

# Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee



**Reading**  
Borough Council

Working better with you

12 July 2023

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| <b>Title</b>                            | New Directions College – Annual update to ACE Committee           |
| <b>Purpose of the report</b>            | To note the report for information                                |
| <b>Report status</b>                    | Public report   |
| <b>Report author</b> (name & job title) | Andrea Wood, Principal and Adult Learning & Skills Manager        |
| <b>Lead Councillor</b> (name & title)   | Cllr Ruth McEwan, Lead Councillor for Education and Public Health |
| <b>Corporate priority</b>               | Thriving Communities  |
| <b>Recommendations</b>                  | 1. That the committee notes the report for information            |

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 In January 2022, ACE Committee requested an annual report that highlights the key activity and outcomes delivered by New Directions College.
- 1.2 This report provides the requested update and covers January 2022 to June 23. The report highlights the core service offer, performance, emerging developments, and learner feedback.

## 2. Policy Context

- 2.1 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 (soon to be called the National Skills Fund) of £1.3m and by a small and reducing budget provided by the Council. Additional commercial income comes from course fees and apprenticeship delivery and in 2022, the College received funding for Multiply, the national numeracy programme funded as part of the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF). 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.
- 2.2 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 3 (A 'Level equivalent') and below. Adults accessing provision at New Directions College must be over the age of 19 and meet strict eligibility and residency rules set by the Department for Education.
- 2.3 Nationally, the Department for Education (ESFA) sets out the funding rules and regulations of the Adult Education Budget. Locally, the Council uses a placed-based approach to both service and curriculum planning and development. We use local social, economic, human, and environmental data and intelligence to build our local learning offer. The Curriculum across all adult learning programmes has a clearly defined purpose

that is relevant to the education and training needs and interests of learners, and to local employment opportunities, and supports local and national priorities.

2.4 ESFA funding is focused on people who are disadvantaged and least likely to participate in education and training. The college works well with other partners to widen participation and support learners' progression to further learning and/or employment relevant to their personal circumstances. Furthermore, the College has excellent partnerships with employers and other partners such as Jobcentre Plus, to ensure that teaching, learning, and assessment enable learners to develop personal, social and employability skills that prepare them well for their intended job role, career aims and/or personal goals.

2.5 The college offers a good apprenticeship provision. The apprenticeship curriculum is designed to meet the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship and to meet the needs of the employer. Employer engagement is generally good and improving. Where possible, apprentices work towards accredited qualifications and generally achievement rates and end point assessment outcomes are excellent.

2.6 Adult skills features as a key priority in several national policy areas. From the FE White Paper, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and the Levelling Up agenda.

### **3. New Directions College Annual Report for ACE Committee**

3.1 Reading Borough Council has directly delivered adult education since 1958. 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.

3.2 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 has previously subcontracted with other providers/the community and voluntary sector to deliver community learning across Reading. The core of 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 (including courses delivered through Multiply – the national numeracy programme) and digital skills
- ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages)
- Vocational and technical qualifications (L1, L2, L3 & L5) 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 to develop independence, social skills and employment skills.
- Employability and preparing for work for long term unemployed including CV and interview workshops as well as careers information advice and guidance. The college offers 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.

3.3 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/Free Courses for Jobs offer. This funds specific L3 courses for adults who have not yet achieved a L3 qualification.

- 3.4 Due to significant changes to the funding rules and regulations, the college will be pausing on subcontracting arrangements in 2023-24. However, in 2025 the College intends to award up to £100,000 to local partners and subcontractors to broaden the community learning offer across Reading. We will be looking at how we can collaborate with other council commissioning programmes such as Narrowing the Gap to maximise opportunities.
- 3.5 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.
- 3.6 A large proportion of our learners are long-term unemployed, vulnerable families, people with mental health conditions, adults with special educational needs or disabilities, asylum seekers and refugees.
- 3.7 Through the ESFA grant, the college provides Additional Learner Support (ALS) 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.
- 3.8 The current overall achievement rate for government funded education and skills at the College is 91.4% (2021-22), which is 2.6% above the last known national rate (88.8%NR 2020) and an 18% improvement since 2018 when the overall rate was 73.4%.
- 3.9 In 2021-22 the college enrolled 1246 learners on government funded further education and skills provision, 976 (78.3%) were female and 270 (21.6%) were male. This demonstrates that the service works with more female learners than the national average of 59.8% (22-23 in year data return).
- 3.10 In 2021-22, 255 (20.4% of the cohort) learners declared a learning difficulty and/or disability. This is higher than the national average of 18% of learners with LDD in 19+ education and skills. Overall, learners with LDD achieve 2.4% less than their peers without LDD at an overall rate of 89%.
- 3.11 Our learners come from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds; the three biggest cohorts are Black/Black British, Asian/Asian British and White British. Our three biggest age cohorts are age 31-36, 37-42, and 43-48.
- 3.12 In 2021-22, the most popular courses were those in 'Skills for Life' which include English, mathematics and ESOL. This was closely followed by courses in education and training, digital skills and childcare.
- 3.13 **Enrolment figures:** Prior to Covid, the college was starting to see a general decline in overall learner numbers. In 2017-18 914 learners were enrolled, in 2018-19 730 learners were enrolled. Whilst this was in line with a national decline in adults participating in learning, the fall was at a faster rate. Covid had a significant impact on

participation and 2020-21 was still impacted by learners who were more hesitant to engage in group learning or had barriers to participating through hybrid learning. Just 323 learners enrolled. In 2021-22, the College saw a significant increase in learner enrolments at nearly 2000 which brought figures back up and beyond pandemic levels.

- 3.14 An increase in our offer of ESOL provision and a package of learner support that helped reduce fees, contributed to the rise in learner volumes. The college was also responsive to meeting the learning needs of an increase in refugees to Reading. Notably, Ukrainian and Afghan.
- 3.15 In 21-22 the College started to deliver hospitality programmes for the first time. These courses are specifically designed for adults with mild to moderate Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND). Community learning also diversified as we began to offer community arts programmes. These included special family learning events for the Queen's jubilee and King's coronation as well as a regular art club delivered within the community.
- 3.16 The service responded well to the local demand of delivering an increased volume of ESOL classes for Ukrainian refugees and developed a partnership with a local Church group who were supporting Hong Kong Nationals with skills for employment.
- 3.17 The College's developing relationship with local employers, such as Ikea, Thames Water and Crowne Plaza and job centre plus resulted in an increased offer of employability and sector-based skills programmes for unemployed adults with potential job offers at the end. On average 43% of learners participating in these courses are offered employment with that employer or other employers by the end of their course. Furthermore, the College was invited by Job Centre Plus to deliver a weekly job club from the job centre in Reading.
- 3.18 In January 2022, the College secured over £160k in Local Growth funds through the Local Enterprise Partnership. This funding enabled the development and growth of a new partnership with Ways into Work, a local supported employment provider. The funding was used by Ways into Work to open a new Café in which learners will access work experience and job opportunities. The remaining funding will be used to install new computers and assisted technology at our main site in Whitley. Overall, the project should enable 300+ adults with SEND to access hospitality training and work experience over 5 years. This project was nationally recognised as one of the ways Reading Borough Council is building inclusive access to learning, leisure and culture at the recent LGC Awards for Diversity and Inclusion.
- 3.19 The College is now better represented at an increased number of external Boards and panels i.e., Social Inclusion Board, Mental Health and Wellbeing Board etc. which is making a significant contribution to increased partnership working, a rise in participation rates and better alignment of provision meeting local needs. In addition, the College established and chairs the Berkshire Adult Learning Officers Group, a group made up of Senior Adult and Community Learning Officers from each of the six local authorities across Berkshire.
- 3.20 In May 2022, the College introduced a new recognition scheme to recognise and celebrate the achievements and success and contribution and impact of our learners, staff, volunteers, partners, and subcontractors. In September 22 the College held the first Adult Learning Awards Ceremony at the Concert Hall in Reading. The recognition scheme runs monthly and will culminate each year in an annual awards ceremony.
- 3.21 2022-23 has seen growth in our apprenticeship delivery and recognition for the quality of our end point assessment. In November 22 the Institute of Leadership and Management formally recognised the college for '*excellence in end point assessment*'. This prestigious award is only awarded to a handful of training providers nationally. The

college is now delivering apprenticeships for other local authorities and employers, including Southampton City Council, Sandwell Council and Launchpad in Reading.

3.22 In February 2023, following a formal inspection, the college received formal accreditation with Matrix, the sector standard for providing high quality information advice and guidance.

3.23 In March 2023 the college established a new Governance Board consisting of the Lead Member for Education, Cllr Ruth McEwan, the Assistant Director for Culture and AD for Housing and Neighbourhood Services, two external representatives from the further education sector, Public Health Consultant, and the BfFC Director of Education. The Governance Board will meet 3 times a year and will:

- Provide advice and guidance for the development of adult skills and community learning across Reading
- Monitor and evaluate the portfolio of provision funded by the ESFA
- Endorse the annual accountability statement and three-year strategic plan/statement of intent for Adult Skills and Community Learning
- Review the priorities of the plan on an annual basis
- Monitor service and financial performance against an agreed set of KPIs and the quality improvement plan.
- Consider and recommend for approval by the Board the annual Self-Assessment Plan and associated Quality Improvement Plan (Ofsted requirement).

3.24 In June 2023 the college along with leisure and culture services in Reading, was formally recognised by the LGC and awarded winner of the Diversity and Inclusion category. Judges were impressed with the holistic and inclusive approach the council is taking to delivering tangible benefits and outcomes for a broad spectrum of the community, covering physical and other additional needs, tackling health inequalities and educational and skills development opportunities.

3.25 In October 2023, the college will be showcasing the history of our service and adult education at a special exhibition at Reading Museum. This forms part of the service's 65<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations.

3.26 The 2022 Learner Satisfaction Survey results showed:

- 95% of learners enjoy learning at New Directions College (all or most of the time).
- 94% of learners would recommend us and 6% might recommend us.
- 97% of learners agree or strongly agree that Tutors listen to what they have to say in lessons.
- 92% of learners say that the College provides them with information about their next steps.
- 95% of learners say they feel safe at college (always or mostly).
- 92% of learners agree or strongly agree that the College encourages them to respect people from different backgrounds.
- 91% of learners agree or strongly agree there is someone to talk to at college if something is worrying them.
- 85% of learners agree or strongly agree the College encourages them to be independent and take on new responsibilities.
- 82% of learners say the behaviour of other learners is always good.
  
- 77% of learners say their Tutor always helps them to do their best.
- 76% of learners say the College supports them to look after their mental health and wellbeing.
- 64% of learners say the College supports them to look after their physical health and wellbeing.

### 3.27 The 2022 end of course survey results show:

- The top reason for learners studying with us is to develop in their career or to get a better job.
- Learners tell us they enjoy developing their confidence at college and that the friendly and welcoming atmosphere makes the difference.
- 96% of learners agree or strongly agree that their Tutors give them feedback on their progress.
- 94% of learners would recommend their course and 92% of learners would recommend their Tutor.
- 92% of learners agree or strongly agree there are plenty of opportunities to join discussions in class.
- 92% of learners agree or strongly agree their skills have improved.
- 92% of learners agree or strongly agree that their knowledge has improved.
- 89.5% of learners agree or strongly agree they are more confident because of learning at New Directions College.
- 87.5% of learners agree or strongly agree they had all the information they needed at the start of the course.
- 87.5% of learners agree or strongly agree the course met their expectations.
- 87.5% of learners agree or strongly agree their Tutor is a specialist
- 87.5% of learners would recommend the venue.
- 77% of learners agree or strongly agree that using IT helped them learn.

### 3.28 Comments from learners in the end of course survey 2022:

*“Although doing my course online, the support I received from my learning provider cannot be understated and I am thankful for her help, as she is a big part in my accomplishment today. If I was to suggest an improvement it would have been nice to interact with other apprentices more. I didn’t know any doing my course.” – L3 Business Admin, Apprentice*

*“Everyone in the class have been incredibly helpful and supportive. Sheila and James have always welcome us with a smile and positiveness throughout. They were incredibly supported, organised and the materials provided for us, including the online work, have always been clean, on time, relevant, appropriate, challenging and supported our own development. THANK YOU!” – Learner, GCSE Maths*

*“I really enjoyed the course Holly was kind, patient, engaging and thorough. Really appreciate the creche facilities and cannot stress highly enough that without that help and funding I would not have been able to study the course to help me change careers. Holly has been quick with feedback, encouraging and gave good constructive feedback on how to improve the work. I will miss coming to her classes and really appreciate the extra help that new Directions College has delivered in enabling parents to be able to study and help with the financial burden.” – Learner, L1 Childcare*

*“I am very happy with my tutor, Julie. She gives me a lot of confidence about my learning skills. I enjoy the class. The college makes me feel positive. The teacher creates a good atmosphere and good vibes. I feel more confident in communicating.” – Learner, Phonics*

*“I was happy to enrol on the course, having been keen for a long time, to start. However, a bit more preparation and adjustment time would have helped me as a learner on the Autistic spectrum.” – Learner, Award in Education and Teaching*

## 4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 4.1. New Directions College aims to deliver an outstanding quality of education that supports all our learners to achieve future social and economic prosperity. The service directly contributes to the Council’s three themes

- Healthy Environment
- Thriving Communities
- Inclusive Economy

4.2 We measure the impact of our service through the following:

- Our learners gain new skills and qualifications, report enhanced levels of knowledge and self-development, including increased resilience, confidence, and independence.
- Our learners know how to keep physically and mentally healthy and have access to education for sustainable development (ESD).
- An outstanding quality of education develops personal and social skills, including employability skills that prepare learners well for their intended job role, career aims and/or personal goals.
- Learners are and feel safe. Arrangements for Safeguarding are appropriate and effective.

4.3 These success measures are underpinned by “Our Foundations” explaining the ways we work at the Council:

- People first
- Digital transformation
- Building self-reliance
- Getting the best value
- Collaborating with others

## 5 Environmental and Climate Implications

5.1 This report is an annual update on New Directions College and does not have any environmental or climate implications.

## 6 Community Engagement

6.1 This is an annual update report on New Directions College for ACE committee. Data contained in this report is already in the public domain.

## 7 Equality Implications

7.1 This is an annual update report and does not have equality implications.

## 8 Other Relevant Considerations

8.1 This is an annual update report on New Directions College for ACE committee. There are no other relevant considerations applicable.

## 9 Legal Implications

9.1 This is an annual update report on New Directions College for ACE committee. There are no legal implications.

## 10 Financial Implications

10.1 This is an annual update report on New Directions College for ACE committee. There are no financial implications.

## 11 Timetable for Implementation

11.1 Not applicable.

## 12 Background Papers

12.1 There are none.