

INFORMATION ITEM ON THE ADULT AND COMMUNITY LEARNING SERVICE

Committee name	Residents, Education and Environmental Services Policy Overview Committee
Officer reporting	Debbie Scarborough, Adult and Community Learning
Papers with report	Appendix 1: Data regarding the take up of adult learning Appendix 2: Courses are provided by the Adult and Community Learning service Appendix 3: Benefits for residents resulting from additional external funding bids Appendix 4: The provision unable to continue during lockdown
Ward	All

HEADLINES

The purpose of this report is to provide a brief overview of the Adult and Community Learning service and how Covid-19 has affected adult residents' learning. The report also considers possible content should the service be the subject of a Committee Review.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Committee:

- 1. Notes the information contained within the report; and**
- 2. Considers whether the subject should form the basis of the Committee's next major review.**

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The ACL service provides courses for adults in Hillingdon. It is externally funded by the Education and Skills Funding Service (ESFA) and the GLA following the delegation of funds to the London Mayor from August 2019. The service was last inspected by Ofsted in December 2019 leading to a Good (Grade 2) judgement.

Historically, approximately 3000 learners have taken courses a year, resulting in approximately 5000 enrolments. Of these, 91% live in Hillingdon, 7.5% are from other London boroughs and 1.5% live outside London. North/south, age and ethnicity profiles are given in Appendix 1.

HACL delivers a wide range of courses to learners across the borough: Appendix 2 provides an overview. The service is completing an additional externally-funded project which allows us to offer free education and careers advice for adults in the borough (Appendix 3). Whilst the support has been developing and available for residents over the past 18 months, the initiative

is not yet well-known to residents. The funding ceases in March 2021 but many of the developments will continue for residents.

Residents who face disadvantages and those living in deprived areas are a key target group for the service, as are those who wish to find work or improve their job prospects, for example the low-skilled, low-paid and career changers. Course fees are kept to a minimum and are as flexible as possible. Residents on Personal Development courses have their fees subsidised by the Council; fees for most qualification courses can be paid through a deposit and three monthly payments and those undertaking high level qualifications (A Level equivalent) can access student loans which are paid back at source when they earn £26,725 per annum.

Courses are as accessible as possible to residents. They are delivered across the borough at four adult learning centres covering Uxbridge, Ruislip and Harlington. The service is open 9-5 and 6-9.30pm from Monday to Thursday, 9-5 on Fridays and 9-1 on Saturdays in Brookfield. Centres are wheelchair accessible. Following the lockdown, most qualification courses are delivered online whilst others use a combination of classroom-based and online learning, otherwise known as blended learning (please see below).

Courses are also delivered at a range of community venues, including schools, children's centres, libraries and 3rd sector partner venues, for example at the Austin Estate community centre. Although Covid-19 is impacting on the availability of partner venues, risk assessments are in place where this is possible and plans are underway to deliver online where possible.

Covid-19 response and impact

When the Covid-19 lockdown seemed imminent, the service was completing its spring term and the Easter holidays were two weeks away. Residents taking qualifications were already half way through their courses and officers and tutors worked hard to convert as many of these as possible to online learning so that learners could gain their qualifications. For example,

- Guidance was prepared for learners and key staff helped them overcome any initial access issues regarding their online course.
- Laptops and Chromebooks were lent to tutors so they could teach from home.
- A significant staff training programme was run to ensure tutors knew how to deliver online learning.
- Childminding workshops and work on the Forum was appreciated by childminders running micro businesses because we tailored content to meet their needs through a challenging period
- Learning support was delivered through online individual sessions carried out during and after the classes.
- Online exams were held where necessary, with a handful delivered in centres where essential, e.g. British Sign Language.
- Tutor assessments for other qualifications were organised, moderated and approved. These accounted for approximately 400 English, maths and ESOL qualifications.

These actions resulted in 85% of qualification courses continuing (mainly English, ESOL, maths and vocational courses), and ultimately 72% (709 residents) gained their qualifications. However, some provision could not continue during lockdown for a variety of reasons, (see Appendix 4).

As the lockdown measures began to ease through July and August, officers developed a variety of new initiatives to enable learning to begin safely in September.

- We successfully bid for additional external funding of £25k to strengthen HACL's digital infrastructure and provide the additional capacity needed to support the increased online traffic
- Tutors spoke to individual learners who were finishing their qualifications in July to agree their next steps. This led to many residents enrolling on their next courses early and negated the need for them to visit centres to enrol in the summer
- A new online assessment process was developed that enabled residents new to learning to undertake English, maths and digital skills tests from their homes whilst the centres were closed to the public in August. Completion of these allowed officers to identify the best qualification-level course for each learner ready for when the new classes started in September
- The entire programme of courses was reviewed and as many transferred to online or blended learning. Centre-based courses were prioritised for targeted groups who were least able to learn online, such as adults with learning difficulties and disabilities.
- Centres were risk assessed and classrooms prepared so that residents could return safely where appropriate.
- Adults with learning difficulties and disabilities were contacted individually to arrange their enrolments without the need to visit centres. Payments were managed in a similar way.
- The website was updated and an option added for online enquiries to increase flexibility for residents and prevent visits to centres

Where are we now?

Enrolments on qualification courses are relatively strong. Demand for qualifications in English, maths, ESOL and childcare remains high and we are seeing high levels of interest in courses that relate to people's current need to improve their skills and retrain in new types of careers, for instance bookkeeping, counselling and community interpreting. Full government funding for learners to do digital skills courses was introduced in September 2020 and whilst these courses are just beginning they are generating increasing demand from residents. At the same time, interest is strong in emotional health and wellbeing courses and we recognise that this provision plays an even more important role at the current time.

To respond to these changing needs, we have continued running at least 5 weekly skills assessment and advice sessions per week, both online and now also in centres. We have put on additional courses where demand exists and we have added short courses to the curriculum to prepare learners for further qualification courses that start in January and February. Learners on all courses are offered a wellbeing survey and recommended a wellbeing course if this would benefit them. Tutors are also referring learners to digital skills courses to help them with the skills they need to learn (and engage more generally) online.

However, in line with other boroughs, enrolments are lower than usual currently at approximately 69% of our normal levels. Compared with 2019-20, this equates to 52% of qualification courses (48% lower) and 37% non-qualification courses (63% lower). There are several contributory factors to this:

- Enrolments can increase from term to term. We have fewer enrolments by adults with learning difficulties and disabilities, partly because class sizes have reduced due to social

distancing measures. Additionally, CMSS are not able to bring their 25 service users to our classes (last year they accounted for approximately 80 enrolments).

- Enrolments on personal development courses are significantly lower than usual, partly because the older population they attract are more likely to self-isolate, partly because many of these learners prefer classroom-based provision to online classes, and partly because of financial uncertainty and under-confidence economically discouraging residents from enrolling on courses. This, however, is likely to reduce our fee income.
- Some courses have not yet begun, for instance targeted outreach courses, so enrolments are difficult to predict. Start dates for some courses have been pushed back and courses normally run at partner organisation venues have been moved online. However, community and 3rd sector partners have emphasised how vital the courses have been in supporting their client groups during the lockdown, e.g. courses for carers.

Since Adult Learning is one of the topics being considered as the Committee's next review, it is suggested that the following might be included as part of that review:

- The service is agile and the course offer is responsive to local needs. In what ways could this be enhanced through increased joint working with other council departments?
- The reduced fee income could impact on the course offer provided by the service because it makes some subjects less financially viable. How might the impact of this be mitigated for residents?
- The service is providing free education and careers advice to adults in Hillingdon. How can sustained when the current project funding ceases?

Implications on related Council policies

A role of the Policy Overview Committees is to make recommendations on service changes and improvements to the Cabinet who are responsible for the Council's policy and direction.

How this report benefits Hillingdon residents

None at this stage, pending any findings approved by Cabinet.

Financial Implications

There is an assumed reduction in fee income as a result of fewer enrolments on fee-generating courses. Currently this is estimated as a reduction of 50%, from £130k to £65k over the academic year, and could reduce the provision available to residents as a result. Since recruitment is ongoing in many courses an overall precise figure is difficult to gauge currently.

Legal Implications

There are no legal implications of this paper.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

[HACL REESPOC paper, Nov 2020: Appendices 1,2,3 and 4.](#)