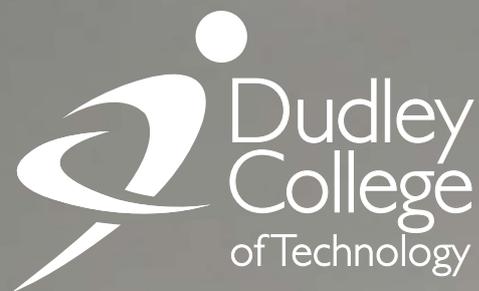


August 2019



# DUDLEY **Insight**

**THE ADULT SKILLS  
CHALLENGE 2019**

This is one of a series of papers aimed at providing our stakeholders, both internally and externally, with up-to-the-minute information on how we are strategically responding to local and national challenges. The papers may be of interest to many relevant stakeholders including parents, employers and the Local Enterprise Partnership.

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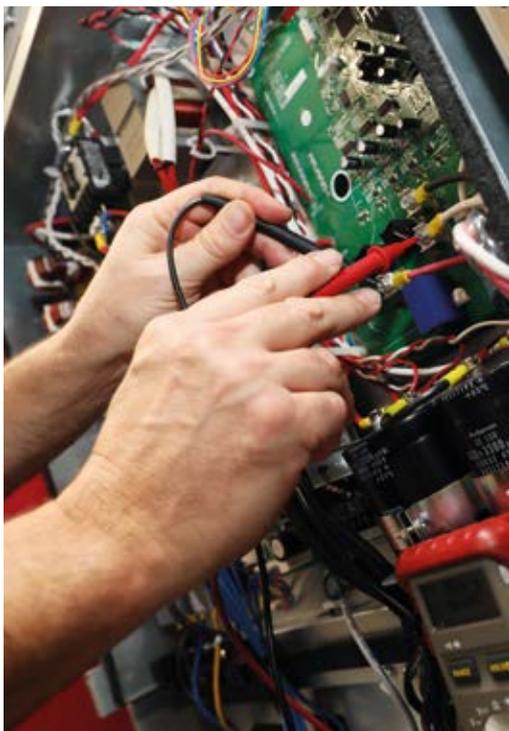


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## INTRODUCTION

Dudley College of Technology has been delivering training to adults from across the Black Country for over fifty years, and we currently engage over 3000 adults in a wide range of programmes. Around half of our learners take qualifications in English, Mathematics, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and employment skills at or below level 2, with the majority of the remainder following professional or technical qualifications in Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies, Construction, Business and Enterprise and IT.

# CONTEXT



Adult Education in the UK has had a turbulent few years with changes in national funding priorities having a significant negative impact on the types and volumes of funded adult provision. Funding for adult courses comes in the form of the Adult Education Budget (AEB) and has previously been administered nationally by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA.) The purpose of the AEB is to engage adults and provide the skills they need to equip them for work, an Apprenticeship or other learning.

Nationally, over the last decade, we have seen a 45% cut in the AEB and overall college budgets reduced by 30%. This has clearly had a significant impact on both the type and amount of provision that has been offered offer, although at Dudley College of Technology, we have continued to offer a breadth of high quality provision, believing strongly that lifelong learning is of vital importance to a cohesive community and engaging adults in upskilling is a core part of our mission.

In 2015 to 2016, the government agreed a series of devolution deals between central government and local areas. The West Midlands was one such area, and the Department for Education agreed the transfer of the relevant part of the AEB to the West Midlands Combined Authority to undertake the adult education functions. This means that from 1 August 2019, the ESFA is no longer accountable for administering the budget, with the WMCA having responsibility for ensuring that learners aged 19 and over in our region have access to appropriate education and training, with £126m made available for the West Midlands.





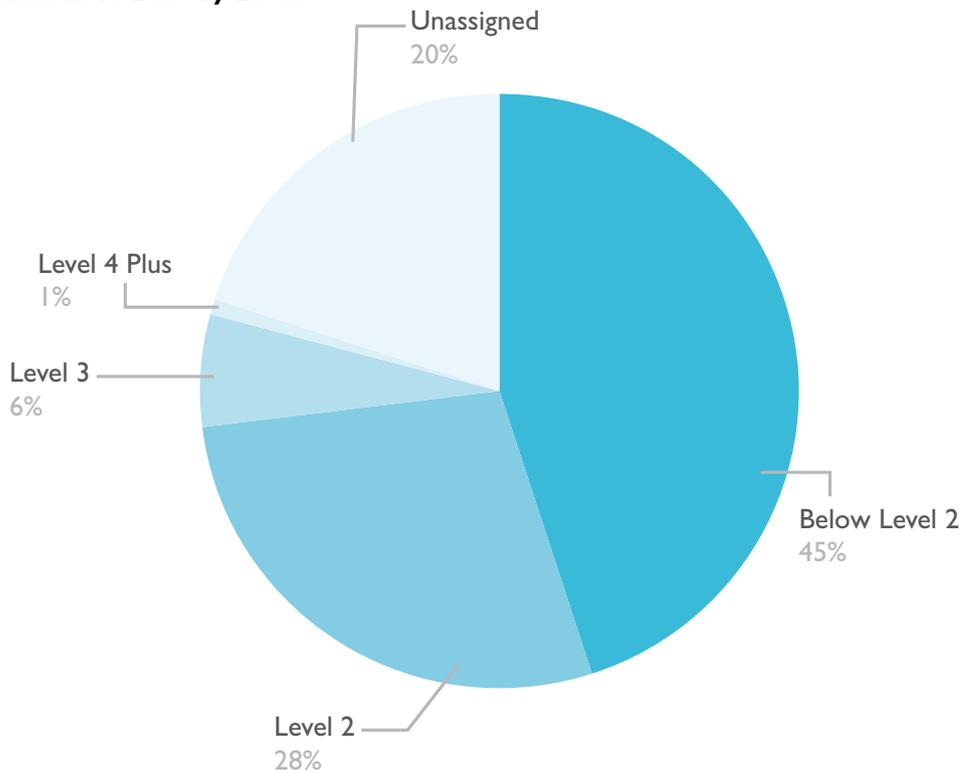
While the West Midlands is a thriving place in which to live and work, there are a number of challenges that our region faces – namely that not all our residents are benefitting equally from the economic growth that we are seeing. While there is a growing number of jobs in the area, there remains a low employment rate and a large number of adults who are low or unskilled.

The WMCA set out their ambitions for the region very clearly in their Regional Skills Plan, published in 2018. They described their plans to deliver accelerated growth, allowing the region to contribute more fully to the success of the UK economy; improving outcomes for residents and reducing the number of benefit claimants. While acknowledging that skills and productivity can be a complex picture, they point out that the recommissioning of the AEB to a more localised control means that they have an opportunity to generate a shift in the way the region works together in order to deliver more for our residents and our businesses.

Following an analysis of adult provision across the region, the WMCA concluded that while colleges are largely addressing a need with the delivery of learning below level 2, there is a need to see a significant increase in the number of level 3 and 4 qualifications being delivered. They also identified some sectoral priorities – advanced manufacturing, building technologies, digital and business and professional services, where they want to see a significant increase in the number of skilled people and the level of their skills. Enrolments at Dudley College of Technology over the last few years have broadly followed this trend, with the bulk of our Adult Provision (45%) being below level 2.



## AEB enrolments 2016/2017 by Level

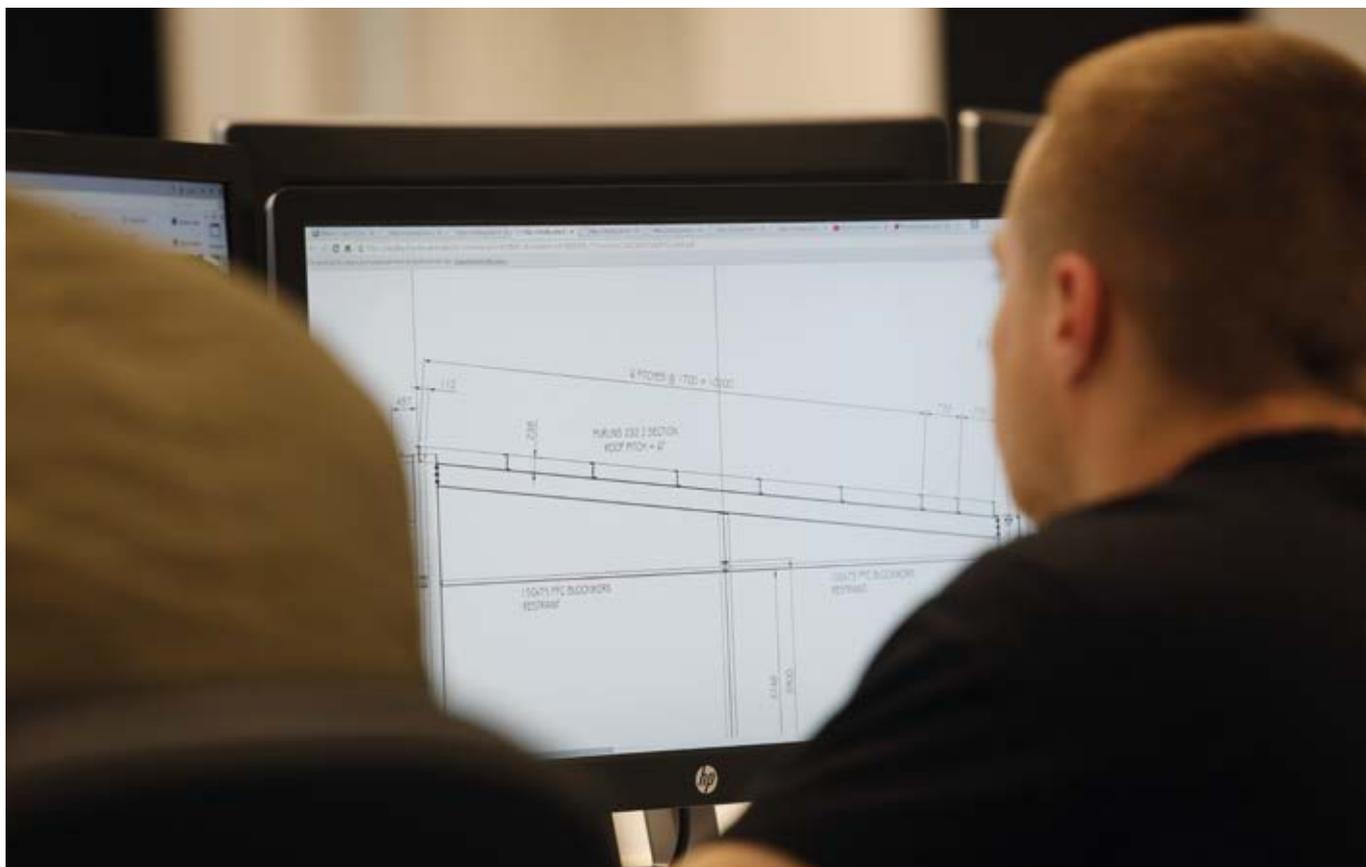


\*Source: Dfe FE starts data: Apprenticeships and education & training, 2016-17

In addition to an increased focus on higher level skills and qualifications, attention has also turned regionally onto the provision of ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages.) The West Midlands has an extremely diverse population and while there is some excellent ESOL delivery in the area, the focus on this subject has received less attention in recent years in line with funding.

A report published earlier in 2019 'Unlocking Potential – Making Sense of ESOL in the Region' compiled by the Further Education Skills and Productivity Group (FESPG) on behalf of the WMCA recognised that ESOL is a vital element of employability which supports inclusivity and giving all residents an equal chance to succeed. In order to meet the needs of this group of learners, FESPG identified some key improvements that they would like to see in place; namely that there should be better alignment between ESOL and priority high-value added and key employment sectors and jobs, the development of ESOL hubs; integrating services in each local area to ensure that there is a breadth of opportunities available, and the development of flexible learning programmes within the overall offer, including new vocational training provision and the development of an ESOL for Employment offer. The review led the WMCA to commit to allowing people earning up to the living wage to be able to access ESOL programmes free, widening participation across the borough.

In addition to this localised research, the government also commissioned a report into the state of FE which was published in May this year. Called The Auger Review, it proposes a raft of measures aimed at strengthening technical education and refunding FE colleges; increasing flexibility and lifelong learning in order to boost adult participation in learning, and incentivising providers to increase provision that is better aligned to the economy's needs. The report highlighted the urgent need to address the underfunding of adult education and FE in general, as being vital in enabling us to close the skills gap and to meet the needs of a rapidly growing economy. In particular, it found that there are 2.2million full and part time adult further education students receiving £2.3 billion of public funding which contrasts sharply with the 1.2million UK undergraduate students in English HE institutions receiving over £8billion of public funding per annum.



## THE CHALLENGE

Based on the changing context and the requirements of the WMCA, the challenges we face are significant and are broadly characterised as

- Curriculum Innovation - We are acutely aware our region needs more, and higher level, technical skills, but creating a new vocational skills offer for both young people and adults is no easy task. We need new models of delivery, innovative ways of teaching and continued investment in staff and facilities to be able to meet the demand.
- Funding higher level provision - Funding at Level 3 and above is essential so that we can devise a responsive curriculum that meets the needs of the WMCA and provides the employment opportunities our residents need.
- Breaking the barriers to participation- For those residents furthest away from employment, entering the world of college and work can be daunting – we need to find ways to engage and support people to make the first steps towards economic independence.
- Aligning ESOL with vocational skills - We need to develop our ESOL provision further to be able to support priority sectors; providing learners with the bespoke language skills more appropriate to the employment market. We also need to facilitate providing ESOL delivery within our wider vocational training.
- Increasing Participation - We need to review and reform our current IAG and careers service delivery for adult learners.
- Ensuring inclusivity of opportunity - With the closure of Stourbridge College, we have a responsibility to provide adult learning across a wider geographical area, ensuring that participation in education and training across our region is not reduced.

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## OUR RESPONSE

Dudley College of Technology is at the forefront of responding to these challenges and has been developing a programme of activity in close collaboration with the WMCA and other colleges.

The Further Education Skills & Productivity Group (FESPG), championed by Dudley College of Technology and chaired by Lowell Williams, our CEO, was formed to ensure we had a regional approach to meeting the needs of adult learners. Formed of all 22 further education colleges in the region, this group works in close partnership with the combined authority to collaboratively design and deliver adult programmes that better meet regional need, whilst also reducing competitive behaviours. This groups has already achieved a number of outcomes:

- Through the Flexible Learning Fund the group has developed an online gateway to enabling training for adults unable to access more traditional classroom based learning. This programme of activity is planned to be extended, with an additional £300K funding from WMCA to see the project beyond its existing 2 year life span. The combined authority will lead on this second phase development and is looking to deliver an online unitised approach to vocational training at Level 3 and above.
- The WMCA Construction Gateway the colleges have set up a network of providers able to deliver bespoke courses specified by employers with job vacancies. Aimed at supporting people to move into much needed roles in construction such as carpentry, electrical installation, painting and decorating, plastering and plumbing. To-date 81 learners have completed programmes through this activity and of which 35 have been placed into jobs.
- We have also been developing very specific adult upskilling programmes to meet regional needs such as the development of a Skills Academy in conjunction with Midland Metro Alliance, to provide the skilled workforce needed to support the expansion of the regional transport infrastructure.
- Through the WMCA 'Career Learning Pilot' initiative we have delivered courses that have been fully or part funded in sectors where there are regional skills shortages, with Dudley College of Technology supporting higher than planned numbers of adults through these programmes.

Outside of collaborative work through FESPG, the college continues to develop its adult learning provision. In order to inform our adult curriculum plan for the future we have invested in new mapping tools such as Vector, which provides Local Market Intelligence, allowing us to match new provision to future demand.

We have also formed a dedicated Adult Leadership Team to ensure that developments around adult education receive the required attention and that we might our aspirations for this important client group.



# PROGRESS TO DATE

As well as the activity detailed above, that we have already piloted or brought to market as part of our response to expanding our adult skills offer we have also developed our approach in the following ways.

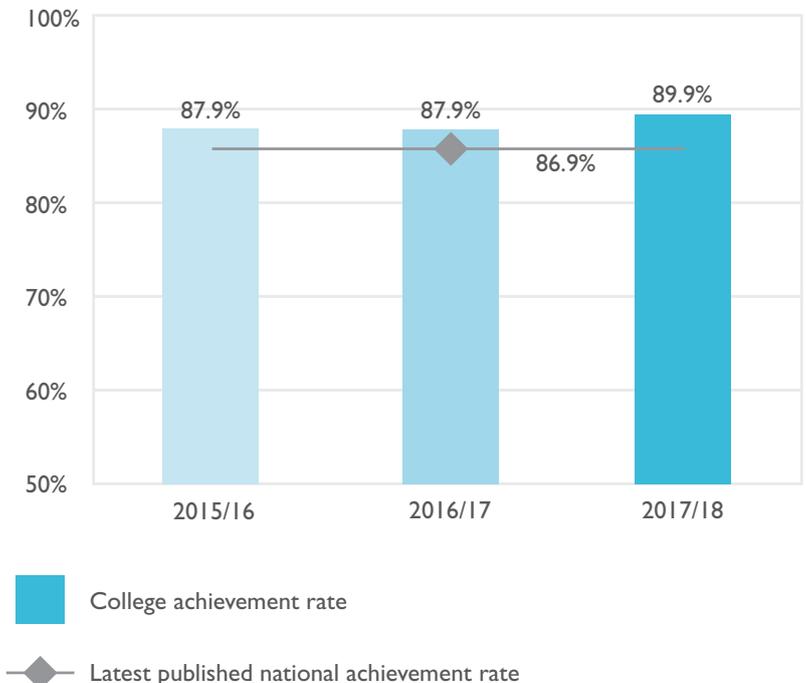
The expansion of our essential skills provision has grown to meet the needs of employers. We now offer English courses on employer premises aimed at helping employees to progress at work or move into Apprenticeship training. These programmes are now running in a number of large local employers and feedback has been exceptionally positive, with each programme tailored to the bespoke needs of the employer.

Building partnership with the Department Work and Pensions through sector based skills academies has been particularly successful and we have a steady stream of candidates for future programmes.

As part of the WMCA led activity we have also played a significant part in the development of an online learning platform, lending our expertise in building a system that will allow adults to improve their functional skills. This platform will be promoted across the region and will provide an alternative approach for upskilling adults for whom this mode of delivery works best.

These activities have had the impact of growing the number of adults in learning at Dudley College from just under 2,000 in 2017/18 to over 3,000 in 2018/19 reversing a declining trend.

In addition to an overall increase in learner numbers achievement rates for our adult learners remain strong and are at or above national rate at all levels:

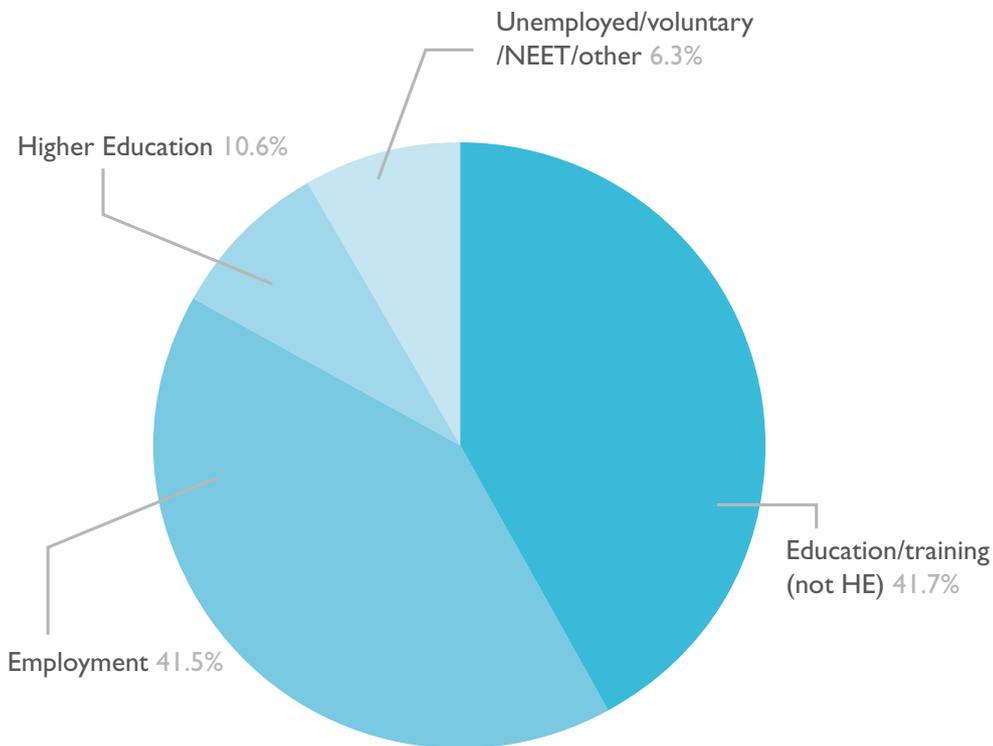


And we continue to provide positive outcomes for our adult learners with 93.7% of completing learners progressing on to a positive destination (education, training or employment), on completion of their studies with us.

### Full-Time and Part-Time Adult Skills Learners - Destinations (2017-18 Year-End)

Learners Destinations

All levels



Overall, Dudley College of Technology has managed to retain a strong offer to serve the adults in the region. Our offer aligns well with the requirements of the WMCA Regional Skills plan and we are confident that we are able to meet the challenges ahead.

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## NEXT STEPS



Our new Strategic Plan (2019-2022) will set out even more aspirational targets for the development of our adult offer, with clear pathways aligned to the needs of an expanding economy.

Through our Business Development Team, and our Essential skills teams, we will continue to develop our relationships with employers across the region and use our networks to create mutually beneficial partnerships for employers and our learners. Whilst adult upskilling will remain a focus for us as part of our Institute of Technology developments.

As a result of the demerger of Birmingham Metropolitan College following an FE Commissioner lead Strategic Prospects Appraisal, Dudley College of Technology will take over the provision at The Skills Shop in the Merry Hill Centre. This will allow us to expand our adult offer further as we look to establish new community hubs to broaden our reach, and widen participation for our residents. As part of this agenda we will actively look at the provision of an adult skills hub in Stourbridge.

We will review and relaunch our career IAG service for adults, using our employer networks to get more positive destinations for learners seeking work. We will develop our 'after care' programme, providing support to the newly employed and those changing career, to ensure the best possible outcome for all parties.

We will expand our curriculum offer for adults to provide more level 3 and above programmes delivered flexibly, in order to contribute the WMCA regional skills plan. The WMCA have identified a need for more adults to qualify at higher levels in order to meet replacement demand and skills shortages in key sectors.

Our ESOL and Adult Functional Skills provision has remained consistent; we have expanded into the work place and broadened our reach in the communities around Dudley. This has put us in a favourable position to continue to strengthen our offer. Our ESOL, Functional Skills and Employability teams are working collaboratively to be able to offer an enhanced delivery model which better equips our learners for the world of work.

We will build on the WMCA online learning platform and contribute to the next phase of its development.

Through these means we will respond to the needs of employers and our regional skills needs ensuring the ability to offer life-long learning opportunities is a core aspect of what we are about. So that we can play a role in creating social mobility, community cohesion and social wealth for the populations we serve.

 | advance

## References

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### Dudley Insight catalogue:

Issue 1: The STEM Challenge - October 2014

Issue 2: The Maths Challenge - October 2014

Issue 3: The English Challenge - October 2014

Issue 4: The Apprenticeships Challenge - November 2014

Issue 5: The Management of Student Attendance - November 2014

Issue 6: Skills Competitions Success - January 2015

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Issue 13: The Mathematics challenge GCSE Resits - The Results - October 2016

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