

Education Skills and Employability Board

19 October 2021

Skills Provision for residents with specific needs

Is the paper exempt from the press and public?	No
Purpose of this report:	Policy Decision
Is this a Key Decision?	No
Has it been included on the Forward Plan?	Not a Key Decision

Director Approving Submission of the Report:

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Executive Summary

Following the completion of the initial commissioning of devolved Adult Education Budget provision, the SYMCA Executive Team has begun to look at whether there are opportunities to improve the provision provided to help specific groups of residents to access adult education. The SYMCA Executive Team will pay particular attention to residents whose progression has been affected by changes to provision resulting from AEB commissioning. The SYMCA Executive Team would like to develop a proposal for an additional programme based on earlier programme proposals around support for disadvantaged learners and integration of early intervention to help residents at risk of long-term unemployment find work. A new costed proposal will be developed and brought back to the Board for approval.

What does this mean for businesses, people and places in South Yorkshire?

Devolution of the Adult Education Budget has enabled SYMCA to commission provision which will better help residents develop skills to a higher level and in a way which supports skills demand from employers seeking to fill vacancies in our priority sectors. The SYMCA Executive Team wants all residents who need to access adult skills provision to make a smooth transition into the learning opportunities that have been commissioned. However, we know that some residents may need additional support. This proposal is for development of a programme that

will help to provide additional opportunities for certain groups of learners who need that additional support to progress in learning and enter employment.

Recommendations

That Board members approve development of an additional support and skills development programme.

Consideration by any other Board, Committee, Assurance or Advisory Panel

None

1. Background

- 1.1 SYMCA took over responsibility for £39.3m devolved AEB funding from August 2021. The Authority took a dual approach to commissioning provision along with an additional £2.79m funding for Level 3s for adults aged 24+, devolved to SYMCA as part of the Government's Adult Skills Offer.
- 1.2 In the first year of devolution, the SYMCA Executive Team has been working to ensure a smooth transition which supported stability in the region's FE Colleges and allowed the SYMCA Executive Team to focus on bedding in the new technical functions for which it now has responsibility – such as development of the funding and performance management approach and paying providers.
- 1.3 As we move beyond that initial commissioning, and with the new shape of provision in mind, the SYMCA Executive Team has started to review provision and to consider the join up between AEB funded provision and other skills and employment work and more widely with programmes in other areas. We also want to maximise opportunities in relation to groups of residents who need additional support to engage with learning, develop skills and progress into employment. This is in line with the approach set out in the Back to Work section of the RAP and includes commitments to provide support to key cohorts.
- 1.4 The SYMCA Executive Team would like to draw on work that it has previously invested in developing that we believe may now be required to provide additional targeted support to residents as a proactive move to put additional support in place. This is a good opportunity to provide additional support for learners who have unintentionally been displaced from existing learning programmes through the devolved AEB commissioning process. Feedback from local authorities and conversation with providers suggests some of these learners will find it particularly difficult to find appropriate alternative provision.
- 1.5 Significant time and effort have already been spent developing evidenced and robust business cases for proposals that spoke directly to key needs across South Yorkshire and from which residents could benefit. The SYMCA Executive Team would like to review those proposals with a view to re-casting them in the new post-pandemic and post- devolution context. The two key proposals are the Disadvantaged Learners Pilot which was developed initially with a focus on young care leavers, and the Early Integrated Employment Support for Claimants at Risk of Long-Term Unemployment proposal.

Disadvantaged Learners Pilot (Young Care Leavers)

- 1.6 Even before the pandemic, NEET rates across South Yorkshire were already higher than comparator areas in England, particularly among 18-24 year olds. Among certain groups – such as young females in Barnsley and Doncaster – rates were among the highest in the country with over 19% of young women in these areas NEET. Even though unemployment rates do not appear to have increased substantially as a result of the pandemic, there is still a concern that the disruption to education and ‘normal life’ for so many young people and their families is likely to have affected their employment chances.
- 1.7 This is likely to have been compounded by the decline in sectors such as retail and personal services and apprenticeship opportunities during the pandemic, affecting the groups of young people who would have made their first steps into employment within these sectors. Care leavers and those who face disadvantaged in finding good employment are likely to be doubly affected.
- 1.8 Through our procurement exercise, we have secured provision in each of the local authority areas to support hidden NEETS and we will want to pay attention to how well this provision supports those young people. But we need to act to ensure that there is sufficient targeted provision in place for the key groups who are most at risk of becoming NEET, which includes groups such as leavers of Alternative Provision and Care Leavers.
- 1.9 In 2015, the SYMCA Executive Team developed with stakeholders a proposal for a pilot valued at just of £1m Adult Education Budget to commission a programme of specialist employment and skills support within the existing Care Leaver pathway to increase the number of former relevant care leavers aged 19-24 participating in education, training or employment in the Sheffield City Region.
- 1.10 We would like to use this model as the basis for additional support for young people to consider whether revisiting a pilot of this sort would add value to and fill a gap in the mix of provision we now have in South Yorkshire.

Early Integrated Employment Support for Claimants at Risk of Long-Term Unemployment

- 1.11 Across the suite of employment programmes that are available to South Yorkshire residents to help them get into work (Kickstart, Restart, SCR’s South Yorkshire Jobs Fund), there is robust support for people who are relatively close to the labour market. Getting people who have become unemployed as a result of the pandemic into support which helps them move back into work as swiftly as possible has been a key priority for government, understandably as numbers have started to rise.
- 1.12 However, for unemployed residents with more severe and/or complex barriers to work, the system is still too often not delivering the integrated range and depth of support that these claimants need. The likelihood is that as a consequence of additional resources being made available to those who can move quickly back into work, those who need more help will have fallen even further behind.
- 1.13 The SYMCA Executive Team previously developed a proposition for a pilot programme aimed at cohorts of early intervention voluntary referrals of claimants with complex and/or severe barriers to work who are at high risk of long-term

unemployment. The programme was proposed for roll out from summer 2017 and would have picked up 4500 people in total at a cost of £13.14m (£8.95m financial and £4.19m in kind). Those costs were to be shared between the SYMCA Executive Team and central government.

- 1.14 This is the kind of intervention that the SYMCA Executive Team would like to put in place to support residents across South Yorkshire and help them into work. However, the context in which the pilot would be delivered has changed significantly since the initial work was done. Critically, no central government funding is available so if we are to take this pilot forward, a new SYMCA investment case would need to be developed.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 The SYMCA Executive Team is not wedded explicitly to further development and delivery of either or both of these programmes exactly as previously articulated. While there is merit in considering both projects as ways of providing additional support to residents, it is conscious that funding and capacity issues may mean we need a different approach, either focusing on one or other of the proposals or bringing elements of the two proposals together. The final proposition will need to evolve to reflect devolved AEB, including the Test and Learn provision procured through Lot 4, or could also bring in other aspects such as sectoral priorities.
- 2.2 With the approval of the ESEB, the SYMCA Executive Team intends to develop and deliver a 2-year pathfinder programme targeting residents who may need additional support to engage and progress in learning and / or employment. The programme should draw on work done previously through the development of proposals as indicated above. Costings for the programme will need to be developed and brought to the Board for approval.
- 2.3 The following are the key milestones:
- Review of existing project proposals in the context of devolved AEB and wider changes within the skills system.
 - Development of a project proposal with delivery partner and in consultation with local authorities.
 - Recommendation's to the Education, Skills and Employability Board in January 2022.
 - Launch of the Programme no later than 1st April 2022.

One or more delivery partners will be procured.

- 2.4 Longer term, the SYMCA Executive Team will feed learning from this programme into our future AEB commissioning plans, making the need for this additional support temporary.

3. Options Considered and Recommended Proposal

3.1 Option 1

Develop a costed programme proposal for approval by ESEB with a two-year delivery window from April 2022.

3.4 **Option 1 Risks and Mitigations**

Risk 1 – development time for the programmes takes longer than anticipated with a delay to the start of the programme and additional time when residents are unable to access support. Mitigation – the SYMCA Executive Team to ensure there is capacity in place to develop this programme. Option to extend the end date for the programme.

Risk 2 – failure to identify the target group which could most benefit from the programme, leaving residents without the support they need and potentially reducing take-up. Mitigation – the SYMCA Executive Team will consult with external partners in development of the proposition.

3.5 **Option 2**

Do nothing. Await final year data on AEB performance before reviewing gaps. This would mean developing additional provision after October 2022.

3.8 **Option 2 Risks and Mitigations**

Risk 1 – some learners who face additional barriers in the shift of provision may fail to find alternative provision and may fall outside the system.

Risk 2 – significant delay in reaching key target groups for provision

3.13 **Recommended Option**

Option 1

4. **Consultation on Proposal**

4.1 Significant consultation took place in development of the two projects for which proposals have already been developed. Additional consultation will be baked into development work around the new proposal.

5. **Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision**

5.1 Development work will be commissioned by the Authority in time for a recommendation to the ESEB in January 2022.

6. **Financial and Procurement Implications and Advice**

6.1 Any procurement activity will be delivered in accordance with our CPR's and the PCR regulations.

6.2 Currently, no budget has been identified for this work. A further paper will need to be presented and approved once funding and budgets have been identified.

7. **Legal Implications and Advice**

7.1 The general parameters of the Programme as described fall within the functions granted to SYMCA by the Barnsley Doncaster Rotherham and Sheffield Combined Authority (Functions and Amendments) Order 2020.

7.2 Delivery Partners must be procured in accordance with procurement law and SYMCA's contract procedure rules. If the indicative budget for the Programme is

below the threshold of £663,540 set for educational services in the Public Contract Regulations 2015. The procurement will remain subject to SYMCA's CPRs and a tender process must be carried out which must:

- i. Be run by a Procurement Professional
- ii. Use the full competitive tender process
- iii. Be appropriately advertised
- iv. Be undertaken using an appropriate electronic tendering system

If a waiver is sought as the value is over £100,000 it must be referred to the Mayoral Combined Authority.

8. Human Resources Implications and Advice

8.1 None.

9. Equality and Diversity Implications and Advice

9.1 This proposal will develop additional targeted support for those most at risk of being left behind due to gaps in provision in South Yorkshire. We anticipate that take up for the programme will be higher for females and those in the BAME communities than for the SY population as a whole.

10. Climate Change Implications and Advice

10.1 No specific climate change implications resulting from this proposal for development of a programme proposal.

11. Information and Communication Technology Implications and Advice

11.1 The programme proposal has yet to be developed. The proposal will make use of suitable ICT where appropriate and where necessary, delivery will consider the availability and accessibility of ICT for participants.

12. Communications and Marketing Implications and Advice

12.1 Any new provision will be promoted in line with the MCA's AEB comms and marketing strategy, working closely with providers to ensure learners are aware of and able to access the support on offer.

List of Appendices Included

None

Background Papers

None