



A Business Plan for the delivery of Adult Education services which meet the needs of the community.

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INTRODUCTION

Medway Adult Education (MAE) is the adult education provider in Medway, receiving £1.8m from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) in 2020-21. The service is a department of Medway Council, a unitary authority.

Medway is growing fast, there are 28,000 new homes and 17,000 new jobs planned by 2035 with the population expected to grow by approximately 40,000 over that same period. Central to the council's ambition for the area is seeing an increase in high value employment, supporting business growth and matching local business demand and skills supply. The council recognises that successful achievement of its growth plans requires an excellent skills base that mirrors employers' aspirations and demands.

Medway Adult Education must play its part in delivering this agenda for those in the job market needing to enhance their skills or to re-train, and for those not currently economically active. For this latter group, short courses with a community learning focus can be the path to more formal work-skills training, and working locally in disadvantaged communities is part of our approach.

The service also recognises that growth for Medway's residents also means having a positive wellbeing, remaining engaged and stimulated during and after formal employment, and /or having a good work-life balance by undertaking fulfilling activities alongside one's employment. A growing area of importance, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic is social isolation. MAE already does much to support people who face loneliness and will strive to do more than ever to help those who need it. Likewise the service is well placed to support positive mental health and will continue to do so.

Cllr Howard Doe

Portfolio Holder Housing and Community Services

BACKGROUND

MAE offers a responsive, accessible, high quality education for individuals, families and businesses which enables all residents to enjoy life, take part in society, have the skills for sustainable and productive employment and reduces reliance on state and public services. MAE uses the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) Adult Education Budget (AEB) as defined in the ESFA funding rules to engage adults and provide the skills and learning they need to be employed or progress in their work, commence an apprenticeship, other learning or volunteering.

MAE uses the AEB to provide flexible tailored programmes of learning, which may offer a qualification/s, to help eligible adult learners of different ages and backgrounds to develop skills, confidence, motivation, resilience, life skills and/or enhance their wellbeing including mental health. Older learners by engaging in adult learning improve their overall well-being and maintain cognitive abilities for longer through learning in a social network provided by classroom-based settings.

The curriculum provides pathways from open access courses to accredited qualification-based programmes and includes regulated qualifications and non-regulated provision. Non-regulated provision, particularly English, Maths and ESOL, will provide support for individuals to progress to a qualification; or engage with employment; or improve independent living skills; or engagement in learning which improves their knowledge, skills and confidence for life and work.

In 2018/19 Medway Adult Education ran 529 courses with 2,111 learners, 4868 enrolments, of which 21.7% of learners were male, 33.56% of learners were BME, 17.67% were adults with self-disclosed learning difficulties or disabilities, 30.12% were aged 60+ and 38.10% of learners were from deprived wards.

Ofsted

Medway Adult Education has been on a significant journey of improvement, which culminated in May 2018 when a short inspection from Ofsted gave the service a 'Good' rating; its key conclusions were that:

- The service continues to provide a good educational experience for learners and apprentices
- It places a strong emphasis on providing a welcoming and safe environment for learners.
- Senior managers are clear about the education centre's strengths and areas for improvement
- Board members and senior managers appreciate the important role their adult education centre plays in combatting social isolation, as part of the public health agenda in the Medway region.
- The service maintained good safeguarding arrangements since the previous inspection

Three areas were identified as the next steps for Medway Adult Education:

- to focus on developing learners' and apprentices' knowledge of 'Prevent' and British Values, so that learners and apprentices understand how they apply to their lives and work
- to improve learners' achievement rates for basic English and mathematics qualifications, to exceed those of similar providers nationally
- to arrange staff development activities to help tutors develop outstanding teaching and learning practice.

Challenge and Opportunity

The service itself recognises that:

- There has been a slight decline in enrolments pre-COVID-19. The impact of COVID-19 has had a large impact on enrolments.
- It has a strong and popular community learning offer, particularly around arts and craft, including for LLDD learners.
- The work skills area has had fewer enrolments, in part due to low referrals from Job Centre Plus as they have adapted to COVID-19. With unemployment high, the work skills area is more important than ever before.
- Apprenticeships has been growing modestly but with a programme focussed almost entirely at this time on Council apprenticeships. The government decision to remove the business admin level 2 apprenticeship also has a negative impact on apprenticeship delivery.
- ESOL, English and Maths has tailored the offer to respond to local demand. ESOL is a large and thriving programme.

The Council's overall Skills and Employability Plan for Medway and the view of the Adult Education Oversight Board is that the service needs to be more active in addressing the poor basic skills in the workforce, whilst reducing social isolation and improving wellbeing. There is an important balance to be kept between delivering funded, non-funded and fee earning activities. As MAE has an excellent track record of spending the entire grant allocation, growing any one area will impact other areas. Therefore the service will seek to achieve a balance which most benefits our residents, whilst aiming to grow fee income.

Britton Farm Mall

In June 2020, funding was secured through the Get Building Fund to renovate the 1st floor of Britton Farm Mall in Gillingham, turning it into a new Learning, Skills & Employment Hub. This will be the home of Medway Adult Education in Gillingham. A wide range of employability courses will be on offer, with a particular focus on digital skills. Digital skills are now nationally recognised as being as important as English and Maths, and the hub will be a place where residents can receive their digital skills entitlement.

The hub will also be the focal point for our apprenticeship training. With ambitions to grow in this area, it will be an important location for ensuring we are providing apprentices with quality training. ESOL will also be delivered in the centre, providing a vital service. English and Maths courses will also be available at the centre, including courses to prepare you for English and Maths. There will also be

courses available designed to improve mental health and wellbeing, and encourage creativity. The training kitchen provides a host of opportunities – domestic cooking, family learning and healthy eating courses. We will explore courses that are a stepping stone to commercial cooking, and could lead to progression at other providers with commercial kitchens.

Climate Change

Medway Council has a new Climate Change action plan, and MAE will seek to contribute to tackling this issue, by inspiring and educating learners. There is also potential to explore opportunities within work skills, to enable residents to work in growing decarbonisation industries.

Medway Council

There is an opportunity to work more broadly across Medway Council, supporting services with training and skills development. The focus would be on areas within the council with skills shortages or large amounts of recruitment. MAE should be the education provider of preference for Medway Council working closely with Workforce Development to meet the Council's needs.

Education Engagement

MAE will develop new relationships with Medway schools, to support with education of parents, staff development, family wellbeing and health living. MAE can offer a comprehensive service when operating within partnerships with fully engaged schools. The education offer can vary from ESOL to English and Maths, to healthy eating. MAE will also work with MidKent College to strategically align curriculum areas.

Medway Residents

Whilst the economically active population of Medway is above the national and south east rates there are some key skills issues:

- Many residents are in low skilled jobs, attracting lower average wages
- 28.6% of the workforce do not have Level 2 qualifications (GCSE)
- The percentage of residents with a level 4 qualification is 10% lower than the rest of the south east
- 32 neighbourhoods are ranked in the 20% most deprived nationally

COVID19

Since the onset of the global pandemic Covid19, the world has substantially changed. Medway Adult Education has at times closed its buildings and ceased classroom delivery, where possible classroom delivery has been maintained at a reduced capacity. The service responded by delivering many of its courses online across a variety of platforms and pedagogical styles. This has rapidly expanded our online offering, and it is crucial that this continues. It will be some time before we know the full impact of Covid19 and what the post-Covid world will look like. There has however been:

- Significant economic impact, with high levels of unemployment
- Social distancing, with people unable to visit our centres in the same way
- Additional pressure on our income streams

- A requirement to develop online delivery, which is crucial to the ongoing success of MAE
- A recognition that marketing is more important than ever before
- A recognition that addressing social isolation and mental health, already key focus areas pre covid19, are areas where there is great need and therefore opportunities for MAE to make a difference.

ACHIEVEMENTS 2019/20 & 2020/21

- English and maths qualification are above National achievements
- Retention and achievement rates have increased
- Increase in targeted learner provision with the local community and businesses
- Support for the apprentice scheme – including MAE Administration apprentice achieving RCET Apprentice of the Year
- Introduction of the new learner integrated management system (EBS)
- Successful delivery of celebration of learning events
- Continued delivery during lockdown
- A wide variety of classes moving to online delivery, with tutors reinventing how they teach
- A loan process established and digital kit purchased to ensure learners could continue during lockdown
- Challenging targets set by Government to deliver against our contract during COVID-19, met and exceeded

VISION

Medway Adult Education will be the place of choice for **all** residents to realise their aspirations. This can be achieved through:

- Improving basic skills and re-skilling to meet the demands of the economy
- Improving mental health and wellbeing
- Reducing social isolation
- Re-engaging with learning across a broad range of subjects
- Inspiring residents to reach their creative potential
- Having fun

Medway Adult Education will work to make Medway a great place to live, work and most importantly learn.

PROPOSAL

It is proposed that MAE adopts the priorities within Medway's Skills and Employment Plan as means to deliver increased income and achieve social outcomes for the people of Medway.

MAE will play its part in making Medway a place to be proud of, supporting our aims to be City of Culture and a Child Friendly City. MAE will work in partnership with a wide variety of Council departments and play its part in reducing the impact of climate change.

It will also adopt the Regeneration, Culture and Environment Directorate ways of working and behaviours in all its activities:

- Be innovative
- Be commercial
- Embrace new ways of working
- Work at pace, and ensure delivery

- Be can-do and proactive
- Work in partnership, internally and externally.

Key priorities for the service will be:

- **Matching Business Demand with Skills Supply**
- **Developing Medway's Talent Pool**
- **Establishing Routes to Employment**
- **Developing Individuals Holistically**

This business plan focuses on new areas of work for MAE, as such it does not consider the huge amount of business as usual work undertaken on a daily basis.

MAE Business Plan – objectives

Priority	Description	Objectives
<p>Matching Business Demand and Skills Supply</p>	<p>Ensure that the work skills curriculum is aligned with business need, seek to develop relationships where courses are designed for business recruitment opportunities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better employment outcomes for our learners • Better outcomes for local businesses • Income opportunities from business explored
<p>Developing Medway's Talent Pool</p>	<p>Provide opportunity for all residents to basic skills – English, Maths and digital. Provide more apprenticeship opportunities in a wider variety of industries whilst developing a wider range of skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pipeline of work ready talent • Increased local basic skills base • Priority business sectors attracted and retained
<p>Establishing Routes to Employment</p>	<p>Provide opportunities to those with barriers to the workplace. Promote and campaign upskilling and retraining opportunities. Encourage and support employers to leave no one behind. Forge relationships with Medway's school base.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased participation in the labour market among priority groups • Increased participation in the wider community • All resident are able to see clear routes to employment
<p>Developing Individuals Holistically</p>	<p>Provide opportunities for residents to develop themselves as a whole, including mental health and wellbeing, engaging with the community, learning new skills and unlocking creativity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happier residents • Reduced social isolation and poor mental health • Greater community engagement

ACTIONS

These priorities will be delivered by a suite of actions behind each priority:

Matching Business Demand to Skills Supply

1. Consult with Businesses to establish work force development need. Establish where MAE can help that need. Particular focus on Medway Council as a customer and businesses with high volumes of zero hour contracts.
2. Develop a prospectus of business focused courses.
3. Seek to identify potential income streams from business.

Developing Medway's Talent Pool

1. Diversify and sell MAE apprenticeship offer. Seek to reach new industries across a wider range of vocational apprenticeships.
2. Understand, embed and deliver the national Digital Skills Strategy, ensuring all residents who need basic digital skills can access them. Seek investment for required equipment and engage with the South East Local Enterprise Partnership Digital Skills Partnership. Maximise the use of the new Britton Farm Mall centre.
3. Develop and expand online learning and blended learning models. Seek to access new learners through online services and explore opportunities for income.

Establishing Routes to Employment

1. Maximise numbers and outcomes of targeted provision. Outcomes to focus on supporting people into community engagement, further useful courses and employment.
2. Work with other Supported Learning and Employment programmes to increase outcomes for more individuals with Learning Disabilities. Seek to increase referral numbers to courses back from other programmes.
3. Strengthen relationships with Job Centre Plus, Leaving Care Team, Special Educational Needs Team, Youth Offending Team, Armed Forces and Housing Associations.

Developing Individuals Holistically

1. Consider trends and public interest when developing courses. Fully explore the best times and days for courses and develop a health risk appetite for starting new courses.
2. Maximise marketing opportunities, fully utilising learner data and case studies.
3. Work closely with the bid to become the City of Culture 2025. Seek opportunities to contribute to the bid whilst raising the profile of MAE.
4. Work closely with the Climate Change team, supporting the delivery of the action plan.

Cross-Cutting

1. Develop a broad marketing campaign focused on life-long learning and improving basic skills. Investigate partnering with other adult education providers locally. Replicate the success of previous national successful campaigns.
2. Seek external investment opportunities

INVESTMENT REQUIRED

To accelerate the delivery of the objectives set out in this plan, additional investment would be required in the short to medium term. We will seek investment from external sources, through a mixture of external funding bids, an increase in income through our income generating services and current and future budgets. Any requirements for Council funding will be incorporated in the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the Capital Strategy process.

Investment required	Impact of investment	Impact of non-investment
Staffing structures – should be continually reviewed to ensure the service is sufficiently staffed to deliver the business plan	Greater capacity to respond to business need, ensure contractual obligations are met, and allow for income generation to be maximised.	Risk of non-contractual delivery and reduced income generation potential
Investment in ICT equipment will be required in order to deliver relevant courses and training	Enable the continued delivery of online learning. Suitable equipment is required to deliver a quality service in a competitive market.	Ineffective and ultimately loss of learners who will receive online learning elsewhere.
To maximise income and reach more residents, a broad marketing campaign, extolling the benefits of lifelong learning will have significant impact.	Increased awareness about the importance of lifelong learning. More learners through the door and ultimately increased income.	Risk of low learner numbers, lack of awareness around the importance of continuing to develop skills and learning.
Investment to innovate – where there is potential to innovate to create new products or services. (e.g. Apprenticeships)	The ability to grow services as the need arises, to seek new income streams and respond quickly to opportunity	Slow to react to new opportunities, will only be able to grow new services incrementally.

Investment already made

Significant investment has already been made in 2019/20 and 2020/21, through a combination of reworking the existing budget, and generating more income and external funding:

- A new Business Development Manager in post, improving marketing and seeking business opportunities
- A new Online Delivery Officer, supporting our digital delivery, ensuring it's to a high consistent standard
- A new Work Skills Programme Coordinator, working to better support those on low incomes or unemployed to gain relevant skills
- The Britton Farm Mall Development, creating a custom-built Adult Education Centre
- 50 tablets and data, to enable learners to access learning from home

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- 3 signed SLAs with businesses for delivery of courses via Adult Skills Budget or commercial arrangement in 2021/22. Target to be reviewed yearly with a view for incremental growth.
- Prospectus of targeted courses for business available by September 2022
- Diversify and sell MAE apprenticeship offer. Deliver 200 new apprenticeships, with 100 apprentices in placement at any one time by 2025.
- To review existing costs and income generated per course. Seek to maximise income generated per paid for course.
- Recover back to pre-COVID, delivering 100% of contract in 2021/22. Seek to deliver 105% thereafter.
- Course list reviewed for courses suitable for online or blended learning. 75% of those suitable courses converted by 2023
- Run a broad lifelong learning marketing campaign with partners in 2023 – increase the number of learners on workskills, English, maths and digital courses by 10% by 2025
- Maintain existing levels of quality assurance to achieve grade 2 Ofsted inspection
- Maintain Service Plan Targets

IMPACT OF SUCCESS

If the measures of success are achieved and we receive suitable investment, then Medway Adult Education will be reaching more learners than ever before, in a way convenient to them. More adults will realise their potential, particularly in relation to creativity, entering or moving within the workforce and community cohesion. Businesses will be able to rely on MAE to provide quality training and we will be a well known quality provider of apprenticeships.

The service will be on sound financial footing with sufficient staff to operate smoothly, whilst remaining responsive to community and council needs.

HOW WILL THE BUSINESS PLAN BE DELIVERED?

A detailed action plan can be found as an Appendix

Governance

- The role of the Governance board – the service will be held to account by the members against the priorities above.
- The role of Skills Board – the Skills Board will seek opportunities to align this business plan with the aims of the Skills & Employability Plan for Medway.
- Council Plan outcomes reported quarterly

This business plan will be supported by:

- Medium Term Financial Plan
- Council Plan 2016/2021
- Skills & Employability Plan 2035
- Medway 2035
- Social Isolation Plan
- Children and Young Peoples Plan