

REPORT TO: Local Economy Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 15th September 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director Environment and Regeneration

PORTFOLIO: Employment Learning, Skills and Community

SUBJECT: Halton Adult Learning – The Creative Curriculum in 24/25

WARD(S) Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide Members with an overview of the new creative curriculum delivered in 24/25 by Halton Adult Learning.
- 1.2 To provide Members with a summary of the impact of creative courses in the academic year 24/25.
- 1.3 To provide opportunities for Members to raise any questions with regards to the curriculum intent and its alignment with the local skills context.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the report be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Background Information

Funded through the Liverpool City Region's Adult Skills Fund, Halton Adult Learning delivers a range of accredited and non-accredited courses in Runcorn and Widnes which aim not only to improve residents' lives but also address the skills gaps in the borough and across the LCR. The service also delivers Family Learning in schools across Halton, and co-ordinates the Pathways to Teaching programme on behalf of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority. In the academic year 24/25, the service recruited a number of new teaching staff, enabling further curriculum development including creative courses in Art & Design, Craft and Creative Writing.

- 3.2 The curriculum intent behind the inclusion of creative courses is that whilst completing programmes in Arts, Craft and Writing, learners develop core transferable skills that prepare them for their next steps, whether that be further training, personal progress or paid employment. Tutors worked closely with managers to design

programmes that would allow holistic development of literacy, teamwork, communication and presentation skills, self-reflection and confidence.

3.3 **Accreditations**

Within the creative curriculum, learners have been able to access tailored learning aims (workshops / courses) with no qualifications attached. These programmes are open and accessible to all, however tutors must evidence tangible skills development within the learner journey. In addition, careful curriculum development ensured that substantial qualifications were embedded into the core offer to allow learners the opportunity to access accredited provision should this be appropriate for them. In 24/25, this included Certificates in Art and Design, Awards in Creative Craft and Awards in Progression.

3.4 Accredited programmes accounted for £34,509 of Adult Skills funding drawn down in 24/25.

3.5 **Progression**

The introduction of new creative courses proved to be extremely popular, with 364 enrolments in 24/25. Many learners did multiple courses, and with encouragement and guidance from their tutors, 39 learners progressed onto accredited courses where they were able to achieve qualifications.

3.6 **Test & Learn programmes**

A proportion of the service's annual funding is ringfenced for 'Test & Learn' projects, which afford the service the opportunity to deliver innovative projects in line with local need. In 23/24, the service offered Test and Learn courses in Creative Writing (Short Stories, Write Your Own Children's stories), designed to support with adult literacy and communication skills. These programmes proved extremely popular, and in 24/25, these courses were mainstreamed into core ASF provision. Furthermore, an additional Creative Writing Course (Write Your Own Memoir) was delivered through Test & Learn in 24/25, to support learners in continuing to develop their reading, writing and communication skills.

3.7 **Performance/achievement in Creative Areas**

Enrolment numbers for creative courses at Halton Adult Learning in 24/25 were:

Subject Area	Enrolments 24/25	Courses
Art	241	29
Sewing	30	4
Creative Writing	93	10
Total	364	43

3.8 **Retention & Achievement**

Achievement overall across creative arts was 80%. This includes data for those that withdrew from courses – for those that remained on programme the achievement rate was over 99%.

3.9 Retention across creative courses, therefore, was 80%, which is under the service tolerance of 90%. To address this, additional Information, Advice and Guidance processes have been built into the learner recruitment and onboarding process for 25/26, with learners meeting their course tutors prior to enrolment to ensure they have a clear understanding of the expectations of their programme of study (for example, learners on the Level 1 Certificate in Art & Design stated that they hadn't realised how much written coursework was required on the course). Reducing withdrawals will maximise funding and reduce wasted costs in enrolment and data processes.

3.10 **Funding and Reconciliation**

The service achieved over 97% of its funding target in 24/25, compared with 91% in 23/24. Creative courses account for £274,349 out of the overall £734,378.79 (over 37%) of funding drawn down.

3.11 Income and expenditure are closely monitored through a combination of internal and external mechanisms, to ensure that contracts are delivered efficiently. This includes termly scrutiny of performance on profile through Quality, Income and Marketing meetings and Review meetings with the service's Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Relationship Manager.

3.12 Where possible, funding streams are maximised to support the delivery of the service. For example, the service utilised its learner discretionary support fund to maintain the service's Warm Hub which offered hot drinks and snacks to learners attending classes in both of its centres. In addition, the service utilises this fund to pay for childcare and travel costs to remove as many barriers to learning as possible. On creative courses, training materials were free for learners, and the service was able to pay for travel to Hazlehurst Studios with Halton Community Transport.

3.13 **Key Successes.**

364 out of 1585 (22%) total enrolments in the last year were on creative courses. It is recognised that the introduction of the creative curriculum has contributed significantly to the service achieving 97% of its funding target.

3.14 The service held a successful Art Exhibition and Open Day in July 2025 with over 100 visitors to Kingsway Learning Centre. Learners exhibited their own work and provided information, advice and guidance to prospective new learners

- 3.15 The service continued to develop its curriculum offer to deliver tangible outcomes for learners. For example, learners on Creative Writing programmes became self-published authors and began to sell their products through online stores; Creative Enterprise learners received tuition on how to establish themselves as self-employed.
- 3.16 Additionally, creative courses have had a demonstrable impact on learners' self-belief and confidence:
- 3.17 'Amazing, I love the atmosphere, the teachers. Everyone is very nice and helpful. I'm very thankful that the childcare costs are covered, I wouldn't be able to do the course otherwise. It's really nice to get out of the house and meet new people.' (Creative Writing)
- 3.18 'I enjoy these courses for my mental health and wellbeing. It's a very friendly and relaxed place at Acorn Learning centre.' (Level 2 Story Sacks)
- 3.19 '[My course is] Very good for wellbeing and learning new skills with fantastic support and advice. Very friendly and welcoming staff.' (Level 1 Art & Design)
- 3.20 Managers in the service have worked hard to foster collaboration across other Council services and organisations across the borough, to raise the profile of Adult Learning but also to expose Adult Learners to the culture and opportunities on their doorstep – these have included designing and creating a mural at Widnes Library, and trips to Hazlehurst Studios and the Dukesfield murals.
- 3.21 **Next Steps**
Collaboration across Halton has continued into the summer break, with Art learners designing and creating a mural in St Mary's Primary School in Runcorn. Managers are keen to explore new ways to collaborate with other Council services and organisations within the borough.
- 3.22 Curriculum development for 25/26 has taken into account the specific needs of the learners on Creative Courses. Progression pathways have been mapped out to ensure that learners can continue to progress through qualification levels with the support of their tutors. Halton Adult Learning's creative curriculum continues to broaden, with brand new Drama courses launching in September 2025.
- 3.23 Across the service, but in particular on creative courses, tutors have identified learners that they feel have the skills and attributes to support their peers and become mentors for the Adult Learning

Service. Therefore, the service's Test & Learn funded Mentoring Programme will launch in Autumn term.

3.24 Concluding comments

Creative programmes remain a core part of the Adult Learning curriculum. Enrolments for 25/26 commenced on 1st August 2025. To date (up to and including 20th August), the service had enrolled 394 adult learners which exceeds the total enrolments for Autumn term in the previous academic year (271). Of these 394 enrolments, 148 (37.6%) were for creative courses.

- 3.25 The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority are committed to supporting Adult Learning in sustaining its support of Halton Residents and helping them to improve their lives. Through regular review and robust monitoring, the CA and Halton Adult Learning seek to continue to provide residents with the opportunity to access new learning opportunities that will provide them with the transferable skills they need for their next steps, whether that be improved personal circumstances, further learning or paid employment.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 None identified at this stage

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Halton Borough Council's Adult Learning Service is 100% externally funded. The service must achieve 100% of its expected delivery outputs to prevent reconciliation and to be able to sustain the Service. As the service only achieved 97% of its target this year, the reconciliation is anticipated to be around £20,000 this year. The Combined Authority recognises the continued progress made by the service and has not reduced the overall allocation for 25/26.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

Halton Adult Learning's Creative curriculum has a demonstrative effect on learners' wellbeing, with one learner stating that their Art & Design course was 'like a candle in the dark'.

Learners have explored ways to monetise their talents, setting up Amazon accounts to sell their published stories, and taking commissions for craft projects. Learners writing memoirs found the process to be cathartic and empowering; learners undertaking 'Mindfulness Mondays' and 'After Work Art' found the courses invaluable to their mental health and ability to relax away from their stressful lives.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

The service continues to offer learning programmes and opportunities that reflect the needs of the residents in the borough and the local skills needs.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

Many of the skills developed on creative courses at Adult Learning seek to address skills gaps in adults that have a direct impact on children, grandchildren and other family members. Learners created story sacks to support storytelling and promote shared reading, parents and grandparents wrote stories dedicated to their children and grandchildren, often featuring their family members as characters to further engage young people with reading.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

Halton Adult Learning are committed to empowering its residents and providing new opportunities for those in need. Adult Learning programmes in 24/25 were free for those earning under £33,958.60, and the curriculum designed in a way that provided opportunities to develop cultural capital – for example studying others' published writing, artist's pieces and visiting educational attractions. Though the Adult Skills Fund Learner Support Funding the service was able to fund transport, childcare and Warm Hub (food and drink) supplies to those in need to ensure barriers to learning were removed wherever possible.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

Sustainable materials were utilised where possible. For example, learners on sewing courses were encouraged to bring in pre-loved pieces from home to re-use the material instead of purchasing new.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

Through curriculum design and development, appreciation for the borough and community was embedded into the delivery of courses. The service offered creative sessions during World Refugee Week to promote social cohesion and a sense of belonging. Learners visited local landmarks such as the Dukesfield murals and designed and created a new mural at Widnes Library.

7.0 Risk Analysis

7.1 The management of the Adult Learning service has been meticulous and close monitoring both internally and externally ensures any risks identified are carefully mitigated, with clear action plans in place to address any underperformance, quality and compliance factors.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 None

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None

**10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF
THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

‘None under the meaning of the Act.’