



How Lakes College Meets Local Need

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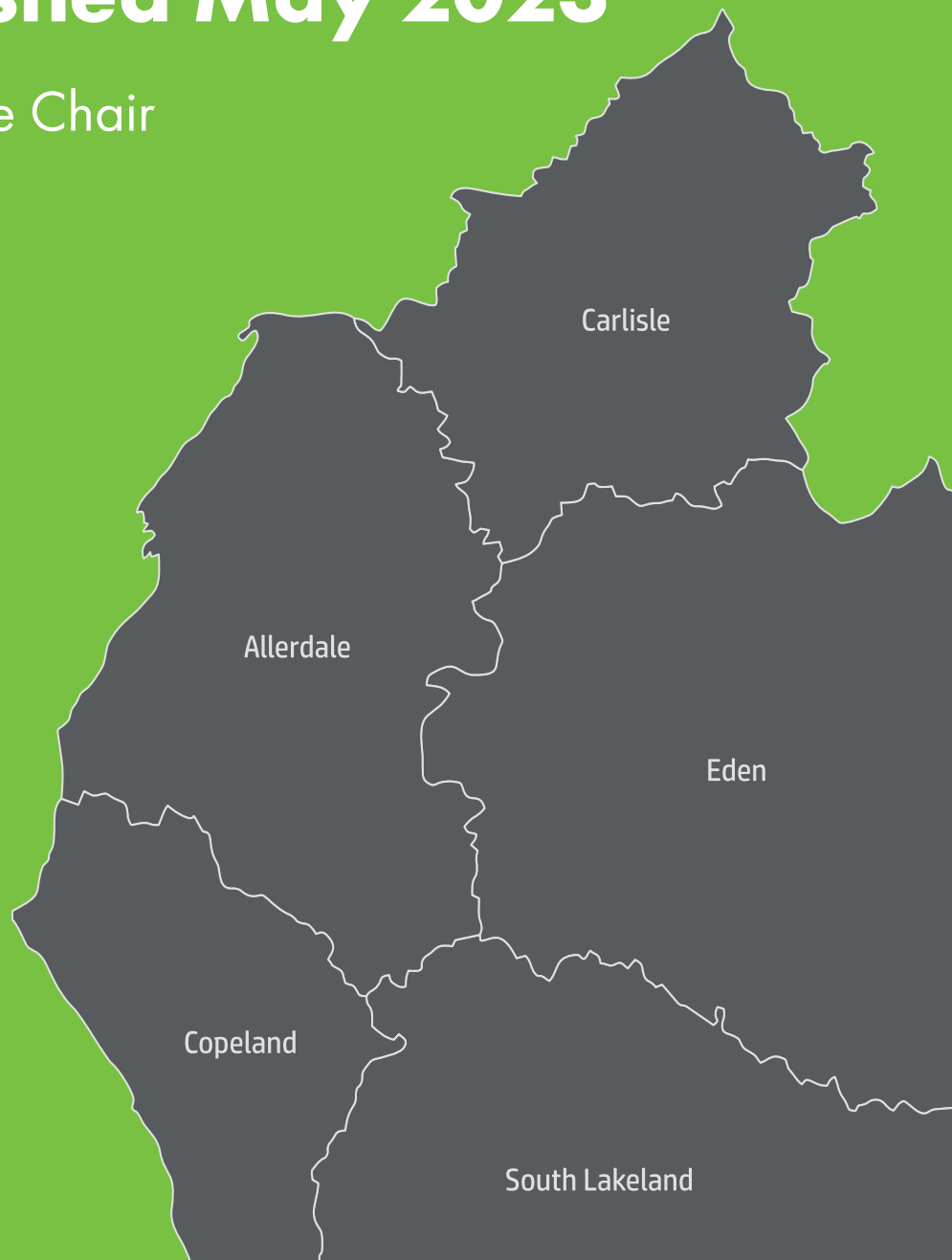
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Foreword from the chair

Lakes College is a small General Further Education College in Cumbria, with a mission to deliver the very best of vocational and technical education to employers and learners in the West of Cumbria and beyond.

Like all Further Education Colleges, we have been tasked, under the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022, to review how we are meeting local skills needs. In meeting this brief, we have been careful not to replicate other documents, but to produce a report which is public-facing and readily understood.

Our offer has long been calibrated to meeting the needs of our employers and learners, and meeting the strategic skills intent for the area, most recently by considering and reviewing our offer in line with the Cumbria Local Skills Improvement Plan. Through our employer engagement and reputation, the reach of Lakes College has extended in recent years to regional and national delivery in specialist areas such as nuclear and engineering.

An Economic Impact Assessment report from 2021 (based on 2019/20 data, the height of the COVID pandemic) has calculated an added workforce skills impact of £110.1M on the immediate locality of West Cumbria, which is an indication of the value Lakes College adds to the local economy.



Added workforce skills impact:

£110.1 million Added income **3,864** Average-wage jobs

Source: Demonstrating the Value of Lakes College West Cumbria:
ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT OF LEARNING, EMSI October 21

As part of this exercise, it was intended to paint the picture behind the statistics, to consider the strengths of delivery and areas where further development work may be required and identify the ways in which we collaborate to support our learners and employers in securing their aspirations.

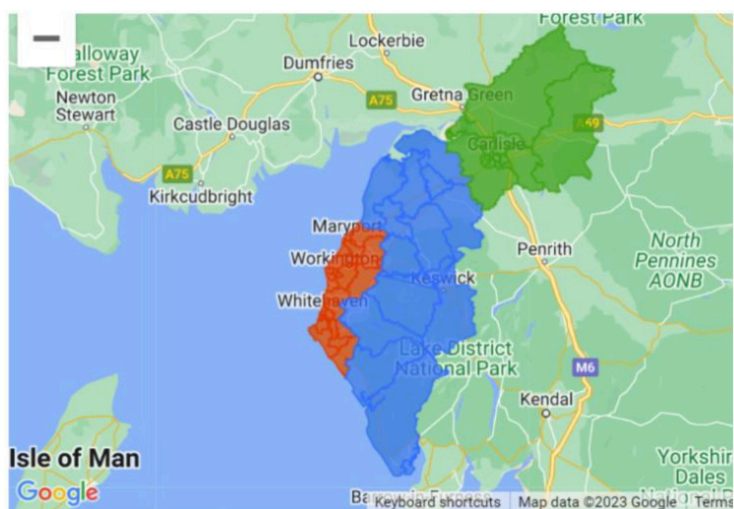
As a Board, our whole focus is to offer the best opportunities possible to our local communities and employers for their continued success. We remain open to any ideas or suggestions that our communities may wish to contribute at any time that would support us in this goal and would encourage you to take advantage of our open-door policy. Strong partnerships bring depth to our offer to the benefit of us all.

Michael Priestley, Chair
18 May 2023

The Review Area

Cumbria is the second largest county in England covering 6,767 square km. With just under 0.5 million inhabitants, it is a sparsely populated county characterised by an outstanding rural landscape, but a comparatively poor road and public transport infrastructure.

This helps to explain why there are four General Further Education Colleges in Cumbria, largely situated around the periphery of the County where the largest centres of population lie; the challenges of transport to and from colleges have a discernible impact on a learner's choice of college.



- Main Area
- Outer Area
- Carlisle

This map highlights the Vector Defined Area used in the 16-19 and adult learner sections Vector. Each colour coded area represents a unique analysis area which will appear in the drop down analysis filters within the Vector dashboards, charts and tables.

However, for many years the four colleges have collaborated on a number of projects and initiatives, including most recently, the ¹Strategic Development Fund projects where they were joined by the University of Cumbria. The first of these projects considered how the colleges and the university meets the needs of the Cumbria as a whole.

²Within the main catchment area identified on the above map, there are 10 communities in the most deprived 10% of communities in England, a fact often masked by an otherwise well-paid local workforce employed by the nuclear industry and its supply chain, which dominates the local employment landscape. The demands placed on the college are therefore diverse, however by putting skills for jobs at the heart of what the College does, it is hoped to bring equality of opportunity for all learners.

The travel to learn area can be recognised as West Cumbria, but where there are specialisms, such as engineering apprenticeships or nuclear, the reach of Lakes College extends beyond this traditional catchment area. This includes some national initiatives under the banner of the National College for Nuclear and more recently moving into the apprenticeship market in other areas in Cumbria at the request of local employers. Our review area covers the communities in our travel to learn area and our communities regionally and nationally that share our interests and specialisms.

¹ These were projects funded by Government specifically to consider how local skills needs could be met, of which Lakes College was the lead partner.

² Cumbria Observatory: Allerdale and Copeland Narrative: Low Layers Super Output areas (Census 2021)

The Methodology for the Review

The most recent collaboration projects by the four Colleges and the University of Cumbria were part of a Government-funded Strategic Development programme to look specifically at how they collectively respond to local skills needs and is continuing under a second phase, which adds Independent Training Providers to the discussion. This has included the direct involvement of the Cumbria Chamber of Commerce and the Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership as key partners.

The Board recognised at the outset of the review that there had already been some considerable work into how the local skills needs were being met through the above-mentioned projects and was keen to avoid duplication. This work was continuing through survey (questionnaire, interviews and focus groups) with key stakeholders in the area by an independent consultant. This being the case, it was felt more efficient to review the recent evaluation of the project and evidence as a basis for forming a judgement, as it covered those areas suggested for the review, adopting a scrutiny approach (reviewing evidence, asking questions, forming conclusions).

Underpinning the review would be to identify where and how the curriculum had changed and adapted (or could be changed/adapted) to meet national policy, the Local Skills Improvement Plan priorities, to meet employer demand and learners' needs and where other actions might be taken or improvements identified.

The membership of the Working Group of Governors, who reviewed the available evidence, included an elected member of the local authority (Chair); a member with expertise in worklessness and careers for young people; a member with expertise in legal, governance and health and safety; the training manager for a major local employer; a member with extensive recent and senior experience of the nuclear industry; and the Principal, with the ensuing report being approved by the Board. There were six meetings of the working group during which time they reviewed:

- the evaluations of the Strategic Development Fund projects;
- reviewed how the Learning and Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) and local LMI influenced curriculum planning;
- considered how employers fed into curriculum design and delivery;
- the outcomes of employer, learner and parents' and stakeholders surveys and focus groups, including those carried out by independent third parties (among them the Chamber of Commerce) and which included responses from the Chamber itself, from the local Enterprise partnership, the local authority and the Job Centre;
- a deep dive into apprenticeship performance;
- the emerging findings from the refresh of the Learning and Skills Improvement Plan and the Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership skills' action plan with representatives from both organisations.
- the working group was already familiar with the self-assessment of the College and current performance trends through regular monitoring (as a Board) of strategic objectives and improvement plans.

Overview

For three years and more, the College has been entirely focused on providing high quality technical and vocational education which delivers the skills and jobs that both employers need and learners want. Our vision and mission are predicated on enabling learners to fulfil their potential thereby enhancing the prosperity of our local communities. Fully committed to playing an integral part of local, regional and national skills development to meet the skills' demand, we have seen considerable change in the way the College operates. Some examples of the changes introduced, which will be expanded upon in the course of the report, are:

- Very focused and sophisticated curriculum plans drawing on local Labour Market Information and more recently the LSIP;
- The development of Training Needs Analyses for employers which feed into the planning process;
- Employer input into the curriculum and curriculum design, adopting a partnership approach;
- The addition of T-Levels to the offer which have been embraced by the College and proving a popular offer for students;
- The introduction of guest and associate lecturers where specialisms exist;
- Further development of our Higher Education offer under the auspices of the National College for Nuclear (of which the College is a partner organisation);
- The Development of Programmes of employability skills for learners, that should ensure that the learners leave college job-ready, in response to employer feedback;
- New approaches to apprenticeship recruitment and delivery in response to demand.

This has led to a period of post-pandemic growth for Lakes College as demonstrated by a comparison of recruitment figures from January 2022 and January 2023. Noting that the number of young people in the area remains static, significant growth in most areas is demonstrated, which would suggest that the offer is meeting the aspirations of local learners and employers (noting an increase of apprenticeship starts of +12% over the previous year at the same stage). It should also give some comfort to partnership organisations at a regional level that apprenticeship recruitment is recovering from the pandemic.

Type of Learner	31/1/23	31/1/23	+/-
³ Education Programmes for Young People (full-time learners)	903	841	+7%
⁴ Apprentices in Learning	910	593	+53%
Apprenticeships new starts	363	323	+12%
⁵ Higher Education Students	424	374	+13%
⁶ 19+ learners who are funded through the Adult Education Budget	485	302	+61%
⁷ Adult Learner Loans	44	53	-17%

³ These are generally 16-19 learners, although some learners are included up to 25 where they have certain additional needs

⁴ Apprenticeship figures vary throughout the year as there is not a uniform start date

⁵ There are two intakes in a year; in September and January

⁶ This figure for 2023 includes those adults who are on a new funded programme to deliver a level 3 qualifications.

⁷ Learners who have taken a loan to pay for their learning. Note that many learners are now entitled to take advantage of a level 3 qualification under a new government-funded offer rather than take out a loan. The Adult Education Budget figures include Level 3 entitlement numbers

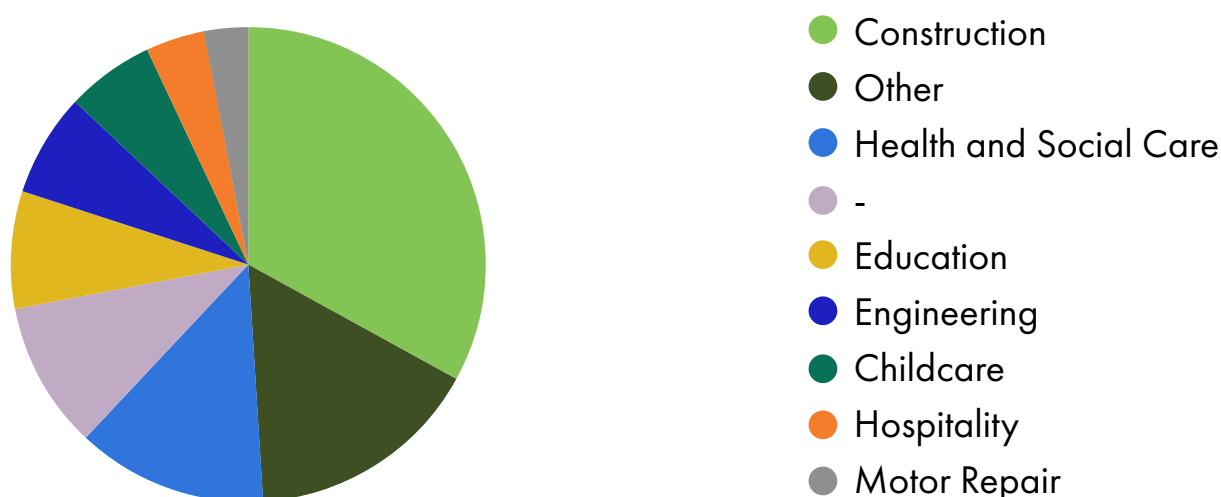
Working in Partnership with Employers to meet the Skills' Need

The collaboration project of the four colleges and the University in Cumbria, together with the Cumbria Chamber of Commerce and the Cumbria LEP as active members of the collaboration, brought greater understanding of the skills' landscape to all parties and supported synergy with the development of the Local Skills Improvement plan, strengthening collaboration for the longer-term.

It was felt that the project brought fresh thinking of the way in which providers can develop new programmes with a shift in emphasis from qualifications to skills development. This helped to develop the new provision and delivery models underpinning growth and has seen a shift in culture from the transactional approach to the strategic.

With the development of a skills hub in each of the provider centres, which gives the one interface for employers to enquire and source skills across the County, together with in-college work spaces, the employer-provider relationship is brought closer together. It is noted that employer contact in the region of 350 in the current year is anticipated through the skills hub alone at Lakes College. This has included meeting staff and reviewing apprenticeship performance.

Lakes College works regularly with around 650 employers, including commercial work, of which the majority, apprenticeship employers are categorised as follows.



Market intelligence of a diverse nature is considered in shaping the offer for our employers; this includes 1-2-1 contact and feedback, including the use of Training Needs Analyses, which combine to give considerable employer input; there is the information gathered and shared through the Learning and Skills Improvement Plan; together with the use of sophisticated planning tools drawing on Labour Market Intelligence locally. These combine to deliver Curriculum Maps.

The Maps provide an analysis of performance, key themes from the LSIP pertinent to that area of the curriculum, anticipated demand for jobs and culminate in a SWOT analysis of that curriculum area coupled with an action plan for the coming year and the working group reflected that the maps could be enhanced by including reference to learners.

By way of example of outcomes, actions coming through on the construction curriculum map is to reflect on the requirement of courses for the retrofit of alternative sources of energy such as ground heat pump (an LSIP priority) and to develop case studies of innovative approaches to working with employers.

Among the new ways of working and supporting employers, many of whom are small and medium-sized employers, there has been support for employers to articulate their skills' need, to have the opportunity to shape the curriculum as far as they are able and to support employers in accessing funding through the levy, which is a complex process requiring a partnership approach from all parties.

This has included an 'apprenticeship academy' approach, whereby the College supports prospective learners with their application and provides support services (such as interview coaching), facilitating interaction with employers who have clearly articulated their requirements. Twenty-five employers are now committed to this approach and have contributed 158 vacancies (growing all the time).

Through open evenings and other channels of communication, the College has received 533 expressions of interest of which 368 full applications have been received at the time of writing. In our engineering academy, our employers have fed into the design of what they need, and the College has provided opportunities for 'block' delivery of the education element whether in the college or in the workplace. This bespoke provision and delivery is now being rolled out to other employers and supports employers to meet their requirements for off the job training in a way which supports them best.

Lakes College has responded to other employers in Cumbria in delivery of their apprenticeships (and in line with the demand identified in the LSIP). This has included the provision of apprenticeship delivery in Carlisle to the above model which was not available locally and has seen increasing interest from other employers in the area.

New Ways of Working

Working with a national employer to deliver for their apprenticeship provision, the employer provided input into the delivery of the standards and the college accommodated block delivery. The employer is also skilling their staff as assessors. This has allowed the employer to better understand the framework, to influence some of the delivery and to better plan for apprentice off-the-job training. This approach is now being offered to other employers.



LAKES COLLEGE HAS A VISION TO BE
AN AMBITIOUS
TECHNICAL COLLEGE
THAT ENHANCES THE
PROSPERITY AND PROSPECTS
OF OUR PEOPLE AND
COMMUNITIES





OUR MISSION & PURPOSE IS TO
ENABLE PEOPLE TO RECOGNISE,
DEVELOP AND FULFILL
THEIR POTENTIAL



Working With Employers

New provision for higher education is being developed as part of our National College for Nuclear offer, meeting the need for further specialisms in degree apprenticeships in line with employer demand locally. While employers have fed into the curriculum on a regular basis, the higher education team are hoping to build a network of employers with whom they can work more regularly on a consultative basis.

The expertise which has been developed under our National College for Nuclear provision is being replicated elsewhere in the country; most recently by supporting the swift turnaround of an apprenticeship programme for Rolls Royce working with the University of Derby. In this initiative, the College was able to lend their support on curriculum design and delivery to assist local providers to deliver to a very short timescale; 200 apprentices in six months which has recently been recognised in a national award. This demonstrates Lakes College commitment to the national skills agenda and its breadth of expertise which is recognised nationally.

In line with our ambition for high quality technical qualifications, Lakes College embraced the roll out of T-Levels which is proving attractive to learners in our area. In support of this provision, the College has also developed foundation programmes for T-Levels, again often with direct input from employers.

As an example of the joint working with employers, the NHS locally has been heavily involved in the curriculum design of T-Levels and are now helping to co-design the foundation programme, ensuring that their expectations are delivered. As a result, inductions are being held directly at the local hospital and more work placements have opened up in a range of health provision.

Although still not meeting post-pandemic aspirations, it is noted for the record that apprenticeship achievements for Lakes College for 2021-22 are above the national average at 58.9% (53.4% nationally) according to the latest data (ESFA March 2023). These compare with pre-pandemic achievement rates of 2018-19 of 74.5% (64.7% nationally).

“Through working with NHS on placement, I have had the opportunity to work with specialist individuals from the Outpatient unit, Copeland unit and I have just recently started with the community nurses. Through these opportunities, I have developed my confidence and enhanced my communication skills through understanding how to tailor my communication skills to patients.” -**Emmie Ling, Yr2 T Level Health learner**



What more can we do to meet our Employers' needs

While the working group as a whole felt that the College has a strong story to tell in the initiatives that it has taken to meet local employer need, there are areas where further development work could be taken.

- The new approaches to apprenticeship delivery already taking place in some areas of the curriculum, including higher education, could be rolled out to other areas of the college, where there is demand and delivery can be efficient. While employer feedback was for the most part very positive, there were some areas of inconsistency identified where a proven approach with a consistent model may be beneficial.
- In light of the current energy crisis, Green Skills has been a recurring theme of skills' strategies and priorities. While consideration has been given to various green initiatives by the College, including the provision of modular construction of an eco-house and courses for retrofit of clean energy solutions, it is felt that there is a piece of work to be done over the next two years to articulate the approach of Lakes College into a green skills strategy at a scale commensurate with the demand in Cumbria and building on existing expertise in the delivery of energy training. An example was given of some situations where green skills training had gone out of county and the resultant loss to the local economy.
- Employers have voiced concern at a regional level of the lack of employability skills being seen in the workplace (the concern is about young people in general and not specifically Lakes College leavers). While the latest Chamber of Commerce survey would suggest an improving picture, Lakes College has already been considering and working with young people and employers to address these issues through an employability passport, with a more formalised programme set to run alongside their programme of study from next year. It is the intention of the Board to monitor the effectiveness of this programme in 2023-24 on a termly basis, through employer feedback and surveys, and through engaging with employers directly at events.
- In line with the national picture, retention is a challenge particularly in the apprenticeship market in the post-pandemic era. In exploring the reasons why people may move away from their apprenticeship, there could be any number of issues which include leaving the framework once they have gained a qualification; being way out of time following the pandemic or being made redundant; moving into full-paid work or to another employer. Where it was felt that the College could influence matters in the short-medium term was to work with employers and learners to ensure that they fully understood the commitment and determine that the apprenticeship programme would meet their business need (as opposed to another form of qualification). A consistent approach to the delivery of IAG at the outset was considered to be necessary to influence a good outcome for learners and employers. It is noted that in the context of a 3-4 year programme, that impact may not be instantly apparent.
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is a key priority for all employers. Lakes College has been developing internships for neurodiverse learners and will aim to support a greater range of employers to engage in the programme, providing support to employers' staff in their support of learners.
- Through our collaboration under SDF2, the intention is to include workplace learning providers in the skills hub database, to ensure that all employers have oversight of the offer in Cumbria.
- That progress with the 'network' approach to employer consultation as part of the National College be monitored for effectiveness and the potential to be rolled out to other areas of the curriculum.
- That where there is inconsistency that, as a matter of policy, employers are encouraged to use the complaints' process to ensure visibility of issues and resolutions at all levels of the organisation.

Delivering for our learners

The work to meet employer need brings our learners the opportunity to access an employer-facing curriculum in the best interests of their future career prospects. To meet the need of our diverse local community, our curriculum is very carefully structured to enable progression for all our learners. There is a diverse offer of qualifications, apprenticeships and degrees to meet local learner need at all levels, which is enhanced by new qualifications in line with identified demand.

The aim for our learners is that they learn and prosper; that through their time at Lakes College they achieve their qualifications to meet their aspirations. To this end, additions to the offer have included a range of T-Level provision together with foundation programmes to help accessibility to the T-Level, which have proved to be a popular choice for our learners. The college has also been successful in securing funding to expand the higher education offer and is working with a partner organisation to deliver three new degrees in 2023-24 including a digital offer.

In a further response to the digital demand identified in the Learning and Skills Improvement Plan, learners have the opportunity to take up a new offer of a business marketing apprenticeship in social media and will shortly have access to enhanced digital facilities through a community digital hub partnership project. As part of the demand for skills for the Visitor Economy, learners can now access a new Level 3 course in patisserie and will have the opportunity in 2024-25 to study a T-Level in Catering (the launch of which was delayed nationally).

In support of the national initiative to help learners into employment or upskill, the College has in the past year participated in the Government's Bootcamps initiative, offering 16-week courses at the end of which the learner is offered an interview during which 23 local learners achieved in a range of subject areas including cyber security; welding and CAD engineering. Two further bootcamps will commence shortly in the lean manufacturing and engineering for manufacturing in direct response to county skills' priorities.

All learners receive a tutorial programme which aims to develop the knowledge and skills they need in the workplace, and to offer enrichment activity and experience a meaningful work experience opportunity.



Areas of focus

- Information Advice and Guidance continues to be a strong theme for the College and for meeting the local skills need. It is intended to continue to monitor performance in this area, to challenge where it is felt that there is insufficient opportunity to deliver independent advice and guidance (insufficient external opportunities in schools) and to ensure that the IAG which is delivered by Lakes College is robust and consistent and seeks to achieve gender diversity in career choice. The importance of robust IAG has been recognised by both the Chamber of Commerce and the Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership to address some inconsistencies arising from workforce data.
- Some learners, particularly those who have been out of mainstream education for some time, have found the transition to College life to be challenging. In the past year, there has been the development of new, off-site provision to assist in their future integration into college life. This has been instrumental in ensuring that those young people are retained in education. This model of provision should be monitored to ensure that the desired impact is achieved, particularly in respect of progression.
- The pass rates of educational programmes are historically strong and remain so in most areas. Retention of some students and the challenges of English and maths progression have impacted on overall achievement rates, which were below the national achievement rate for 16-18 year olds by 1.3% in 2021-22. In common with many other providers, maths has proved particularly challenging over a number of years. In the past year, staffing has been reviewed and a new structure put in place with significant training and development activity is taking place. It is anticipated that improvements will be seen and the Board will closely monitor strategies for progress and impact.
- The college-wide quality strategy is being refreshed. The strategy should now be finalised for implementation in 2023-24 to address inconsistency in some areas of delivery. Where there is inconsistency in performance, these areas should continue to be subject to closer monitoring and will be challenged directly by Governors during self-assessment processes.
- Following an external review of high needs provision in 2022, which identified that learners were safe and well cared for but that more should be done to support their aspirations, there has been a significant transformation of our approach:
 - our curriculum has been fundamentally reviewed;
 - good transition arrangements have been identified as a crucial success factor in the first year and better partnership with schools sought;
 - internships have been facilitated to offer work experience to learners with high needs;
 - new off-site provision can be accessed by those who might struggle with a general FE College environment;
 - a capital project will create additional spaces and facilities within the College to cater to specific needs;
 - staffing structure has been reviewed, strengthening oversight;
 - increased staff engagement in training and support for learners, including specialist teaching methods;
- The Board has continued to monitor progress throughout the current year, both in their meetings and by the Link Governor, and will be gauging impact through an evaluation of achievements for 2022-23.

Resources

The challenges of staff recruitment in the current economic climate have been well documented nationally. Comparatively poor pay levels for further education staff generally and high wage levels in local industry specifically, leads to a challenging set of circumstances for Lakes College in both attracting and

retaining staff, whether teaching or support staff. Through these challenges, Lakes College has piloted the use of associate and guest lecturers to bring in expertise in specific areas and ensure that the College has the capacity to deliver for both employer and student.

New Ways of Working

A senior manager from a national employer, who is accommodating work placements for T Levels in construction, is co-delivering in the classroom one afternoon a week, bringing benefits to all parties including upskilling of staff.

Staff development resource has increased in support of business growth. The upfront investment should even out in years 2 and 3 of delivery as more learners are added to that programme area, but in the interim development costs are impacting on the financial health of the College (as measured by the ESFA – the College has robust reserves). The Board will continue to monitor financial performance to ensure that anticipated efficiencies are realised.

The College has been particularly adept at the smart investment in its estate, leveraging in significant funding. The overall estate, much of which dates from the early 2000s, is in relatively good health through a programme of reconfiguration and refurbishment. For the most part, employers and students can enjoy a good level of accommodation and resources. The most recent refurbishment of the estate includes the provision of an independent-living kitchen for some of our learners. The National College for Nuclear enjoys some state-of-the-art facilities, some of which has been directly provided through employer funding.

A current priority for the College is to secure permanent facilities for brickwork, which is temporarily co-located (and which has been mentioned in one of the employer surveys).

Resources continue to be challenging for Further Education Colleges across the country, however it is felt that Lakes College has taken a prudent and canny approach to financial management, which ensures that learners and employers have access to good facilities which meet their need.

The Board will continue to review the most efficient ways and structures for delivery, in partnership and collaboration where there may be efficiencies to be gained, working with other providers to fill gaps in provision in the delivery of county-wide ambitions.

In the coming year, financial performance will continue to be monitored to ensure that efficiencies in curriculum delivery are materialised and it is suggested that a review of the property strategy be carried out to ensure that it continues to be relevant to inform future funding opportunities.



Conclusions

Lakes College can demonstrate that it has gone some considerable way to meeting the needs of employers in the area, by introducing new ways of working and creating more complex partnerships designed to ensure that the offer meets the skills demands of employers, collectively and individually. Collaboration is continuing with other providers in Cumbria to ensure that Lakes College is contributing to the provision of skills priorities under the Local Skills Improvement Plan. Where there is a recognised strength in provision, Lakes College has shown a willingness to advise and support other providers in that specialism in support of regional and national skills priorities, including as an active partner under the National College for Nuclear.

As demonstrated throughout the report, Lakes College will continue to reflect, listen and identify areas where it can improve and address inconsistencies. However, for a college of its size, it has many a good story to tell in innovative approaches to curriculum delivery to support employers, to equip learners for the world of work and in sharing best practice and specialist knowledge locally, regionally and nationally.

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