

Sutton Wins Bid to Build Facility for Learners with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities

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The Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the organisation that exists to make England better skilled and more competitive, has approved a £3.5 Million capital project to build a new college facility for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in London South.

The proposal submitted to the LSC for the new Vocational Progression Unit was jointly developed by Orchard Hill College and Carshalton College, with the support of the London Borough of Sutton. The new facility, which will be built at Carshalton College, will provide specialist support for learners with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

Once the new Vocational Progression Unit is completed, learners requiring specialist support will no longer have to attend training provision in other parts of the country, which means they no longer have to spend time away from their families and carers in unnecessary residential provision.

Vic Grimes, Learning and Skills Council Area Director for London South, said: "We are delighted to support this project which mirrors our vision and strategic plan for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, to provide a high quality environment, with appropriate specialist support and extra learner places, which is locally accessible. We believe that this project will set a benchmark for the rest of the country."

Mrs Mavis Peart OBE, the Chairman of the Governing Bodies for both Colleges, said: "I am really pleased that the LSC have agreed to support this development. The Vocational Progression Unit will provide wonderful progression opportunities for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and a much needed service for the growing number of learners with autistic spectrum disorders. The new facility will cement the very strong links between Orchard Hill College and Carshalton College and provide an important new centre of excellence for these learners."

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Editors Notes

The Learning and Skills Council exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. We are responsible for ensuring the availability of high-quality education and training for everyone. We have a single goal: to improve the skills of England's young people and adults to world class standards. Our vision is that young people and adults in England have knowledge and skills matching the best in the world and are part of a truly competitive workforce. We work nationally, regionally and locally to deliver this ambition on behalf of learners and employers.

The Unit would provide 76 places for young people. 36 people would be moved from residential national specialty colleges and local authority funded places to the more appropriate day provision at the unit. London South currently has a high volume of learners supported outside of the borough. A growth of an additional 40 places would be supplied to meet growing demand as predicted in national and London South demographics. Research commissioned by the LSC shows an expected increase in the number of learners with ASD of 200 per cent and learners with communication disorders by 100 per cent.

The LSC will fund 70 per cent of the capital project. It is intended that the building incorporates low energy and sustainable design and construction principles where possible to reflect the London Borough of Sutton's "Environmental Sustainability Strategy".