

Draft York Learning and North Yorkshire Adult Learning and Skills Engagement Strategy 2021-2025 Summary

Background

York Learning and North Yorkshire Adult Learning Service provide largely Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) funded adult and community learning provision, with additional income deriving from contracts, dedicated project work, apprenticeships and the support provided for those learners aged 19-25 with EHCPs.

The services are supported by a shared head of service to enable closer harmony with the economic needs and skills strategies of the York and North Yorkshire region. This area is working towards potential devolution of its adult learning budget under a combined mayoral authority, potentially from 2024/25.

Grant funded community learning is defined by the ESFA as learning that develops the skills, confidence, motivation and resilience of adults of different ages and backgrounds in order to:

- progress towards formal learning or employment
- improve their health and well-being, including mental health
- develop stronger communities

The Adult Education Budget (AEB), on the other hand, has the aim of 'engaging adults and providing the skills and learning they need to progress into work or equip them for an apprenticeship or other learning'. It enables more flexible tailored programmes of learning to be made available, which may or may not require a qualification, to help eligible learners engage in learning, build confidence, and/or enhance their wellbeing'.

Expectations on the post-16 education sector have never been greater, with the focus of national policy firmly fixed on the sector as a cornerstone of post Covid-19 recovery. The 'Skills for Jobs – Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth' whitepaper published in January 2021 laid out a bold ambition to place employer skills needs at the heart of the post-16 system and to empower individuals to use learning to progress into work and in the workplace to higher paid and higher skilled jobs. Local Authority adult education is discussed in this paper alongside Further Education colleges as a key cornerstone of the policy and the importance of community level education is stressed, but the context

stresses the importance of progression to higher level qualifications and in offering provision that meets local and national skills needs.

Research commissioned by York and North Yorkshire Local Enterprise partnership (YNYLEP), as part of the work to develop their skills strategy, paints a picture of the local adult education landscape that suggests a potential disconnect between the education offer for adults and local skills need, citing limited innovation in community learning, a decreased focus on family learning, learning to support deprived communities and a lack of support for capacity building in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). At the same time, reviews of adult learning and digital skills suggest an educational landscape that, whilst aiming to meet the demands of the community, fails to engage individuals in the breadth of learning experiences necessary to meet the aims of skills strategy. The relevant reports stress the disconnect between the majority of adults and the skills sector, with the largest proportion of training being in English and Maths or provision delivered to those already in work, largely in the Health and Social Care sectors.

The impact that the pandemic has had on the accessibility of learning must also be considered. Both services have coped admirably to adapt to new ways of working demanded by the pandemic. Delivery moved swiftly online and across two funding years have enabled the full grant funding to be received for work carried out with only minimal clawback due to ring-fenced funding initiatives that have taken place after curriculum planning has taken place. Movement to online delivery has for some programmes been effective and led to more efficient deliver models, but this movement has been taken as a direct result of the pandemic and not through formal strategic planning for a modern and responsive service.

Against the important and combined drivers shown below it is essential to set a clear strategy for the services between now and 2025:

1. Adult education must support the development of the local economies
2. Adult education must feel accessible to the community to be able to deliver on its aims
3. Adult education curriculum must meet the needs of published skills strategies
4. All adult education provision must provide a basis for progression in skills, confidence and wellbeing

5. Adult education programmes must have clear intent, effective implementation to meet this intent leading to demonstrable impact.

Aims

Against this backdrop the strategy must meet the following aims:

1. To clearly define the purpose of the adult learning services
2. To develop a curriculum offer that is in line with local skills needs
3. To reach and inspire learning for the full breadth of the community demographic with the offer
4. To be the provider of choice for those furthest away from the skills offer
5. To protect the full aims of community learning within York and North Yorkshire
6. To grow provision into areas not well supported by other providers
7. To support a clear progression pathway for all adult learners from entry through to higher education
8. To provide effective value for money for the communities of York and North Yorkshire

To achieve these aims we must:

- Use the widest range of media to promote the link between learning and personal growth, whether that be in the ability to earn better wages, create a better work-life balance or make a more effective contribution to employers and communities.
- Develop effective partnerships with communities of interest, under-represented groups and the disadvantaged to provide clear engagement points for learning
- Develop close working relationships with other providers of education to offer clear pathways into the higher skills agenda
- Work closer with the VCS to support effective use of community learning and develop their capacity to support targeted communities
- Develop a flexible, blended curriculum offer that supports access to learning , developing digital skills were possible
- Provide face-face engagement points for those hardest to reach and engage

- Use an appropriate combination of digital and face-face IAG to work with learners to identify appropriate next steps at the start of provision, using RARPA to maintain 'next-steps' focus and measure progress, develop and recognise transferable skills
- Increase progression from engagement programmes into main curriculum offer and onwards to specialist skills and higher education provision.
- Use established links with community learning partnerships, CVS, intra- and inter-authority networks to develop a wider network of community groups to plan engagement opportunities with hardest to reach individuals
- Continue to develop provision and project funding to widen the income streams available to the service, e.g. apprenticeships, traineeships, Nationals Skills Fund Level 3 offer, Multiply