



Higher Education

Strategy 2023-25

Assistant Principal

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Our purpose is simply 'defining futures'. City of Wolverhampton College achieves this by developing and delivering knowledge, skills, and behaviours in collaboration with stakeholders and partners, which contributes to positive destinations and improves life chances.
- 1.2 Our Vision for 2023 is ambitious and by working ever more closely with our stakeholders and partners it can be achieved.

2. Context

- 2.1 The West Midlands has:
 - The lowest employment rate of the 10 combined authorities: 68.6%
 - The highest unemployment rate of the 10 combined authorities: 6.6%
 - The highest working age economic inactivity rate: 26.5% (Annual Population Survey: April 2022 to March 2023)
- 2.2 Although the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) saw strong growth in employment in the period leading up to the pandemic, this has now stalled. Inactivity has risen as the area emerged from the pandemic with 26.1% of residents being economically inactive, 28.8% are students, 25.6% are looking after family/home, 25.7% are long-term sick, 4.5% are retired early, 2.4% are temporarily sick, 11.2% have other reasons.
- 2.3 The Claimant Count in the WMCA area is 124,780 (August 2023). These are Universal Credit claimants who are required to look for work plus those receiving Jobseeker's Allowance. This makes up 6.8% of all working age people in the area – the highest proportion of all the 10 combined authorities. Although this is well down on the pandemic peak of 175,700 reached in March 2021, progress has been limited during 2023.
- 2.4 The West Midlands is by far the most ethnically diverse of all the combined authority areas, with 36.7% of the working age population from an ethnic minority. It has the highest proportion of working age residents with no qualifications of all combined authority areas (9.6%)
- 2.5 A significant proportion of young people in the region are leaving their initial education without the qualifications needed to progress into further study, a good job or an apprenticeship.
- 2.6 Within Wolverhampton there is a good balance of levels of education provided for residents; Entry Levels (24%), Level 1 (22%) and Level 2 (30%) provision. However, there is a small amount of higher-level provision (Level 3/4/5) and provision not fully aligned to vacancies in Wolverhampton.

- 2.7 As part of the WMCA, they see that there are opportunities for provision to cover more subject sector areas and align more fully to vacancies in the city. This is about increasing provision at higher levels (Level 3 and up), using a targeted approach to certain professions, and further links with employers to ensure training meets needs.
- 2.8 The labour market is now shifting with a demand for higher skills, and education, Level 4+, to fulfil the jobs.
- 2.9 City of Wolverhampton College are committed to work with the WMCA to increase resident's qualifications to a Level 3 and/or higher to increase retention and motivation within employment, promotion opportunities and reskilling.
- 2.10 Despite the growth need for higher levels of education, Universities are grappling with a decline in interest from the home market for post-graduate (PG) degrees. This trend emerged due to population deficits of 18-year-olds between 2014 and 2018. The rising cost of living has led to a significant increase in the number of students withdrawing from university courses in the UK during 2021-22 and there has been a year on year increase of 23% of students withdrawing from courses.
- 2.11 The College has also seen a downward trend on enrolments for higher level qualifications. This strategy aims to support a refresh and renew of our higher education offer to fulfil the local, and national needs articulated through the new Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), the government's focus on qualification reforms including T levels, Higher Technical Qualifications and Higher Apprenticeships.

3. Aims for City of Wolverhampton College's higher education offer

- 3.1 The College has outlined a Vision 2030: Action 2030 plan which covers six strategic focuses for the College over this time frame. Aligned to this strategy are the priorities of:
 - 3.1.1 Increase adult participation and outcomes for programmes that meet LSIP priorities.

We will do this by providing:

- a curriculum offer that is current and aligned to government initiatives that has clear progression routes for opportunities for employment or upskilling which meet local and regional skills
- a curriculum offer that is reflective of the emerging reform and that meets LSIP priorities of Leadership and Management Skills and Essential Skills for Employment and aligned to WMCA growth clusters
- relevant provision that is created for adults with suitable employer links that will support a decrease in Wolverhampton's Claimant Count
- accessible provision for adults from differing communities to increase their opportunities for progression onto vocational learning or a move directly into employment

In addition, we shall:

- co-create opportunities with partners and employers who will shape our offer in key sectors of local and regional strategic importance

3.1.2 Develop an offer of high technical qualifications (HTQ) and professional development opportunities that lead to upskilling and career promotion.

We will do this by providing:

- an offer where students and apprentices can access a range of higher technical skills that supports career longevity and progression
- an offer of professional and higher-level development and upskilling opportunities that enables individuals to progress within their workplace or career
- an offer that meets LSIP priorities of Leadership and Management Skills to support the strategic leadership capabilities across the local area and region
- co-created opportunities through the engagement with key partners and employers in key sectors of importance and are aligned to WMCA growth clusters

In addition, we shall:

- offer bespoke upskilling and development programmes for employers that support their workforce development strategies

4. Objectives for City of Wolverhampton College's higher education offer

- 4.1 To be flexible and responsive to demand from stakeholders, such as WMCA and employers.
- 4.2 To support the local and national needs, including using the LSIP to shape the curriculum and bridge the skills gap requirements.
- 4.3 To provide learning that is appropriate and relevant to all stakeholders, valued and recognised by employers, Universities, and other professional bodies.
- 4.4 To strengthen our Partnership provision, where it has proven to be successful, to further develop these Partnerships and seek alternative new ones to develop and enrich the offer.
- 4.5 To create opportunities for formal connections with the Universities, to allow for mapping of learning to higher courses and therefore, allow for greater progression opportunities for students.
- 4.6 Develop flexible learning opportunities, with delivery to be in response to the students and stakeholders needs, such as hybrid, online or modular delivery.
- 4.7 To commit and develop provision which supports widening participation, with more students able to access higher levels of education, particularly focusing on those students from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who have low social mobility.

- 4.8 To respond to all Government policy, such as the development of the colleges HTQ offer and Higher Apprenticeship standards.
- 4.9 To identify progression routes from T levels and ensure all students on T level programmes are equipped to progress to a higher level qualification.
- 4.10 All higher level education learning, to be endorsed by, and have industry expertise to support curriculum development.
- 4.11 To be committed to further progression to Level 4 and above for all, by ensuring all students having awareness through activities across College and their course to showcase mapping where possible to Level 4 and above.
- 4.12 To develop links with employers to provide the right skills and knowledge needed to support the local, regional and national economic growth by creating a better workforce.
- 4.13 To support employers and provide flexible and responsive upskilling opportunities for employees particularly within the priority areas.
- 4.14 To provide and deliver learning which allows for students to progress, whether is to upskill or reskill within employment, and to support promotion opportunities.
- 4.15 Plan all learning through the curriculum planning processes, to be flexible in year and ensure they are efficient and viable.
- 4.16 To be responsive to any funding opportunities for higher level qualifications which will enhance the Colleges offer and allow for high quality resources and staff development to be prioritised.

5. Implementation objectives for the higher education offer

- 5.1 To develop a higher education curriculum that reflects not only the diverse needs of the students but also the businesses and employer's needs.
- 5.2 To create accessible and diverse learning using different experiences to support and develop all students regardless of background and starting points.
- 5.3 To increase social mobility through creating opportunities for access to Higher Education for those with the ability and therefore closing attainment gaps
- 5.4 To pursue a culture of widening participation and provide continuous advice and guidance to promote higher levels of education.
- 5.5 To ensure a high quality of education for all students, by measuring and monitoring all delivery through the College's Quality assurance and improvement processes.
- 5.6 To provide students with high quality, timely feedback to encourage students to reflect, analyse and develop their strengths and weaknesses.

- 5.7 To support accessibility for all. The College is committed to supporting students access to digital technology and to utilise eLearning where appropriate to improve skills and knowledge and enhance learning experience.
- 5.8 To commit to delivering high quality tutorials for students to discuss feedback, and issues.
- 5.9 To create and deliver activities to increase awareness of higher levels of education, through initiatives such as open events, employer forums and employer visits.
- 5.10 To utilise the wraparound support within College for all students where necessary such as Counselling, Safeguarding etc.
- 5.11 To create an alumni platform to celebrate progression and successes.