

Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel: Supporting more people into jobs and training – our strategic approach

21 June 2023

Current Context

Current Strengths

- Wide range of post 16 provision
- Large, diverse and experienced Voluntary & Community Sector (VCS)
- Good relationships between stakeholders
- Adult Education Wolverhampton (council service), College and most schools and Independent Training Providers (ITPs) are rated Good by Ofsted
- Low levels of NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) aged 16 and 17
- Skilled and experienced staff and good cross-team working across the council
- Youth Employment Hub – very successful first year, DWP to fund a second year
- Extensive data collection and analysis
- Additional resources for SEND transition and extended remit of VSH and Connexions
- Investment of £3m for Wolves@Work programme (18-24), various initiatives, more informed voice of YP, and better partnership with DWP

Current Challenges

- High levels of long-standing unemployment, particularly amongst 18 to 24 year olds
- Low levels of formal qualifications compared to region and national averages (although improving)
- Low level essential skills: English, Maths, Digital and ESOL
- Imbalance between the skills, qualifications and experience required by employers and what job seekers have = skills shortages
- Current employer focus on running the business and trying to recruit staff rather than upskilling or reskilling existing staff = skills gaps
- Loss of EU funds
- Covid legacy – mental health problems, isolation, lack of confidence and motivation

Opportunities

- Post 16 review identified clear priority areas for action, including the facilitation of a collaborative approach to sharing post 16 options in school and college, thereby offering a greater choice to students, and increasing the viability of certain subjects
- New funding streams – Commonwealth Games Legacy Fund and Shared Prosperity Fund
- Developing new approach to business support
- Devo deal between national government and WMCA will see more place-based activity to address LA specific challenges
- Education, Skills and Employment Strategy will give focus to council and all partners on priorities
- City Learning Quarter
- Large capital programmes will bring new jobs, both in the construction phase and upon occupation

Impact

- Employment and skills support for individuals – all ages, all demographics, working to support into better jobs and careers as well as working with the unemployed
- Employer engagement – recruitment; upskilling; reskilling; response to redundancy
- Currently delivering on Restart Scheme, Black Country Impact, Towns Fund and Refugee programmes (RTOF)
- To date, work on the **Restart** contract has supported 338 people into employment, and a further 13 people into self employment. Of the 338 participants, 108 have reached Outcome (earnings totalling over approx. £4500) – which is 32%.
- The work on **RTOF** has seen Wolves at Work support 80 refugees seeking employment – of these 47 have entered work and 35 of those have sustained their employment for a period of longer than 4 weeks. In addition, 26 of the 47 took part in work experience prior to entering work.
- Wolves at Work **Towns Fund** project has worked with 1,082 local residents since April 2021, and guided 568 people into sustainable employment, with 207 sustaining that employment for a period longer than 12 weeks. In addition to this the team also supported 196 residents into sector based or work focused training.
- In the same time period, **Black Country Impact** has supported 760 individuals, with 125 going into work and 358 into vocational training.

Community Skills – Supporting Adults Furthest away from Job Market

- Community Skills delivery focuses on supporting adults who are furthest from the jobs market into first steps skills and provision in community settings
- Programmes delivered during this academic year in partnership with the College, Adult Education Service and Learning providers:
 - ✓ First Steps into Employment: to support those furthest away from the labour market to move closer to positive outcomes within neighbourhoods.
 - ✓ Skills & Wellbeing packages: to support those with health barriers to have access to learning, services and support.
 - ✓ Second Language Speakers: to support new arrivals, migrants and those who have English as a second language to obtain tailored support to enable progressions into jobs and warm handovers.
 - ✓ Multiply – to support adults both unemployed and employed with their maths skills to budget effectively and equip them to deal with the cost of living.
 - ✓ Learning Disabilities – Bespoke programme to support learning disability customers through Supported Employment Team.
 - ✓ Wolves at Work – Bespoke employability programme to support Wolves at Work customers.

Next Steps

- Community Grants from the Shared Prosperity Fund have been awarded to VCS groups in the area which will include employment and skills focused projects.
- The Council is developing a dynamic purchasing system to enable skills and employability providers (particularly from the voluntary sector) to deliver commissioned skills programmes.
- Community Learning collaboration being developed with the College to deliver through community partners
- Joined up approach to be developed with in-house Adult Education Service

Adult Education Service subcontracting to Voluntary and Community Organisations to provide Learning Opportunities

- To widen participation in learning across the city and to engage priority groups the Adult Education Service subcontracts to Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations to deliver learning in communities.
- Since 2019, CWC's Adult Education Service has subcontracted part of its Adult Education Budget Skills funding for this purpose.
- Subcontracted partners currently include Job Change, Bilston Resource Centre, Access to Business, and TLC College and courses delivered include entry level digital, English and maths.
- The procurement of Adult Education Budget learning services is being retendered this summer for the next 3-years.
- This year there have been 138 students, over 80% of whom are unemployed with a mean of 38% coming from Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs).

Background – WAW 18-24 Programme

- In 2021, the Council established the WAW18-24 Programme Board to focus on the challenges presented by high historic levels of youth unemployment in the City which were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a direct response to this, the Council agreed to the establishment of an £3.25m fund from reserves intended to test new ideas and interventions, improve communication with key city partners and ultimately help to create more opportunities for jobs and careers for young people.
- Engagement with young people, City based employers and public sector partners across the City has strengthened as a result of the programme and there are many examples of where the work of the 18-24 team has helped to broker opportunities for new jobs and careers.
- Achievements arising from the programme can be broadly split into two categories, strategic benefits and direct impacts. For a programme of this nature, it is the strategic benefits that reflect the most significant long term improvements arising from this programme.

WAW 18-24 Programme Achievements

In terms of specific highlights:

- **Over 151 City events delivered**, attended by over 894 young people, often in some of the wards most impacted by youth unemployment
- **142 young people** have been supported into employment by the WAW 18-24 team from October 2021 to June 2023.
- **The Council employed 111 young people aged between 18-24 into roles since Sept 21 (an 82% increase year on year)**. 66 of these (59%) were Wolverhampton residents. This joined up approach across the council has helped to recruit more young people into Council roles.
- **24 companies/organisations offered schemes through the City Ideas Fund**, with engagement from 187 young people of which 79 young people entered employment, education or training opportunities.
- **75 employment opportunities for 18-24s put forward through Council Leadership pledges**

WAW 18-24 Programme Reflections

- The voices of those young people that have engaged with the programme through the many events held and through direct contact with the team have provided clear themes for future focus.
- Additionally, the 2022 Youth Employment Census outlined a situation where an escalating mental health emergency, the cost of living crisis and ongoing political tensions (both here and abroad) contribute to a scenario where young people are often struggling and unsure of their place in society (Youth Employment UK, 2022).
- Further to this, these challenges appear to be felt even more acutely for care leavers, those with disabilities, those from an ethnic minority group, and those who are LGBTQ+.
- Wolverhampton's young people highlighted their concerns around feeling insufficiently prepared for work and the associated lack of confidence stemming from this featured highly in terms of perceived barriers. This correlates with some of the national feedback around confidence and mental health.
- All of this has helped to inform the development of the new education, skills and employment strategy which will form the basis for the rest of this report.

Future Vision for Education and Skills in Wolverhampton

Our economy is changing – significant investment is taking place

- £billions of investment on site or in the pipeline
- Bringing different and new job opportunities for the people of the city
- Epicentre for green growth and sustainable construction
- Home of new National Brownfield Institute at University of Wolverhampton
- Green Innovation Corridor – Investment Zone Proposal
- Growing sectors in digital, creative and professional services

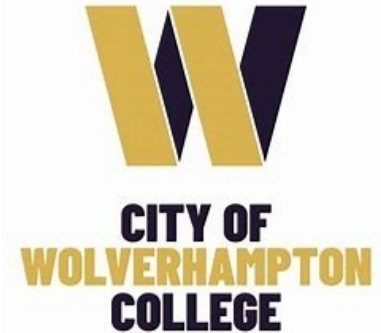


Education, Skills and Employment - Strategy

- We want to ensure local people can access new opportunities in our city, and that employers have access to a talent pipeline which meets their needs and helps the city to grow.
- Through our strategy we will develop an integrated approach to the delivery of education and skills provision across the city.
- Focus on five emerging key areas for transformation and action;
 1. Children have the best start in life
 2. High quality education which prepares young people for work
 3. Post 16 education provision that meets the needs of city employers
 4. Lifelong learning and pathways to good quality work
 5. A new employer support model
- Currently consulting on the strategy with a Cabinet date in September.

Delivering through Strong partnerships

- Regional
 - WMCA – Delivery of AEB, UK SPF and Multiply
- City Partnerships
 - Education, Skills and Employment Board
 - Wolverhampton Anchor Network (public sector partners)
 - Towns Fund Board
 - ConnectEd
 - SEND Partnership Board
- Community
 - Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council



**West Midlands
Combined Authority**



Thank you

Any questions?