

Scrutiny Board

09 March 2021

Report title	Adult Education Strategy, Offer and Outcomes 2019-20	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Dr Michael Hardacre Education and Skills	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Richard Lawrence, Director of Regeneration	
Originating service	Adult Education	
Accountable employee(s)	Joanne Keatley	Head of Adult Education
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Report to be/has been considered by	Regeneration Leadership Team	16 February 2021

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Scrutiny Board is recommended to:

1. Provide feedback and challenge on the suitability of the Adult Education strategy, learning offer and outcomes for residents.
2. Comment and advise on how Adult Education can contribute further to reducing the digital divide.

1.0 Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the scrutiny panel with an overview of the Adult Education strategy, offer and outcomes for residents, highlighting digital inclusion strategies.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Further Education sector is divided into FE Colleges, Adult and Community Learning Providers and Training Providers. Adult Education Wolverhampton (AEW) is an Adult and Community Learning (ACL) provider. The ACL sector has a distinct focus and purpose enshrined in lifelong learning and the wider benefits of learning. Most ACL providers have a mixed portfolio of funding for skills and funding for community learning. This positions them to make a valuable contribution to agendas such as health and well-being, digital inclusion, qualifications and skills, employment and community cohesion.
- 2.2 The City of Wolverhampton Council receives just over £3m annually from the Department for Education via the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) to provide the Adult Education Service. The funding is split equally between funding for qualifications and skills and funding for Community Learning, which tends to be non-qualification based and supports widening participation, digital inclusion and health and well-being.
- 2.3 The service has an Advanced Learner Loans facility for learners aged 24+ undertaking an eligible level 3 qualification. The service receives a small amount of funding from the Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) for learners aged 16 to 18 years.
- 2.4 AEW's funding is for adults aged 19 and over. AEW's unique position as an ACL provider affords it the opportunity to attract adults who are returning to learning and seeking a safe, discrete learning environment with other adult learners. AEW's offer allows adults to be the primary focus and caters specifically for their needs rather than those of young people. Adults who enrol with the service are well supported, often overcoming health and specific learning barriers that they have had since school or developed in early adulthood.
- 2.5 The Service received an Ofsted inspection, under the new Education Inspection Framework (EIF), in November 2019, it received an overall effectiveness grade of Good and graded good in all areas. The service was graded Outstanding for Personal Development. The Service continues to focus on improvements from the Ofsted inspection alongside improvements identified by the Service from its annual self-assessment report. A single Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) exists to capture all improvement work.
- 2.6 The 2019-20 academic year was significantly impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic. From March 2020 all face to face learning ceased and moved to a remote form of delivery. Therefore, participation, achievements and outcomes were adversely affected. For example, participation was 9% lower than planned on qualifications courses, achievements were 18% lower than planned and outcome reporting was significantly impeded with only 280 students completing the Next Steps survey, compared to almost 1,000 in previous years, giving less validity to the results.
- 2.7 The City Learning Quarter (CLQ) will be developed around the Old Hall Street area of the city centre once funding is secured. It will include a City of Wolverhampton College campus, the council's Adult Education Service, and the Central Library. The aim is to

improve the offer to all users of the library, college and adult education provision. The City Learning Quarter will also see investment in the public realm as part of Wolverhampton's regeneration programme.

3.0 Adult Education Strategy

3.1 **The mission of the service is ‘to make a positive difference to the lives of individuals and communities through high quality learning that inspires, challenges and leads to further learning and employment’.**

3.2 In realising this mission, the service aims to impact on three of the Council’s strategic outcomes:

- well skilled people working in an inclusive economy;
- strong resilient and healthy communities and children
- young people get the best possible start in life.

Going forwards the Service’s work will be intrinsically linked to the Relighting the City plans and particularly Generate more Jobs and Learning Opportunities.

The West Midlands Combined Authority’s Covid-Recovery plans, its Strategic Economic Plan and the Council’s Strategic Economic Plan provide a backdrop to the service aims, particularly the need to contribute to inclusive growth and provide residents opportunities to position themselves to take advantage of a more prosperous city.

3.3 To impact on the strategic outcomes of the Council and aims of the WMCA the Service uses key demographic data along with information on the labour market trends to inform the planning and delivery of the offer to residents. Wolverhampton is an area of extreme and multiple deprivations. Key facts for Wolverhampton from the Black Country Consortium, Economic Intelligence Unit, April 2020 include:

% of Residents with No Qualifications			
	2004	2014	2020
Wolverhampton	23.8	19.6	17.3
National Average	14.9	8.5	7.5

% of Residents with Level 4 and above Qualification			
	2004	2014	2020
Wolverhampton	16	23.6	24.9
National Average	26	40	40

- The Experian Literacy Score mapping project (2016), within the 533 Parliamentary constituencies in England, ranked Wolverhampton South East and Wolverhampton North East as being 9th and 14th respectively in having the greatest literacy need.
- Numeracy skill levels reported in 2011 showed 58.6% of Wolverhampton residents as being below level 1, as compared against 49.1% in England. Having numeracy skills below level 1 means a person may not be able to understand price labels or pay household bills.

Unemployment rates have been significantly adversely affected as a result of the pandemic:

- 10.3% of the working age population claimed unemployment benefit in December 2020, with 16,795 claimants and a 73% increase over 12 months. **Wolverhampton has the seventh highest claimant count in the country.** The national average is 6.4%.
- Youth unemployment (18 – 24 age group) for Wolverhampton in December 2020 is 15.2%. It is ranked third highest in the country. In England it is 9.0%.
- For those aged fifty plus (50-64 age group) in Wolverhampton in December 2020 the claimant rate was 8.03%. In England it is 5%.
- Other groups with higher unemployment rates than the Wolverhampton average include working aged disabled people and ethnic minorities of working age.

3.4 The curriculum strategy focuses on attracting residents from deprived communities, with low levels of skills and qualifications and high levels of unemployment. The curriculum is designed to widen participation in learning particularly for those furthest from the labour market; offer opportunities to improve health and well-being, putting people in a better position to move towards employment and provide people with the qualifications, skills and attitudes needed by employers today.

3.5 To support the Service to deliver against its strategy, the Service has a 'Plan on a Page', agreed with its Advisory Board, to steer its key performance indicators. In 2019-20 these included:

- % of residents from the 9 most deprived wards
- % of residents living in the top 10% of Lower Super Output Areas
- % unemployed and looking for work
- % who are in work and on a low wage
- % with low and no qualifications

- 3.6 In 2019-20, the service has tried a new strategy to widen participation further in deprived communities by subcontracting some provision to third sector providers who are directly delivering to residents in their communities. The aim is for these learners to progress into AEW learning opportunities in the City centre.
- 3.7 The curriculum strategy ensures AEW works hard and purposefully to provide an inclusive learning environment to support its impact on individuals and their communities. Its endeavours to be inclusive are supported by well-developed, productive partnerships internally within the Council, and externally with a range of public, private and third sector organisations, including City of Wolverhampton College, the City of Wolverhampton University, Schools, Strengthening Families Hubs, Job Centre Plus, the Refugee and Migrant Centre and the Learning Platform. A new partnership with Wolverhampton Homes is developing and a bespoke package of learning is being designed to engage their most vulnerable pre-tenants and tenants.
- 3.8 The curriculum strategy includes managing efficiency and value for money through effective and integrated use of all funding streams, income from student fees, income from small projects and income from work with employers. Annual curriculum planning includes scrutinising efficiency indicators such as class size, teaching hours utilised, room and building usage.
- 3.9 The curriculum strategy aims to support those in low paid work who are aiming to improve their skills to access higher paid work. The service provides core qualifications such as English, maths and ESOL in the evening to enable those in daytime work to study in the evening. And in ESOL we have a project to test a more flexible offer for shift workers, who struggle to attend regularly and miss too much content to achieve their qualifications.
- 3.10 To support the lifelong learning agenda and the concept that learning throughout life is good for health and well-being, but to remain within funding priorities, the Service offers a suite of 'Club Classes'. These classes are not funded by Government; the tutors are self-employed, and the students all pay. Adult Education's role is to support with aspects such as marketing and facilities.

4.0 The Curriculum Offer

- 4.1 In line with the need in the City, the service has developed strengths in areas such as English, maths and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) alongside vocational provision at level 2 and below and provision specifically designed for those with mental health issues and learning disabilities. The service also provides opportunities for adults to enter higher education after following an Access to Higher Education programme or other Level 3 courses.
- 4.2 To ensure we attract residents with low and no skills the curriculum offer provides multiple entry points from community engagement activity, which is likely to be non-qualification based, through entry level and up to level 2, 3 and above.

- 4.3 Following engagement the curriculum is designed to offer linear and non-linear pathways to take adults through to meaningful outcomes including employment and further learning with AEW or other FE and HE providers. Examples of linear pathways would include progression from entry level, in a subject such as maths or English, up through the levels to GCSE in the same subject. Non-linear progression would be a student starting their journey studying, for example, a basic skill such as English or Maths but then moving sideways to a vocational subject such as Health and Social Care or Supporting Teaching and Learning in school.
- 4.4 Given the low levels of literacy and numeracy skills for adults in the City and the importance of these skills to function well in work, community and society, the AEW curriculum concentrates on improving these skills from many angles. It is designed to provide English and maths development discretely, as part of a learning package, embedded in vocational/employability packages and in targeted support workshops.
- 4.5 Typically, following Careers, Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG), adult learners interested in re-entering the labour market, or looking to change/improve their earning power, follow multiple courses. These are packaged as a 'Programme of Study', taken concurrently or sequentially and inclusive of English, maths and ICT. The vocational areas of study would include health and social care, supporting teaching and learning in schools, business administration and customer service. The package would also aim to improve their employability with additional relevant qualifications in areas such as food hygiene, paediatric first aid and first aid at work.
- 4.6 AEW offers provision designed for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities. There are two key pathways one designed to maintain skills and gain independent living skills and the other designed to progress skills sufficiently to gain greater independence, maintain for gain voluntary work or move towards paid employment.
- 4.7 The AEW 'Like Minds' programme supports individuals with mental health difficulties. They are referred to the programme by their GP or other health professional. The programme concentrates on practical creative and craft-based activities, whilst building self-confidence, self-esteem, friendships and resilience.
- 4.8 In partnership with schools and children's centres, the service offers family learning opportunities targeted at those parents whose children are at risk of low attainment. The aim is to support adults to engage with their children's education but also to encourage adults to take-up further learning for themselves.
- 4.9 In partnership with the University AEW offers five Access to Higher Education pathways. These include Access to Health Studies, Access to Music Technology and Access to Social Science. A pre-access course has been designed to provide a pathway and support those not ready to take the full Access programme.

5.0 Outcomes for Students

Participation

- 5.1 As a result of the service's strategy and curriculum offer it is important to measure success by looking at whether the service has attracted the students it intended to and to evaluate if those students were successful in achieving a positive progression to further learning or a positive destination if appropriate.
- 5.2 In 2019-20, the service attracted 2483 students, which was an 15% decrease on the previous academic year. The decrease was a direct result of the pandemic with fewer opportunities for students to enrol on new programmes from March 2020, when schools, colleges and adult education providers closed provision for face to face learning and moved to remote delivery. Widening participation in learning was particularly impacted by Covid with schools and community venues closed.
- 5.3 In 2019-20, of the students it attracted, 34% were unemployed and looking for work, which was a 3% increase on the previous academic year. And of the 36% who were employed, 21% were earning a low wage of below £17,004 per annum. These students qualified to learn without fees due to their low wage.

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Number of Students	2598	2833	2483
% unemployed and looking for work	36%	31%	34%
% employed	38%	43%	36%
% of employed on low wage	n/a	n/a	21%

- 5.4 In 2019-20, **62% of students had no or low qualifications (below level 2)**, which was a 4% increase on the previous academic year.
- 5.5 In 2019-20, **60% of students lived in the 9 most deprived wards**, which was an increase of 5% on the previous year and 30% lived in the top 10% of Lower Super Output Areas in the City, 2% lower than the previous academic year. The offer will be further refined to continue to increase the proportion of residents engaging in learning from Lower Super Output Areas.
- 5.6 In 2019- 20, **27% of students declared a learning difficulty or disability** and of these 114 declared a mental health issue. This is an increase of 5% from the previous academic year.

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Number of students	2598	2833	2483
% declared disability including mental health	21%	23%	27%
Of which % had a mental health issue	4%	11%	17%

- 5.7 In 2019-20 the service delivered 260 qualification courses and 159 community learning courses. 49% of these were at entry level, 18% at level 1 (pre-GCSE), 13% at level 2 (GCSE A-C equivalent), 13% at level 3 and above and 7% on mixed levels.

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Number of students	2598	2833	2483
Entry Level	51%	49%	52%
Level 1 (pre-GCSE)	23%	18%	21%
Level 2 (GCSE Equiv.)	17%	13%	19%
Level 3 and above	8%	13%	7%
Other and mixed	1%	7%	1%

- 5.8 In 2019-20, of the 2278 enrolments onto qualification courses, 25% were for students studying English as their second language, 30% were studying vocational qualifications including health and social care, supporting teaching and learning in schools, business administration, British Sign Language and creative subjects, 20% were studying English, 15% were studying maths.

Achievements

- 5.9 In 2019-20 overall achievement for students on qualification and skills courses was 72% against a 2018-19 benchmark for similar providers of 85%. For Community Learning the achievement was 96% against a benchmark of 90% for 2018-19. There was no benchmarking data for 2019-20 due to the impact of Covid. 6 out of 10 subject sector areas achievement rates were above provider benchmark and 4 were below. Again, this was against 2018-19 benchmarking data due to Covid.

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Number of students	2598	2833	2483
Achievement Rate	91%	90%	72%
Relevant Benchmark	85.1%	85%	n/a

- 5.10 There were no discernible gaps in achievement between those students from the 9 most deprived wards or for those living in the 10% most deprived wards.

- 5.11 There were no discernible gaps in achievement between gender, ethnic groups or those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Destinations and benefits of learning

- 5.12 In 2019-20, based on 280 responses to the Next Steps survey, 51% of students reported a positive employment outcome with 8% gaining full-time employment, 10% part-time, 5% became self-employed, 15% gained a promotion or better job and 13% securing a job interview. However, there was 0% gaining volunteering.

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Next Steps Completed	993	892	280
% into full-time work	9%	5%	8%
% into part-time work	9%	10%	10%
% into self-employment	4%	5%	5%
% gaining promotion	11%	13%	15%
% gaining an interview	13%	12%	13%
% into voluntary work	18%	15%	0%

- 5.13 In addition to the employment outcomes, the Next Steps survey also showed that because of engaging in learning: 88% of students improved their personal confidence, 37% improved their physical and mental health and well-being. Also, 40% reported their ability to live independently had improved and 76% felt their ability to parent and support their child with education had improved.

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Next Steps Completed	993	892	280
Improved personal confidence	70%	79%	88%
Improved physical and mental well-being	35%	39%	37%
Improved skills to live independently	13%	13%	40%
Improved parenting skills and supporting child's education	53%	48%	76%

The Digital Divide

- 5.14 In line with Government guidance the Service ceased face to face teaching and learning in March 2020. The guidance was to move learning to remote delivery. There are many ways to deliver learning remotely and the right mode depends on several factors. However, having access to a device, having digital connectivity and skills to use ICT are needed for most remote delivery.

- 5.15 The Service conducted a survey during lockdown to help understand the digital barriers faced by students. Key outcomes of the survey were:
- 506 students completed the survey
 - 88% said their learning did continue after lockdown
 - 54% of those felt they learned less than when they attended class
 - 22% did not feel they had the right equipment to learn at home
 - 25% did not have either a laptop or PC to work on
 - 35% did not have Wi-Fi at home.
- 5.16 When asked what would help them to learn at home, students responded as follows:
- 26% said a PC/or laptop would help
 - 24% said Wi-Fi/internet connection would help
 - 12% said more digital skills would help.
- 5.17 In response to the survey results, and the on-going disruption from the pandemic, the service has implemented the following:
- Intensive digital skills development frontloaded at the beginning of learning
 - An enhanced loan service with over 100 laptops available to loan to students
 - A 'dongle/MiFi' service providing internet cards to students with enough connectivity at home.
- 5.18 To date 64 laptops have been loaned and 6 MiFi 30GB 'dongles' have been provided to students.
- 5.19 The Service has devised a digital transformation plan to implement changes that will enhance its service to staff and students. It will enable the Service to continue to make rapid progress in this area and position it well for the future.

6.0 Financial implications

- 6.1 There are no financial implications to this report, however for information purposes the financial impact of COVID-19 on the Adult Education service is provided.

In 2019-20 the West Midlands Combined Authority and the Education and Skills Funding Agency provided assurance that there would not be any clawback of grant funding for under-delivery due to Covid. However, the Service did receive less fees for courses from students in 2019-20 and incurred additional costs relating to ICT equipment expenditure.
[VS/24022021/R]

7.0 Legal implications

- 7.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

[Legal Code: TS/20022021/Q]

8.0 Equalities implications

8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment, part A, has been completed.

9.0 All other implications

9.0 There are no wider implications

10.0 Schedule of background papers

10.0 There are no background papers