



Department
for Education

A guide to effective practice: Adult Education Budget

Strategies employed for the successful
utilisation of the adult education budget

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Introduction and background

The FE Commissioner and her team offer a wide range of support and help to all statutory further education (FE) colleges in England - [About us - Further Education Commissioner - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/about-us/further-education-commissioner). This support includes research built from qualitative studies to identify effective practice or 'how to' guides that can be shared with the sector.

In 2020/2021 many colleges reported challenges with delivering their adult education budget (AEB) allocations in-full. It is recognised that the covid-19 global pandemic had an impact in the ability to attract and support adult learners into education and training. Since then, some providers have seen an increase in their delivery but there are still those that report under delivery of AEB.

In the summer of 2023, visits were undertaken at 7 colleges who are successfully meeting and, in some cases, exceeding their AEB allocations. Three of these colleges operate in devolved funding areas and have AEB funding provided by the ESFA and the mayoral combined authorities (MCAs). Those operating within MCAs also provide an understanding of the opportunities afforded by funding flexibilities, to meet local needs.

In 2022/2023, the FE commissioner's team expanded their remit to deliver active support to local authorities. This research has been extended to include 3 local authority (LA) providers, where further visits took place.

The purpose of this document is to provide insights into the strategies providers adopt to deliver their respective AEB allocations and to share these with the sector.

Both FE and LA providers operate in a complex and challenging landscape. The data in this study offers the reader insights into examples of effective practice under key themes, and is presented in 2 parts for audience access:

Part A: College Providers

Part B: Local Authority Providers

Methodology

The primary aim of this research was to explore and present strategies from a sample of colleges and Local Authorities operating in the post 16 sector, identifying effective practice in the utilisation of the adult education budget.

A qualitative methodology has been adopted. Multi-method data capture was undertaken in 2 stages. First, a desk top review was undertaken to capture quantitative data for college performance against AEB allocation for 2021/2022, this provided contextual information and identified providers for purposeful sampling.

A field study was then undertaken by FEC colleagues and DfE place based teams, who visited the participant providers. Semi-structured interviews were used to capture qualitative data for thematic analysis of the key strategies, differences and nuances employed by providers.

Colleagues from DfE funding policy have been consulted at key stages of the project and attended 2 of the FE college visits. This was aimed at obtaining first-hand insights into positive practice, and an understanding of some of the challenges that colleges experience.

Three very different local authorities were selected. They were selected to show the range and complexity of provision and to provide a sample of the strategies they employ to ensure successful delivery of their AEB.

Provider case studies are included in the document appendices to further share effective practice.

Summary

This document offers insights into strategies implemented by 7 colleges and 3 local authority providers who effectively manage and deliver their adult education budgets. These providers are successfully optimising their use of adult skills funding, which is vital to their employers and communities.

Local Authorities employ diverse commissioning models aligned with council and community priorities. Adult and community learning provision under local authorities operate within much larger council structures, each has its own distinct infrastructure. The small sample of local authority providers that took part have different proportions of subcontracted provision for the delivery of their adult education budgets but share some common themes and similarities with those found in colleges.

In all providers, key insights highlight strategic and operational approaches:

- each provider's strategy is tailored to its unique context, skills need, social and economic challenges. Strategies provide clear objectives to ensure appropriate priority is given to adult learning
- leadership and management roles and accountabilities are clear and effective, whilst affording sufficient freedoms and flexibilities to promote innovation and responsiveness
- partnerships are varied and recognised for their critical importance. They support flexibility of funding and delivery models, learner participation and progression. They offer a joined-up approach to meet many skills, and health priorities
- robust performance management processes are in place. These ensure timely in-year monitoring is effective to meet budget allocations and enable swift and adaptable responses to needs
- curriculum planning and flexible use of funding, effectively manages high demand provision and avoids displacement of other provision required by local stakeholders
- innovative work force strategies attract industry professionals, nurturing new staff and teaching apprentices to address staffing challenges and develop a future workforce
- emphasis on appropriate learner and learning support mechanisms, are considered vital for adults. Innovative methods remove barriers, identify needs swiftly, and deliver ongoing support for their progression

Many of the common issues addressed by colleges and local authority providers to ensure the successful delivery of the adult education budget are included within this effective practice document, however, it should be noted that some challenges remain. These include competing pressures on space and resources, meeting the cost of new developments, growing adult support needs, managing declining provision, managing tensions between non-regulated provision to support adults progress and, the desire to provide qualifications. Furthermore, sustainability concerns were raised for those

colleges who are in non-devolved areas over future funding to support some local and national skills priorities.

Presentations of the findings of effective practice have been shared at meetings with mayoral combined authorities and at the Association of Colleges annual conference. We hope the detail presented within this document and its appendices support effective practice for the successful delivery of the adult education budget.

Part A: College providers

1. Strategic approaches of colleges

1.1 Strategy

A clear statement of strategic intent is important to ensure that appropriate priority is given to adult skills. However, each college's strategy needs to be tailored to its unique context, skills needs and social and economic challenges.

Common strategies across these colleges include providing equality of opportunity and experience, inclusion, clear pathways for progression and, enabling a flexible and responsive offer to meet changing needs. Recognition of the individual support needs of adults, their personal development, and the acquisition of soft skills, is also an important strategic focus.

Pedagogical innovation for equity and advantage

- the City of Liverpool College is situated in an education improvement zone with shifting demographics. It places a strong emphasis on promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion to create a sense of belonging amongst its learners. The colleges strategic drivers for adults, focus on enhancing employment prospects, upskilling, reskilling, and providing robust support to enable them to achieve and progress
- using insights from disaster affected countries, the college developed an approach to turn '**disadvantage to advantage**' for their learners through the 'Liverpool Way'. This has 3 core principles, to provide learners with clarity, scaffold their learning, and offer them dynamic feedback to reinforce positive achievements and stretch them to expand their horizons

A swift response to stakeholders

- Barnsley College makes effective use of its subsidiary company (ITS Ltd) to deliver key elements of its AEB provision, notably Sector Based Work Academies (SWAPs). The company functions as a vehicle for rapid response short course provision. They use flexible employment contracts for delivery staff and operate from leased town centre venues that are easily accessible for learners. The company maintains strong and productive relationships with employers and Jobcentre plus which have helped to achieve high levels of participation
- whilst the subsidiary company model works well for the college, senior leaders recognise that a separate company structure is not essential, as long as managers within the college have sufficient flexibility and freedoms to respond quickly

- the underpinning ethos promoted by the group CEO and Vice Principal for Adults at the Luminate Education Group, is to adopt a swift and adaptable response to needs, guided by a dedicated strategic plan for its adult provision. The group established an adult strategy team to gather LMI, inform planning and develop its strategy

Seven themes focus on increasing the proportion of adults with skills at level 3 and above, progression to employment, inclusivity, prioritising economically valuable and significant provision, developing new provision seen to be driving the economy, learner growth to meet national and local priorities and, improving quality and the learner journey. The strategy is reviewed every 3 years, informed by an assessment of the unique requirements for each local community they serve.

Considering progression and employability skills

- separate curriculum, employer, and community engagement strategies interconnect to underpin West Nottinghamshire College's strategic plan. The plan aims to meet both the immediate and future needs of the community and employers, while embracing new technologies and practices for the future. The college made strategic changes to stop significant volumes of sub-contracting. They used their termly leadership conference to break down barriers, open dialogue and empower middle managers to design curriculum intent for direct delivery of AEB

The college's strategy focuses on learners' progression and is informed by a 7 step '**ASPIRE**' planning approach. Adopting this approach, thorough curriculum mapping is undertaken to identify gaps in provision and facilitate progression across programme types for the future.

- Lincoln College's strategy revolves around its core purpose to be an exceptional employer-led organisation, articulated by their '**Be Extraordinary**' strategy. The strategy is dedicated to cultivating a highly skilled and productive local workforce, yet it recognises a need to develop soft and employability skills. A similar message is communicated though Preston College's strong intent to develop adults' digital skills, where a digital skills qualification is embedded in all adult learning programmes to support employability

1.2 Leadership structures

College leadership structures and job roles vary and are largely contingent upon the size and complexity of their provision and their strategic objectives. Whatever model is adopted, it is important that respective roles and accountabilities are clear and effective, whilst affording sufficient freedoms and flexibilities to promote innovation and responsiveness.

Colleges emphasise the strategic significance of adult provision by adopting structures that deliver for the specific needs of each of their stakeholders. These are underpinned by clear lines of accountability.

- Luminate Education Group has a Vice Principal who is the dedicated senior leader for all adult provision. Representation and promotion of adult skills at the top tier of the group's leadership is seen as an effective way to ensure adult skills is given a high profile and priority, and this is reflected in the group's extensive provision for adults. The vice principal is supported by a director of operations and curriculum, adult, community and ESOL who co-ordinates provision for adults across the group

Significant freedoms and flexibilities are given to each curriculum area for adult delivery, but these are underpinned by robust performance review processes and clear bottom-line financial targets. Efficient space utilisation is promoted by charging curriculum managers for spaces they use.

- leadership for AEB at Suffolk New College and Preston College are fully integrated within the leadership and management structure of all provision types. This reflects the smaller scale of provision at Suffolk New College but is also seen as important to ensure that adult learners benefit from a **'one college cohesive approach'** across all sites. Staff appreciate the diversity and the enriching experiences of teaching different age ranges within their curriculum areas. At Preston College leaders describe how adult learners are given equal parity alongside study programmes and apprenticeships, **'avoiding silo mentalities'** and, ensuring a **'one team'** culture is underpinned by clear lines of accountability for performance and delivery

Directors and heads of adult learning

Within colleges, there are several 'director' or specific 'head of' roles who are either directly responsible for adult learning, or who work collaboratively with their peers to facilitate and support the adult learner journey. Examples include:

Commercial Director

Director of Social and Cultural Curriculum

Director of Progression

Head of Adult Funding and Full Cost

Director for Adult and Higher Skills

Director of Operations and Curriculum, Adult, Community and ESOL

- a new post of Director for Adult and Higher Skills was introduced at Barnsley College, working alongside an assistant principal for young people. This helped to spread the portfolio across 2 leaders, make workloads more manageable whilst strengthening the profile and oversight of adult delivery. The principal and CEO describes curriculum leaders and managers as having a **'framed degree of autonomy'** with high levels of freedoms and flexibilities, all underpinned by robust systems for performance and accountability
- several directors at the City of Liverpool College work collaboratively, one is specifically responsible for adult provision and focuses on meeting skills needs, quality, and avoiding duplication across campuses. A commercial director with previous experience as an economist, provides labour market intelligence for planning the curriculum intent. This role bridges the gap between the college and employer boards, ensuring the college's programmes align with job market demands. A director of progression is then responsible for tracking adult learners' progression and destinations and where appropriate, provides further support and guidance

1.3 Partnerships

To maximise the funding opportunities available to them and support their communities and employers, colleges emphasise the importance of partnerships.

Partnerships include, local and district councils, local enterprise partnerships, Jobcentre Plus, NHS trusts, employers, education and training providers, universities, plus, a range of other agencies and community groups. Partnerships support the delivery of DfE AEB funded provision and some colleges are effectively using other funding sources to enhance and grow their adult provision.

Three of the participant colleges are operating within the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, and the West Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority.

Educational partnerships

- after playing a pivotal role with other partners in the creation of one of the UK's newest universities, the University of Suffolk, adult learners at Suffolk New College benefit from the strong and special relationships that are in place. Access to higher education learners from the college can access the university's library and some resources. The university provides a £1,000 bursary for each college learner enrolling at the university. Senior leaders and managers from both organisations collaboratively review the alignment of provision and curriculum mapping to keep it relevant to sector needs
- the Luminate Education Group collaborates with other FE Colleges through the West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges to deliver projects that are funded through "Gainshare" [The Investment Funds Programme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/programmes/gainshare). These programmes are designed to meet immediate and emerging training needs which provide additionality to provision that already exists through AEB because of devolution within West Yorkshire

Local Authority and town partnerships

- members of the executive team at Lincoln College play a pivotal role in contributing their expertise to both the Lincoln, and Newark, Towns Fund Boards. Supported by a Towns Fund grant, the college developed training in Gainsborough for adult learners seeking to enter the hospitality and tourism industry
- engagement with local stakeholders is an integral part of Preston College's approach. Partners see the college as an "anchor institution" and is a natural referral point by the local authority for learners lacking skills at entry/level1/level2, particularly those without English as a first language

1.4 Staffing and workforce strategies

In recent years, colleges have encountered difficulties in recruiting staff with the necessary technical and teaching skills.

Tackling shortages through innovation

Colleges continue to be innovative in the ways they mitigate staff shortages, against a challenging economic climate. They 'borrow' from employers, 'grow their own' and think creatively about job titles and roles in response to staff recruitment and retention and, to engage, inspire, and support adult learners.

- the principal and CEO of the City of Liverpool College describes that they '**borrow from employers and build the staff of tomorrow**' and around 70% of the college's staff are classed as dual professionals. Many staff work part time in industry, or have recently left industry, for example health professionals are sought after to take up lecturing when they retire

In addition, lecturers are supported to return to industry for long periods of time, to update their skills, whilst their teaching posts are held open for them. New staff receive a differentiated induction programme depending upon their experience, but all staff are inducted into the college's approach of the '**Liverpool way**'.

Adult learners like the dual professional model because '**it's real and relevant**'. Many want a quick return to get back to work and speaking to staff who work in or have just left a sector is inspirational.

- Suffolk New College has formulated the concept of a '**licence to teach**' for workforce recruitment and development. Alongside working in industry, once recruited, experts receive a preparing to teach programme to help them to plan, deliver and engage learners. They teach around 2 hours per week and have an assigned mentor who can accompany them into their first lessons, where they develop the skills to breakdown learning of technical concepts within vocational subjects

The college's initiative utilises AEB funding, and the concept includes a '**licence to support**', where they have adopted a grow your own model, employing some learners progressing from adult programmes.

Adult learners are also encouraged to volunteer to work with other adult learners, in doing so the volunteers develop their own employability skills as a next step to employment. The college is exploring developing a programme a '**licence to volunteer**' for the future.

- The Luminate Education Group has largely managed the resourcing of adult programmes without reliance on agency staffing. The group have employed 12 **teaching apprentices**. Extensive support is then provided to this valuable staff group as they progress in their careers, which then ensures a ready source of future lecturers

Outreach staffing

- leaders at West Nottinghamshire College convey that **'each adult learner is valued, and outreach engagement is crucial'**. To achieve their strategic objective to better serve the local community, 2 new learning engagement officers (LEO) posts are funded from the college's central contribution

The LEOs create a short engagement programme to encourage adults to re-enter the world of learning and guide them for progression in their next steps. To reach a wider audience, the college expanded its town centre footprint. The LEOs spend time in the town centre premises and at least one day per week at the job centre, to signpost ACL as a first step back into the workforce.

2. Operational approaches of colleges

2.1. Robust planning and consistent monitoring

Making best use of funding to meet stakeholders needs

Consistent processes for curriculum planning and on-going performance monitoring methods are essential to meet adult budget allocations and flex provision up and down in year. The colleges are driven by the imperative to meet employer and learner needs and are there, higher focused on maximising all the funding available to them.

Performance is monitored half termly, monthly and, in some cases, weekly to avoid late identification of material shortfalls against funding allocations. Some colleges have a deliberate strategy for risk, to over deliver against allocations on the basis that this may secure additional growth, others monitor the risk of over delivery more tightly.

- Suffolk New College experienced regular over delivery of adult provision, resulting in unfunded delivery, lower contribution rates and posing a risk to financial sustainability. The college is situated in a non-devolved area, where the LA operates its own in-house adult provision. Although the college have been successful in securing additional funding working in partnership with their LA for some initiatives, this is limited
- leaders now monitor provision of directors' areas monthly, to look at actual income against the plan and to ensure the college does not exceed 100% of delivery, where no further income is available. Based on this monitoring, expansion and contraction of the offer takes place in year. In recent years, the college has met but not exceeded their AEB allocation.
- Barnsley College adopts a different approach. They have a well-established curriculum planning methodology which draws heavily on LMI data and is effectively a "zero-based" approach, using an assessment of need as the starting point rather than a specific funding envelope or target. Three planning rounds follow initial curriculum strategy workshops with heads of department, during the preceding year of adult delivery

The college has a policy of planning over-delivery against funding allocations on the basis that 'known' demand for training exceeds the level of funding allocated to the college and that at least some of the over-delivery is likely to be funded, if delivered. The college prides itself on never turning away an adult learner due to lack of funding. Overtime, this strategy has led them to successfully increase their AEB by around 30%.

Colleges have seen an increase for adult learning support need. There is a need for an equally rigorous approach to capture and monitor the costs of Additional Learning Support (ALS).

- Preston College has developed a bespoke front-end tool that links to the main MIS system (Tribal/EBS). Lecturers and support staff capture the delivery of additional support via mobile devices to provide information in real-time. This approach helps to monitor earnings adjustments on a bi-monthly basis throughout the year, rather than calculating resourcing and costs retrospectively at year-end
- comprehensive reporting and tracking systems are in place at the Luminate Education Group to **'adjust delivery and address any emerging areas falling below target'**. Timely and accurate reporting is critical to maximise enrolments, maintain efficiency of class sizes and reduce waiting time for applicants. The group also gives equal importance to timely capture and logging of discretionary learning support and additional learning support. This is important because in 2022/2023 learning support accounted for around 10% of the groups AEB funding earned

Reports inform 'weekly' tracking of enrolments and performance; leaders see the capture of ALS **'as vital to maintain responsiveness'**.

2.2 Flexibilities of funding

To respond quickly and adapt to the evolving demands of the job market, colleges welcome increased flexibility of funding to enable them to achieve greater delivery opportunities.

- ESOL typically accounts for around a third of adult provision at the Luminate Education Group and demand is high, however, the local community and employers also require a diverse range of other provision from their AEB

Community learning funding is used flexibly to plan **'bridging courses'** slotting adult learners, who are not yet ready to start accredited ESOL, into programmes of 10 to 15 hours delivered over 4 to 6 weeks. Regular interviews by dedicated adult adviser/assessor roles, typically result in a 2-week turnaround from enquiry to placement. The bridging course strategy helps to achieve 2 objectives; firstly, learners build the foundations for accredited qualifications and secondly, the group is then able to carefully **'manage enrolment numbers and avoid displacing other adult provision'** by the prudent management of its budget.

- Leaders at the City of Liverpool College feel that devolution has made it easier to be responsive to local needs. Previously many learners who were co-funding,

struggled to contribute towards the cost of their training. This was a barrier to participation and progression for some adults. The Liverpool City Region (LCR) increased the low wage threshold. The number of adults required to co-fund has since dropped to around 10%

During and post the Covid-19 pandemic, the combined authority also approved funding for new qualifications to be developed by the college, with awarding bodies. The college feels that their financial risk to development of new provision is now shared with the LCR. Although they cover the upfront costs for programme development, they know they have pre-approval to go ahead. Both these flexibilities have enabled an increase to adults accessing level 2 provision.

2.3 Flexible delivery modes and removing barriers

Colleges employ various delivery strategies to cater for the diverse needs of their adult learners and to raise their participation. Some place significant emphasis on outreach provision, whilst others focus on supporting adults to attend their main campuses. Models include infill into 16 to 19 study programmes as well as discrete adult provision. There are innovative examples of how colleges have developed flexible learning opportunities and outline delivery.

Colleges are mindful of the many barriers to participation faced by some adult learner groups and have adopted strategies to make engagement in learning more accessible to those from areas of disadvantage and diverse communities.

- Preston College employs a campus-based delivery model, strategically centralising most of its adult provision through flexible delivery modes on its main campus, where there is spare capacity. This approach optimises space utilisation and eliminates the need for rental costs. Barriers to participation are reduced through the provision of free travel passes for eligible learners

Flexible delivery in the evenings also reduces pressure on specialist workshops for adults attending training in key areas for the local economy, such as construction, where the college has a strong reputation for its provision. In response to demand, around 50 different classes are delivered each evening from Monday to Thursday, plus an additional 6 Saturday ESOL classes.

- conversely, faced by a need to overcome space limitations at its main college campus and, a desire to align with the emphasis placed on inclusivity by the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, the Luminare Education Group delivers around 40% of its adult provision in outreach centres

The group reviewed bus and walking routes to select venues, taking learning out to their community. They are committed to maintaining a strong delivery presence in areas with the highest levels of deprivation. Delivery is often in partnership with other agencies, local authorities, and community groups.

Online delivery supports local rurality and meets national needs

- the creation and implementation of online learning programmes requires a significant amount of investment and staff input but Lincoln College is committed to cater for the rural nature of their county and have embraced online delivery

Online learning makes up around 50% of the college's AEB with 32 courses offered to around 850 adult learners. Provision is predominately at level 2 and is mainly delivered to those working or seeking to work in healthcare, where flexibility is essential for shift patterns or preventing longer travel time.

The college also support major national employers with online learning programmes. In recent years, around 200 of one national employer's staff nationally have accessed the provision. Forty-five managers have received mental health training at level 2, helping to reduce absence at work and maintain employee wellbeing.

Cost effective infill models

Where appropriate, colleges operate an infill model to place adults into programmes with 16 to 18-year-old learners. Some create flexibility, allowing adults to slot in for shorter periods of learning, to develop skills in demand by employers.

- in response to the local skills demand, West Nottinghamshire College's partnership with the Jobcentre resulted in adult recruitment to meet a local skills shortage in fabrication and welding. To ensure the provision was cost effective, the college adopted a short infill model, placing adults into study programmes for a period of up to 3 weeks. They then collaborated with the job centre and employers to assist adults to secure jobs and to re-enrol onto a higher level of training, targeted at employers' ongoing skills needs

Breaking down barriers to participation

- to remove barriers and encourage participation by prospective ESOL students, Leeds City College, part of the Luminate Education Group has set up an enquiry tab on its website which allows ESOL students to provide basic information that is then used to invite them in for assessment (see [My Enquiry - Leeds City College](#)). The rest of the application process is then completed in person (although there is an option to complete the full application form online if language and digital skills allow)

2.4 Support strategies to help adult learners succeed

The ways in which colleges provide support for adults is varied, ranging from quick wins to longer, more sustained support. They typically offer a combination of support strategies and mechanisms to help adults engage with learning and succeed in their goals.

- Lincoln College's online learning provision has a particularly robust support system for adults. A team of 7 progress coaches play a pivotal role in ensuring that all adult learners are placed onto the right online programme. The coaches are responsible for conducting initial assessments and screening for learning support. They collaborate with other staff to understand and accommodate adults' preferred learning styles

A significant strength of the college's model for online learning is the flexibility of support provided by these progress coaches. They are available to respond to adults' needs during the day, evenings and on weekends, making it especially beneficial for those who are employed with shift patterns that are varied. Achievement rates for the college's online provision is around 90%.

The proportion of AEB used to provide additional learning support for adults by most of the participant colleges ranges from between 5% to around 10%. Colleges underline the benefits of capturing support needs as early as possible and make changes to the ways they provide support.

- Luminate Education Group has a well-established initial assessment process, which identifies adults' complex and increasing range of needs early, despite the fact some have pre-conceptions about accepting support. To maximise impact, they have shifted the emphasis from **'learning support to teaching support'** reinforced by revised job roles and titles. Most support is now provided by 'teaching assistants' with 'learning support assistants' deployed where individual personal care is required, to keep the emphasis on learning and progression
- finding that ESOL learners often have an additional learning support need, in addition to a language barrier, the City of Liverpool College made changes to better plan their curriculum delivery, with an aim to improve sequencing to support learners' progression and identify and target learning support

Enrolment was changed from a roll-on/roll-off model to 3 onboarding points, one each term. For early identification of learners' needs, staff are given first contact training. Initial assessment captures around 80% of support requirements quickly. In many cases, support needs to continue at the next level because of the increased challenge. A greater understanding of needs has enabled to college to plan ongoing resources. By implementing these changes, progression rates have increased.

Some colleges are pro-active, establishing relationships with their local councils and Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCA), to secure additional learning support funding.

- at West Nottinghamshire College, the delivery of ALS for adults was disconnected from the ALS team providing support for the college's programmes for young people. Seeking to rectify this and to meet the increasing demand of ALS for adults, they established a joined-up approach and negotiated with the local authority for additional funding

Before learners commence their programmes and after, staff collaborate with the local councils to identify ALS requirements. The additional funding has proved beneficial to adults, who can also be placed in smaller group sizes for functional skills. The skillset of staff is now used cohesively across all funding streams and funding adults' ALS needs has become a priority for their local authority, who see the benefits to their community.

3. Example outcomes from colleges

3.1 Employers

Advantage of collaboration

Colleges promote strong employer engagement to shape the intent of their curriculum. In some cases, they also foster a way of working that is mutually beneficial to the adult learner and their employer.

Maths and English skills enhance employees' skills

- leaders at Lincoln College have grown a strong partnership with 2 prominent locally based national employers. Through negotiations, work schedules have been adjusted to accommodate participation in the functional skills programme. Employees now attend classes conveniently during the working day or evening, in dedicated on-site classrooms. These employers see tangible benefits for their employees and their organisations, because of increased opportunities to further progress into apprenticeships or management roles within the company

Adopting a roll-on, roll-off model, the college delivers accredited learning over a 6-month period. Four classes are timetabled each day, plus evenings. Achievements are around 90%, and up to 400 learners are expected to complete the programme in the academic year.

Maths and English support adults' employability

- at Suffolk New College, learners find the multiple in year exam points of functional skills attractive. Some fast-track level 1 and level 2 in one year and can then progress into a GCSE in the following year
- at Barnsley College, basic maths and English skills programmes make up about 11% of the AEB delivery and courses are delivered all year round, making use of the college resources. Most adults (70%) take functional skills rather than GCSE Maths and English, usually on a 60-hour programme of study in groups of 12 to 15

The college's work is supplemented by an additional allocation from the local authority for bespoke adult numeracy programmes funded through Multiply, [Multiply Investment Prospectus \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#).

Sector-based work academy programmes (SWAPs)

Luminate Education Group and City of Liverpool College have seen a decline in SWAP provision, with lower mandated referrals from the Jobcentre Plus, post the global pandemic. Subsequently, SWAPs represent a relatively small proportion of adult learners in these colleges but in others they are working well.

- SWAPs are a highly successful part of Barnsley College's adult delivery, comprising around 30% of the total AEB provision for up to 600 learners each year. Jobcentre Plus support learners' travel costs, Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and some licences, while the college cover CSCS card costs for construction SWAPs. Despite these additional costs, the college manages a positive gross contribution, between 30% to 40%

The college typically work with large local employers, who attend information sessions with potential candidates prior to enrolment. They deliver SWAPs for a range of sectors, including health and care, retail, construction, security, and manufacturing, with adults' developing personal, employability and mental health awareness skills, alongside vocational training.

Colleges generally find that the SWAP methodology works well for large employers who have opportunities for large placements and established processes in place.

- Lincoln College offers around 10 SWAP programmes each year in response to new employment 'openings' in their local area. Acknowledging the challenges of forecasting numbers against the curriculum plan, they are flexible with their funding and delivery and work with both SMEs and large employers

SWAPs take place most months, for groups of between 10 to 13 learners. The college's main delivery is for the hospitality sector, where customer service skills are developed. They tailor the customer service programmes to meet larger employers' needs, for example communicating to learners what the regions water company looks for in an applicant for progression to employment and adding additionality into the programme to build future applicants' resilience.

- 'Warehousing to Wheels' and 'Driving 2 Work' are initiatives of 2 other colleges who both work in collaborative partnerships with employers and training associations. Other colleges have reported delays in successful learners obtaining licences or barriers to progression to employment due to the cost of licences. Understanding that there is a high cost of training, testing, and obtaining licences, Lincoln college praises the vital support for their programme provided through collaborations with their local enterprise partnership in addressing some of these challenges

Free courses for jobs (FCFJs)

- [Free Courses For Jobs](#) (FCFJ) was a welcome development at Preston College, attracting significant numbers of adults in construction, AAT, counselling, and health courses. At Barnsley College, they have found that many adults in their local demographic are not yet ready for a FCFJ Level 3 programme
- college leaders at the Luminate Education Group have worked together with the West Yorkshire Combined Authority to address barriers to participation of FCFJs, by negotiating greater flexibilities of funding

Following the submission of an employer focused rationale, the group has been able to add additional level 3 qualifications to their local FCFJs offer. The offer now includes skills development for theatre technicians for the regions creative sector and a level 3 aviation course, working to fill skills shortages with Jet2 and other airlines at Leeds/Bradford airport.

Using AI to plan employee's soft skill development

- Suffolk New College has been working with a large construction group to support the soft skill development for their entry level employees. Aware of the college's work for learners' personal development, the employer recognised an alignment with their own corporate values

The college has an ePASS framework in place which is designed to support the development of essential employability skills. They have evolved their ePASS framework, into an ePASS+ for this employer. The software platform uses AI to capture initial assessment information which is then used to put together individual learning pathways to develop employees' skills and alignment with corporate values, for successful careers. Impressed by this work, another large employer has asked the college to develop 'The Sizewell C Way' in preparation for a large infrastructure build in the area.

3.2 Contributions to community and social value

Colleges offer vital community education programmes, delivering both regulated and non-regulated provision, the curriculum is predominantly preparation for life and work and includes cross cutting themes of numeracy literacy and digital skills. Adult and Community Learning (ACL) often serves to promote well-being and encourage adults to advance into accredited skills-based provision.

Outreach work and tackling social isolation

- West Nottinghamshire College uses additional Multiply funding for outreach delivery, targeting learners at several community venues, helping them to improve their maths and get on in life. The college expanded their town centre footprint, renting spaces for providing advice and guidance and, for delivery. The college accommodates adults' shift patterns, offering lessons during the day and evenings. They plan smaller group sizes, to benefit those who require more personalised interaction and teaching
- the Luminate Education Group receives ACL funding from their devolved authority and through a subcontract with the city council, creating pathways from non-accredited learning to accredited learning, for their most deprived communities. They are also delivering a small wellbeing focused programme to tackle social isolation

Digital skills are a priority of the combined authority, but the group initially found it challenging to meet targets for growth. To address this, they introduced a range of pre-digital preparation programmes such as "First Steps in Digital" (a 20-hour programme over 6 to 10 weeks). They are now making significant inroads encouraging participation, where progression for learners now takes place to new Essential Digital Skills Qualifications.

A stakeholder first approach

Colleges understand the needs and priorities of society and are widely acknowledged as anchor institutions in their communities. As such, they are well placed to connect with their stakeholders, and they play a significant role adding social value.

Insights from the participant colleges demonstrate a 'stakeholder first' approach takes place, using the mechanism of adult funding to engage their communities in learning and to provide social, emotional, and financial support for their journey.

- the Luminate Education Group collaborates with community groups, referral and support agencies are located on their campuses. They provide food and clothing banks. They are in the process of developing a wider anti-poverty strategy and are exploring ways to measure the broader social impact of their work by possibly employing various social value metrics which encompass more than progression and destination data. This work is in its early stages but there is potential for development among other colleges

Supporting stakeholders with health and mental health needs

- employers experience challenges with staff retention, sometimes due to poor mental health. As part of their SWAP initiatives, Lincoln College designed a programme to raise learners' self-awareness and enhance mental health and wellbeing
- after recognising a local community need, West Nottinghamshire College designed and implemented a pilot programme, with the aim of training parents in mental health support. In addition, the college collaborates with drug and alcohol addiction groups, to provide community learning opportunities and facilitate progression onto other AEB funded programmes

Leaders at the college have utilised valuable resources from a legacy project funded by the EU, called 'Reskilling and Recovery'. The funding played a pivotal role in securing defibrillators for a local district and the college has delivered training on how to use a defibrillator and perform CPR. Using these resources, the college equips members of its community with valuable life-saving skills.

Enriching experiences

- adult provision at the Luminate Education Group is focussed on some of the most deprived communities in England with the highest proportions coming from the lowest 10% to 20% income brackets. These learners often face additional social needs due to poverty, limited prior learning experiences, undiagnosed learning needs, limited access to technology and increased health concerns

To address barriers to participation, the group offer a comprehensive welfare support package and well-being support through enrichment events. Such events take place in culturally diverse areas and promote tolerance, mutual understanding and respect and foster social cohesion.

- a unique role of Director of Social and Cultural Curriculum is in place at the City of Liverpool College. This role adds value by enriching adults' social and cultural knowledge, skills, and understanding. By doing so, it promotes diversity among all college learners

Colleges of sanctuary

Refugees and asylum seekers have often encountered trauma on their journey to the country and into education. With a desire to understand how to provide the very best support to these learner groups, 2 of the participant colleges have gained accreditation as a "**Colleges of Sanctuary**".

- Luminate Education Group have embraced the college of sanctuary approach, to shift the culture and attitudes towards asylum seekers and refugees, foster

equality, diversity, inclusion and to create a sense of belonging. This commitment is underpinned by various activities from the staff and student body, including creating a garden of sanctuary, refugee week and a refugee film festival

- at Preston College, accreditation mirrors the City's designation as a City of Sanctuary and is seen as epitomising a common purpose

Part B: Local authority providers

4. Strategic approaches of local authorities

4.1 Strategy

Adult education providers within local authorities are very different to college providers, they sit within much wider local authority structures and are guided by community and council priorities. They share common goals to enhance people's wellbeing and support their communities to make a positive contribution to the local economy.

Like colleges, common strategies include, providing equality of opportunity and experience, inclusion, clear pathways for progression and, enabling a flexible and responsible offer to meet changing needs.

Some authorities contract out a high proportion, or all their delivery to trusted providers. They see their work as 'partnerships' with these 'trusted providers', who know their local communities well.

The 3 local authority participants share some common goals but there are nuances within their focus, particular to the area they serve, their financial and operating models and where they sit within their respective wider council structures.

- Lincolnshire County Council serves a rural county, and the Lincolnshire Adult Skills and Family Learning Service (ASFLS) sits in the 'place directorate' of the council within the area of economic development. Strategic priorities are aligned with skills goals identified from the council and the local enterprise partnership. The delivery of their vision **'more people having the skills and attributes for work, enabling them to make a positive contribution to their community'**, is targeted at those furthest from work

The curriculum is designed to fill delivery gaps from other providers and ensure access to participation is available for all adult residents as potential learners. To achieve this, they provide both in-house delivery and subcontracted. A strategic decision to over-plan the budget is taken, based on experience of historical performance with subcontractors, who can sometimes be overly ambitious in their delivery plans. Mid-year adjustments take place to reallocate funding when targets are not met.

Conversely, the Learning and Skills Service (LSS) which sits within the Children's Services Department at Sunderland City Council contracts out all its provision to a quality assured delivery partner. The partners align their provision to the Sunderland City

Council City Plan and the vision of LSS and are closely engaged with the communities the service needs to reach. The authority operates in a highly deprived area, emphasising the need to address education, skills, and health disparities. A strong theme runs through the providers strategy to improve health and wellbeing, which aligns to the city's ambition to reduce health inequalities through '**Starting well, living well and Ageing well**'.

More recently, the provider has remodelled their payment methodology for adult learning to be learner centric. Funding to subcontractors is offered on a per person, per guided learning hour payment. This approach places the learner at the heart of the process and enables more effective differentiated learning to take place. For example, in response to a community need, a health and wellbeing provider co-created the curriculum to improve knowledge and understanding through a programme for living life with the menopause and another titled 'Mansformation' to raise men's confidence and self-esteem.

Since the remodelling of their payment methodology, the authority has seen an increase to participation, retention, and destination rates.

4.2 Leadership within the council structure

Leaders of adult learning at local authority providers have various job titles, these include heads of service, service managers or principals and they may have different reporting lines through to the council executive and elected members.

- at Westminster Adult Education Service (WAES), the Principal and Head of Service, is supported by a senior team who all have experience within GFE colleges as well as adult and community education. The operational structure shares similarities with FE colleges, where a team of curriculum managers have responsibility for leading curriculum areas
- at Lincolnshire ASFLS, the Service Manager is supported by a principal officer for learning and skills and a business intelligence manager who is responsible for the commissioning process and data recording and reporting
- the Service Manager has day to day management of Sunderland City Council's LSS, and is supported by the Quality, Performance & Achievement Manager who has day to day responsibility for management of their partners

4.3 Curriculum

- Sunderland City Council's ambition to reduce health inequalities drives the design of their subcontracted provision and curriculum intent. Because of high levels of deprivation and health issues within the city, the LSS favours face to face delivery

Although their emphasis is on supporting health and wellbeing, basic skills and pre-employment courses is also key to support pathways for many to move closer to the labour market. Therefore, the offer reflects both accredited and non-accredited learning to encourage learners on their journey.

The curriculum intent for 2 other providers is built around providing progression through a pathway or plan offer.

- at WAES, future learners receive advice and guidance to establish their purpose for study before being enrolled onto an Adult Career Plan or a Cultural Health and Wellbeing Plan

The provider offers a range of apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships and employability, community learning, and cultural programmes. Council objectives are to support adults into learning and work. They therefore focus on accessible and inclusive provision which can be classroom-based, online or through distance learning.

- at the Lincolnshire ASFLS, there are 3 engagement pathways. Adult Skills is a pathway to engagement onto further vocational or qualification programmes, that will lead directly to higher level learning or link to employment. Health and Wellbeing is a pathway that supports learners who may need a softer re-introduction to education, and Family Learning allows parents to develop their skills and knowledge through gaining an understanding of how their child learns, enabling them to better support their child's development

5. Operational approaches of local authorities

5.1 Partnerships

Delivery partners know the local communities well. Partnerships ensure delivery is targeted to reach local needs through local provider forums, effective relationships, and the strategic use of community venues.

Provider forums and support

- Lincolnshire is a large rural county and around 70% of the ASFLS provision is subcontracted. Leaders highlight the importance of relationship building with their partners for successful delivery and learner achievement

Local provider forums operate around the county and are chaired by the head of service for adults or their principal learning officer. These forums ensure that funding allocation is spread according to geographical need, as well as to meet the council's key performance indicators.

The use of the local provider forums and ongoing relationship management by project officers within the adult education service results in better positioning of provision to avoid duplication and to deliver what is needed at a local level. Project officers also have the flexibility to work with their contracted providers to move funding between adult skills and wellbeing programmes.

- the Sunderland City LSS subcontract all their adult provision to between 10 to 15 providers each year. Similarly, partners working with the city council are well embedded within their local communities and understand the needs of local people. As such, they are part of the overall team for informing and influencing the curriculum and learner recruitment.

Curriculum activity is commissioned with partners in 7 "lots": developing employability skills, vocational qualifications, digital inclusion, maths and English, community engagement and health and wellbeing

Outreach work through extensive delivery in community venues

- WAES delivers most of its provision direct. The providers' adult delivery team provide flexible online learning and traditional face to face learning. A substantive distance learning programme enrolls around 2,000 adults a year and uses the services of a referral agent. The agent recruits adult learners and provides initial

advice and guidance, to make sure the programme is suitable for learners' needs.

Face to face provision takes place at 3 main centers and, in 80 local community venues. The adult education service places significant importance in collaborating with these community venue partners so that adults benefit from delivery that is right at the heart of their local community.

Family learning partnerships support children within the county

- at Lincolnshire County Council, effective collaborations with schools are helping to break down barriers and position family learning provision appropriately. School partnerships are high developed to provide a thorough understanding of each schools' individual needs and requirements

The Lincolnshire ASFLS tutors with the correct skills, experience and knowledge are matched to the schools' requirements to ensure desired outcomes are met. The strength of these partnerships is reflected in the positive feedback received from schools helping to work with parents to improve children's attendance and outcomes.

5.2 Flexibility

Flexible approaches are used by adult education providers within local authorities to support their delivery partners and subsequently, their community.

- the Lincolnshire ASFLS used discretionary funding to meet the needs of a delivery partner by funding a L3 Award in Education and Training qualification for their staff. This helps the subcontractor to '**grow their own**' tutors, in areas of subject shortages. The subcontractor is helped to retain and recruit staff but in turn they can develop and provide the right curriculum, in the right place for the council's priorities

The service also works with 4 general further education colleges in Lincolnshire, they are partners in the same way as all other subcontractors. However, because of colleges' robust approaches to quality and other operational performance, the council is flexible in their commissioning methodology which is less onerous for the colleges. The council can then target provision within the catchment area of each college, which supports adult learners' progression seamlessly into their local FE college.

- many Afghan and Ukrainian refugees have good skills and expertise and a reasonable level of English but not the necessary qualifications to move straight

into commensurate levels of work. WAES uses flexibilities from the Greater London Authority (GLA) to help those with reasonable English to either access work or University by delivering a programme to improve achievement in and fund the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam

One learner from the first cohort was offered all 5 university choice places which they would not have been able to do without the funded programme because of the cost of IELTS.

Provision is delivered in a range of venues to promote engagement, these include pre-entry ESOL in community settings, libraries, faith centres and conversation cafes. Other initiatives using community learning funding include enterprise programmes delivered in libraries for business startups.

Governance and performance monitoring

Accountability and alignment with council priorities

Governance of adult education at local authorities differs from FE colleges in terms of their structures, functions, and scope of powers. Their title may vary, many are called as advisory boards. Governance models at these 3 participant providers, ensure strategic oversight to support alignment with council priorities and monitor the performance of service delivery.

Membership typically consists of the principal or head of service, business leaders, employers, executive council officers and councillors, who in some cases are cabinet members.

- WAES advisory board has been instrumental in providing challenge and support for senior leaders and monitoring effective performance. The long-established governance arrangements, governors' skills and experience inform both strategic and operational targets and provide effective monitoring of performance against the council's strategic economic aims
- the Lincolnshire ASFLS has a long-established Learning Board, to provide governance for the councils 3 FE and Skills areas, adult and family learning, apprenticeships, and young people's learning provision (YPLP). The board effectively provides oversight of the adult skills and family learning service plan and monitors performance against council targets

Representation on the board includes the providers internal directorate areas, Councillors, local employers, training providers and other stakeholders from the Department of Work and Pensions, Barnardo's, and a local SME.

- the Sunderland City LSS has a performance management framework in place. Their subcontracting model requires careful and persistent monitoring, with a strong oversight of providers' quality. Performance management data is reviewed by the adult education team and the chief officer's group, as well as the lead councillor with the portfolio for this area

The provider forum meetings held by the Lincolnshire ASFLS and the Sunderland City LSS, are also used to regularly monitor performance.

- all subcontracting partners attend the LSS provider forum meetings, where trends in performance are reviewed to manage risk. Contract updates are communicated, and partners are encouraged to work with each other, to improve adults' progression opportunities

6. Example Outcomes from Local Authorities

Local authority adult provision includes maths and English, employability skills, family, and community learning. Below are a few examples of provision delivered directly by providers or through their network of subcontractors. More examples can be found in the appendices.

6.1 Employers

- WAES successfully deliver SWAP programmes in construction with partner employers in Battersea and Nine Elms. The redevelopment of the former Battersea Power Station to accommodate housing and retail has enabled the provider to further expand their SWAP delivery into retail/hospitality with a trusted sub-contracting partner. The subcontractor can respond quickly to deliver at employer premises. To date, over 70% of learners have progressed into work, demonstrating the benefits to local businesses and the community

The provider also used funding from the Greater London Authority (GLA) prescribed element of flexibility, to design digital skills programmes with a partner to meet the authorities' and employers' priorities and to prepare them for a bid for future Skills Bootcamp funding. Over 250 adult learners have accessed digital programmes and a 16-week, full-time training programme in collaboration with Code Institute will run in the future, preparing learners for careers in the digital workforce as software developers.

- subcontracted programmes at Lincolnshire ASFLS respond to local economic needs, as such, the service has supported Lincoln College in developing programmes linked to employment with utilities companies, food production companies and some in the financial sector. This is targeted provision and successful through hospitality, working from home and customer service courses

6.2 Community and social value

Strategies employed by local authorities address issues related to accessibility arising from geographical or digital needs. They seek opportunities to improve the health and wellbeing of their communities, through social initiatives and their approach to learning.

- in Lincolnshire, learners can face challenges accessing provision due to the geography of the county and public transport. With a 90-minute bus journey each way, some learners who had completed level 2 qualifications faced difficulties in accessing suitable level 3 progression opportunities at a college. The Lincolnshire

ASFSL used national skills fund money to establish a programme delivered locally, in the coastal area of Skegness. This supported learners to access provision and meet the needs of local employers

- in Sunderland, the LSS are working with sub-contractors to co-design a new health and wellbeing curriculum that focuses on self-help strategies, mobility, and diet improvement. The result will support members of the community to better understand ways to improve their health and wellbeing and, to access education provision

The provider has developed similar work in conjunction with “warm spaces” and “social prescribing” all of which facilitate curriculum development in areas that are most relevant and accessible to people who are not yet engaged with education and learning.

The city has experienced a significant increase in the number of households using food banks. Some using the food banks had limited knowledge of how to use the standard packages they were receiving. The service engaged 2 partner providers and worked with them and staff from the food banks to design menus and deliver cookery courses using the ingredients from the food banks.

Local health teams were also involved in supporting weight loss and diet and as a second phase, the citizens advice bureau was involved to support the development of budgeting skills, so that an additional £10 supermarket voucher could be used efficiently to supplement the food bank parcels. The result was better use of provisions, increased home cooking and better budget management by the learners taking part.

Sunderland City Council’s IT scrappage/replacement strategy was reviewed to repurpose old technology. Many laptops have been repurposed for use by adult learners who do not have their own access to IT equipment. The adult education service faced challenges when initially requesting to repurpose the laptops, but the initiative successfully led to council leaders and executive officers having a greater understanding of digital poverty and their communities digital learning needs.

Appendices: Provider case studies

Barnsley College

AEB Data (2021/2022 Actuals)

Funding Allocations:

Non devolved: £31,442

Devolved: £2,182,880

Total: £2,214,322

Actual Value of Direct Delivery:

Non devolved: £80,941

Devolved: £2,487,693

Total: £2,559,634

About Barnsley College

Barnsley College is a large tertiary college in South Yorkshire which provides a variety of education programmes including a direct entry cohort at age 14, over 5,000 16 to 19 funded study programmes, almost 2,000 adults, around 650 class based higher education learners and around 1,800 apprentices in learning. Provision is delivered from 10 campuses including 2 out of region satellites.

The college was inspected in March 2022 with all aspects judged as outstanding other than Apprenticeships (judged as good). Prior attainment of adults in Barnsley is well below UK average at levels 2, 3 and 4.

The college has a relatively small but growing adult education budget (£2.6 million in 2021/2022).

Barnsley College is the lead partner for South Yorkshire Strategic Development Fund (SDF) and partner in the South Yorkshire Institute of Technology.

The principal and chief executive is David Akeroyd.

Background to AEB delivery at Barnsley College

Despite its origins as a tertiary college, Barnsley College has made adult skills one of its top strategic priorities and has an ambition to grow its provision in response to local demand and needs whilst maintaining the outstanding quality of provision. The college has an impressive track record of exceeding its AEB funding allocations and anticipates building-up its funding allocations incrementally to circa £5 million in order to meet local demand.

The college owns a subsidiary company (Independent Training Services Limited - ITS) which delivers the college's Sector-based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs) and other adult programmes as a virtual department of the college rather than via a formal subcontract. The managing director is an integral member of the college leadership team.

The college does not currently receive an allocation for community learning – historically this provision has been delivered by other providers. The college is keen to find ways to work more closely with these providers to ensure best use of devolved funding.

Overview of the college's leadership and management of AEB delivery

The college's leadership structure reflects a matrix model that operates within a culture of empowerment with high levels of management freedoms and flexibilities coupled with robust systems of accountability for performance. This offers an attractive and effective approach to curriculum and business planning that encourages flexibility and innovation and focusses on bottom line performance and outstanding quality outcomes, with less emphasis on traditional efficiency indicators and controls over inputs.

The principal and chief executive describes this as a "framed degree of autonomy" underpinned by funding rules and the college's financial regulations. The approach is seen as critical to the responsiveness, flexibility, and expansion of its AEB delivery as well as the college's track record for outstanding quality.

Leadership responsibilities for adult provision are shared across the leadership team, with the deputy principal – development and productivity leading on relationship management with funders (specifically South Yorkshire MCA and West Yorkshire MCA). Engagement at this senior level is seen as critical to ensuring responsiveness to funding priorities and securing growth.

The vice principal – technical and professional education is responsible for the curriculum strategy across all aspects of provision including adults. Similarly, the vice principal – quality has college-wide responsibility for quality and outcomes across all curriculum areas.

In the last 18 months, the college has however invested in a new dedicated post of director for adult and higher skills, underlining its strategic importance to the college and its stakeholders (even though AEB represents a relatively small proportion of each head of department's overall funding). This new role has helped to spread the portfolio of the assistant principal – classroom-based learning whilst at the same time strengthening the profile of adult delivery and the effectiveness of oversight.

The director for adults and higher skills has responsibility for designing the curriculum offer with the heads of department to ensure that it meets local, regional, and national priorities whilst also ensuring the funding allocation is fully utilised. Essentially this

involves operationalising the curriculum strategy and includes line management by the director for adults and higher skills of some heads of department.

An important part of the director of adult and higher skills' role is to chair monthly reviews of adult skills funding performance via task and finish meetings of the adult development group, which are attended by all heads of department. These meetings provide a valuable mechanism for monitoring the achievement of plans and funding targets alongside more formal quarterly reviews with each head of department and the director of student recruitment and marketing.

Marketing activity focusses on maintenance of a highly visible physical presence in the community and development strong relationships with local stakeholders. Most adult programmes (other than SWAPs) are delivered at main college campuses rather than community venues. Skills advisers play an important role in onboarding students to college though there are not specific skills advisers for adult programmes. ITS Ltd employ their own business development managers including one specifically dedicated to SWAPs.

Key elements of the college's curriculum strategy for adult skills

The college has a single overarching corporate plan that sets out its strategic focus across 5 strands including quality, curriculum, sustainability, and reputation. Underpinning this is the curriculum strategy which is reviewed annually by the board of governors and sets the overall direction of travel for a three-year curriculum planning horizon. The curriculum strategy identifies 3 pillar priorities for the college, one of which is specific to adult programmes: *“develop an adult education curriculum that addresses local skills priorities and provides clear pathways to skilled jobs”*.

Six priority sectors and areas are identified including:

- digital
- construction
- engineering
- health and care
- leadership, management, and professional business services
- sustainable green technologies

These reflect the key themes that have emerged from the Local Skills Improvement Plan and take account of Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) data from Lightcast.

The college's curriculum planning methodology draws heavily on LMI data and is effectively a “zero-based” approach using an assessment of need as the starting point rather than a specific funding envelope or target. Three main rounds are involved following initial curriculum strategy workshops with Heads of Department in December/January:

Round 1 (February): outline plan to provide a broad steer for the year ahead based on performance to date to period 6

Round 2 (April): plan for the new academic year is largely complete

Round 3 (June): budgets finalised and signed-off

Highly effective business/curriculum planning and review processes enable the college to flex-up provision where shortfalls against plans materialise. Alongside these, there is strategic willingness / appetite to aim high and plan for over-delivery against funding allocations to build confidence with devolved funders and take advantage of in-year growth funding opportunities as/when these become available.

Examples of successful provision and innovative programmes

Devolution of AEB funding

The college delivers AEB provision to 2 different MCAs (of which South Yorkshire MCA) is the largest. Whilst local differences in approach can introduce added complexity, the college has developed strong relationships with both MCAs and secured funding growth through a consistent track record of over-delivery against funding allocations.

Sector based work academies (SWAPs)

ITS deliver a range of flexible and responsive SWAPs programmes built on well-established relationships with DWP/Jobcentre Plus and major local employers. These offer short, intensive programmes away from the main college campus that include added value qualifications and certificates to maximise progression into employment. SWAPS currently account for almost one third of the college's AEB delivery with the main constraint on further growth being the current funding allocation.

Key features which account for the success of the SWAPs programmes include:

- bespoke and tailored programmes reflecting the specific and varying requirements of each employer (noting that even within the NHS each trust has different expectations)
- flexible programmes that can include up to 10 learning aims and which may include non-fundable provision (e.g. CSCS cards and food safety qualifications) that are deemed important to employers and potential employees
- discrete provision that is delivered offsite, typically in rented town centre premises
- flexible staffing including full time tutors who typically teach from 9.30am to 3.00pm 5 days per week
- positive contribution rates that are comparable with levels of contribution for other provision delivered by the college

Whilst delivery via ITS Ltd (the subsidiary company) clearly works well for Barnsley, it is the principles and features outlined above that are considered most critical to its success rather than the company structure itself.

Maths/English/functional skills

Basic maths and English skills programmes recruit throughout the academic year and account for around 11% of AEB delivery, though this is supplemented by a small allocation via the local authority for Multiply. Participation rates have remained broadly stable in recent years with around 20% of delivery offered in evenings rather than during daytime. The majority of adults (70%) take functional skills rather than GCSE Maths and English, usually on a 60-hour programme of study in groups of 12 to 15.

Digital programmes

Digital skills are an important national and local priority where the college was set an ambitious growth target as part of its delivery plan with SYMCA. After a slow start, take up has increased based on a short 60-hour programme spread over 10 weeks covering areas such as digital marketing and cyber security with clear progression pathways from level 2 to level 3.

Drone courses

The college is currently exploring scope to secure funding for training in the use of drones. This is an area where demand is growing linked to the need for employees to be licensed when using larger drones. The college is hoping to use SYMCA's innovation fund to support the development of this provision which includes online modules covering theory and practical sessions flying drones.

City of Liverpool College

AEB Data (2021/2022 Actuals)

Funding Allocations:

Non devolved: £401,693

Devolved: £10,389,489

Total: £10,791,182

Actual Value of Direct Delivery:

Non devolved: £394,478

Devolved: Not known

Total: Not known

About the City of Liverpool College (WNC)

The college is located within the city and is the largest in the Liverpool City Region (LCR) devolved authority. Curriculum is delivered across 5 main campuses. The main industries served by the college are health, manufacturing, construction and allied industries, professional services, creative industries, and the visitor economy.

The college was inspected by Ofsted in 2017 and graded as good. The principal and chief executive is Elaine Bowker.

Background to AEB delivery at WNC

Just over 20% of the colleges total provision is delivered to adults. The majority of the AEB is taken up by learners on long courses and through infill models. Adult programmes are delivered during the day and evening. Health and professional learners are amongst the largest cohorts.

Support for learning and for learners at the college is highly valued by adults. Socio-economic support is also provided through foodbanks and the co-location of some external agencies.

Leadership and management of AEB delivery

Integrated leadership structure

Several key roles and responsibilities are crucial for the success of adult provision. The Vice Principal, oversees quality, pastoral and progress support for adult learners. Reporting to the Vice Principal is a director responsible for adult education, they monitor the quality and consistency of provision and avoid duplication across the college campuses. This strategic role has been in place for two years and focuses on identifying and meeting skills needs.

The college has a commercial director who provides labour market intelligence for short, medium, and longer-term planning. They act as a bridge between the college and

employer boards, ensuring the college's programmes align with the demands of the job market.

A unique role at the college is that of the Director of Social and Cultural Curriculum. This role adds value by enriching adults' social and cultural knowledge, skills, and understanding.

In-year performance monitoring and adjustment

The college delivers its curriculum through 4 faculty areas, all of which offer provision for adults. Rigorous monitoring and reporting take place, and marketing initiatives are implemented to increase the numbers of adult learners. The budget is adjusted to areas that are delivering to target. This allows the college to deliver in year growth and meet their targets for the overall AEB. The outturn for 2022/2023 was 106.8% of ESFA allocation delivered and 97.5% of devolved allocation delivered.

Workforce strategy

The college adopts a range of methods to employ high quality staff to deliver their adult and skills provision. They 'borrow from employers and build the staff of tomorrow'. A dual professional model is fostered and around 70% of college staff are classed as dual professionals. Many are currently working part time in industry, have recently left industry or return to keep their skills up to date; they take periods of time out of teaching and their posts are held open for them to return to. Some construction and engineering lecturers work part-time either employed in local companies, or through self-employment and creative arts staff continue to undertake freelance work.

Adult learners value the skills set that the staff bring to their learning, they like the dual professional model because it's real and relevant.

The college also adopts a grow your own approach for some teaching roles, teaching assistants teach ESOL learners and see this as their next step to lecturing. Former students are sometimes recruited as technicians and are encouraged to take up part time work in the sector before progressing to lecturing. There is a PGCE expectation within the first 3 years.

The college's curriculum strategy for adults

The college adopts a collaborative approach with employers to clarify its curriculum intent and respond quickly to the evolving demands of the job market. Industry boards, each chaired by an employer, shape the medium and long-term education and training offer. Close links are maintained with the LCR combined authority, LEP and Chamber of Commerce. There are 3 main drivers for the adult strategy:

- progression to employment for those that are furthest away
- supporting upskilling and reskilling

- understanding individuals and providing effective support to enable achievement and progression

Strategic approach to curriculum

Liverpool is an education improvement zone, and the cities demographics are changing. In response the college adopts the 'Liverpool Way', which is research informed pedagogical strategy, this strategic approach underpins learning for students on all programmes. Introduced in year 1 of the current strategic plan, it emphasises shared first-order principles that respond to learner needs and align with an ethos of 'turning disadvantage into advantage'. This approach incorporates the principles of providing clarity, scaffolding learning, and giving dynamic feedback. This college-wide focus on metacognition is integrated into staff CPD and induction for new teachers.

Alongside this, sits a social and cultural curriculum to build and strengthen the social and cultural capital of learners. Schemes of learning (enrichment, mentoring, tutorials) explicitly and implicitly support adults to develop and recognise themselves as:

- well-connected and rich in relationships, both horizontally and vertically (social capital)
- knowledgeable about their own heritage, their city and world (cultural capital)
- able to enter and operate in new environments with a mindset of resilience, confident in their own abilities and their interactions with others (resilience and confidence)

Examples of successful provision

Supporting local health services

The college is working to address shortages in health through collaborations with employers to promote adult social care as a route into nursing. This is now marketed as a defined entry route into the nursing profession. Where appropriate, a small number of adults infill into 16 to 18 study programmes, however, they are separated into discrete age groups for health and for care.

Digital

Adult learners within the Digital Academy have the opportunity to work with cyber security consultants as part of their programme to develop knowledge and skills which is identified as priority skills need in the sector. Some adult learners have worked on a collaborative project with a large local cancer centre to enhance patient experience. The project won Virtual Care Initiative of the Year at the prestigious Health Service Journal (HSJ) Patient Safety Awards in 2023. The video project offers patients a virtual tour of the Radiotherapy Department, helping them feel better informed and prepared for their first appointment.

Construction, engineering, and green skills

The college's employability school has developed a range of short intensive courses in groundworks and scaffolding through their work with housing foundations and employment officers within the LCR. These have led to positive employment outcomes.

Adults benefit from a newly installed steel framed training bay to support upskilling within the industry and to improve employability prospects, as well as additional training packages for learners alongside their courses in renewable and green energy. Adults studying within engineering, green technologies, and logistics, also benefit from employer links providing industry intelligence for course content to meet current and future skills gaps, including work with the city region team on tidal power and energy and the contextualisation of net zero within the curriculum.

ESOL

In 2022/2023, adult ESOL numbers have increased by over 10% for the second consecutive year with 3,221 adult ESOL leavers (Across both devolved and non-devolved AEB). Marketing and recruitment for ESOL takes place all year. Previously learners joined ESOL provision in year, the college has now changed this to 3 onboarding points, one each term. This change resulted to improvements of curriculum implementation through sequencing of units to support learners' progression and, to better support a spikey learner profile, where additional learning support can be targeted. Progression has increased since this change.

Maths and English

ESOL and adult English and Maths learners benefit from Test and Learn funding from the LCR combined authority, focusing on, learner autonomy, social and employability skills, social and cultural capital, wellbeing, and family learning.

Additional delivery for Multiply is employer focused, aimed at specific sector needs. The college is given space to innovate, they test different approaches to engage learners. Take up has been high, this is delivered face to face by staff who are familiar with adult delivery.

Some new delivery is online where the 'Liverpool way' is very important because it includes mentoring. Students make steps towards accredited GCSE or functional skills provision. The college uses funding flexibly, where for example improving maths can also help some parents support their children with homework.

Additional learning support

Initial assessment is undertaken with all adults to identify their needs, around 80% of support requirements are captured up front. The college finds that adults are comfortable to ask for support and are aware of the college strengths in helping individuals. Periodic reconciliation takes place to monitor and manage the budget.

ESOL learners often have an additional learning need, in addition to a language barrier. If they progress the support continues because the next level is more challenging. The college is undertaking 'first contact' training with staff to continue to improve identification of ALS needs.

Flexibilities for successful devolved AEB delivery

Devolution has built relationships that make it easier to be responsive to local needs. For example, during and post the pandemic, the LCR were able to approve funding for the delivery of new qualifications, these were developed by the college with their awarding bodies. This met a requirement to provide a swift response to the reskilling or upskilling need. The college feels that their risk to development of new provision is shared with the MCA; although the college puts in the groundwork for development, they have pre-approval to go ahead and for funding when learners are enrolled, which is more secure for the college.

Flexibilities have enabled an increase in level 2 funding and delivery. Previously many learners who were co-funded and struggled to contribute towards the cost of their training. This was a barrier for enrolment and progression for some adults. The flexibilities have increased the low wage threshold, which now results in around 10% who are required to co-fund. In a small number of cases, a challenge remains where learners sit just outside the postcode boundary.

Future developments

Skills Bootcamps are being developed in construction, engineering and digital. These courses are developed in consultation with employers, to ensure the contents supports adult progression to those industries, for example the college is working with a large employer who has provided input to an electric vehicle bootcamp. The college is now liaising with employers to identify job routes and guarantee interviews to learners. They are revisiting the development of rail engineering and electrified engineering, due to the need in the region.

Past barriers and challenges to AEB delivery

Challenges with students' debt

Around 50% of access to higher education provision is funded through AEB or adult learner loans. Progression to HE is high at around 90%, however, learner enrolment numbers have reduced to around 1,000 because of economic reasons and learners' reservations about taking on additional debt when progressing to university. To support learners, more progression routes have been mapped to the colleges HE offers, this includes applied sciences starting in September 2023.

The college is increasing opportunities for HNC/D programmes which provide learners with greater flexibility of learning and contribute to the skills needs for the city. However,

higher technical qualifications (HTQ) delivered under a year pose a barrier to learners because they are not able to receive a maintenance loan. If an HTQ has a duration longer than a year, it will support the students' financial needs but may slow down their progress, where in many cases, adult learners are able to complete the qualification in a shorter time frame. This is an example where funding models do not enable flexibility of curriculum delivery to support learners.

Supporting adults' needs is an expense carried by the college

The work undertaken by the college for adult workforce development and to support their wider needs is an expense carried by the college, due to a lack of funding increases. Adults receive tutorials, support for mental health, and for socio-economic reasons, where the college engages with multiple agencies. As a result of the infrastructure of college support services, retention and progression is good.

Complexity of fees policy

The multitude of funding rules when writing the college fees policy, is complex. It is difficult to articulate the nuances of different funding streams for adult programmes in the fee policy, and to succinctly communicate course fees through print based or social media marketing channels. There is a risk for the college if adults are not correctly enrolled against the appropriate funding stream. When staff are enrolling adult learners, individual circumstances must be carefully reviewed, for example, the low wage threshold for LCR devolved funding at £30,000 is lower than for ESFA funded provision, and, where learners from neighbouring devolved areas, enrol onto a course that is not provided within their own area. This creates three sets of rules to follow.

Lincoln College

AEB Data (2021/2022 Actuals)

Funding Allocations:

Non devolved: £3,507,000

Devolved: N/A

Total: £3,507,000

Actual Value of Direct Delivery:

Non devolved: £3,919,000

Devolved: N/A

Total: £3,919,000

About Lincoln College

Lincoln college is a large GFE college with a significant amount of commercial and international provision, operating through a complex group structure. The group has several subsidiary companies. Each year more than £3m of earned revenue is re-invested back into the wider curriculum. There are 2 main sites in Lincoln and Newark.

Two local skills improvement plans are in place for the area the college serves, one for the Greater Lincoln Local Enterprise Partnership (GLLEP) and one for the Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham, and Nottinghamshire (D2N2). It is expected that devolution for a combined county authority will take place in 2025.

The college was inspected by Ofsted in 2018 and graded as good. The principal and chief executive is Mark Locking.

Background to AEB delivery

Around 5 to 6 years ago, the college faced challenges in meeting its adult education budget (AEB) allocation. The percentage of subcontracting provision both locally and through distance learning, exceeded 30%. Since then, the focus has been to eliminate subcontracted provision, with an objective to create increased opportunities for adult learners within the local market, and to develop a longer-term strategy to achieve 100% of future delivery by college staff.

There are strong working relationships with employers, local authorities and the job centre, a member of the colleges staff attends the job centre one day per week. The college currently, deliver 2 thirds of its adult education budget to support local employability and skills needs, and one third to support national employers, many of whom are also large local employers.

Leadership and management of AEB delivery

Integrated leadership structure

The college decided to reduce reliance on subcontracting by revising their management structure, they put in a new Head of Adult Funding and Full Cost. Responsibility for delivery, sits with curriculum and commercial managers. New tracking and data management systems have been introduced and monthly meetings take place with curriculum and commercial managers to monitor performance. These meetings enable managers to fully understand how AEB funding works, support them to nurture a stronger connection with the local community, and enable them to better understand local needs to plan adult provision.

In-year performance monitoring and adjustment

Taking more direct control of the adult education has resulted in new tracking and data management systems, these provide greater accountability and efficiency. The college manages its AEB using ProSolution which tracks applications, enrolments, online learning, and adult learner income by funding stream. Funding summary reports and a live data dashboard is produced through ProMetric, to monitor the college's actual progress against forecast delivery. This real-time information allows the college to make informed decisions and remain flexible, delivering in-year provision.

The college's curriculum strategy for adults

The colleges strategy to 'Be Extraordinary' revolves around its core purpose to be "an extraordinary employer-led organisation, producing a highly skilled and productive local workforce". This ambition drives the curriculum which is primarily influenced by local employer and local skills needs. The key skills identified for the job market recognised by the college are, soft skills and employability. Additionally, the college focuses on addressing needs within the regions core industries of engineering and technology, health and social care, policing, construction, and the visitor economy.

The college works effectively with the local authority, they meet quarterly to understand what new employers are coming into the area and their likely recruitment needs. Information from these meetings also help design the college's curriculum intent for adults.

The colleges main curriculum area strengths are, air and defence (working with RAF), construction (particularly plumbing), the policing college, and the care college (upskilling for NHS) for programmes for adults.

Curriculum planning

Curriculum planning for adults starts in November, for the following academic year. A growth target of around 10% is built into the budget for 2023/2024. The college uses the

Pro-resource planning tool to accurately identify profiling for learners rolling forward and the percentages of funding banding, they also model the plan for adult infill into other provision types. This is complex, but applications and monitoring of performance against plan regularly takes place.

Examples of successful provision

Online provision

The creation and implementation of online learning programmes requires a significant amount of investment and staff input. The college is committed to cater for the rural nature of the county and have embraced online and blended delivery, which now make up around 50% of the college's AEB.

Thirty-two online courses are offered to around 850 adult learners, this is predominantly at level 2 and is mainly delivered to those working or seeking to work in healthcare. The college has also delivered online learning to around 200 staff at a major local and national employer, over the past 5 years. Forty-five managers have received mental health training, at level 2, with some self-funding their progression to level 3.

Seven progress coaches are in place to ensure that all adult learners are on the right course. They provide effective initial advice and guidance and collaborate with other staff to ensure that adults preferred learning styles are understood. The progress coaches undertake initial assessment and screening for learning support and follow up with other staff teams, to effectively address learning support needs. One of the significant strengths of this model is the flexibility of support offered by the coaches, who are on hand to respond to adult learners during the day, evenings and at the weekend. This level of accessibility is especially beneficial for those that have varying shift patterns. Outcomes for the colleges online learning programmes are over 90%.

ESOL

ESOL provision at the college has increased by around a third to 440 adult learners, this expansion has enabled more learners from Ukraine, Middle East, and Africa to access the college offer. A key factor contributing to this successful growth is the college relationships and collaboration with the local authorities and charity organisations. 66% of ESOL learners progressed to higher levels of learning and 70% of Ukrainian refugees successfully transitioned into work, following the completion of their course.

Sector-based Work Academy Programmes (SWAP)

Around 10 SWAP programmes are delivered each year, these are based on new employment 'openings' in the local area. SWAP programmes are scheduled most months for groups of between 10 to 13 learners. One of the main industries served by SWAPs is the local hospitality sector, where adult learners develop their customer service skills. Another customer service SWAP is tailored for a large utilities' provider, where the

college identifies what the employer looks for in an applicant and add additionality into the programme to build future applicants' resilience.

Other SWAP initiatives include a programme developed to enhance mental health, where many employers experience issues with staff retention, due to workers mental health issues. Progression to work from the college SWAP programmes is high at around 45%.

Maths and English

Managers have built a rapport over a number of years with 2 large local employers to deliver a successful workplace Functional Skills offer, this is from entry level to level 2. Managers at the college negotiated with the employers, so that their employees attend classes that are held during the companies' time. The employers see the benefits that learning maths and English brings to their staff and their organisation, where it is hoped that further progression to apprenticeships or management careers within the company will take place. The college is flexible in their approach, they enrol the employees on a rolling programme, lessons are for 2 hours per week over a 6-month period, there are 4 classes a day, plus evening classes. They deliver to around 400 adult learners.

Workplace delivery of functional skills also takes place with the Royal Air Force, where some learners prefer to learn through more block delivery.

Heavy goods vehicle training

The college in collaboration with the Inspire Education Group have forged a partnership with the Road Haulage Association to deliver a new 'Drive to Work' initiative, focused on heavy goods vehicle training. Recognising the pivotal role of the logistics sector in the greater Lincolnshire area, a joint bid submitted to the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership successfully secured funding for the programme, which commenced in early 2023.

The 'Drive to Work' initiative is tailored to meet adult learners needs, is employer-led, and is designed around face-to-face delivery, online, or a blended learning mode to ensure it is accessible for adults. Learners are supported through medical, theory and practical driving tests.

Engagement with district councils

Members of the executive team play a pivotal role in contributing to both the Lincoln and Newark Towns Fund Boards. Additionally, they actively engage with the West Lyndsay District Council around wider FE provision for the district. By securing a Towns Fund grant, the college has been able to develop new facilities and provide training at the No. 17 coffee shop in Gainsborough for adult learners. Working with the City of Lincoln Council, in redeveloping the marketplace, they have also worked with local businesses to offer adult learning provision.

Past barriers and challenges to AEB delivery

Notable shifts in adults' enrolment and learning patterns

Previously adults seeking educational opportunities would initiate contact by phoning to ask about the courses on offer, however, since the pandemic this has changed. The college has adapted its approach and now invests considerably more in advertising to attract adult learners. To support their recruitment effort, the college uses learner finder companies, which has proven to be effective in recruiting approximately 50% on the college's online learners. Staff at the college then invest substantial time to ensure that each learner is appropriately placed onto programmes that meet their needs and aspirations.

Defunding of IT user level 2 qualification

The college and some adult learners have faced a challenge through the defunding of the IT User level 2 qualification. This qualification had been incredibly beneficial in catering to the needs of local employers and adult learners. Unfortunately, there is currently no alternative qualification in place, except at level 3. In response to this funding gap, the college has taken the initiative to offer the IT user qualification as non-accredited provision, despite their efforts, many adult learners still express a strong desire to obtain a qualification at level 2.

Complexity of fees policy

The college has an ongoing challenge related to the bureaucracy around learner funding, such as considering factors like prior learning, age, and other criteria. As a result, it becomes challenging for them to provide straightforward guidance on fees to employers and potential learners. This complexity generates additional workload for staff who are responsible for providing advice and guidance.

National delivery funding

The college is mindful of potential funding complexities that may arise due to devolution, particularly when catering to the needs of large companies who require adult learning but some of the employees could be based nationally and live outside the devolved funding area. Whilst this specific barrier to learning has not yet emerged, the college will need to address this possibility when planning future adult education budgets.

Luminate Education Group

AEB Data (2021/2022 Actuals)

Funding Allocations:

Non devolved: £640,000

Devolved: £16,534,000

Total: £17,173,000

Actual Value of Direct Delivery:

Non devolved: £646,000

Devolved: £16,176,000

Total: £16,823,000

About Luminate Education Group

Luminate Education Group is a large college group formed because of a series of mergers. The largest college within the group is Leeds City College which operates out of several campuses and outreach centres across Leeds. The other 2 colleges within the group are Keighley College (also in West Yorkshire) and Harrogate College (North Yorkshire).

The group was inspected by Ofsted in April 2022 with good grades in all but 2 aspects (personal development and adult learning programmes) both of which were judged outstanding.

The group has grown rapidly in recent years reflecting rising demographics and substantial investment in estates which is ongoing both to address remaining poor condition buildings and to increase capacity (space is at a premium).

AEB funding accounts for almost one fifth of group turnover, with the majority of funding (95%) devolved to West Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority.

The chief executive of the group is Colin Booth.

Background to AEB delivery at Luminate

Luminate were in the fortunate position of having embedded digital learning strategies into the curriculum pre pandemic and having a proactive approach to responding to local needs, both of which helped protect the group from the severest challenges of education during the pandemic. In the aftermath of the pandemic, a lack of confidence amongst adult learners paired with historic funding cuts and reduced support, resulted in the lowest adult participation rates in a decade.

To combat this, the group has invested significant resources into removing barriers for adults wanting to access education and to support business recovery, as well as the national skills agenda:

- close partnerships have been forged with several local and regional employers to ensure the education offer suits current and future economic needs
- significant resources have been channelled into providing opportunities and outreach programmes for adults who have previously been economically inactive. This includes providing specialised provision for those with high needs or learning difficulties, as well as one of the country's largest English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programmes

Adult education continues to be a priority for the group to support the regional economy, as well as providing learners from the Leeds, Keighley, and Harrogate areas with the best possible outcomes.

The group has a consistent track record of hitting or exceeding funding targets and as a result AEB funding at Luminate has grown significantly in recent years. Against an allocation of over £17m for 2022/2023 the group managed to overachieve this by around 10% with minimal sub-contracted out AEB delivery following a deliberate decision some time ago to move away from this model.

A significant element of adult provision is delivered from outreach centres, in some cases through partnerships with other agencies (e.g. local authority and / or community groups). A relatively high proportion (around 60%) of adult learners come from Black and Minority Ethnic groups.

Overview of the college's leadership and management of AEB delivery

Dedicated senior leadership representation for adult skills

Adult skills is represented within the group leadership team by the group vice principal adults supported by a dedicated director of operations and curriculum, adult, community and ESOL. Inclusion of a dedicated senior leader for adults at the top tier is considered to be essential to ensure that the group's extensive adult provision is given sufficient priority and profile, particularly as adult provision is delivered by almost all curriculum departments across the group, not just the school for adult, community and ESOL.

Adult strategy group

The adult strategy group has been established to gather and disseminate Labour Market Intelligence to inform curriculum planning and innovation and engage regularly on a one-to-one basis with each department across the group as part of the group's highly devolved business planning process. The group vice principal adults chairs the group

with representation from all departments with adult funding, and appropriate business support teams.

Employer engagement board

The group has an employer engagement board which is supported by a number of business development executives who build links with employers and source LMI data to inform curriculum development and planning complementing insight collated through the marketing team.

Marketing and recruitment

The group has invested considerable time and energy on reducing barriers to participation and enhancing the learner journey. This is seen as a far more effective way of engaging and recruiting learners than expensive marketing campaigns, noting that word of mouth is seen as particularly important for the adult market.

Key elements of the college's curriculum strategy for adult skills

As a reflection of the importance attached to adult education provision, the group has developed a separate adult skills strategy for the period 2021-2023 that was finalised in November 2020 following the publication of the West Yorkshire AEB strategy. It includes a specific annex as a response to the Leeds Covid-19 Recovery Plan.

The group's adult skills strategy is updated every three years and based on a detailed assessment of the context of each local community served. The strategy reflects the underpinning ethos of the CEO that the priority for the group is to identify what the local need is and then respond swiftly and with flexibility.

Seven key strategic themes have been identified:

1. Increasing the proportion of adults with level 3 skills and above
2. Focussing the curriculum on progression into employment, apprenticeships, and higher education with a particular emphasis on the skill sets needed by the regions and UK economy
3. Prioritise economically valuable/significant provision responding to skills demands using local and regional intelligence and information
4. Develop new provision to support the sectors which are seen to be driving the economy
5. Championing inclusive growth through improving the skill levels of adults living in areas of deprivation in Leeds, Keighley, and Harrogate
6. Grow the adult provision to respond to the national and local priorities including Covid recovery

7. Improve the quality of adult provision and the adult learner journey

The group has maintained close links with its local authority partners noting their importance as referral agencies. Luminate have been able to increase their own direct funding for community learning by sub-contracting in from the local authority.

The group is committed to maintaining a strong delivery presence in areas with the highest levels of deprivation. This aligns well with the emphasis placed on inclusivity by WYMCA and helps to reduce pressure on space at the main college campuses, which is at a premium due to continuing growth in student numbers. Around 40% of all adult provision is delivered in outreach centres or off-site.

Examples of successful provision and innovative programmes

Digital skills

Digital skills is one of WYMCA's priorities for growth which initially proved challenging for Luminate to meet targets for growth. The group has now started to make significant inroads here through the introduction of a range of pre-digital preparation programmes such as "First Steps in Digital" (a 20-hour programme over 6 to 10 weeks) with progression to the new Essential Digital Skills Qualifications.

Free courses for jobs (FCFJ)

The group has used the flexibilities offered through FCFJ to deliver additional provision in programmes including AAT; health; digital; counselling and construction. The group has welcomed the flexibilities offered by FCFJ and prospects of further simplification anticipated when the new Skills Fund is introduced to bring most funding streams into a single pot.

Strategic development fund (SDF)

The group benefited from funding from both West and North Yorkshire to implement Electric Vehicle Technology opportunities into existing programmes, providing resources, staff training and curriculum development. Sustainability training using Strategic Development Funding has been built into tutorials complementing carbon literacy provision.

Skills bootcamps / gainshare

Luminate Education Group collaborate with other FE Colleges through the West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges to deliver DfE Skills Bootcamps and Gainshare. Funded through WYCA's Skills Connect, the 2 skills programmes are designed to meet immediate and emerging training needs which provide additionality to provision that already exists through AEB as a result of Devolution within West Yorkshire. Luminate are actively involved in the delivery of Bootcamps to equip recent graduates and other

creative workers with the skills and knowledge they need to start a career in the creative industries by equipping them with skills in digital, design, business and soft skills supported by a mentoring program.

Bridging programmes

The group makes effective use of its community learning funding to offer bridging courses for Maths/English/ESOL learners who are not ready to start formal accredited learning. These are typically 10 to 15-hour programmes over 4 to 6 weeks that help build the foundations for formal qualifications and provide a ready pipeline of learners waiting to start the next wave of functional skills or ESOL courses.

Shift of emphasis from learning support to teaching support

Adult learners have an increasingly complex range of needs which the group seeks to identify upfront as part of a well-established initial assessment process. In the majority of cases, support is provided through Teaching Assistants with Learning Support Assistants allocated mainly where individual personal care is required. The Teaching Assistant model mirrors to a large extent practice in schools and is seen as important in ensuring the focus of support is on learning and progression. The extensive pool of Teaching Assistants and training programmes also provides a ready source of future teachers and lecturers.

Tutorial support

Almost all adult learners are allocated dedicated tutorial time (other than those on very short programmes). The tutorial sessions can be up to one hour per week (in groups) and can be delivered by subject tutors, teaching assistants or learning coaches. These tutorials are seen as critical in helping to keep learners on track, attending and promoting progression. For ESOL learners the tutorials provide an important vehicle for promoting awareness of “British Values” and assimilation into British life.

Enrichment for adults

Whilst there is no specific source of funding for enrichment for adult learners, the group has explored ways to offer enrichment to adults as part of its response to the wellbeing issues that have increased since the Covid-19 pandemic. An example of this is football sessions for asylum seekers enrolled on ESOL programmes.

Accreditation as a place of sanctuary

The group has gained accreditation as a “College of Sanctuary” initially at Harrogate College initiated in response to the influx of refugees from Ukraine. Accreditation has recently been extended to all three FE colleges and University Centre Leeds. This initiative was used to review the learning journey of asylum seekers and refugees and implemented changes that improve inclusion and student experience. This was a valuable experience and work will continue recognising the different needs, experiences,

aspirations and contributions of refugees and asylum seekers reinforcing the commitment to inclusion and welcome for all.

Past barriers and challenges to AEB delivery

Maths and English

For many the adult learners who failed Maths and English at school achieving GCSE grade 4 remains a significant challenge. The group uses a combination of bridging programmes (funded from the community learning budget) and functional skills as stepping stones towards GCSE qualifications – which is the aspiration for most adult learners. Resourcing and funding for functional skills delivery remains a concern for the group as does the lack of more bite-sized programmes that are eligible for AEB funding. Multiply is creating some new opportunities for maths.

Contribution rates

AEB funding rates have not kept pace with inflation for most of the last 10 years – though WYMCA have increased devolved rates by 10% and ESFA have increased some rates in recent months. Luminate have been able to maintain contribution rates for AEB provision at around 40 to 50% by ensuring the majority of classes achieve a target of 20 students. This is helped in part by high levels of demand for some programmes (notably ESOL) but also by a tight focus on building a pipeline of learners; simplifying and speeding up the enrolment process; and proactively filling places left vacant because of withdrawals. The Head of School for Adults, Community and ESOL described a “one out one in” policy where new learners are infilled to vacant places from September onwards to maintain average class sizes at or around 20. Managers and tutors have access to a simple ACE sheet to enable them to track and monitor group sizes.

Space utilisation

Luminate has very high space utilisation due to the significant growth in learner numbers achieved over the past 5 years. Limitations on physical space have been overcome through a combination of strategies including:

- incentivising efficient use of classrooms and practical workshops through a system of charging budget holders for premises costs. This provides a financial incentive to minimise unfilled places on courses and increasing sessions run per day
- flexible delivery models which includes an extensive evening programme for adult learners
- maintaining access to outreach venues where this is cost effective, affords local access, and reinforces links with local partners and stakeholders
- implementing blended learning programmes which combine onsite delivery with virtual taught classes and independent learning

Delivering recruitment and funding targets

A key ingredient of the group's success in outperforming its AEB funding and recruitment targets has been a real focus on tackling the barriers to participation. Strategies and approaches include:

- a dedicated website and forms for adult learners with a clear and accessible landing Page and a simplified application form specifically designed for adults that is only one page long
- regular interview calendars to enable a swift response to enquiries and applications – typically on a 2-week turnaround basis facilitated by the dedicated Adviser/Assessor roles. Typically, around 90% of applicants turn up at interview
- multi entry points for many courses throughout the year
- targeted use of learner support funds to help with costs such as transport and lunches linked to a wider anti-poverty strategy the group is developing
- use of Google classroom which students have access to once enrolled during the summer to chat with classmates and see a flavour of the curriculum prior to starting their course

Staff recruitment

Despite a generally tight labour market and high demand for teaching staff across the sector, Luminate has largely managed its staffing and resourcing of adult programmes without having to rely heavily on agency staffing with the exception of electrical and some trades. This has been helped by the progression opportunities from Teaching Assistant to lecturer; in ACE the employment of a pool of 12 Teaching Apprentices; employment of a bank of dedicated evening tutors for ESOL; and financial contributions from the group towards staff CPD.

Preston College

AEB Data (2021/2022 Actuals)

Funding Allocations:

Non devolved: £6,064,000

Devolved: N/A

Total: £6,064,000

Actual Value of Direct Delivery:

Non devolved: £5,536,000

Devolved: N/A

Total: £5,536,000

About Preston College

Preston College is a medium sized general further education college which operates from a large campus in the northern outskirts of Preston.

Whilst college has grown 16 to 19 study programmes significantly in recent years, adult learning and apprenticeships remain important (AEB funding accounted for almost a quarter of turnover in 2021/2022 with a market share estimated at circa 50%).

The college was inspected by Ofsted in January 2023 with all aspects graded as good and with a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

The college was the first to achieve “College of Sanctuary” status and is committed to maintaining accreditation as its three-year review approaches.

The principal and chief executive is Simon Nixon.

Background to AEB delivery at Preston College

Lancashire is not yet operating under devolved funding therefore all AEB delivery is funded by ESFA. However, the college has well established links with its local authority partners as well as a wide range of community groups and employers as well as the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership.

Adult education remains a significant component of the college’s delivery and is given equal parity alongside study programmes and apprenticeships, noting that opportunities to grow in both these areas are greater than for AEB.

Most adult learners’ study on a part-time basis and around 20% of all learners are from ethnic minority groups. All direct delivery takes place at the college’s main campus. A small proportion of the college’s delivery (2%) is sub-contracted out mainly in respect of Prince’s Trust programmes and distance learning.

Overview of the college's leadership and management of AEB delivery

Integrated leadership structure

Lead responsibilities for curriculum delivery and quality operate cross-college by 2 vice principals with specific responsibilities for:

- curriculum delivery & planning
- quality, teaching and learning and learner support

Four heads of school are responsible for all delivery organised by subject sector covering study programmes, AEB and Apprenticeships. This integrated model is seen as an important way of avoiding silo mentalities and ensuring a “one team” culture underpinned by clear lines of accountability for performance and delivery.

Dedicated adult recruitment team

Reporting to the vice principal for curriculum delivery and planning is the role of assistant head of adult recruitment and progression. This postholder has a specific focus on AEB and is supported by 5 full time “advisers” all of whom hold Level 6 information, advice and guidance qualifications who act as the main initial contact point with all adult learners/applicants. This is a significant resource with a discrete focus on adult provision which is considered vital to ensure that students are enrolled on the right course and that recruitment targets are achieved.

Flexible marketing resource / approach

Within the marketing and communications team there are 3 marketing and communications managers, one of which has specific responsibility for adult and higher education. Marketing strategies and budgets are flexed in-year to target any areas recruiting below target and involve a mix of digital and more traditional marketing tools. Every marketing campaign is measured for its return on investment and this analysis has confirmed that for specific adult campaigns, traditional forms of marketing (e.g. direct mail flyers promoting basic digital skills) work well. Outdoor digital billboards are also considered to be highly effective.

Key Elements of the college's curriculum strategy for adult Skills

Alongside its recently updated strategic plan, the college has also updated its strategies for curriculum and for quality. These strategies cover all aspects of delivery (rather than having separate strategies focussed on adult delivery).

The college's overall mission and vision statements are as follows:

Mission: *“To inspire, educate and support our diverse community to reach its potential”*

Vision: *“To transform lives through education”*

The college has identified 8 strategic objectives, the first of which is *“to develop and deliver a responsive curriculum portfolio which directly meets the skills needs of local and regional employers and LSIP priorities”*.

Whilst the strategic plan's ambitions for growth focus more on 16 to 19 study programmes and Apprenticeships, there is a clear statement of intent in both the strategic plan and the curriculum strategy to utilise the college's AEB allocation in full. There is a strong emphasis on digital skills including a statement of intent to embed a digital skills qualification in all adult learning programmes to support employability.

Campus-based delivery model

The college has a deliberate strategy of delivering all its direct provision from the main campus which has spare capacity other than in specific curriculum areas (notably construction). This has helped to improve space utilisation on campus and means the college does not incur rental or running costs for offsite provision.

Barriers to access are reduced through the provision of free travel passes to eligible adult learners and in practice the college's experience is that adult learners are willing to travel from outside the city to attend courses in ESOL and construction where the college's reputation extends well beyond Preston. Free lunches are provided to eligible learners and menus are adjusted to reflect the requirements of learners.

Additional learning support

The college adopts a rigorous approach to capturing Additional Learning Support needs and costs, using a bespoke front-end tool that links to the main MIS system (Tribal/EBS). Teachers and support staff can capture additional support delivered via mobile devices to capture this in real-time helping to monitor earnings adjustments on a bi-monthly basis throughout the year rather than calculating this retrospectively.

Responsiveness to local needs

The college places great importance on responsiveness to the needs of employers and local communities, making extensive use of labour market intelligence to inform its curriculum plan. At the same time the college recognises the importance of in-year flexibility and responsiveness to adjust plans and redirect resources to meet changing demands and ensure overall targets for funding and performance are met.

Roll on roll off provision gives the college a high degree of flexibility and around 2 thirds of adult learners participate on this basis as opposed to around one third of adults starting long courses from September.

Rigorous and timely monitoring of recruitment and funding

The college has a well-established approach to curriculum planning and monitors AEB performance against plans and allocations rigorously (on a monthly basis from September onwards using ILR data from R03 onwards).

Monthly business planning reviews with each head of school draw on an extensive range of data on funding performance, student recruitment, staff utilisation, average class sizes, attendance, qualification achievements, sickness, and absence to identify appropriate actions to mitigate or address adverse performance against key targets.

Examples of successful provision and innovative programmes

Flexible modes of delivery

Much of the adult provision takes place in the evenings – for many ESOL learners this suits them better and for construction programmes this avoids competing with study programmes for workshop space during the day. On a typical evening (Monday to Thursday) the college runs around 50 different evening classes.

Progression pathways

The college has created clear pathways for adult learners from entry/L1 to L3 and above which has helped maximise positive destinations into further study and/or employment.

Saturday programmes for ESOL

In response to demand the college runs Saturday ESOL courses which have proved popular (there are currently 6 running).

Women-only classes

The college has identified and responded to demand for women-only evening classes in construction and now runs 3 course per year specifically aimed at adult women.

Short-burst courses at Level 1

The college offers a range of intensive short courses (typically between 8 and 14 weeks) aimed at adults looking to retrain. A successful example of this has been a course aimed at taxi drivers looking to retrain as plasterers.

Free courses for jobs (FCFJ)

The college has welcomed the increased flexibilities offered by FCFJ and has attracted significant numbers of adults taking courses in construction NVQs, AAT, counselling, and health.

Multiply

The Multiply programme has helped the college to reverse the previously declining trend in adult Maths learners.

Hybrid construction courses

Plans are in place for the launch of hybrid construction courses which combine a mix of practical delivery with online tuition via the virtual learning environment.

Past barriers and challenges to AEB delivery

Sector based work academies

Whilst relationships with DWP/Jobcentre Plus are positive, there has been a marked decline in referrals to the college since the Covid-19 pandemic. The college has continued to run some sector-based work academies, but these have been direct with employers rather than via DWP/Jobcentre Plus.

Maths and English

The college attributes the decline in English and maths enrolments to a recent trend for some employers and universities to relax their entry requirements. Promotion of Multiply has helped to address this in respect of Maths.

Devolution of AEB

The college is concerned about the lack of clarity on timescales for devolution of AEB and how in practice this might work in Lancashire, noting that previous adult provision to students travelling to Preston from Bolton and Wigan was lost following devolution of AEB in Greater Manchester.

Funding flexibilities below Level 3

Funding rules for 19- to 23-year-olds at Level 2 create barriers to participation in programmes in construction, engineering, and health which the college is keen to see addressed.

National skills fund

The college's allocation has proved insufficient and in 2022/2023 the college had to halt recruitment in March 2023. The college would welcome capacity for in-year growth.

Clarity of ESFA funding reports

ILR funding reports currently need significant reworking to enable the college to break down funding to school / course level.

Suffolk New College

AEB Data (2021/2022 Actuals)

Funding Allocations:

Non devolved: £1,886,000

Devolved: N/A

Total: £1,886,000

Actual Value of Direct Delivery:

Non devolved: £2,400,000

Devolved: N/A

Total: £2,400,000

About Suffolk New College

Suffolk New College (SNC) is a medium size GFE college based in Suffolk with delivery from its 4 campus locations in Ipswich, Suffolk Rural at Otley, 'On the Coast' provision at Leiston and at a Skills Centre in Halesworth. The college has close links with the University of Suffolk, with the Ipswich Campus situated next to the University in what is known as the 'Education Quarter' of Ipswich.

Suffolk New College were represented on all sub-groups, to inform the local skills improvement plan. They are the lead partner for the Norfolk and Suffolk local skills improvement fund, with 5 key delivery strands including - employability skills, digital skills, digital technologies, green skills a delivery of a joint business training programme.

The college was inspected by Ofsted in November 2022 with all aspects graded as good except personal development, which is rated as outstanding. The college received a reasonable rating for its contribution to skills.

The principal and chief executive is Alan Pease.

Background to AEB delivery

The college considers the needs of the adult community in Ipswich and the wider county of Suffolk, where there are challenges of low attainment and limited social mobility. The college has welcomed the opportunities provided through a merger in 2020 to create the Suffolk Rural campus at Otley.

Staff foster an inclusive culture that promotes delivery of adult learning from each of the college's 4 campuses. Consideration has been given to creating environments to nurture adult learners and provide an infrastructure that supports their needs. This includes physical changes to create adult common rooms, extended opening times of food outlets and staffing.

The college has undertaken a significant amount of work to support adults' personal development. Face to face or online sessions are provided for careers advice and guidance and masterclasses are offered to build employability skills, these are not mandatory, adults can choose to take up this offer and many do. This additionality demonstrates the commitment by the college to ensure adults are not treated differently to young people.

Overview of the college's leadership and management of AEB delivery

Integrated leadership structure

Leadership for the college's adult education budget and delivery, is integrated within the leadership and management structure for all provision types. This ensures a one college, cohesive approach across all sites, curriculum, and business support areas. The deputy principal leads nine directorate areas and has overall responsibility for curriculum. Within the directorates, curriculum leaders are responsible for all provision, including AEB.

Grow your own model – response to staffing challenges

The college have developed the concept of a 'licence to' approach. This includes a 'licence to teach', where industry experts are recruited as teachers with training through the licence to programme. They receive a preparing to teach programme to help them to plan, deliver learning and engage learners. They teach around 2 hours each week alongside working in industry and have a mentor assigned to them. Mentors can accompany them into their first lessons, where they develop their skills of breaking down learning of technical concepts. This initiative uses AEB funding, and includes a 'licence to support', where the college have employed learners from their adult programmes, as a grow your own support model.

In-year performance monitoring and adjustment

Monthly funding meetings take place to look at actual and projected numbers for AEB against the college's allocation. Expansion and contraction of the adult offer is based on this monitoring of in year performance.

College governors scrutinise AEB performance data against college KPIs at the academic scrutiny committee and full board. They also play an important role in monitoring the progress and performance of adult learners within each directorate, through the link governor scheme. For instance, one governor with a land-based background, acts as the link for the Suffolk Rural campus, providing direct feedback on employer engagement to the board.

The college's curriculum strategy for adults

The college understands the needs of the adult community in Ipswich and the wider county of Suffolk, where there are challenges of low attainment and limited social mobility. The curriculum strategy and plan are built on 4 pillars of engagement with civic authorities, employers, other local colleges, and staff. The college has a responsive curriculum offer, shaped to suit local needs. This includes raising social mobility and supporting adults for access to employment, HE or improve their career advancement.

Adults studying on full time programmes or apprentices, gain access to a wide range of provision through infill models. Flexibility of delivery for adults is also key to accommodate those who are in work or have other responsibilities.

Curriculum planning

Curriculum planning for AEB is embedded into the college's annual curriculum planning process, this is undertaken 2 years ahead of planned delivery and each directorate has its own strategic and curriculum plan. Teams use labour market information, employer, and learner feedback to decide on the future offer. Staffing is considered early so that appropriate target numbers are set against the colleges ability to deliver the plan.

The college maintains a cautious approach, to avoid a scenario where they overpromise and underdeliver provision, they invest time to understand the appetite of adult learners, create the offer, market it, and run it. On the rare occasion where adult enrolment numbers are lower than expected, if there are no opportunities to keep learners engaged in preparation for a future intake, courses still run. This is because the college places significant value on learner and employer customer satisfaction. This approach is helping to rebuild the reputation of the rural campus, post-merger, which leaders see in turn helps to grow future enrolments.

Examples of successful provision

ESOL

Around 96% of work for part-time ESOL provision is undertaken in partnership with the job centre. The college responds to the job centres priorities which aims to help ESOL learners with reading and completing job application forms by delivering short 7-week courses to over 300 adult learners. Delivery times are flexible, but teaching is face to face because in many cases learners' IT skills are low or they are in shared bedrooms, which provide a distraction for online learning. The college also delivers a small amount of external provision going out to employers.

The college is a trusted provider within the area, they work with the local authority's strategic migration lead, to identify what is best for each ESOL learner. There are many other local providers working in this space but the college's academic and pastoral reputation results in the trusted provider status. Additional direct funding from the local

authority is received to undertake ESOL work in hotels to around 200 adult learners. Around 60 different languages are spoken, and the college works closely with Suffolk Refugee Support Services.

Learning support for adult ESOL learners sits under the remit of the Director for English, Maths and ESOL. Initial assessment is undertaken quickly and where appropriate adult learners can choose if they wish to undertake the qualification, if for example their goals are to develop their own skills to support their children's homework, then initial assessment and individual learning plans are completed as part of RARPA.

Functional skills

Function skills courses start at different points during the year for adults, they find the multiple in year exam points attractive and some fast-track level 1 and level 2 in one year. Those who wish to progress to higher education, join the colleges GCSE classes, however, infill into groups in January is complex causing challenges around sequencing of learning.

The head of adults' personal development, share employer videos with learners about the importance of English and maths within the workplace and to inform career progression. The college promotes self-directed study and ownership of learning to adults taking English and maths. Tutors are on hand to respond to emails from adult learners but are clear about expectations for turnaround time for marking test papers. The college provides additional help to adult learners for self-directed study through the Hegarty Maths platform.

Provision to support health and care services

Short courses for adults, aimed at filling vacancies in the local hospitals in Ipswich and Colchester are delivered face to face. These are in partnership with the large local NHS trust. The college has an MOU in place with the trust, who support guest speakers and student placements. The college hosted several of the trust's expo events, these were targeted at those who have health needs, and may be the furthest away from the labour market. The college provided advice and guidance at these events.

A successful level 5 childcare programme is delivered online to around 60 adult learners, due to the rurality of the county, this provides access for those in the early years' workforce.

In addition to the AEB, through a regional partnership led by East Coast College, Apollo NHS funding is used by the college to employ job coaches for training models and packages aimed at getting people into NHS work.

Using AI to develop learning pathways for adults

The college works with a large construction group to design their ePASS framework, currently used for young people's personal development into ePASS+ to develop adult

learners' soft skills. The platform uses AI to capture initial assessment information which is then used to put together learning pathways for individuals. A further pilot using ePASS+ has been started with the energy group, who operate the Sizewell nuclear power plant in Suffolk. The AI will adjust the learning packages for individuals and align with the company's corporate values.

Entrepreneurial skills

There are few large companies in Suffolk and many adults wish to setup small enterprises or are self-employed. AEB is used to provide training for this group, where the college infill adult learners onto other college programmes or, provide bespoke programmes for example, floristry, agriculture, and horticulture.

Dog grooming is popular, adults either work in dog parlours or seek self-employment. They can complete an accredited level 2 or level 3 programme and then attend an additional short course on setting up their own business. There is a requirement to practise on a range of breeds, the local public have supported this programme by bringing in their dogs. The course is delivered one day per week to around 10 learners, the college has expanded the provision, and it is now offered on 6 days per week. The college has achieved British Horse Society accreditation and are planning equine training for the future, using their links with industry.

Customer Service for taxi drivers

Working in partnership with the borough council, the college offers an introductory course for professional taxi drivers and private hire drivers. Funded under AEB provision this develops adult learners' customer service skills and professional standards. The district councils are pleased with the outcomes of this programme as it also supports those drivers with ESOL, helping them to interact with the public and understand cultural situations. The course runs twice a year and has around 40 learners annually. The local authority, validate the programme and certify drivers' licences. Learners are invited back for a refresher programme at 3 years.

SDF bid supports new curriculum

The college was successful in their SDF bid to develop provision at the Suffolk Rural campus, with the theme of green skills, large composting areas for tractor use, a vertical farm using hydroponics and outdoor classrooms were developed. This has supported the development of adult provision at the campus.

Other funding support for adults

A strong partnership exists between Suffolk New College and the University of Suffolk. Senior managers from both organisations review the alignment of provision and curriculum mapping across subject areas. The university provides financial support to college learners, through a £1,000 bursary. The colleges adult access to science

programme has the greatest number of students progressing to the university, however, the bursary is available to learners who progress into in all subject areas.

Funding outside of AEB is used to provide additional skills training

The college is also delivering [Skills Bootcamps](#). Whilst AEB funding cannot be used to deliver Skills Bootcamps this attracts separate funding from the DfE. Working with the areas large NHS foundation trust, the college delivers a level three Skills Bootcamp for healthcare. The trust provides 12-week placements.

The college also designed and delivered a successful level 2 Skills Bootcamp in Arboriculture. Delivery takes place in parks and on local estates for an eight-week block and learners also attend college part time. Learners build their skills and portfolios by taking optional, additional complementary or compliance qualifications, for example working at height or chainsaw maintenance.

Past barriers and challenges to AEB delivery

Funding capacity

The college has the capacity to deliver greater numbers of adult provision but is limited by their AEB allocation. Curriculum and budget planning ensures that the budget is carefully managed to deliver maximum benefit to adult learners for best fit to their needs and that of the local employers and community. In previous, years there was some over delivery against the AEB budget, but this is not sustainable.

Devolution and longevity of funding

Devolution in the area is currently planned for 2025/2026, due to the devolution of adult skills funding and the local authorities own in house delivery to the adult market, this may pose a future challenge for the college. The college has asked to be included in discussions for the process for devolved funding, so they can forward plan. In doing so, they hope to ensure continued funding for those adults who are already on programmes at the college to support their progression goals and ensure the college can meet the need for core adult skills provision.

Meeting the needs of large infrastructure projects

Four large infrastructure projects are taking place or are due to place within the region in the next few years. These will necessitate the training or backfill of several thousand skilled jobs. They college are engaging with large employers ahead of the commencement of the projects, to better understand tier 1 and tier 2 supply chain needs for the decommissioning of 2 nuclear power stations and the build of another at the Sizewell nuclear power station. However, they are concerned that the AEB allocation, already at capacity, may not be sufficient to support the needs arising from these large-scale projects.

West Nottinghamshire College

AEB Data (2021/2022 Actuals)

Funding Allocations:

Non devolved: £6,111,000

Devolved: N/A

Total: £6,111,000

Actual Value of Direct Delivery:

Non devolved: £6,608,000

Devolved: N/A

Total: £6,608,000

About West Nottinghamshire College

WNC is a medium sized general further education college operating across 4 main centres and a small amount of outreach work. It has specialist engineering and construction centres in Ashfield, a sixth form college and the main college site in Mansfield, Nottinghamshire.

The college was inspected by Ofsted in March 2023 with all aspects graded as good except personal development and provision for learners with high needs, which is rated as outstanding. The college received a strong rating for its contribution to skills and works with over 2,000 employer partners from businesses in every major industry. Good links are fostered with public sector employers and two district councils.

AEB delivery is currently funded by ESFA. Devolution for the area is expected to take place in 2024 with devolution for skills funding expected to take place from 2025.

The principal and chief executive is Andrew Cropley.

Background to AEB delivery

In recent years there has been a strategic focus on reducing subcontracted AEB provision, whilst simultaneously developing an improved offer that better serves both the 'college's community and local employers', which is primarily seen as being within a one-hour public transport travel radius. The college have defined this in their accountability statement.

College leaders have also articulated a community pledge which is responsive to context and place, and strategic goals for adults are to:

- increase the proportion of adults in local communities who take up education and training opportunities, including those in work who need to upskill and those adults who are not economically active
- meet the needs of adults, employers and the local economy through a curriculum offer that will provide adults with the required knowledge and skills to meet their career aspirations and regional skills shortages
- place emphasis on engaging and upskilling adults residing across the Mansfield and Ashfield communities as well as those living in the D2N2 LEP area

Under the new leadership subcontracting has been significantly reduced to around 20%.

Overview of the college's leadership and management of AEB delivery

Integrated leadership structure

The college is led by an executive team of 6. An Assistant Principal has responsibility for AEB and because of the desire to bring more adult learning provision in house, the AEB team has been expanded with specific leadership positions created for community learning and flexible, employer responsive learning. Curriculum leaders are responsible for their adult budgets.

Creation of new posts for outreach work

Two Learning Engagement Officers (LEO) posts have been established. Their goal is to encourage adults to take up learning and guide them into progression for their next steps. To reach more people, the college expanded its town centre footprint and the LEOs are based in 2 units to engage and deliver learning to adults. This enables a soft approach to build learners' confidence and pave the way for progression to the college's other sites.

The LEOs spend at least one day per week at the Jobcentre where they can signpost to ACL as a first step and to help people get back into the workforce.

The college's curriculum strategy for adults

There are 3 underpinning commitments within the curriculum strategy:

1. To develop a curriculum which not only meets the needs of local regional national employers today but also embraces new technologies and practices for the future.
2. To design a curriculum in partnership with employers which puts the experience of students first and prepares them fully for future stages of their education and working careers.
3. To deliver a curriculum which widens participation, is inclusive and engaging and, which challenges students to raise their aspirations and then surpass them.

Labour market intelligence, insights from civic and employer boards, and local knowledge informs the design of the curriculum. Curriculum mapping address gaps in provision and promotes progression. Adult learners can access a broad range of part-time and full-time provision. Including, those learning alongside younger learners by infilling onto full-time study programmes.

Curriculum planning

The college adopts a structured 7 step planning approach, ASPIRE (ambition, success in life, planning, individual needs, relevance, empowerment), across all curriculum types.

Managers undertake a risk register for each area of provision. The Assistant Principal conducts regular meetings with curriculum heads to monitor in year performance, ensuring targets remain realistic and to deliver the budget. In the past, contribution targets for adult learning were rigid; however, managers are now given more flexibility, as long as they achieve a contribution of 20% or more.

Examples of Successful Provision

ESOL

In recent years, the college has reinstated ESOL provision as part of its offer. Collaborating with local councils, refugee centres, and large employers, a nurturing approach is adopted to encourage adults to engage in learning through a short introductory course. A non-accredited ESOL programme caters to adults' everyday English requirements and is structured and evaluated through the RARPA framework. Many students advance onto accredited provision.

Around 400 adult ESOL learners are enrolled each year, and the college is committed to overcoming staffing challenges and internal quality assurance (IQA) capacity, to accommodate even more learners.

Sector-based work academy programmes

The college collaborates with People Plus and the Jobcentre to focus on those who are furthest from employment. Around 150 adult learners were enrolled onto an LGV programme to increase the number of haulage drivers in the local industry. However, there were delays in obtaining driving licences. In response, a program revision has been made, facilitating most learners to attain the LGV 'C' class driving license in around 18 weeks.

The college works with the Jobcentre on other initiatives, for example, in response to the local skills demand in fabrication and welding. An infill model placed adults into study programmes for a short delivery period of up to 3 weeks. They then collaborated with the Jobcentre and employers to assist adults to secure jobs and re-enrol onto a higher level of training, meeting employers' ongoing skills needs.

In response to online shopping and more local deliveries, is a new programme called 'Warehouse to Wheels', for urban drivers. Following the approval of a new apprenticeship standard this will incorporate maths and English. Equipping learners for a career in transport and distribution.

Maths and English

The college is very effective at engaging with adult learners to promote English and maths skills and to emphasize how these qualifications can support career progression. To accommodate adults' shift patterns, delivery is flexible and is timetabled during the day and evenings. Smaller group sizes are organised for those who benefit from more personalised attention. There are around 2,000 adult learners on different maths and English programmes. Outreach delivery takes place in community centres, using Multiply funding.

Learning support

The AEB budget has been used to provide learning support for some learners. A successful partnership with the local authority, secures funding for additional learning support (ALS) needs for some adult learners. Before learners commence their programmes and after, staff collaborates with the local authority, to identify any ongoing ALS requirements that will aid adult learners' progression into higher levels of education and training. Funding adults' additional support needs has become a priority for the local authority.

Re-skilling

The college also uses the AEB funding to reskill people from industry for a career change to become lecturers in construction. This is proving successful in meeting some of the staff shortages in construction subjects. For example, 2 students from the "Women in Construction" course have now become technicians in the college's wet trades department.

Meeting local health needs

The college is equipping members of its community with valuable lifesaving, online safety, and employability skills.

They deliver training for parents in 'mental health support' and are working with a drug and alcohol addiction group to provide informal learning and support for progression. The college obtained funding to secured defibrillators from a legacy EU project, using the equipment within the Mansfield & Ashfield district they delivered free training to local community groups on how to use a defibrillator and perform CPR effectively.

The college also offers the same training, plus employability and skills training including mental health first-aid, team leadership and green skills is offered to local SMEs. The

college is currently working with adults in local community groups to provide free digital media literacy interventions in collaboration with OFCOM.

Over 850 adults were supported into sustained employment through the college's AEB courses in 2022-2023, and around 500 progressed into further training.

Past barriers and challenges to AEB delivery

Significant reduction to subcontracting

In the past, college subcontracting for AEB delivery was around 80%. Curriculum teams faced competing priorities for delivery across different provision types. Under the new leadership, the college changed their strategy to better serve the local market. They reduced subcontracting by 2 approaches, firstly, promoting a renewed culture for growth and demystifying the regulations surrounding adult funding and secondly, creating a joined-up approach with local organisations. Subcontracting has been reduced significantly from 80% to 20%.

Leaders recognise that some partnerships effectively improve the employment and life chances of local people, therefore careful selection of future subcontractors takes place, following the seven-step curriculum planning process. The college quality team adopt a deep dive methodology to review the quality of subcontractors' provision, and continuous professional development for subcontractors is delivered by the college without charge.

Sector based work academies

SWAP methodology proves highly effective for larger retail employers, but its rigid framework can be compromised in by the number of vacancies, where some adult learners' may perceive the programme as working for free when they might be employed. In some cases, this has led to a lower take up of numbers for the programme.

Additional learning support

In previous years, the delivery of ALS for adults was disconnected from the 16 to 18 ALS team, this has been rectified and the skills set of staff and resources are now used cohesively across all funding streams. Learning support was rated as outstanding in the college's last Ofsted inspection, particularly for those with high needs.

Online courses

After piloting online courses, the college responds to learner feedback. Recent improvements include early contact with each learner prior to the course to explain commitment; study guides; student handbook; and to allocate a dedicated support advisor. The college also offers the option to attend on site IT workshops, this attendance fosters a sense of community and connectedness by initially bringing the adults together. Online learning has teacher input and use breakout groups.

Lincolnshire County Council, Adult Skills and Family Learning Service

AEB Data (2021/2022 Actuals)

Funding Allocations:

Non devolved: £2,021,066

Devolved: N/A

Total: £2,021,066

Actual Value of Direct Delivery:

Non devolved: £394,644

Devolved: N/A

Total: £394,644

Actual Value of Sub-contracted Delivery

Non devolved: £1,626,422

Devolved: N/A

Total: £1,626,422

About Lincolnshire Adult Skills and Family Learning Services

Lincolnshire Adult Skills and Family Learning service (ASFLS) sits within the Place Directorate of the council within the area of economic development. Adult Learning programmes are managed by the Adult Skills and Family Learning Service (ASFLS) within the Commissioning Group for Economic Growth.

The Adult Learning Programme targets its provision at local people who are least likely to participate in learning and enable them to access a range of local, high-quality learning opportunities. This programme is designed to fill gaps from other funded programmes and provide accessibility to provision for learners.

The service meets the needs of a wide rural geography using effective partnership working and continues to meet/ exceed allocations and strategically plans to do this with a view to good value for money and effective management of a range of partners. The provider produced its first accountability agreement for 2023/2024 with a service vision of “more people having the skills and attributes for work, enabling them to make a positive contribution to their community.”

Adult Learning programmes are planned and delivered to support the delivery of key strategic priorities of Lincolnshire County Council (LCC), as well as alignment to the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership's (LEP) priority of increasing skills in Lincolnshire and driving economic growth. The subsequent programme is designed to meet the specific needs of residents and employers in Lincolnshire. The service reaches just under 7000 unique learners in any one year.

The service was last inspected by Ofsted in June 2019 with good grade judgments in all aspects of provision. AEB funding is just over £2million annually and the Service Manager is Thea Croxall.

Background to AEB delivery at Lincolnshire Adult Skills and Family Learning Services

A significant challenge in Lincolnshire is geography. A population of approximately 750,000 individuals reside across an area 20 times the size of Birmingham. Road and transports links are generally poor, and whilst improvements are ongoing, the reality is that access to learning, primarily located in a few urban areas (Lincoln, Grantham, Stamford, and Boston) is both limited and costly.

ASFLS historically directly delivered the majority of its ESFA funding, having Adult Education Centres in the key towns across Lincolnshire. This proved extremely difficult to manage across the wide geographical area, culminating in an inadequate Ofsted inspection in 2008. At this point, the majority of direct delivery was dissolved, and the Service moved to a partnership model that is still in place today. This allows the service to draw on the expertise of providers located and operating in different areas, addressing the specific priorities and barriers within their local communities.

The importance of relationship building for the successful delivery of this provision cannot be overstated. This is a large rural county and local provider forums chaired by the adult learning and skills manager and the principal learning officer operate around the county to ensure that funds and allocations are spread according to geographical need as well as to meet the KPIs.

A standard practice is for the ASFLS service to over allocate funding as part of curriculum planning. This is based on years of experience of working with contracted providers across Lincolnshire who, as a rule, are overly ambitious at the point of submitting delivery plans for the year. The rationale of this is to reduce the risk of underperformance across the programme, whilst at the same time giving partners confidence to put on an array of provision to meet local needs. A mid-year review is carried out to facilitate the reallocation of funds. This is a successful model of operating and relies on well established relationships of trust and real partnership. The service has a consistent track record of hitting or exceeding targets.

Overview of the leadership and management of AEB delivery

Dedicated senior leadership for adult skills

Adult Learning programmes are managed by the Adult Skills and Family Learning Service (ASFLS) within the Commissioning Group for Economic Growth. The ASFLS is managed by an experienced and knowledgeable adult learning and skills manager (head

of service) who has overarching responsibility for the adult learning programme. This includes budget management, directing the commissioning process, reporting to DfE and ESFA and acting as nominee during OFSTED inspection.

The adult learning and skills manager is supported by a principal officer for learning and skills with overall responsibility for quality, communications and safeguarding, and a business intelligence manager who is responsible for the commissioning process and data recording and reporting.

These senior managers are supported by 3 senior project officers who provide oversight of a wide-ranging programme of learning, 20 delivery partners and the tutors involved in family learning and the direct delivery programmes. They are responsible for contract monitoring activity, carrying out quality checks and supporting providers to develop their provision.

There are a further 3 project officers who support the financial and data management role of the service providing weekly MIS reports and monthly workbooks to enable effective monitoring of delivery.

Adult learning board

The work of the leadership team is overseen by a Learning Board which has been established for several years and provides governance for the councils three FE and Skills areas, adult, and family learning, apprenticeships, and Young People's Learning Provision (YPLP). The Learning Board includes representation from the council directorate areas, in addition to wider representation of Councillors, local employers, training providers and other community stakeholders such as DWP, Barnardo's and a local SME.

Local provider forums

The service has established over time Local Provider Forums which are open to current and prospective partners and also include the national careers service and DWP. This model of practice for supporting ongoing access to citizens who may not otherwise access any form of learning and skills is very successful in engaging the hardest to reach. There is a strong coaching culture between the service project officers and their delivery partners which is based on helping providers to do their best and remain committed to the service. The forums are chaired by the adult learning and skills manager and are often attended by local elected members.

Key elements of the curriculum strategy for adult skills

The services vision is that learning is recognised by their residents and employees as an essential part of creating a better future for themselves and for the Lincolnshire community. The County Council raises achievements and aspirations by providing high quality learning opportunities, both externally via Education & Skills Funding Agency

(ESFA) funded programmes, and internally via apprenticeship provision, in a safe environment that enables learners to progress according to their ability, needs and interests.

The main elements of the ASFLS curriculum strategy are to develop clear progression pathways for learners, particularly those from “seldom heard” groups to facilitate a transition into further learning, employment, or to improve their lives. There are 3 key engagement pathways through the adult learning programme:

- adult skills courses are a pathway to engagement onto further vocational or qualification programmes that will lead directly to higher level learning or link to employment
- health and wellbeing courses support early engagement with learners that may need a softer re-introduction to education, or support with overcoming a lack of confidence, prior to engaging with more formal or accredited learning
- family learning allows parents to develop their skills and knowledge through gaining an understanding of how their child learns and enables them to better support their child’s development. This pathway can support learners to gain confidence and progress to other learning or engage with volunteering

In addition to the 3 main engagement stands, ASFLS has a small qualification programme that enables delivery of a range of vocational, steppingstone, and English and Maths qualifications as an in-built progression route for learners, whilst bridging the gap to longer courses or employment.

Examples of successful provision and innovative programmes

The ASFLS programme aims to respond to local economic needs and, as such, they have supported their partners in developing and delivering a range of programmes linked to employment. Growth of Qualification Programmes has been an achievement in 2021/2022 and allows the ASFLS team to develop in built progression pathways which enhances the Community Learning offer, which forms the most significant aspect of the providers’ programme.

Sector based work academy programmes

The services partnership with a local GFE College delivers successful Sector Based Work Academy programmes in partnership with DWP in Lincolnshire to provide employability and vocational pathways for claimants. They deliver sector-based courses supporting claimants with knowledge and qualifications in targeted areas including hospitality, working from home and customer service. Courses are linked with a wide range of large employers.

Working with partners within deprived wards

A key feature of the ASFLS programme is to plug gaps in mainstream provision, prioritising widening participation. The provider sub-contracts delivery to several learning providers operating in deprived wards across Lincolnshire.

A local independent training provider partner is located within the deprived abbey ward in the city of Lincoln which sits within the top 5% of deprived areas in the country and the top 1% for health deprivation. Provision is focused on healthy cooking and eating classes, reading club and maths and English.

A further partner delivers a range of NVQ Programmes in Advice and Guidance, Customer Service, Business Administration and Food Production, along with qualifications in Barista. These programmes are delivered to employers to meet an industry staff training needs with practical elements delivered in their working café.

An information technology partner offers a range of ICT courses using their online platform to support learners on a flexible basis. They have developed a range of modules to meet a variety of needs. For the employed the provider focused courses on aiding individuals in the workplace to help with their career including courses on teamwork and team leading, communication skills, time management, communication skills, body language, mindfulness in the workplace and a range of IT courses at introduction and advanced level.

A further provider partner designs their curriculum taking into consideration feedback from partners, employers, and learners to ensure it meets the needs and interests of learners and local employment opportunities, supporting local and national priorities. Their flexible, online delivery is a popular option for job seekers. Their construction course is normally delivered over two weeks and includes personal, social and employability skills development in the first week. This progresses onto sector specific training and development in the second week that prepares learners to sit their end tests such as the Health and Safety in a Construction environment, which ensures learners know how to keep safe while on-site and embeds mock CSCS tests throughout delivery to motivate and engage learning.

Working in partnership with local colleges

ALSFL works with all 4 of the GFE colleges in the county. They are partners in the same way as all other providers they work with, however, the commissioning process is slightly less onerous due to the size of the colleges and their QA systems. This approach means that provision for adults is within the catchment area of one of the main colleges for progression and the provision subcontracted to the colleges is intended to further support this progression.

One College aims to offer Community Learning provision across the curriculum areas of the main college and have had a wide range of courses available to learners. They have

ensured that courses have a clear progression route onto other funding streams (generally ESFA Adult Education Budget) and many learners progress onto other courses. The curriculum is developed with key partners which include employers, Voluntary Centre Services, the National Careers Service and JobCentre Plus. This means that learning and training options reflect the skills shortages within the community and priority sectors. This ensures that courses help prepare learners for new or progressing careers or inspire them to further learning for example through Access to HE courses.

Developing provision for coastal needs

It is not always possible for a learner to access L3 provision within the progression routes provided by college partnerships due to the difficulties of geography and public transport. To address this ALSFS accessed national skills fund monies to establish a programme for hospitality and health and social care within the coastal area of Skegness. This was to help meet the needs of employers and the progression opportunities for learners who had completed L2 but who would have faced a 90min bus journey each way to attend a college. This is a small cohort of learners which continues to grow.

Sunderland City Council, Learning and Skills Service

AEB Data (2021/2022 Actuals)

Funding Allocations:

Non devolved: £1,270,772

Devolved: N/A

Total: £1,270,772

Actual Value of Direct Delivery:

Non devolved: N/A

Devolved: N/A

Total: N/A

Actual Value of Sub-contracted Delivery

Non devolved: £1,367,074.56

Devolved: N/A

Total: £1,367,074.56

About Sunderland City Council Learning and Skills Service (SCCLSS)

LSS of SCC is an effective and successful provider supporting a wide range of citizens from the City of Sunderland. The provider is fully funded by ESFA, however, from August 2024 they will be part of the wider Tyneside Mayoral Combined Authority and funding will be devolved to this authority. An experienced and enthusiastic team are playing a key role in supporting the definition of a skills strategy for the new devolved authority and are keen to ensure that the very particular needs of Sunderland residents are met. The provider has produced an accountability agreement making clear reference to the LSIP and the needs of local employers.

The service vision is to motivate, equip and empower people through training and education to realise their full potential and improve all aspects of their lives, their families, their communities, and their local economy. The service strives to meet its vision through the design, development and delivery of unique, high quality learning opportunities enabling people to acquire knowledge, skills, and behaviours for their personal and professional development. There is a strong theme of improving health and wellbeing running through the services strategy and this aligns to the city's ambition to reduce health inequalities through "Starting well, living well and Aging well".

SCC Adult Education services operates in one of the most challenging environments in the UK and is ranked the 33rd most deprived authority in terms of education, skills, and health, and in the region ranks 2nd on income and employment deprivation. It is the second largest city in the region with a population of c275,000 people with high level qualifications lower than both the region and nationally, and salary levels at levels significantly below the northeast and UK averages. Healthy life expectancy is 7 years lower than the England average for men and 6 years lower for women.

Despite the demographic, social and economic challenges SCC recruits circa 1,500 unique learners a year, has a turnover of just over £1.3m and consistently hits or exceeds AEB targets.

The head of service is Julie Gwilym.

Background to AEB delivery at Sunderland City Council Adult Education

This is a completely devolved commissioned service that works with trusted and long-standing partnerships with a range of local providers who are closely engaged with the communities the service needs to reach. The Learning and Skills Service is part of Sunderland City Council and delivers a range of learning opportunities via the Adult Education Budget and Multiply. The service recognises that commissioned adult and community learning plays a vital role in supporting residents in the city on their journey to learn skills, to enter, return or progress in work. Alongside the economic benefits, it also provides an opportunity to reduce isolation, makes people happier, healthier, and more resilient.

The service commissions a range of informal and formal learning from entry level courses to accredited qualifications linked to sector-based employment as well as a range of courses that offer support for those moving towards the labour market, those looking to develop skills to support in everyday life and confidence boosting courses in a range of community settings.

The partnership delivery model generally includes between 10 to 15 providers in a year and there are comprehensive commissioning processes and practices that have been tried and tested over the last five years. Partners range from single individual providers to larger charities and all members of the team have contact with all providers within the context of their individual roles whilst the engagement officers are their main point of contact.

These partners are well embedded within their local communities and understand the needs of local people and so are part of the overall team for informing and influencing the curriculum as well as recruitment. The commissioning process requires that their work clearly aligns with the service strategy and the quality outcomes expected by the service. The service operates an effective provider forum that facilitates a strong sense of teamwork and support.

Overview of the leadership and management of AEB delivery

Dedicated senior leadership representation for adult skills

The Learning and Skills Service sits within Sunderland City Council Children's Services Department. This is a recent move following a council restructure and the service is

realigning provision to meet the objectives of Sunderland's City Plan and Healthy City Plan, with key focus on being a Dynamic Smart City, a Healthy Smart City, a Vibrant Smart City alongside the City Plan and Starting Well, Living Well & Ageing Well.

Leadership, Management & Governance is clearly laid out in the providers "Performance Management Framework" and involves oversight and scrutiny from a chief officer's group which the service manager reports to on a monthly basis. This is in conjunction with the CEO of "Together for Children" who is the Accountable Officer responsible for overall management of the wider Learning and skills Service (LSS).

The Service Manager has day to day management of the LSS provision and was appointed as Service Manager in November 2021 with previous role in service as Quality, Performance and Achievement Manager. She is supported by the Quality, Performance & Achievement Manager who has day to day responsibility for management of partners and compliance with Department of Education Funding Rules and has been in this role since January 22 and was previously the Quality Monitoring Officer.

Two Engagement Officers develop and manage compliance with LSS Commissioning Strategy, KPIs and funding rules and regularly visit providers to provide support on all matters around compliance.

The Quality Monitoring Officer supports with observation of teaching and learning, learner voice, lesson plans/schemes of work and a very useful tutor digest (see later sections) and a Data Funding Officer is responsible for data scrutiny, preparation, and submission of funding returns to DFE and development of essential data reports.

This is a small, experienced team who have held various roles within the LA context and have experience of working within GFEs.

Local provider forums

Considerable time and resource is invested into training provider forums which meet regularly to share practice and provide ongoing support. These forums were established by the provider team and are chaired by the service manager and the quality performance and achievement manager. All partners are expected to attend, and attendance is from both partner managers and tutors. In addition, the forums are attended by DWP and the national careers guidance service. Council members also attend and at most meetings guest speakers are invited to support on-going development of the knowledge and skills of the providers. The meetings discuss progress, contract updates, areas for development, trends in performance, quality and data and funding issues. Partners are encouraged to work with each other so that progression opportunities are improved for learners and there is a holistic approach to understanding the wider AEB service offer. Provider partners report that the events are positive in supporting networking opportunities as well as effective CPD events. Overall, there is a strong sense of one team amongst partners.

Within all AEB provision learning provider partners are expected to develop defined progression routes to higher levels of learning, apprenticeships, employment, volunteering, or other desired destinations.

KPIs therefore focus on key priority groups including those who are unemployed, those with complex personal issues and lifestyles, those with moderate/ mild learning difficulties and/or disabilities, those with mental health needs, those who suffer from isolation, those from the most deprived communities and minority ethnic groups.

A matrix model of performance management against these indicators enables the management team to continually assess recruitment, attendance, retention, and outcomes for individual partners, courses, and learners. Regular performance management data is reviewed by both the team and the chief officer's group as well as the lead councillor with the portfolio in this area. An indication of the team meeting the criteria for learner profiles comes from the fact that in any funding year there are never more than 5 learners (out of a head count of c1,500) who pay any level of fee contribution.

Key elements of the curriculum strategy for adult skills

A highly detailed analysis of the area and the context within which the provider operates highlights the need for locally based interventions, and it is on this basis that the provider determines the curriculum.

SCC LSS continues to shape its curriculum in line with national, local, and sectoral strategies to meet the needs of the city, its communities, citizens, and employers. This is achieved through collaborative working with external partners, including training providers, community organisations, referral agencies, employers, and other local authorities. This work is aligned with the work of internal colleagues in the council such as elected members, local area coordinators, policy makers and other senior leaders.

Local context and needs are the drivers for designing the AEB curriculum and it is acknowledged as a Council that there are deep rooted issues that face many of the residents across the City and careful consideration is given to the balance of priorities for participants along with the drivers from National and Local policy. The resultant focus is a curriculum that is driven by a key driver of health and wellbeing at all stages of life, and this is reflected in both the accredited qualifications offered as well as the community learning programme.

Curriculum is predominantly within preparation for life and work and all curriculum includes cross cutting themes of numeracy literacy and digital skills. More specific vocational areas include retail, hospitality and health and social care. Approximately 800 enrolments are within accredited skills and c2000 within community learning.

The service has been working closely with other education and training providers, employers, and key stakeholders to build an evidence base for the recently submitted

Local Skills Improvement Plan. The LSIP submitted to DfE in May 2023 includes recommendations that positively change post 16 technical education and training in the sectors of advanced manufacturing, construction, digital, health and transport and logistics. The LSIP development and recommendations have played a major role in the development of the AEB curriculum design for 2023/2024 and support pathways for progression for many to move closer to the labour market, into work or live better independently.

Examples of successful provision and innovative programmes

In recognition of the need to support residents to progress onto either further education, closer to the labour market or into work curriculum development has incorporated more progression opportunities for many who have a low starting point. To support progression, the service has moved more of the offer from Community Learning into Adult Skills and focussed on the specific sector-based qualifications required to support employers across the city.

Health and wellbeing

Relationship building across the council has led to several new initiatives to respond to specific local need. The Service manager is a member of council's health and well-being strategy board and they have working with providers to co design and co-develop new health and wellbeing curriculum.

Courses are being designed to enable people to develop more self-help and to increase mobility and improve diet whilst providing them with skills and knowledge to access education provision with either AEB or other providers. Similar work has been developed in conjunction with "warm spaces" and "social prescribing" all of which facilitate curriculum development in areas that are most relevant and accessible to people who are not yet engaged with education and learning.

Working with a local health partner with a focus on living life with the menopause and men's formation, a learner led co-created curriculum was developed to support improved knowledge and understanding of key health issues responding to an identified community need. A previous learner led the group that designed the programme, and a pilot programme was initially run. This was aligned to the service strategy of "aging well". Nearly 60 learners in total took part in both programmes (36 women and 21 men) and the offer has been continued to support community need.

Food bank cookery curriculum

The city has experienced a significant increase in the number of households using food banks and particularly in the context of the cost-of-living crisis. Many using the food banks had little idea of how to use the standard packages they were receiving and therefore the best was not being made of these items. Working with 2 partner providers the service designed and delivered cookery courses and associated menus using the

ingredients from the food banks. The providers worked with the food bank staff to understand the provision that were received and designed menus so that the community could use the ingredients to the best benefit of themselves and their families. The local health teams were also involved in supporting weight loss and diet and the citizens advice bureau were involved at a second stage to support the development of budgeting skills so that an additional £10 supermarket voucher could be used effectively and efficiently to supplement the food bank parcels. This resulted in better use of provisions, increased home cooking and better budget management by the learners taking part.

Tutor digest

In order to support provider partners to deliver the cross-cutting themes of English, maths and digital throughout the curriculum the quality officer produces a regular Tutor Digest for all partners and all tutors within partners. This digest pulls together current and topical articles about things that may be affecting learners and the local community and maps where tutors could use these items to include key priority skills. All learners complete a reflection document at the end of each course and within this they are asked how much they feel they have improved their maths English and digital skills which are cross cutting themes across all courses. Other areas learners are asked to reflect upon are safeguarding/prevent, skills development, employability, health and wellbeing, social and overall satisfaction.

This feedback is then shared with the partner provider on a termly basis and is used as a method of monitoring how much the tutor digest is used and where improvements can be made. This is a very effective way of supporting learning and teaching of key skills through life skills and preparation for work in an inclusive and accessible way to learners as well as staff.

Go get online

This project was set up in the wake of the pandemic at a time when the provider team were handing back their old laptops to be replaced as part of the councils scrappage/replacement strategy. The team asked if they could keep the laptops to distribute to provider partners so that they could be used with students who did not have their own access to IT. This was not an easy process but successfully led to council leaders and executive officers having a greater understanding of community digital needs, the development of the current digital strategy and learners having better access to IT to continue their studies. This programme has continued beyond the end of the pandemic period and the councils wider understanding of digital poverty means that local residents and organisations can continue to access wider IT kit and equipment, see <https://www.sunderland.gov.uk/article/16961/G-O-Get-Online-ICT-recycling-scheme>.

Westminster City Council, Westminster Adult Education Service

AEB Data (2021/2022 Actuals)

Funding Allocations:

Non devolved: £689,890

Devolved: £6,664,160

Total: £7,354,050

Actual Value of Direct Delivery:

Non devolved: £339,000

Devolved: £6,663,860

Total: £7,002,860

Actual Value of Sub-contracted Delivery

Non devolved: £350,000

Devolved: £300,000

Total: £650,000

About Westminster Adult Education Services

The stated purpose of Westminster Adult Education Service (WAES) is to support adults into learning and work by delivering a high-quality, accessible, and inclusive programme of adult education this approach supports many of the council's most fundamental strategic economic aims.

Students are placed at the centre of all decision making. It has a recent Ofsted rating of good (June 2022) with outstanding features. The provision is predominantly adult based and is delivered out of three main centres and up to 80 local community venues as well as a very successful distance learning programme.

WAES seek to provide inclusive high quality adult education in curriculum areas that have employability at their heart and provide career paths that support students' aspirations. It is a division of the growth planning and housing department of Westminster City Council and is within the portfolio of the Cabinet member for young people, learning and leisure.

WAES is funded by the EFSA and most substantially the Greater London Authority (GLA). The service reaches around 6000 unique learners annually (c16,000 enrolments) which includes a small number of 16 to 18 year olds and a cohort of c30 apprentices. Funding has grown over the last few years and is expected to grow further. Most delivery is direct with c£650k pa for partnership working.

The principal is Arinola Edeh.

Background to AEB delivery at Westminster Adult Education Services

The mission of WAES is to support adults with none of the “distractions” of other age cohorts and the challenges that they bring for leadership within other educational contexts. This simple clarity of purpose is shared by all staff, and teams are never too busy to consider new opportunities, being flexible and responsive about how and when they deliver curriculum. Where expertise is needed that is not available from existing teams, strong trusted partnership working enables a continued responsiveness to employer and hence curriculum need.

The provision ensures that it meets the London Mayors Skills for London strategy and the “Nine missions of the Mayor of London Recovery Programme” based on three key pillars of community, careers, and culture. They take a strategic approach to planning within the councils Fairer Westminster strategy with governor and cabinet member scrutiny and support.

WAES considers it is important to develop and support a creative and entrepreneurial mindset within both students and staff and across support services and council departments. The offer is therefore flexible and dynamic to meet the needs of different individuals. This innovation and flexibility of the colleges approach is captured within their use of EFSA direct funding to support a defined career and work need within health and social care using a tried and tested model that facilitates maximum access and a high volume of learners. Overall, 73% of learner are female, 54% of London learners are unemployed or low waged and two thirds of all learners are from the most deprived wards in Westminster and London.

The service has a consistent track record of hitting and/ or exceeding its allocated targets and is frequently able to deliver further activity supported by the flexible and discretionary funding of the GLA.

Overview of the leadership and management of AEB delivery

Dedicated senior leadership for adult skills

WAES operates a discrete service within the council for adult education and the provision is led by a principal supported by a senior team of an Assistant Principal Curriculum and Quality, an Assistant Principal Business support services and several curriculum and functional heads of department. There is a dedicated Head of Marketing and Admissions, and the service works with several local partners to also support recruitment.

All senior managers including heads of curriculum departments are responsible for hitting recruitment targets and a highly responsive team of staff fully understand the ever-changing nature of the adult market and the various funding regimes. Adults are this services priority and managers are both “fleet of foot” and “never too busy” to identify and develop curriculum to meet emerging markets.

Many of the senior leadership team also have experience of the general further education sector and have developed a “college model” of operating the service with access to good data and budgetary control.

Governance board

WAES has well-established governance with an experienced chair. New governors have recently been recruited as well as a new clerk to the board and a strong emphasis on skills and currency means that the regular skills audit ensures that the membership is fit for purpose. The membership of the board includes governors with experience of higher education, youth services, and community schools, civil servants with experience of business and economics, councillors, and staff members.

Ofsted commented favourably on the “proactive” nature of the governors and their engagement with students. The leadership have recently developed a new strategic plan 2023 to 2028 led by governors and the council members with cabinet responsibility for education and skills and the college principal.

Key elements of the curriculum strategy for adult skills

The focus of the WAES curriculum strategy is to enable the service to achieve their ambition to support more learners into work, progress in work and support those that are self-employed. There is a strong economic focus in line with council strategy.

The WAES strategy articulates several clear strategic drivers:

- local and regional context
- strong progression pathways
- maximise outcomes for learners
- digital business and basic skills development
- enterprise and Innovation
- employer led curriculum offer
- community and culture

The curriculum strategy considers all types and levels of curriculum offer and delivery including, but not restricted to, core classroom-based learning, online and distance learning programmes, apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeship programmes, employability, community learning programmes and leisure and cultural programmes.

There are 5 key curriculum sectors, creative industries, professional pathways, and apprenticeships, ESOL, basic skills English and maths, digital and inclusion and community learning.

Supporting students and learners to articulate their aspirations is a key element of the implementation of this strategy. The starting point for any learner embarking on a

programme is to establish their purpose for studying at the point of engagement onto either an Adult Career Plan or a Cultural Health and Wellbeing Plan.

The learner may well move between plans on their learning journey but for WAES to ensure that it is providing the best possible learning it emphasizes the importance of establishing the student intent from the start.

Examples of successful provision and innovative programmes

Digital

WAES were successfully able to establish a bootcamp style of delivery with a specialist digital curriculum content partner before applying and securing DfE funding for bootcamps. They then secured funding to run 3 digital bootcamps across the 2021/2022 academic year. Over the last 2 years the provider has gone from 40 enrolments on digital skills to over 250 across skills and technical IT development qualifications from Level 2 to Level 5.

This provision is supported by GLA funding within both the prescribed element but also kick started with the GLA flexibilities funding which constitutes circa 10% of their total funding grant. It is an example of how the flexible nature of funding has enabled a much needed and successful curriculum offer with positive employment progression options as well as further study to be developed and delivered.

Of 75 learners 31% had secured work in London with more in the pipeline for those that are were finishing. (Summer 2023). Over 50 had secured an interview with a hiring firm and employers are engaged in curriculum support for employability on mock interviews, coaching, mentoring, and expectation setting. Within this over 80% are from the global majority community and 40% female which is above sector norms.

Construction and retail SWAPs

In 2021/2022 the college offered a number of short intense qualifications as SWAPs in the construction industry as part of the Battersea power station development. In 2022/2023 they developed this further with a trusted sub-contracting partner to expand into retail/hospitality sector on Nine Elms Power Station. This has been so successful that the college has now been asked to deliver 2 per month for 2023/2024. They work with a small partnership company which is able to respond quickly and effectively to local demand. This is good partnership working for community and business benefit.

The SWAPs in retail have had over 70% progress into work based on the collaboration between partner organisations and the provider coming together regularly to ensure the offer is fit for purpose. On site delivery ensures that the delegates can see the venue and visit the locations and hear from employers in situ.

Industry recognised qualifications

As part of the providers levelling up funding, they are able to offer (2022/2023) the prince 2 programme. The first programme, open to those that were unemployed and fell below the London wage criteria, had 20 people start, with 12 being successful on their first attempt with all resits succeeding.

Enterprise

The college developed a programme in partnership with a charity sector partner who deliver enterprise programmes initially focused on the creative industries which is a large area of provision for the provider across all levels. This programme takes students business ideas to the end point of developing a business plan and potential funding. A small group of 12 students successfully completed this programme with strong business proposals and self-employment outcomes.

Distance learning

The college offers a distance learning programme with a focus on the health and social care sector. This programme has been running for a number of years and has a small, dedicated team supporting up to 2000 on programme learners. The programme attracts 2 main groups of students, those who are already in the workplace and looking to upskill and improve their job prospects, and those who are out of work and keen to get into this area of work. There are also several students who join these courses to support their own mental health and personal and family interests.

Qualifications are mainly at L2 with a strong focus on certificates in understanding mental health and the mental health of young people. In 2022/2023 the college has introduced counselling to the offer and recruited over 90 people onto the programme with 30 continuing to the L3. A tutor on the distance learning programme won the colleges tutor of the year award with many students talking about how well the tutor (and colleagues) made the students feel connected to the college community despite the distance learning. Students on this programme are offered additional learning support where needed.

Green curriculum

The college has engaged with a consultant and undertaken research to be able to deliver community engagement and Level 2 retrofitting qualifications which started in September 2023 and building up for 2024. Community learning have a current programme 'Green Live Learning Lab' which is a programme in the community to raise awareness of green technology using experts, and to develop careers materials which they will build upon as they expand the offer.

IELTs getting ahead

This programme was developed to help those with reasonable English either access work or University using IELTs (International English Language Testing System). This programme was initially established for Afghan refugees and then more recently for Ukrainian nationals funding a coordinator role. Many of the client group have a reasonable level of English and good skills and expertise but not the necessary qualifications to move straight into commensurate levels of work. The first cohort completed and one of the learners was offered all 5 university choice places which they would not have been able to do without the funded programme as IELTs is typically very expensive.

Acknowledgements

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Department
for Education

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