



ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
7 MARCH 2022

LEICESTERSHIRE ADULT LEARNING SERVICES

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES

Purpose of report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an overview of the Leicestershire Adult Learning Service's (LALS) performance for 2020/21 from the context of the annual self-assessment (including the work undertaken by an external consultant to validate the findings of this assessment) and potential OFSTED inspection. The Committee is asked to review and comment on the performance detailed in the report.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

- 2 The LALS Strategy 'Realising Potential 2018-2022', supports a number of wider objectives set out across a number of key strategies, in particular 'Delivering Wellbeing and Opportunity in Leicestershire: Adults and Communities Department Ambitions and Strategy for 2020–2024' and the County Council's Strategic Plan 2018-22, 'Working together for the benefit of everyone' which has been developed by the Council to focus on the issues that will make life better for people in Leicestershire including achieving the vision of the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Leicestershire.
- 3 LALS does this through the provision of learning programmes targeting vocational skills, basic skills, and mental health. In addition to leading on the Work and Skills Leicestershire project which supports people to regain employment.

Background

- 4 The Service is funded externally through the Adult Education Budget grant administered by the Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and raises additional income through tuition fees and contracted services.
- 5 LALS provides part-time courses for adults (19 years+) across the County. The Service delivers community learning across circa 50 venues, employing around 300 staff, and pre-pandemic had 6,500-8,000 enrolments per annum.
- 6 The purpose of ESFA funded Community Learning is to develop the skills, confidence, motivation, and resilience of adults of different ages and backgrounds in order to:
 - Progress towards formal learning or employment, and/or
 - Improve their health and wellbeing, including mental health, and/or
 - Develop stronger communities.

7 The strands and focus of the LALS programme is set out in the table below:

Adult Skills	Personal Development	Vocational Skills & Work Experience	High Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills for Life (English and maths) • English for Speakers of other Languages • Digital Skills • Employability • British Sign Language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning for Wellbeing • Information Advice and Guidance • Family Learning • Foreign Languages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kickstart • Work and Skills Leicestershire • Apprenticeships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health • Transitions Learning (High Needs) • Learning for Independence

8 The Service is regulated by OFSTED and is currently rated as “Good”. The last inspection was in February 2018 and it is anticipated that there will be an inspection this year.

9 LALS produces a self-assessment report each year as part of the quality assurance process and in line with OFSTED compliance. In November 2021, an external consultant was engaged to validate the findings of the self-assessment and identify areas for improvement in advance of a potential OFSTED visit. The self-assessment report is attached as Appendix A to this report.

LALS Self-assessment Process and Findings

10 LALS monitors progress against quality improvement plan targets for the whole service and curriculum areas. Performance is reviewed internally at the monthly Quality Board meetings. Priorities and risks are followed up through Service meetings with Programme Managers and by other curriculum and themed working groups.

11 Tutors and learners contribute to the production of the self-assessment report through course evaluations and surveys. Classroom observations of tutors inform developmental action plans. Learners’ views from course reviews are fed back to curriculum meetings and any issues raised are highlighted and responded to throughout the year.

12 Appendix B summarises the Service’s self-assessment against the OFSTED criteria. Despite the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic the findings of this self-assessment continue to judge the service as ‘Good’ for overall effectiveness.

Evidence Informing Self-Assessment Findings

Adults Achievement Rates

13 Learner ‘Achievement’ is a key performance measure used to monitor the effectiveness of learning providers by the OFSTED inspectorate.

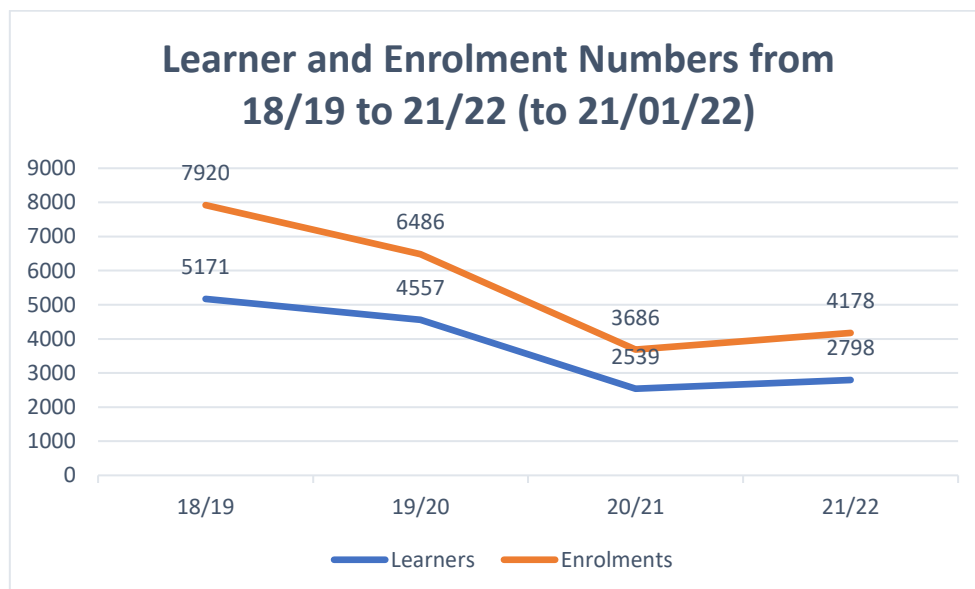
14 Previously LALS has successfully maintained an overall achievement rate comparable with national benchmarking data against other local authorities. Given the context of the work and LALS’ focus towards supporting more vulnerable learners, achievement performance has previously been recognised by OFSTED inspectors as a strength.

LALS	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Variance
Achievement Rate	91.73%	85.67%	88.44%	+2.77%

- 15 Measuring performance against national benchmarking data during the pandemic has been more difficult due to the limited availability of published data. Performance has therefore been monitored through regional peer reviews with local learning providers.
- 16 Consistent with other local providers, LALS' achievement has improved during the academic year 2020/21 following a decline due to the initial impact of the pandemic. Achievement rates for longer learning programmes such as English and Maths GCSEs have been more significantly affected due to learner and staff illness and other interruptions to learning brought about by the pandemic.

Learner Numbers

- 17 In the academic year 2020/21 learner numbers declined by 45%, equivalent to 2018 individual learners as set out in the graph below. This decline is mainly due to the impact of the pandemic, which has been significant particularly for the target groups the service supports. Although there is limited benchmarking data available to compare enrolment trends, a survey of local providers shows that LALS performance is consistent with other services in the adult learning sector. To improve performance a 'Learner Recovery' group has been established to co-ordinate learner engagement activity. A marketing and promotional programme is also due to be launched in the spring with open days and short courses to re-engage people back into learning.



Courses Delivered and Average Class Size

- 18 The chart below sets out the total number of courses delivered per academic year and average class sizes. A list of course venues for the academic year 2021/22 is attached at Appendix C to this report.

	19/20	20/21	21/22
Total Number of Courses Delivered	902	656	772
Average Class Size (number of students)	7.2	5.6	5.4

Learner Feedback from End of Course Evaluations

- 19 Despite the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, learner satisfaction remains high according to end of course evaluations.

End of Course Evaluation Questions	Agree or Strongly Agree (1,610 responses)
Enrolment on this course was well organised and helpful	93%
Aims and outcomes of the course were appropriate	100%
The room, equipment and resources for this course were appropriate	100%
The course length and timings were appropriate	97%
Induction to the course was well managed and included ground rules	99%
I was able to complete the contents of the course	99%
The teaching and learning methods and activities were effective	99%
Additional learning support was effective where provided	99%
I feel more confident now than at the start of the course	98%
I feel participation in this course has improved my wellbeing	99%
The things I have learnt will help me at home, work and in the community	95%

Safeguarding

- 20 LALS Safeguarding policies and procedures are robust and learners report that they feel safe in their end of course reviews. The Service has well established procedures to identify, report and respond to any safeguarding concerns.

External Assessment of Standards

- 21 In November 2021 the Service engaged with a consultant who is a current OFSTED inspector to validate the findings of the self-assessment report and identify any areas for improving the robustness of the quality assurance process.
- 22 The consultant reviewed the Service's self-assessment reports and quality improvement plans and met on-line with the two Cabinet Lead Members, Assistant Director, Head of Service, the Service's Inspection Nominee; senior managers; programme managers; Programme co-ordinators and the Professional Development Lead. The consultant asked a range of questions regarding the content of the self-assessment reports and the Further Education and Skills Inspection Handbook.

- 23 It is important to note that the findings presented below are arrived at following a limited range of activities, i.e. the scrutiny of quality and strategy documents and from conversations with leaders and managers. Given the limited scope of this exercise, the consultant could not validate his judgements through the usual wider range of quality assurance activities undertaken during an OFSTED inspection.

Main findings

- 24 The main findings in respect of the overall Quality and Standards of the Service confirmed that:
- Managers and leaders have constructed a curriculum which meets the needs of learners and local stakeholders. Managers have a very good understanding of how the curriculum aligns with service strategic ambitions. Intent statements clearly set out the purpose at programme level.
 - Programmes enable learners to develop essential life and employability skills. In the discussions, managers were able to give specific examples of how the curriculum enables learners to develop these skills.
 - Accredited and non-accredited courses closely mirror the Council's strategic ambitions of supporting apprenticeships, promoting wellbeing, promoting independence, developing the workforce, and improving access to digital skills and resources.
 - Managers engage very effectively with local partners. There are many good examples of this from across the curriculum, including for example in Mental Health with Leicestershire Recovery College and in Family Learning with local children's centres.
 - The safeguarding measures in place appear to be effective from the evidence available within the scope of the review.

External Consultant - Specific Recommendations

- 25 The consultant recommended that leaders and managers should address the following areas for improvement:
- a) There is some inconsistency in the quality of the self-assessment report and the quality improvement plans. It was recommended that the Service ensures that the improvement plans are reviewed regularly, in line with the Service's quality calendar, to harness the collective will and accountability of all staff in driving quality improvement. The Nominee should address the feedback given in the whole Service self-assessment report and should include as a priority progression and destinations data. Leaders should ensure clarity in the use of achievement rate data so that there is a greater synergy between the whole service and programme level self-assessment reports and quality improvement plans.
 - b) Leaders should strengthen governance through the implementation of a thorough induction programme and ongoing training and establish a formal and clear schedule of meetings in which Lead Members can challenge, support and gain a greater oversight of curriculum and quality matters from leaders and managers.
 - c) Leaders should ensure a greater consistency in terms of the language being used by managers across the service when making judgements about quality and standards, so that all managers show high ambitions for their learners.

Leaders should continue to build cross-service communication and networking to assist in joint planning and the sharing of good practice.

- d) Leaders should ensure that all Programme Managers know the strengths and weaknesses of their provision and the quality of the various aspects of Implementation (Teaching Learning and Assessment) so that they can be clear as to how to manage their areas to Outstanding.
- e) Bring together the many good ideas for recovering learner numbers into a plan which looks to current and future jobs and skills needs, considers the role of other providers and ensure that the service continues to take advantage of its extensive stakeholder networks to meet local and regional needs.

Resource Implications

- 26 Although LALS is externally funded and the majority of the actions identified will be resourced from the Service budget, some investment in time from officers working with elected Members will continue to be required if the contribution of adult education to the wider strategic goals are to be realised.
- 27 Future adult education funding will depend on the funding streams available from the Government and some resource will be required to position the Service within the local skills strategy. Investment in governance to oversee the service will be necessary to ensure high standards are maintained.

Timetable for Decisions

- 28 Recommendations relating to the self-assessment process identified by the external consultant's report will be implemented and will continue to be monitored through the Service's quality assurance process timetable.
- 29 The outcomes of the pending OFSTED Inspection will be brought back to a future meeting of this Committee following the publication of the report.

Conclusions

- 30 LALS remains in a strong position to maintain its rating of 'Good' overall and has received some valuable external recommendations to begin to implement in preparation for future OFSTED inspection.
- 31 The Committee is asked to review and comment on the performance of the Service detailed in this report.

Background papers

- Realising Potential – The strategy for Leicestershire Adult Learning Service 2018-22 - <https://politics.leics.gov.uk/documents/s138879/LALS%20Strategy%202018-22%20Appendix.pdf>
- Delivering Wellbeing and opportunity in Leicestershire – Adults and Communities Department Ambitions and Strategy for 2020-24
- Leicestershire County Council Strategic Plan 2018-22

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

31 None

Equality and Human Rights Implications

32 The purpose of this report is to provide scrutiny of quality assurance processes and contribute towards continuous improvement in standards. The recommendations are not proposing any specific change to the Service.

Appendices

Appendix A LALS Self-Assessment Report

Appendix B Performance against OFSTED criteria

Appendix C - List of Course Venues – Academic Year 2021/22

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