

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee		
DATE:	31 st March 2022		
TITLE:	New Directions College - Learning for Life: the role of adult community education in developing thriving communities		
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SERVICE:	New Directions College (DEGNS)	WARDS:	All
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This paper seeks to raise awareness and increase understanding of the Council's Adult Community Education service: **New Directions College**. The paper sets out the College's role in supporting the levelling up agenda, developing thriving communities and contributing to an inclusive economy.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 To note the achievements of New Directions College to date and to receive an annual update on adult learning and skills in Reading and the work and impact of New Directions College.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 [New Directions College](#) is Reading Borough Council's adult and community education (ACE) service. The College is mainly funded by an annual Adult Education grant of £1.3m and by other external income streams such as LEP project funding, course fees and apprenticeship levy funding (for the delivery of apprenticeships). The main Adult education grant is issued by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) which is an executive agency of the Department for Education (DfE). The College is inspected separately by Ofsted under the [Education Inspection Framework](#) (EIF). The College is currently graded Good and is due another inspection within the next 2 years. The College must also operate under strict [funding rules and regulations](#) as set out by the ESFA.

- 3.2 Local authority led adult and community education is part of the UK's broader 'Further Education' sector and predominantly focuses on delivering learning at Level 3¹ and below. Adults accessing provision at New Directions College must be over the age of 19 and meet strict [eligibility and residency rules](#).
- 3.3 The Department for Education sets out the broad rationale for the Adult Education Budget. Locally, the Council determines how it spends its own grant allocation ([New Directions College - Strategic Development Plan](#)) and will be working more closely with council officers and other local grant recipients of AEB funding and education, employment and training providers to ensure a more place-based and targeted approach to adult learning and skills is adopted in Reading.
- 3.2 Funding for **Adult skills (regulated/accredited provision)** aims to engage adults and provide the skills and learning they need to progress into, or within, work; or equip them for an apprenticeship or other learning. It enables more flexible tailored programmes of learning to be made available, which may or may not require a qualification, to help eligible learners engage in learning, build confidence, and/or enhance their wellbeing.
- 3.3 Funding for **Community learning (non-regulated/flexible learning)** aims to engage people who are disadvantaged and least likely to participate, including people on low incomes with low skills. It also aims to widen participation and improve people's life chances by supporting progression relevant to personal circumstances, including:
- improved confidence and willingness to engage in learning
 - acquisition of skills, preparing people for training, employment or self-employment
 - improved digital, financial literacy and/or communication skills
 - parents/carers better equipped to support and encourage their children's learning
 - improved/maintained health and/or social well-being
- 3.4 Adult education also has the capability to develop stronger communities, with more self-sufficient, connected and pro-active citizens, leading to:
- increased volunteering, civic engagement and social integration
 - reduced costs of welfare, health and anti-social behaviour
 - increased online learning and self-organised learning
 - the lives of our most troubled families being turned around
- 3.5 Locally, the Council's Corporate Plan - 'Investing in Reading's Future' (updated in February 2021) sets out the following three interconnected themes:
- Healthy Environment;
 - Thriving Communities and
 - Inclusive Economy
- The themes focus all our activity and underpin delivery of the Council's Vision: 'To ensure that everyone who lives and works in Reading can share in the benefits of its success'.
- 3.6 Nationally, Adult education features as a priority in several key national policy areas, including the Further Education White Paper, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Levelling Up White Paper. It also spans central and local government funding for refugees and policy areas focused on improving social mobility, mental health and wellbeing and community cohesion across the UK. A summary of current policy announcements is detailed in annex A.

¹ See annex B for qualification level descriptions

4. NEW DIRECTIONS COLLEGE

- 4.1 Reading Borough Council has directly delivered adult education since 1958. Initially called Reading Technical College, the service offered courses at Battle, EP Collier and Alfred Sutton Schools. Today, New Directions College continues to provide a safe, empowering local space in which adults can build their confidence and capacity, learn new skills, and take steps towards further education and new employment opportunities.
- 4.2 The College currently delivers a range of informal and formal learning from entry-level courses to professional qualifications, as well as employment support, interview support and confidence-boosting programmes in a range of community settings. The College delivers courses directly and subcontracts to other providers to deliver community learning across Reading. The core provision is focused on skills for life; maths, English and digital skills and skills for employment and work. Our broad range of provision includes:
- English, Mathematics and Digital Skills
 - ESOL (English for speakers of other languages)
 - Vocational and technical qualifications (Level 1, Level 2, Level 3 & Level 5)² in Childcare, Education, Supporting Teaching and Learning, Business Administration & Management, Hospitality and Book-keeping/accountancy
 - Apprenticeships - L2, L3 and L5
 - Family learning courses to enable parents to better support their children in literacy and numeracy (delivered in partnership with Reading Libraries and Brighter Futures for Children)
 - Provision for adults recovering from brain injury (Rosetta Life)
 - Provision for adults with a range of mental health conditions and learning difficulties and/or disabilities (Food4Families and our own Supported Learning/employment programmes) develop independence, social skills and employment skills
 - Employability and preparing for work for long term unemployed including Traineeships, Kickstart preparation courses, CV and interview workshops as well as careers information advice and guidance. In addition, we offer a range of sector-based work programmes in partnership with local employers such as Thames Water, Ikea and Crowne Plaza.
 - Courses in arts, ceramics and other cultural and creative craft to support wellbeing.
- 4.3 New Directions College actively promotes English, mathematics and digital skills provision that is free of charge under the 'legal entitlement' for adults to access fully funded provision if they have not yet achieved a full L2 qualification in these subjects. In addition, and in response to the latest policy in adult learning, the College is also promoting L3 courses that are fully funded through the Lifetime Skills Guarantee. This funds specific L3 courses for adults who have not yet achieved a L3 qualification.
- 4.4 The College awards over £100,000 each year to local partners and subcontractors to help us deliver community learning across Reading. The College currently commission Brighter Futures for Children (Children's Centres) Berkshire School of English, Rosetta Life, Reading Community Learning Centre and Food4Families. A list of provision types offered is featured in Annex C.
- 4.5 The main College site is at 330 Northumberland Avenue. We also deliver outreach provision at Southcote and Whitley Community Hubs, a range of Children's Centres and Libraries and within other community venues such as local church halls.

² See annex B for qualification level descriptions

- 4.6 Annually the College educates, trains and retrains between 500 - 1500 adults, including Apprentices. All learners come from the most deprived wards in Reading. 83% of our learners are female with 17% male. Our learners come from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds; however, the three biggest cohorts are Black/Black British, Asian/Asian British and White British. The service is aimed at adults over the age of 19. Our three biggest age cohorts are age 31-36, 37-42, and 43-48.
- 4.7 A large proportion of our learners are considered 'hard to reach'. This includes the long-term unemployed, vulnerable families, people with mental health conditions, adults with special educational needs or disabilities, asylum seekers and refugees.
- 4.8 Through the ESFA grant, the College provides Additional Learner Support funding that includes financial support with the cost of childcare, course fees and associated course expenses and travel expenses whilst accessing learning at College. The College also provides access to digital kit and equipment to support all our learners to fully participate in learning. Furthermore, the College provides all eligible learners with additional learning support that includes access to a learning support worker in and out of class, specialist dyslexia support, specialist support for the visually impaired and deaf. We also provide full assessments for dyslexia, exam access arrangements and exam concessions.

5.0 NEW INITIATIVES

- 5.1 Throughout the pandemic, the College worked alongside Reading UK CIC to act as a Gateway organisation for the Government's Kickstart Scheme. Throughout the scheme the College applied for £600,000 in Kickstart job payments on behalf of local employers offering over 130 local jobs for 16-24yr olds who were claiming out of work benefits. In addition, the College provided initial training and ongoing training to those young people who were successful and not successful in securing employment through the scheme.
- 5.2 In January 2022, the College was successful at winning £130,000 in local growth/skills capital funding from the Thames Valley LEP. In partnership with Ways into Work, the College will deliver a range of education and skills programmes to support adults with special educational needs and disabilities who are looking to progress into employment. This will complement an existing skills capital project that saw an investment of £115,000 into a new state of the art hospitality training kitchen at the main delivery site on Northumberland Avenue and will move hundreds of unemployed adults into jobs within the local hospitality sector within the next 5 years.

6.0 PARTNERSHIPS

- 6.1 The College works well with other local services including employment, regeneration, education, health and culture, and adds value to each, as well as connecting with agencies like Jobcentre Plus and other local colleges and training providers. However, we are ambitious about building these connections further.
- 6.2 The College reaches people and communities experiencing multiple disadvantage, whose support needs often demand the coordinated intervention and engagement of different Council and external services. We work alongside these services and signpost learners to local information, advice and guidance and the strength of this work is recognised through the national Matrix accreditation for information advice and guidance. Examples of this are the signposting work we do to services such as housing, benefits and debt advice, health and wellbeing services, and to other training providers and employment support services such as the National Careers Service.

- 6.3 From the learner’s perspective, our reach into other local services, and our close connection with employers and other education providers, enables them to connect with employers, further learning opportunities and their community - and ultimately to maximise their own potential.

7.0 FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

- 7.1 The cross-cutting nature of the service and its capacity to add value to other services means we have an especially important role to play in the Council’s place-shaping ambitions and in responding to entrenched, complex issues such as poverty or long-term unemployment.
- 7.2 In its capacity as an adult education provider, the College is also in a clear position to support national and local priorities for inclusive economic growth, the Council’s Corporate Plan and Reading’s Powered by People Strategy and to support specific initiatives as outlined in the Government’s Plan for jobs, Levelling Up White Paper and plans for the Social Prosperity Fund.

8.0 THE CASE FOR ADULT EDUCATION

- 8.1 Adult skills and community education play a vital role in supporting residents on their journey to learn skills to enter, return or progress in work. Alongside the economic benefits, it reduces loneliness and makes people happier, healthier, more confident, capable and resilient - making Reading more skilled and more inclusive.
- 8.2 As well as having clear and direct benefits in terms of economic prosperity, employment and productivity, adult learning is also linked to the ability to maintain a healthy lifestyle, grow confidence and self-esteem and provide meaning and purpose in life.
- 8.3 Associated outcomes of participation include the development of collaborative and creative thinking skills such as problem solving, innovation, curiosity and adaptability; enhanced physical and mental health; greater interest in politics and community engagement; and greater diversity in the workforce.

9.0 CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 9.1 New Directions College aims to deliver an outstanding quality of education that supports individuals to achieve their personal aims and aspirations whether they are to gain employment, improve their skills and learn something new, or to help them be part of their community.

This complements Reading Borough Council’s vision:

To help Reading realise its potential - and to ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its success.

- 9.2 The service provided by New Directions College has clear links to the Council’s corporate themes:

Healthy environment

- The college promotes sustainability and raises awareness of local issues and how service users can make a difference within their communities.

Thriving Communities

- The college is committed to delivering accessible adult learning to all

- The college builds relationships and strengthens the capacity and resilience of the voluntary and community sector through subcontracting delivery to them and building partnerships that produce good outcomes for our learners.
- The college is committed to delivering provision to all learners across Reading including those disadvantaged and least likely to participate in learning, including those on low incomes and/or with low skills.
- The college is delivering specific support to local employers and communities through the Kickstart scheme and is focused on supporting those who have experienced adverse effects from Covid 19. Our additional learner support fund is breaking down barriers for learners so that they can access digital kit and equipment and financial support with course fees.

Inclusive economy

- The College delivers education, skills and training opportunities with good links to local employers through the offer of Kickstart job vacancies, traineeships and apprenticeships.
- The College is focused on delivering digital skills at basic and foundation level and accredited digital qualifications up to and including L2 under the new digital skills legal entitlement.
- The College has strong links to Reading's cultural heritage and delivers a range of arts, leisure and wellbeing courses. The service is managed within the Directorate of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood services under the leadership of the Assistant Director for Culture.

9.3 Full details of the Council's [Corporate Plan](#) are available on the website. The service plan and development plan for New Directions College can be viewed on the College website: www.newdirectionsreading.ac.uk

10 ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no environmental or climate implications arising.

11. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

11.1 New Directions College conducts frequent learner surveys and captures feedback on a range of key service deliverables. This feedback is essential at helping to shape the service in the future. Furthermore, we plan to co-produce our next strategic development plan with our learners and partners.

11.2 In our 2020-21 End of Course Survey, our Learners told us:

- I am eternally grateful for the opportunity I was given by New Directions. I was able to continue learning during this pandemic in such uncertain times. A big Thank you to my tutor who is a star, she made a huge impact on my learning. I never once regretted joining New Directions, Keep up the Good work!
- My teacher was amazing and very supportive, I liked the fact that I could contact her directly and she was always happy to help with everything and anything.
- My Tutor was fantastic. I have always found Math difficult, but he made it easy to understand. Thank you
- I would highly recommend NDC to my other friends because it's helped me to build back my confidence and self-esteem. This English course has helped me to support my youngest son.

- I applied for a job with confidence because I could say I had completed my course at New Directions.
- Coming to New Directions is the best thing I have done. It directed me to walk in new ways with new confidence.

11.3 Feedback from learners at the end of the year (end of course learner survey)ⁱ confirm that learners feel safe and;

- 94.1% of our learners were satisfied or extremely satisfied with the College
- 91.7% of our learners were satisfied or extremely satisfied with advice or guidance about their next steps
- 94.8% of our learners were satisfied or extremely satisfied with the support they received
- 95.6% of our learners were satisfied or extremely satisfied that the course met their expectations
- 94.7% of our learners felt prepared for what they wanted to do next

11.4 The College has previously led a Community Learning Service Advisory Board which was independently chaired and used for service development and consultation purposes. The Board was made up of LA Officers across a broad section of services and members of the CVS across Reading. This group was disbanded in 2021 and the College will work with the Social Inclusion Board and the Lead Councillor for Education to identify new methods of governance for the service.

11.5 The College is planning a Celebration of Adult Learning in September 2022 at the Town Hall and will award our learners, staff, partners and employers with a range of awards that recognise their significant achievements and contributions to adult learning throughout the year.

12. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

12.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is not relevant to this report.

13. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are no legal implications in relation to this paper.

13.2 Procurement rules are followed when commissioning community learning providers.

14. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

15.1 A Local Government Association paper: [Learning for Life: the role of adult community education in developing thriving local communities - A handbook for councillors | Local Government Association \(lga.gov.uk\)](#) was used to provide context within this paper.

Annex A:

The latest policy developments for adult education are:

The [FE White Paper](#) outlined how the Government propose to support people to develop the skills they need to get good jobs, including measures to provide a flexible, lifetime skills guarantee. The Government will now fund all adults to acquire their first full L3 qualification³. Previously this was restricted to 19-23year olds. New Directions College received the first grant for this in April 2021 and immediately used it to fully fund learners (mainly mothers returning to work after having a family or young people progressing at work) studying L3 Early Years Educator qualifications. Previously, learners studying this had to pay for tuition via a Learning Loan (c£3,600). The College has plans to broaden the offer of L3 provision that is fully funded so that more adults can benefit from this locally.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

In broad terms the SPF will provide £2.6 billion of new funding for local investment by March 2025, with all areas of the UK receiving an allocation from the Fund via a funding formula rather than a competition. A key theme within the SPF is *People and Skills* and it majors on adult skills. In particular there will be a new numeracy programme called Multiply (a new £559m adult numeracy programme), and it is our understanding that RBC will receive funding for this and will have to make some decisions about how we spend this locally - through our own provision (New Directions College), through a competitive process or through grants. New Directions already deliver Mathematics programmes from entry level to Level 2 (including functional skills and GCSEs) for adults across the borough and has qualified and experienced staff and resources in place to deliver this.

Levelling Up and Devolution - The Government published the Levelling Up White Paper in February 2021. The paper sets out ambitious plans for localism, devolution and tackling key determinates of poor social mobility. Devolution offers an opportunity to bring businesses and residents together to provide areas with the skilled workforce they need to thrive. A key commitment in the framework is devolving the core Adult Education Budget (AEB) as part of the level 2 and 3 offer, allowing places to better shape the adult education provision available to residents to ensure it meets the needs of the local economy. The devolution of adult education funding has been a core part of all Mayoral Combined Authority's devolution deals to date. Berkshire has already committed to submitting an expression of interest for a devolution deal and devolution of the Adult Education Budget should form part of the deal. This would create local, integrated skills and employment offers tailored to the needs of our local economy and residents.

Unemployed - The Budget confirmed funding for the Restart scheme in England and Wales, to continue providing intensive and tailored support to long-term unemployed people to help them find work. Locally we are already engaged with Fedcap who have been commissioned by DWP to deliver Restart in the South-Central region, including Reading.

ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) - Funding for the UK's commitment to welcome up to 20,000 Afghan citizens over the coming years, including £20,520 per person for Local Authorities who settle Afghan families, with an additional £17 million available to top-up housing costs and an extra £20 million pot of flexible funding. These funds include an amount for language training.

³ Restrictions apply. The Government sets out which specific qualifications at L3 it will fund.

Family Hubs - The Budget announced new investment of £302 million to fund new programmes to support parents, provide bespoke breast-feeding services and parent-infant mental support, and funding to rollout Family Hubs across England. This provides further opportunities for the co-location of family learning.

Annex B - Qualification Descriptions

What qualification levels mean

There are 9 qualification levels in England, starting at Entry level through to Level 8. You can find out more about levels on the [Gov.uk website](https://www.gov.uk). New Directions offer courses from pre-entry and entry level through to level 5.

Pre-entry and entry level

Each entry level qualification is available at three sub levels, 1, 2 and 3. Entry level 3 is the most difficult of these levels. Entry qualifications are:

- Entry level award
- Entry level certificate
- entry level Diploma
- entry level English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)
- entry level essential skills
- entry level functional skills
- Skills for Life

What you will gain:

- basic knowledge and skills
- ability to apply learning in everyday situations
- You may also study non-accredited courses at this level.

Level 1(L1)

What you will gain:

- basic knowledge and skills
- ability to apply learning with guidance or supervision
- may be linked to job competence

Level 1 qualifications are:

- Level 1 awards or extended awards or certificates in vocational subjects
- GCSE - grades 3, 2, 1 or grades D, E, F, G
- Level 1 ESOL
- Level 1 Essential Skills
- Level 1 Functional Skills
- Level 1 national vocational qualification (NVQ)
- Traineeships are available at this level.

You may also study non-accredited courses at this level.

Level 2 (L2)

What you will gain:

- intermediate levels of knowledge and understanding of a subject
- ability to perform a variety of tasks with some guidance or supervision
- appropriate for many job roles
- work placements are a typical component of most L2 technical, vocational or applied subjects.

Level 2 qualifications are:

- CSE - grade 1
- GCSE - grades 9,8,7,6,5,4 or grades A*, A, B, C
- Level 2 awards, certificates or Diplomas in vocational subjects
- Level 2 ESOL
- Level 2 Functional Skills
- Level 2 Essential Skills
- Level 2 national certificate or diploma
- Level 2 national vocational qualification (NVQ)
- level - grade A, B or C
- Intermediate Apprenticeships are also available at this level.

Level 3 (L3)

What you will gain:

- you will study more advanced level subjects and could apply a range of knowledge, skills and behaviours at an advanced to higher level
- Some Level 3 qualifications carry UCAS points and so this level is appropriate if you plan to study at a higher level or want to go to university.
- You typically need to have or be working towards a L2 qualification in Maths and English to be able to study technical or vocational qualifications at this level.
- You will work independently at this level, and/or, in some cases, supervise and train others in their field of work
- Work placements are a typical component of most L3 technical, vocational or applied subjects.

Level 3 qualifications are:

- A Level
- Access to higher education diploma
- Applied general
- AS Level
- International Baccalaureate diploma
- Level 3 award, certificate or diploma.
- Level 3 ESOL
- Level 3 national certificate or diploma
- Level 3 national vocational qualification (NVQ)
- Tech Level
- Advanced Apprenticeships are also available at this level.

Annex C - Provision delivered by partners and sub-contractors

Reading Community Learning Centre

Provide education and support for ethnic minority women and their families, particularly women who are marginalised, to achieve their full potential.

Berkshire School of English

Provide targeted online/digital English courses for adults who are speakers of other languages.

Reading Children's Centres (Brighter Futures for Children)

Provide family learning, including parenting courses and early years development.

Reading Libraries

Provide family learning through regular Rhyme Time sessions at Reading's 7 libraries, open to parents/carers and pre-school children.

Rosetta Life

Rosetta Life is a group of artists who work with those living with life-limiting illness to shape and share stories that matter through movement, song, image, film and writing. They aim to transform the stigma of illness and change the perception of disability.

World Education Berkshire - Food 4 Families

Provide a community-based Reading project for local residents which aims to enable them to manage land in their own neighbourhoods for the sustainable growing of food for their own consumption, encourage healthier eating and lifestyle habits and develop understanding of the broader environmental, cultural and economic aspects of sustainable food production.

For more information visit: www.newdirectionscollege.ac.uk