



Northumberland

County Council

FAMILY & CHILDREN'S OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

3RD FEBRUARY 2022

Annual Report for Learning and Skills Service 2020/21

Report of Cath McEvoy-Carr, Executive Director of Adult Social Care & Children's Services

Cabinet Member: Cllr Guy Renner-Thompson, Lead Member Children's Services

Purpose of report

The annual report for Learning and Skills Service is provided to highlight the performance during the academic year 2020/21; present the work of the Careers Guidance Team and provides an understanding of the role and impact of the Employability and Skills team within the wider service. The Learning and Skills Service contains a number of specialist skills and support areas and provides training for young people age 16-19, adults and apprentices across eight campuses in Northumberland as well as training in the workplace.

Recommendations

Members are recommended to:

- Consider and review the content of the annual report.
- Endorse the approach developing the Northumberland curriculum models to enhance the learning experience and support our students to acquire the skills and knowledge to be successful in life.
- Recognise the performance given the continuing challenges of the global pandemic against operating circumstances and the valuable support provided to all learners within the:
 - Learning and Skills Service
 - Careers Guidance Team
 - Employability and Skills Service
- Review the improvement actions set out in the 2019/20 report (impact in bold)
 - Skills strategy which meets Northumberland and North of Tyne - **developed and approved by cabinet**
 - More young people (16-18) access the right programme and support to be able to achieve well with good opportunities for employment - **retention for young people improved in 2020/21 and the achievement rate increased by 10 percentage points**

- More adult learners enrol to improve their chances to gain employment through a curriculum offer which supports this approach- **destinations in 2020/21 improved significantly with more students than ever progressing to the next level of training and to employment**
- A coherent approach working with businesses, building relationships which benefit industry, skills, schools and our residents (**Introduction of Global Bridge digital platform linking schools and industry, Curriculum research with sector specific career links, employer led partnership development e.g., Port of Blyth welding, integration of planning and skills via section 106 agreement**)

Agree the identified areas for improvement and the routines established to monitor progress

- Strengthen curriculum models and the pastoral model to support better retention and achievement in Northumberland Skills
- Continue the transformation to a dynamic and flexible demand led service
- Continue to focus on the Apprenticeship model for Northumberland to meet the needs of more services and businesses
- Synchronise employability programmes and create a progression model to support sustainable employment with skills training
- Underpin the Preparation for Adulthood agenda in two ways; undertake all statutory EHCP reviews with year 9 pupils to plan career pathways; develop routes and partnerships to have a sustainable training and employment route for young people with EHCP and SEN support, including internally within NCC.

Link to Corporate Plan

This report is in strong accordance with the following priorities in the Corporate Plan:

- We want you to have access to the things you need; ‘connecting’
- We want you to achieve and realise your potential; ‘learning’
- We want you to attract more and better jobs; ‘thriving’

In addition, the report is directly linked to the Education and Skills priorities

Priority 1- We will take a key role in the strategic leadership of educational improvement in Education and Skills in Northumberland. Our vision will define the purpose and will ensure connectivity and inclusion to eradicate gaps.

Priority 4- We will develop an alternative education model which offers routes for children which support their future career choice; the model may also support keeping our children in education and provide a positive and financially viable contribution to our communities.

Priority 10- We will develop key relationships with education and industry to support careers ambition, curriculum development and routes into post 16 and Higher Education which support the economic priorities in Northumberland.

Priority 11- We will develop a strategy and create an appropriate curriculum supporting the needs of all our young people and adults in Northumberland so that more can access

suitable/appropriate/good fit apprenticeships, skills training and development to underpin careers, employment and in work progression.

Priority 12- We will work closely with Newcastle City Council, North Tyneside Council and North of Tyne Combined Authority to be innovative in our approaches and to be ground-breaking and leading the way in education for all our stakeholders.

1. Key issues

- 1.1 The annual self-assessment review grades the Learning and Skills service as GOOD with some areas that require improvement. Areas where performance could be better will form part of quality improvement planning for routine monitoring as well as the areas where the focus and emphasis need to continue the changes to meet strategic and economic priorities.
- 1.2 The impact of lockdown has meant reduced recruitment in adult learning whilst residents chose to stay safe and not join classrooms on site. The development of a virtual offer is good but needs more promotion and development to not only continue to increase the uptake but to also reach into areas of the county to support greater engagement with learning, ultimately supporting progression to higher levels of study and employment.
- 1.3 The work to transform the service into a responsive and dynamic offer meeting the needs of residents and businesses continues, supporting more and more young people and adults. The service in particular is able to support young people and adults with a strong pastoral and personalised curriculum model to meet their needs and to work with them to ensure the starting point, the pathway, and the journey led to successful outcomes including employment.
- 1.4 Working with our young people to identify much earlier in their progression discussions their potential career pathways so that they feel safe and secure and feel that they can be ambitious and succeed is a core principle embedded within the Education and Skills priorities. In particular this work will have a strong focus for our young people who have Education Health Care Plans as the service develops plans and pathways to improve the routes to sustainable employment.

2. Background

2.1 Learning and Skills Service

2.1.1 2020-21 was another year of disruption and change and a very untypical academic year for education, skills and training. The Learning and Skills service self-assessment grades the service as GOOD, in terms of Ofsted gradings for 2020/21. The last inspection was based upon the Common Inspection Framework (CIF) and graded the service as GOOD in July 2018. The new Education Inspection Framework (EIF) was implemented September 2019 and has a change in priorities and areas of focus which determine the overall grade. The work continues to develop the service, now Northumberland Skills, to provide excellence in training and a values-based

education model and student experience as a platform to further study and employment.

2.1.2 Adult Learning for those aged over 19 forms the largest majority of the service and remains as a GOOD performance with an achievement rate of 84%, just below the National Average. Given the challenges to ensure learners remained on programme, engaged and making good progress throughout the pandemic this achievement rate is reassuring. English and maths programmes this year were impacted particularly by retention (i.e., student leavers) Programmes commenced across the year and when tracking the learners, it can be seen that leavers coincide with increased school restrictions and lockdown where parents and carers adjusted their focus to home learning. The achievement rate excluding English and mathematics is 93%. Achievement rates for learners with EHCP is outstanding at 100% (learning continued on site throughout lockdown/ restrictions).

2.1.3 There were 1027 enrolments onto programmes across eight campuses in 2020/21 for adult learners and 38 enrolments for young people aged 16-18 with the largest majority (96.3%) of enrolments being adult learning. It is important to note that there is no publication of performance rates nationally and these cannot be compared to any previous year performance.

2.1.4 The range of courses included Diplomas in Early Years Practitioner, Supported Teaching & Learning and Childcare. Diplomas in Bricklaying; Painting and Decorating and Construction Skills. Diplomas in Hair & Beauty and Catering. Bespoke SEND, Pre-Vocational, Skills for Independence and Work and Personal and Social Development as well as English and mathematics, languages and English for Speakers of Other Languages. Business and customer services, management training and digital skills have also expanded in 2020/21.

2.1.5 Staff and learners continue to demonstrate tremendous resilience working in covid safe environments, managing household absences from work and school and continuing to learn new skills. The further investment of digital devices in 2020/21 has supported a more continuous learning journey and the learner's ability to adapt to online is improved from the sudden change in 2019/20.

2.1.6. Apprenticeship recruitment in line with classroom-based learning also decreased significantly. Apprenticeship performance rates overall have reduced with some Apprentices leaving their roles, many owing to Covid related issues. The 19-24 age group (the largest cohort) however performed well above their peer Apprentices. The introduction of a new Apprenticeship manager has focused the work of the model of delivery to help more Apprentices successfully complete and achieve but more importantly to focus on a pastoral element of support in the workplace. Apprentices - Positive learner feedback about blended delivery received along with the appropriate level of challenge and support which has resulted in minimal delays with end point assessment (EPA) A good higher-level achievement at EPA for apprentices - as an example of the Apprentices working towards IC Qualifications EPA their results for 2020/21 were more than good with 84% of apprentices who completed their EPA achieving a higher-level result.

Use of Padlet to gather Learner comments and views throughout the year 20/21 to ensure that learners felt listened to and responses made appropriately https://padlet.com/Northumberland_Skills/Learner_Voice

2.1.7 in 2020/21 a new curriculum model including 6 weekly reviews was introduced to support learners progress on course much more clearly for all learners undertaking classroom and workshop-based programmes, this incremental review approach underpinning achievement rate improvements.

2.1.5 Internal progression is Good for learners, more than 94% progress and complete another programme after their first engagement but still not enough learners secure an Apprenticeship. As an example of the 127 adult learners undertaking Health and Care qualifications - 97 progressed into employment.

2.1.6 The curriculum extends learning beyond the vocational elements of the course, providing the opportunity for learners to development personal, social and employability skills. Lerner feedback is very strong in this aspect.

2.1.7 Development of Study Skills across the Service is Good. This has been a key focus in 2020/21 with a new pastoral lead, leading to learners feeling well supported in readiness to progress to the next phase of education and/or employment.

2.1.8 Virtual learning continued to be adapted and developed quickly by both staff and learners alike. This has been embedded into normal expectations during the continued Pandemic period. The case studies developed reflect the learning which has accelerated for those who embraced the need to continue their studies virtually as well as highlighting the need for a blended approach for some of our most vulnerable learners where a face-to-face interaction in a secure environment is so important.

2.1.9 Learner's attitudes to their education are positive and have been shown to have improved over time. Behaviour and attitudes of learners is good, with learners demonstrating effective behaviours for learning supporting what we know to be the expectations of employers.

2.1.10 Tutorial and Skills development sessions are effective and enable learners to develop their character including their confidence, resilience and subject specific knowledge, for those learners who are our most vulnerable greater engagement and contact will be modelled moving forward.

2.1.11 Learners receive good links to industry throughout all curriculum areas, leading to the development of knowledge, skills and behaviours required to progress into high-quality destinations. The links are provided by staff and with business engagement being strengthened this year but with a recognition that even more engagement will benefit more of the study programme development.

2.1.12 Career's advisers work with a range of external agencies to effectively source provision from a range of providers. The Careers Guidance team performs the Council's statutory duties to encourage, enable and assist young people over statutory school age but under 19 (or 25 with an EHCP) to participate in education and training. The team is also responsible for the statutory duty to track record report and support Northumberland residents in this cohort in relation to their post 16 education and training.

2.1.13 Effective teaching and course management enables learners to complete qualifications, providing progress into a positive destination. Where this works well the curriculum is coherently planned and sequenced towards development of knowledge and skills for future learning and employment.

2.1.14 The arrangements for safeguarding are very effective. Comprehensive log of any safeguarding issues is maintained. Learners are confident they know how to

report and feel safe. The service continues to develop staff and learners with an emphasis on remaining safe from extremism.

2.1.15 Learners excel in an environment in which they feel safe because staff and learners do not accept bullying, harassment or discrimination.

2.1.16 Attendance remained strong across all curriculum areas whilst engagement posed some challenges during lockdown. Engagement was closely monitored throughout lockdown and all campuses were well managed to be covid safe learning environments.

2.1.17 During academic year 2020-21 Northumberland County Council had Apprenticeship sub-contract arrangements in place with Newcastle City Learning and North Tyneside Council. Achievement rates across all aims and levels are at 83%, significantly greater than national rate. Timely completion rate is 90%, 3 learner completions exceeding 3 months past their end date but with a variety of pandemic based complexities affecting these learners. The success on these programmes is in part underpinned by the development of a comprehensive sub-contracting provider monitoring framework for 2020-21. The framework gathering evidence via monthly sub-contractor meetings with detailed and robust minutes taken, actions recorded, and interventions being implemented on an evidence-based approach in a timely manner. Sharing of learner tracking systems and data has become transparent, in some cases with NCC having direct access to online learner progress tracking platforms for NCC sub-contracted learners, again supporting timely and evidence-based actions to support achievement rates in 2020-21.

2.1.18 Learner behaviour is Good across the Service due to consistent expectations and challenge across the curriculum team. Consistent high expectations have supported the achievement outcomes across the whole service to all learners.

2.1.19 Learners confirm that they enjoy their programmes at Northumberland Skills. Learners are regularly encouraged to feedback on the programmes via [Learner Voice](#) leading to suggestions for improvement and subsequent actions. Digital approaches and forums have been employed to support more routine and formative feedback ongoing.

'I realise this lesson is really important and will help me with my career path. I've used my CV to apply for three jobs already.' Shaun Ingleton

'Enrichment is going really good because it is my favourite thing to do with the teacher and my friends...I enjoy engaging in the sessions and the work we discuss.' Nicole Telford

2.2. Careers Guidance Team (CGT)

2.2.1 Local authorities have statutory responsibilities to track, report on and support young people into education employment or training. NCC's Careers Guidance Team (CGT) is responsible for the discharge of these duties.

2.2.2 Local authorities collect information to identify young people who are not participating in education employment or training (NEET), or who are at risk of not doing so, and to target their resources on those who need them most. The information collected must be in the format specified in the Client Caseload Information System

(CCIS) Management Information Requirement document. This standalone system, which has a national interface with DfE, is operated and managed by the CGT.

2.2.3 Through the team's work with school's colleges and providers, arrangements are in place to confirm young people's current activity at regular intervals through exchange of information with education and training providers and other services as well as direct contact with young people. The CGT works with schools to identify those who are in need of targeted support or who are at risk of not being NEET and these young people can be referred for intensive support from the CGT and other services.

2.2.4 The CGT supports enables and assists young people aged 13-19 and those aged 20-25 with an EHCP to participate in education employment or training. Regular tracking of young people's participation successfully is a key element of this duty.

2.2.5 The CGT leads the September Guarantee process, which underpins the delivery of these duties. This is the process by which local authorities aim to ensure that all 16–17-year-olds receive an offer of a suitable place in education or training by the end of September each year. Information is recorded and reported on the number and proportion of young people in each area who:

- receive an offer under the September Guarantee.
- are participating in education or training.
- who are NEET, or
- whose current activity is not known.

2.2.6 Data is taken from the CCIS data reported to DfE and made available publicly via the DfE website on a regular basis. The team reports on a number of key data collections throughout the academic year. The first of these in the 20/21 academic year is the September Guarantee.

2.2.7 September Guarantee 2021 - The overall figure is 96.8%, a slight increase on the previous year (2020 figure was 96.6%). Northumberland remains above the national average of 95.5% and the regional average of 95.7%. Regionally Northumberland has the second highest 2021 September Guarantee figure behind Hartlepool (97.0%)

September Guarantee table

	16 and 17 year olds	Offer made (%).	Is the proportio n of 16/17- year-olds receiving an offer higher than in 2020?	Offer not appropriat e (%)	No offer (%)	Not recorded (%)
ENGLAND	1,195,380	95.5%	Yes	1.1%	0.9%	2.6%
NORTH EAST	56,280	95.7%	Yes	1.2%	0.9%	2.1%
Northumberland	6,480	96.8%	Yes	1.5%	0.8%	0.8%

2.2.8 The CGT collects the required monthly data from schools, alternative providers and staff also telephone individuals in order to satisfy DfE reporting requirements. This has proved more challenging since the beginning of the covid pandemic as staff have been unable to work face to face in schools and with young people.

2.2.9 The CGT delivers a robust data set whereby the number of young people whose current activities in relation to education and training are unknown is low. In September every 16–18-year-old is made 'not known' in the system and the team must then find and record and track their destination.

2.2.10 In November 2021 (the latest figure available) there were 197 young people (3.1% of the cohort) whose current destination was not known. The CGT continue to work with all young people to improve their knowledge around the opportunities available to them.

2.2.11 The number of pupils with EHCPs in schools not receiving a full transition review is too erratic and therefore the service will have a greater focus on these pupils in 2021/22.

2.3 Learning and Skills Service Employability Team

2.3.1 The service continues to play a vital role throughout the challenges of 2021/22 academic year supporting residents through some really challenging personal phases of their lives, helping residents when any employment potentially feels very hard to achieve. The service has supported and engaged with residents throughout lockdown in new and different ways, developing new services to be responsive to residents who became unemployed or significantly at risk in their roles throughout the pandemic.

2.3.2 The service has continued to work throughout the pandemic and the service has grown in response to resident's needs. We have increased our offer of employment focussed programmes to respond directly to the expected high rise in unemployment. The team delivered 4 employment programmes – The DWP JETS Programme (job entry targeted support), DWP Restart Scheme and DWP Building Better Opportunities and the North of Tyne Combined Authority funded Triage programme, which commenced in June 2020 and ceased October 2021.

2.3.3 The DWP Jets Programme continued, delivered with Reed in Partnership, as a digital employment support programme to offer support throughout the pandemic remotely. Referrals are from Job Centres across Northumberland and participants are residents who are newly unemployed and have been impacted by the downturn in the labour market. Support is primarily digital, and 550 residents have started on the programme and 250 have moved into employment. Due to its success, the programme will continue until March 2023 to help residents who prefer digital engagement.

2.3.4 The service continues to deliver The DWP Work and Health Programme - delivered in partnership with Reed in Partnership. A voluntary programme targeted at those with physical and mental health issues. Support includes general employment support, employability and skills training along with health and wellbeing support i.e., mindfulness sessions and confidence support. 1091 residents have started on the programme since November 2017 and 368 have gone into employment. Whilst some participants felt too vulnerable throughout the pandemic to continue looking for work (due to health conditions), many have now reengaged and

gone into roles in newly emerging sectors i.e., facilities management, care, logistics and home working.

2.3.5 The DWP RESTART scheme went live in July 2021 and is supporting benefit claimants who have been unemployed for 12 months. The purpose of the programme is to help those impacted by the pandemic and those even further removed in the labour market, maximising employment, and reducing the impacts of rising long-term unemployment. The programme offers IAG and skills support including using Resilience, self-awareness and confidence, digital media skills, budget management, effective job search & CV support, transferable skills etc. The programme offers additional skills support for the over 50's and young people who have been further impacted by the pandemic. The Employability Service is working collaboratively with REED in Partnership to deliver the programme in Northumberland. To date 151 have started on programme and 20 have gone into employment.

2.3.6 The North of Tyne Combined Authority granted funding to create the employment support Triage Programme which commenced in June 2020 and ceased in October 2021. Staff acted as a single point of access for all online or phone queries through the NCC Covid Communities hub, supporting employment issues faced by individuals in need and working with JCPs and local support providers. Providing 'light touch' advice and guidance, direction to online resources, and if appropriate, referral to existing Council Employability and Skills programmes. 657 residents accessed the service and received support until the programme ceased.

2.3.7 North of Tyne Combined Authority funding provided digital devices to participants on employment programmes to engage in digital employment support and learning. As of November 2021, the employability team gave out 94 devices to participants and a further 55 devices were given to Refugees to enable them to continue their ESOL studies. An online learning platform called OFF2CLASS was also procured and used by the Refugees whilst in lockdown to further enhance learning. Learning is now back in campuses and beneficiaries continue to use digital devices to support their studies and further digital integration

2.3.8 The service continues to be well positioned to respond particularly to North of Tyne Inclusive Growth projects where the prime aims are to support residents into gaps, reduce inequality and disadvantage gaps and to support progression into employment as well as in work progression through training.

2.3.9 Working in tandem with the skills service provides a seamless referral point from engagement and initial training into more structured training supporting employment. To improve the progression from the non-North of Tyne funded programmes all of the residents who accessed the covid triage programme and DWP Employment programmes will be supported by the skills service.

3. Conclusion

3.1 Academic Year 2020/21 has been without doubt yet another challenging year for Learning and Skills. The resilience of learners, clients and staff has been tested throughout and the transfer between restriction changes and subsequent lockdowns has pressurised the service. The Skills team have supported learners who benefit most from greater support and pastoral care whilst at the same time preparing the learners for their next steps.

3.2 Young people, adults and apprentices have continued to adapt, some much better than others are able to thrive, with some learners 'surviving' their educational journey

alongside changing lifestyle patterns. The implementation of the new supporting pastoral approach definitely improved the resilience levels, however when parents and carers needed to resume duties at home with online learning with their children, their own learning focus disappeared.

3.3 Adult learners pursued their learning well, (the English and maths functional skills is the exception as an in year start programme and parents/ carers leaving to support children in home learning) The achievement rates are in line with previous years, but removal of English and mathematics achievements shows the performance to be outstanding and so confidence that the model is working when a return to classroom-based learning without disruption is high.

3.4 Apprentices did not perform at the same rate as the previous year. Recruitment of new apprentices was low and retention of existing apprentices impacted on the achievement rates in 2020/21. Northumberland Skills is not out of line with national performance with the challenges the sector has faced.

3.5 The service has undergone further significant change; realigning curriculum; developing curriculum that is responsive to the needs of business in the county; designing curriculum and courses that meet the needs of our residents and is well placed to continue the strengthening and change moving forward.

3.6 The Employability team continued to respond very well to a fast paced continuously changing environment, completing the work on the COVID triage model to support rapid redeployment into jobs with supported skills training for 657 residents across the year.

3.7 The work of the Careers Guidance Team helped to maintain a relative performance of NEET statistics given the real challenges faced with not being able to engage face to face with young people, some of the most hard to reach became very difficult to engage with and so to have a position which is strong North of Tyne is good. However, our focus for those pupils with EHCP must shift to securing a pathway much earlier and support the Preparation for Adulthood approach in Northumberland.

3.8 Staff continue to adapt very well, a weekly CPD routine was established in 2020/21 that supports all aspects of development for staff, not least digital development. The quality of education continues to be a key driver in the day-to-day operations. Personal development, behaviours and attitudes are strong, the bar has been raised even further to support ambition. The transformation of the services continues to make this a dynamic service that meets the needs of residents and businesses across Northumberland.

Implications

Policy	All NCC policies apply in relation to the operational Learning and Skills service.
Finance and value for money	ESFA grant funded service with Apprenticeship Levy funded provision from NCC Levy fund. Schools Service Level agreement for CEIAG work Adult Education Budget is funded via NTCA for adult focused curriculum. Sub-contracted apprenticeship provision is funded directly to NCC and paid at 85% to the sub-contractor monthly on a pre-agreed profile.
Legal	Annual contractual arrangement for all grant contracts
Procurement	n/a
Human Resources	Review of staffing requirement in relation to the curriculum plan required to deliver the grant profiles
Property	Eight sites around the county including shared working spaces, corporate buildings and Skills sites.
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) N/A X	n/a
Risk Assessment	All staff have individual risk assessments. All sites are risk assessed. All sites are covid risk assessed and undertake reviews every week as well as spot checks on premises to ensure routines and expectations are being followed
Crime & Disorder	Engagement with employability and projects within employability aim to support reductions in crimes and disorder within the county
Customer Consideration	Service plans and systems are approached from the customer perspective. All learner facing approaches include the learner/customer journey to improve satisfaction.
Carbon reduction	The increase in digital and remote learning as well as digital meeting spaces as significantly reduced the travel and carbon footprint in 2020/21.
Health and Wellbeing	Student and staff wellbeing is reviewed and monitored as a routine. In particular the wellbeing of staff throughout lockdown

	was carefully monitored and recorded to ensure support was provided.
Wards	All aspects of the service support all wards in Northumberland, the digital reach has now expanded this opportunity.

Report Sign Off

	Full Name of Officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Suzanne Dent
Relevant Executive Director	Cath McEvoy-Carr
Chief Executive	Daljit Lally
Portfolio Holder(s)	Guy Renner-Thompson

Author and Contact Details

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