

21 July 2022

**Children, Education and Communities
Policy and Scrutiny Committee**

Report of the Assistant Director (Communities and Equalities)

York Learning – Strategic Plan Progress Report 2021/22

Summary

1. This report presents the end of academic year performance report and data for York Learning for 21/22.
2. This report forms part of the service’s governance reporting arrangements, which are crucially important for the service in demonstrating to Ofsted that it has secure and robust governance arrangements in place. Since the last scrutiny meeting it was approved that York Learning would need a York Learning Improvement Board to meet Ofsted’s requirement and give more weight in the level of challenge and scrutiny we receive.

Recommendations

3. Members are asked to:
 - Comment upon the performance of York Learning and seek clarification on any areas of concern.

Reason: To help monitor the service, guide managers and ensure robust and accountable governance arrangements.

Background

4. York Learning is a council service, which delivers a range of adult learning programmes to support people into employment, to improve their skills and to support their personal development. The service is funded almost exclusively from external contract funding and fee income. The service has reported income for the academic year 2021/22 in the region

of £4.4m.

Significant highlights in performance.

5. The services have performed well against measures set out in the strategic plan for 2021/22. This is reported in Annex A. The services performance in supporting 16-18 Learners and Special Education Needs (SEND) students is good. The 16-18 programme is highly valued, but the impact of the pandemic has reduced overall funding which is challenging and relies on other areas of the service over performing to cover any shortfall. The 16-24 Special Education Needs (SEND), programme numbers continue to over hit targets, which again challenges budgets. However, both offers are part of a statutory duty on the council and therefore if oversubscribed or underfunded it is out of York Learning's control.
6. We have concentrated over the last 18 months to improve our partnership links with community groups and to involve those groups within the development of our courses (Annex B). Examples of what we have created alongside those partners are:
 - a) Bespoke IT course which ended with learners receiving their own reconditioned laptop at the Travellers Trust, with English planned for September;
 - b) Bespoke IT course with MySight York;
 - c) Cookery class for Young Carers and a singing class for York Carer;
 - d) Art and craft sessions with York Carers and NHS – early intervention into Psychosis service and planned for next year Millinery at Murton Museum of Farming (and The Guild of Spinners, Weavers and Dyers);
 - e) Create a Garden Bench out of Pallets at Men's Shed.
7. **Digital Inclusion** - The service continues to provide a wide range of courses and provide significant partnership working to reduce the numbers of those who suffer from lack of digital access and skills. Covid highlighted significant impact on residents and learners relating to accessing digital devices and digital connectivity. Through Covid we could connect those who needed free access through additional funding, but this is no longer available. However, there are opportunities to get discounts or free access with broadband providers and we signpost whenever we can.

- a) Our teams are involved in workstreams within the 100% Digital Partnership led by CYC in partnership with Explore York focussing on Digital Skills/Training and working with the ITReUse Scheme. We have joined together with others to identify the skills and training needs to support improvement and greater signposting to the training that is available. Working and identifying with; ITReUse; CYC Local Area Coordinators; CYC Welfare and Benefits strategy; Changing Lives; York Cares; Live Well York; who are all working with harder to reach sectors of the population. This has allowed us to share what we currently offer for increased signposting to ourselves but also signposting to other opportunities to support various levels of digital need.
- b) The new Essential Digital Skills qualifications are supposed to develop the Entry and Level 1 skills needed to overcome digital exclusion. However, the qualifications are presenting challenges as they are pitched too high for the levels presented. From August 2022 these are the only qualifications we can continue to fund for free via the Digital Skills Entitlement that suit our learner demographic. The Level 1 and 2 ECDL(ICDL) qualifications will no longer be funded, and these had provided us with a proven route to build confidence in using digital work skills as part of our employability offer. We have therefore created for August onwards a range of non-accredited courses that we can fund via community learning to cover those Level 2 skills that we will provide for free to those who earn below £18,525.
- c) Our older learners have no interest in learning digital skills with a qualification and we provide a wide range of courses such as – Get to know your laptop; Emails; Avoid Online Scams; Windows; Laptops for Beginners/Improvers; Online Safety. Alongside these we create bespoke courses to meet our partners needs e.g. MySight; Travellers Trust; York Menfulness; Kyra; York Over 60s Centre.
- d) The offer is fully flexible to learners who can choose from four centres over 6 days a week all year round with a range of times to choose from.
- e) We have successfully bid as part of a wider consortium to launch a Digital Skills Bootcamp focussing on an introduction to coding in September which will be free at the point of delivery for the learners. This is a growth area within the economy and are delighted that the

first Bootcamp is already full. We have been granted funding to run a second Bootcamp in January 2023.

- f) We are working with the groups to produce a 'skills map' related to digital skills and improving the search options on Live Well York to correctly identify the various offers.
- g) We have/are creating courses with partners which have included gaining a reconditioned laptop with ITReUse to engage residents to come on courses and enable them to leave the course with a device of their own.
- h) Working with ITReUse we have managed to match 40 learners to reconditioned laptops of their own to support their study and ITReUse are signposting to York Learning to encourage those who claim a device to take Online Safety training with ourselves. The lead at ITReUse has moved on to another role and a member of the team is supporting the project, but a new person has not yet been recruited which has stalled the progress a little and we are working alongside them to get things moving again.
- i) A new digital lead has been recruited within the libraries as part of 100% Digital and we hope that this post will keep the partnership's working move forward.

8. **Post Covid Recovery** - The service has again switched its delivery model from fully 'online only' through Covid, back to primarily face to face classroom delivery. However, alongside that we have also retained and improved the delivery with Hybrid and Online models in courses that are primarily Level 2 and above in accredited provision such as GCSEs, Languages, Counselling, and some leisure classes particularly. Learners have needed increased support with access to digital equipment and we have handed out over 40 recycled devices to support learners as well as increasing our bank of loan laptops.

Recognising that there are increased stressors on our learners we have started a new method for collecting additional support being provided to our learners from our tutors. There has been an increase in the number of learners who need additional 1-1 support before and after class which is proving successful in helping us to retain our learners. We have also been successful in accessing funding to train a mental Health Lead to

support us with creating a Wellbeing Strategy for our learners and York Learning teams. Request for help to purchase study resources, travelling costs etc. to support learning has also increased.

The National Skills Fund L3 was introduced in April 21 but as we didn't already have pathways to many of the qualifications offered, we are still not fully spending this funding. Delays in starting courses due to lockdowns have also delayed this work. We are looking at where we can work with employers or other partners to help identify other areas we can realistically respond to.

- a) Key challenges we have found are: Increasing impact on the social emotional mental health needs of our young people particularly has created additional and, challenging at times, support being needed to be put in place.
- b) Increased costs of travelling on learners and tutors reducing enrolments and increasing drop out of classes.
- c) Increasing vacancies in learner workplaces has created less time for them to study due to expectations on taking additional shifts which are often unsociable hours. This affects their attendance and is affecting higher drop out within apprenticeships and work based learning particularly.
- d) Finding appropriate venues for delivery due to previous venues no longer being available.
- e) Increased costs of room rental, resources and tutor pay when each course, accredited particularly has not generated increased funding payments in line with increasing cost of delivery.
- f) Cost of living crisis has an impact on our ability to increase prices to cover our increasing commitments, it is a balancing act as we don't want to price ourselves out of the market but still need to cover our costs.

We are optimistic that 22/23 will come with increased recruitment in accredited programmes as more learners start to move through our non-accredited programmes and into progression routes at Entry/Level 1.

9. The increased need for our own venue has never been clearer, due to COVID. and significant support is required to have a fully accessible and fully visible adult learning base, which can celebrate and visually motivate adults to embrace lifelong learning. This would enable us to grow our

higher-level accredited pathways, increase eco-skills delivery and our ability to create pathways to green skills. Having a base would enable us to invest in the appropriate tools, setup of workrooms and adequate storage for portfolios and tools that are related to this type of learning. It would also enable us to use the building in the evening to support the wider community learning programmes in culture, health and leisure which would help to keep those programmes overall costs down and keep it accessible to those with lower incomes. Solutions are being discussed with CYC Head of Property, but there may not be a solution in the short term.

Concerns

10. The service received ESF funding via external contracts to support some of the most vulnerable people across the city. Two of these projects are respectively called “Action towards Inclusion” and “Positive Progressions”, these two programmes offer high levels of support to individuals over a significant period, allowing individuals to gain confidence, raise their self-esteem and gain qualifications to prepare them for work. There are numerous examples of work with very vulnerable individuals having significant effect on their life chances and on their general health and wellbeing. Funding in these projects will end March 2023 so discussions are ongoing regarding potential future UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and possibilities of any support in the gap year between ESF funding ending and UKSPF funding kicking in during 2024 subject to process and approvals. The service also has a contract with the Manchester Growth Company to support rehabilitation of offenders back into communities and this is also partially funded by ESF. We do not at present know if this will be able to continue after March 2023.

Options

11. This report is for discussion and comment. There are no options to consider.

Corporate Objectives

12. Any plans and strategies developed are set within the context of the council plan but also respond to a number of sub-regional, regional and national policy objectives.

Implications

13. **Finance:** The service is fully funded via external contracts and grants. Whilst the service has robust procedures in place to ensure the services maximises income this is not without some risks. Also some of the areas that York Learning cover are a statutory duty of the council to support and external funding does not always cover the subscriptions to the service.
14. The report has no Human Resources, Equalities, Legal, Crime and Disorder, Information Technology, Property or other implications.

Risk Management

15. There are no risks to consider that arise from this report.

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Report
Approved

Date 11/07/22

Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Annexes

Annex A York Learning Strategic Plan 21_22 York learning
Annex B York Learning Partnership Work
Annex C York Learning Delivery and Funding areas

Abbreviations

UKSPF	UK Shared Prosperity Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
CYC	City of York Council
ECDL	European Computer Driving Licence
ICDL	International Computer Driving Licence
SEND	Special Education Needs