



West Midlands Combined Authority

Thursday 5th December 2019

WMCA celebrates 100 years of adult education with local learners and training providers

Learners, training providers and leaders in adult education came together with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) to celebrate 100 years of lifelong learning.

The WMCA organised the event, which was attended by more than 70 people, at Solihull College & University Centre to show how adult education has changed in the region over the past century and explore how it could look in the future.

In November 1919, following on from the First World War, the Government's Ministry of Reconstruction published a report on adult education, saying that a population educated throughout life was vital for the future of the country.

Exactly 100 years later, the Centenary Commission on Adult Education, which is made up of leading universities, educational charities and trade unions, published a [report](#) last month to set out a vision for lifelong education for the century ahead.

The report highlights how educational opportunities in this country have expanded dramatically over the last hundred years but says too many people's needs are not being met. This could be because they left school without basic skills, their jobs are insecure or disappearing, they are new arrivals in the country, or they are leaving prison or care.

The WMCA recently took responsibility for the region's £126m Adult Education Budget (AEB) and how it is delivered, aiming to help local people to improve their quality of life by equipping them with the skills needed for future jobs.

Julie Nugent, Director of Productivity and Skills at the WMCA, said at the event: "Taking control of the AEB means local people can benefit from flexible, tailored programmes of learning that build their confidence, enhance their wellbeing and give them better career opportunities.

"We're aligning our funding with priority growth sectors, such as digital, advanced manufacturing and engineering, and business and professional services, to drive up skill levels among our communities and ultimately improve productivity across the region.

"We're also upskilling local workers whose jobs could be under threat of automation through our £5m 'Beat the Bots' fund, with training courses including digital skills, manufacturing technology, drone technology and virtual reality.

"But we know there is still much to do and we look forward to contributing to the Centenary Commission's recommendations over the coming months."

The event at Solihull College yesterday was attended by local training providers, learners and adult education experts. Speakers also included Mel Lenehan, principal and chief executive of Fircroft College of Adult Education in Selly Oak, Birmingham, and Professor

John Holford (Robert Peers Professor of Adult Education, University of Nottingham), joint secretary of the Centenary Commission on Adult Education.

Mel Lenehan, principal and chief executive of Fircroft College of Adult Education, said: “It is fantastic to have an opportunity to celebrate the success of 100 years of adult education in the West Midlands. But as the 2019 Centenary Commission report demonstrates, recovering and reconnecting to the social purpose of adult education and reimagining what it could be in terms of supporting active citizenship must also be part of its future.”

As part of the celebration, the WMCA invited people from the West Midlands to share their experiences of adult learning. Four of their stories follow below.

Eddie Roche

Two years ago, recovering drug addict **Eddie Roche** left London and moved to the West Midlands to restart his life. He had to change everything – including his home and his circle of friends – to protect himself from relapsing.

He found out about Fircroft College of Adult Education from his drug treatment centre and initially enrolled on an Introduction to Counselling course. At first, he wanted to be a counsellor but he enjoyed supporting, coaching and mentoring other learners so much that he is now training to be a tutor.

Eddie, aged 54, said: “I didn’t do very well at school, so becoming a tutor is something that I’d never dreamed of. It’s amazing that thanks to Fircroft College, I’ve just completed my award in education and training.

“I’m helping with learning support in the classroom, and I’m still improving my skills so that I can help to give other people the chances I have had and give them hope that the future will be better.

“Adult education has given me so much confidence and helped me to believe that I can achieve my full potential. In particular, the learning and residential environment at the college has enabled me to thrive and to grow.

“It’s a community where everyone is supported, encouraged and nurtured. I can’t praise the college staff highly enough – they do so much to help us to grow and to be better people.”

Heba Nafea

Heba Nafea moved to Birmingham from Egypt three years ago at the age of 17, to complete her education and help her achieve her dream of becoming a radiographer. She enrolled at Birmingham Metropolitan (BMet) College and has gained a number of qualifications, including a BTEC in applied science level 2 at grade D*D (equivalent to a GCSE grade A*), and GCSEs at grade 7 in English and maths. She is now studying BMet’s Access to Science course to prepare for studying radiography at university.

Heba said: “The course is helping me to develop my skills in recording observations and analysing results while carrying out many scientific experiments, which are key requirements of radiography. Adult education is helping me to boost my career, confidence and self-esteem. I heard about the college from my friends and I’d definitely recommend it to other people.”

Farah Yousaf

Farah Yousaf, from Edgbaston, Birmingham, had to give up her career in banking due to back pain caused by endometriosis, which made it very difficult for her to sit at a desk. She decided it was time for a career change and wanted to use her personal experience of food

intolerances and coeliac disease to help other people. She is now studying Dietetics and Nutrition at the University of Nottingham.

Farah said: "I became fascinated that something as simple as an allergy or an intolerance can have such an adverse effect on someone's wellbeing, and I decided I wanted to become a dietitian.

"Adult education has helped me to pursue this dream. I started an Access to Science course last September at BMet Sutton Coldfield, and completed it in June. I achieved 45 distinctions, and 15 passes on pass or fail topics. The tutors were amazing, they were very supportive in every possible way. Returning to college gave me the opportunity to make friends with lots of people from different backgrounds. Coming back into education was definitely the best decision I could have made."

Julie Robertson

Julie Robertson, aged 58, returned to further education at Solihull College & University Centre in 1999 after completing an art foundation course in Essex 18 years earlier. She went on to study psychology alongside fine art, achieving a bachelor's degree in sculpture and then a master's degree (MA) in fine art in 2016. This has given her the confidence to take up multidisciplinary art as a career. She sells her work in the UK and internationally, and was a finalist in the Global Art Awards 2018.

She said: "I didn't think that I would have a second chance to do my art education, which had been disrupted by several experiences, including a move. However, at Solihull College I was able to do this because the course offered flexibility for parents. This was essential for me because my daughter and son were very young at the time.

"Adult education has changed my life. As well as gaining academic qualifications, I have met some amazing people and experienced an improving situation for students, both in terms of quality of courses and support from the tutors. My increased skills and confidence opened up a world for me of exhibiting and selling work, and of further study opportunities, with an MA at Margaret Street School of Art through the University of Central England, now Birmingham City University. These achievements have finally proved to me after so many years how much I have to offer and share with the world."

ENDS

More information from the WMCA media office on 0121 214 7073, or email media@wmca.org.uk

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Notes to Editors:

1. Pictures of Eddie Roche, Heba Nafea, Farah Yousaf and Julie Robertson are available from the WMCA media office on media@wmca.org.uk
2. The Centenary Commission was formed as part of the 'Adult Education 100' campaign, to mark 100 years since the Ministry of Reconstruction – created towards the end of the First World War – published its 'Report on Adult Education', saying

lifelong education was vital for the future of the country. For more information visit www.centenarycommission.org

About the WMCA

The West Midlands Combined Authority was created on 17th June 2016. It comprises:

Constituent members:

Birmingham City Council, City of Wolverhampton Council, Coventry City Council, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council and Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council.

Non-constituent authorities with reduced voting rights:

Cannock Chase District Council; Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council; Redditch Borough Council; Tamworth Borough Council; Telford and Wrekin Council; North Warwickshire Borough Council; Rugby Borough Council; Stratford-on-Avon District Council; Shropshire Council; Warwickshire County Council.

LEPs (Local Enterprise Partnerships):

LEPs are voluntary partnerships between local authorities and businesses. They determine local economic priorities and lead on economic growth and job creation within their areas. They are:

- Black Country LEP
- Coventry and Warwickshire LEP
- Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP

Observer organisations:

- Herefordshire Council
- The Marches LEP