

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

16 October 2024



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
Working better with you

<b>Title</b>	New Directions College Annual Report 2023-24
<b>Purpose of the report</b>	To note the report for information
<b>Report status</b>	Public report
<b>Report author</b>	Lisa Welch, Principal and Adult Learning & Skills Manager
<b>Lead Councillor</b>	Cllr Ruth McEwan
<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 activities and outcomes delivered by New Directions College.
- 1.2. This report provides the requested latest update and covers activity during the period June 2023 to July 2024 and the performance information for the 2022-23 academic year. 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 primarily funded by an annual National Skills Fund (formerly the Adult Education Budget) of £1.3m and a small budget provided by the Council. Additional income comes from course fees and apprenticeship delivery. In 2023, the College continued to receive funding for Multiply for year 2 and year 3 of the national numeracy programme funded as part of the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF). The main National Skills Fund grant is issued by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) which is an executive agency of the Department for Education (DfE). The College must also operate under strict funding rules and regulations as set out by the ESFA. The College is inspected by Ofsted under the Education Inspection Framework (EIF). The College is currently graded Good and is due another inspection within the next 2 years.
- 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 Skills Fund. 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 programme. 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. The newly formed Skills England, which has been created by the Government (July 2024), will have the role in ensuring we have a highly trained workforce needed to deliver the national, regional and local skills needs over the next decade, aligned with a new Industrial Strategy. Adult Skills is a key area of its oversight of the post 16 skills ecosystem.

### **3. New Directions College 2023-24**

#### **Background**

- 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 capability, 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 subcontracts with other providers/the community and voluntary sector to deliver community learning and multiply courses 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 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. The College current delivers L3 qualifications in Early Years, Teaching Assistant, Business Administration, Leadership and Management.
  - 3.4. Due to significant changes to the funding rules and regulations, the College has paused subcontracting arrangements for 2023-24 with the exception of provision for the delivery of Multiply. Following the clarification of the changes to Community Learning funding, 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 are actively working with the Closing the Gap commissioning team, exploring ways to maximise opportunities for shared outcomes for learners.
  - 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 church halls. In addition, once the new Central Library has been built, the College will be delivering provision from the proposed new training room within the Civic Centre.
  - 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 to learners which can include financial support with the cost of childcare, course fees and associated course and travel expenses whilst accessing learning at College. The College also provides access to digital kit and equipment to support all learners in fully participating in learning. Additionally, 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 as well as specialist support for the visually impaired and deaf. We also provide full assessments for dyslexia, exam access arrangements and exam concessions.

### **3.8. Outcomes**

Overall, the College experienced a 5% decline in achievement rates from 91.41% in 21-22 to 85.89% in 22-23. This was a result of an increase in learner volumes at entry and level 1, mainly ESOL and skills for life learners, who due to their circumstances, some being refugees and or asylum seekers subject to dispersal orders were unable to continue their learning. Despite this, the College is performing at around the national rate of 86.2%.

- 3.9. In 2022-23 the College enrolled 1,283 learners on government funded further education and skills provision. The College continues to mainly teach females (79%) over males (21%). Females perform slightly better than males at 87.5% versus 80.2% for males. Females at the College outperform the national rate of 86.2% by 1.3%.
- 3.10. Adults with a disability or learning difficulty (LDD) represented 16.45% of the learner cohort in 22-23 which was a decline from 20% in the previous year. Learners with an LDD marginally outperformed their peers without LDD by 0.5% in 22-23. This is a testament to the high quality of support that learners with LDD receive.

- 3.11. Our learners come from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds, reflecting the population of the town; 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 2022-23, the most popular courses were those in 'Skills for Life' which include english, mathematics and ESOL, followed by courses in education and training, digital skills and childcare.

### **3.13. In Year Activity**

The College continues to be responsive to meeting the learning needs of an increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers in Reading. Notably, Ukrainian and Afghan, but also increasingly supporting the large number of Hong Kong nationals. ESOL learner numbers for 2022-23 were 671 a significant increase from the 271 in 2020.

- 3.14. The College has been successful in securing additional funding from South East Strategic Partnership for Migration to establish and chair a Reading ESOL Provider Network Group with the aim of working collaboratively to support the high demand for provision as well as a mechanism to share best practice, support the use of shared resources where appropriate and to seek to secure additional funding when opportunities arise. Members of the group include Reading Community Learning Centre, WEA, The English Language Centre, Activate Learning, Palladium who have the Home Office contract in Berkshire to deliver employment support to Refugees.
- 3.15. The College continued to build its offer of learning in hospitality which saw learner numbers grow to 40+ and overall achievement rates of 96.7% which is a positive achievement for this emerging curriculum offer. These courses are specifically designed for adults with mild to moderate SEND. Most of these learners have continued in learning and or are part of the College's work experience programmes. However, supporting adults with SEND into employment continues to be challenge, especially in light of Barista and Beyond' s town centre closure, and further work is required with employers to support this.
- 3.16. The College's learner café has provided work experience opportunities for our SEND Hospitality learners which has helped build their confidence and skills in a safe and supportive environment.
- 3.17. The College's developing relationship with local employers, such as Ikea, Thames Water, Crowne Plaza and Job Centre Plus resulted in an increased offer of programmes for unemployed adults. Furthermore, the College was invited by Job Centre Plus to continue delivering a weekly job club from the job centre in Reading. Overall 15% of the College's learners who attended provision in 2022-23, moved into paid employment.
- 3.18. The College continues to be well represented at an increased number of external Boards and panels i.e., Social Inclusion Board, Mental Health and Wellbeing Board, Sanctuary Partner Forum 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 continues to chair the Berkshire Adult Learning Officers Group, a group of Senior Adult and Community Learning Officers from each of the six local authorities across Berkshire and the Principal has been highly involved in the development of the education and skills theme of the Berkshire Prosperity Board.
- 3.19. The College has continued with its Recognition Award programme which issued 195 awards to staff, learners and volunteers during 22-23. A further 143 awards, were made at the third annual awards ceremony which took place in the Town Hall in July 24, to coincide with celebrating the end of academic year.
- 3.20. 2022-23 was the College's 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. To mark the occasion, the College secured £10k in funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and curated a historical exhibition which opened in November 2023 which was visited by 58,000 people.

- 3.21. Multiply has grown from strength to strength throughout 2022-23 and was recognised by the Department for Education for its outstanding partnership approach with the NHS and other local authorities and high-quality delivery. The College is now focused on securing the legacy of this programme which ends in March 2025, by continuing the partnerships that have been established and building new provision to meet the needs of adults and employers.
- 3.22. 2022-23 has seen continued growth in our apprenticeship delivery. The College is now delivering apprenticeships for Business Administration and Leadership and Management for other local authorities and employers, including Southampton City Council, Sandwell Council and Launchpad in Reading.
- 3.23. In June 2024, there was a change in Leadership at the College with Andrea Wood departing and, Lisa Welch, previously the Deputy Principal, being appointed as Principal, providing strong transition and ongoing continuity for the College.

### **3.24. Learner Feedback**

The 2023 Learner Satisfaction Survey Results showed:

- 100% of learners say “yes”, they feel safe at College.
- 99% of learners enjoy learning at New Directions College (all or most of the time).
- 99% of learners say “yes”, the College encourages them to respect other learners and College staff.
- 99% of learners say “yes” they are happy with the way staff treat them at New Directions College.
- 99% of learners say “yes” they are happy with New Directions College.
- 98% of learners say “yes”, they feel listened to by their tutors and other staff.
- 98% of learners say “yes” they feel they are making progress towards their goals.
- 97% of learners would recommend us to friend and family.
- 95% of learners say “yes”, there is someone to talk to at College if something is worrying them.
- 89% of learners say the College supports them to look after their mental health and wellbeing.
- 76% of learners say the College encourages them to look after their physical health.

3.25. The 2023 End of Course Learner Survey Showed:

- 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 a difference.
- 94% of learners would recommend their course and 94% of learners would recommend their Tutor.
- 94% of learners agree or strongly agree there are plenty of opportunities to join discussions in class.
- 94% of learners agree or strongly agree their skills have improved.
- 94% of learners agree or strongly agree that their knowledge has improved.
- 93% of learners agree or strongly agree they are more confident because of learning at New Directions College.
- 92% of learners agree or strongly agree that their Tutors give them feedback on their progress.
- 91% of learners agree or strongly agree the course met their expectations.
- 90% of learners agree or strongly agree their Tutor is a specialist.
- 90% of learners would recommend the venue.
- 86% of learners agree or strongly agree that using IT helped them learn.
- 82% of learners agree or strongly agree they had all the information they needed at the start of the course.

3.26. Comments from Learners from the end of course survey 2023:

*“Simon is very knowledgeable and skilful in the topic of employability. He is able to help us to see ourselves in very positive terms, empowering us to try applying for potentially suitable industries/jobs. We have fun along the class time. I love his role play for demonstrating effective and ineffective interview practices. We enjoyed the class so much and many times we were fully engaged in class activities and discussion. It was a brilliant learning experience! Thank you so much, Simon! He has conducted a wonderful course! If I were to comment on area for improvement, it would be better to skip those content in the first session which may not apply to a short 6-sessions workshop.” – Learner, Employability/Interview Skills*

*“The course exceeded my expectations, mainly because of the highly professional tutor and his ability to create friendly atmosphere in class where everybody feels welcome. Also, I was very pleased by his range of knowledge which went far behind course content. David was very helpful, patient, and ready to assist in any case. Thank YOU!” – Learner, IKEA SWAP*

*“My tutor was very approachable and explained the things that I didn't understand in to more details, I feel I have learnt some new skills which I didn't know at the beginning of the course. I would like to get in contact with someone to do the next course.” – Learner, Digital Skills*

*“The tutor was very willing to answer questions from individuals, which is very helpful, tutor got extensive knowledge and experience and most importantly very patient to all the queries. Overall, very interesting and useful course. Thank you tutor :)” – Learner, Award in Education and Teaching*

*This Course was very helpful, I gained confidence and Knowledge about Schools. Tutor support is amazing and encouragement is awesome. Special thanks to my lead and Tutor for helping me in successful completion of course, Thank you all for Providing me with all facilities for completing my course.” – Learner, STL L2*

#### 4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

4.4. 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 themes 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**

- 5.4. Throughout the year the College made excellent progress towards being a more sustainable College. With the previous Principal being the Policy Lead for Sustainability at a national level on the HOLEX Policy Forum and the successful recruitment of our Lead for Education for Sustainable Development. The College is well on its way to outlining its strategic approach to sustainability as well as leading the way locally and regionally with an offer of carbon literacy training and support for the further education sector and employers.

## **6. Community Engagement**

- 6.4. The College has an emerging relationship with the John Madejski Academy (JMA), supporting parents of the children who will be joining the school in September 2024 with a view to offering provision that meets emerging needs.

## **7. Equality Implications**

- 7.4. The College has a number of key actions within the Council's Tackling Inequality Strategy and is delivering three projects as part of the Council's Placed Based Pilot project. The projects are centred around adults in Whitley and Church Wards and are largely focused on employment opportunities and support.

## **8. Other Relevant Considerations**

- 8.4. This is an annual update report on New Directions College for ACE Committee. There are no other relevant considerations.

## **9. Legal Implications**

- 9.4. This is an annual update report on New Directions College for ACE Committee. There are no legal implications.

## **10. Financial Implications**

- 10.4. This is an annual update report on New Directions College for ACE Committee. There are no financial implications.

## **11. Timetable for Implementation**

- 11.4. Not applicable.

## **12. Background Papers**

- 12.4. There are none.