 - 91 (46) 16–18-year-olds on Study Programme (the service has had a significant increase in the number of young people with EHCPs)
 - 1,188 (1,444) people on Adult Skills courses
 - 55 (47) Apprenticeship starts

Funding

11. The service is totally externally funded. The overall funding generated from the DfE and TVCA for the Learning & Skills Service in 2024/25 was £1,278,454 (£1,126,252). This was split as follows:
 - £528,553 (£370,245) 16-18 Study Programme (ESFA)

- £412,537 (£396,408) - Adult Skills Fund (TVCA)
- £3,200 (£33,521) - Adult Skills Fund (DfE)
- £311,531 (£300,183) - Apprenticeships (DfE / Employers)
- £22,633 (£25,895) – Level 3 Funding (TVCA)

Performance

12. Provisional achievement rates are given below. Final achievement rates for 2024/25, with national benchmarks will be published in March 2026. Apprenticeship achievement rates have improved significantly following a dip in 2023/24.

	Overall Achievement Rate		
Provision Type	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25 (Provisional)
16-18	82.6%	80.0%	88.7%
Adult Skills	93.4%	94.5%	93.1%
Learning for Inclusion	99.0%	99.8%	99.5%
Apprenticeships	66.7%	62.1%	78.6%

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. Positive destinations for 16-18 year olds have dropped with the significant increase in young people with EHCPs. These young people often have complex needs and may not be ready to go into employment of leaving the service.

	Positive Destination Rate		
Provision Type	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25 (Provisional)
16-18	97.8%	84.2%	76.9%
Adult Skills	85.8%	88.0%	84.7%
Learning for Inclusion	68.9%	64.1%	72.6%
Apprenticeships	87.9%	86.1%	86.6%

Learner Satisfaction

15. Learner satisfaction (those rating the service good or above) has risen from 91% in 2022/23 to 95% in 2024/25.

Employer Satisfaction

16. Employer Satisfaction (those rating the service good or above) rose from 96.3% in 2022/23 to 100% in 2024/25.

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;

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good

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

- Ensure that all tutors use information about learners' starting points to effectively plan learning that meets individual needs
- Ensure that all learners benefit from a range of work experience opportunities
- 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.

20. A new Ofsted framework is being implemented from November 2025 and the service is expecting an inspection sometime in 2026 or early 2027.

Challenges Ahead

21. Changes in the skills agenda, including; the development of Skills England, the very recent move of the skills brief away from the DfE, the proposed changes to apprenticeship assessments, as well as further devolution have the potential to impact on service delivery. These changes will be monitored closely and delivery adapted as required.

22. Following devolution of the adult skills fund in the surrounding localities the service will no longer receive Adult Skills Funding direct from the DfE. The service has managed to secure funding from the York & North Yorkshire Combined Authority for 2025/26 and hopes to attract some funding from the North-East Combined Authority from 2026/27. This means that in 2025/26 the service will not be able to provide learning opportunities to anyone who resides in the County Durham area.

23. At the end of December 2025 the service will vacate the Coleridge Centre, handing it over to the academy trust, and move to the new Adult Skills Centre in the old Northern Echo building. Moving delivery to the town centre will hopefully have a positive impact on recruitment.