



SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL Cabinet Report

Report of: Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families

Date: 19 June 2013

Subject: Adult and Community Learning - Fees Policy 2013-14

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Summary: This report describes the fees policy for adult and community learning, funded by the Skills Funding Agency and organised by Lifelong Learning, Skills and Communities.

Reasons for Recommendations:

The following recommendations will allow the city to secure its adult learning funding and allow the engagement into learning of as many vulnerable adults as possible to meet external funding targets.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- notes the contents of this report and
 - approve the fees policy set for LLSC for the academic year 2013/14
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Background Papers:

Category of Report: OPEN

If Closed add – ‘Not for publication because it contains exempt information under Paragraph... of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).’

Statutory and Council Policy Checklist

Financial Implications
YES/ Cleared by: TBC
Legal Implications
YES Cleared by: Nadine Wynter
Equality of Opportunity Implications
YES/ Cleared by: Bashir Khan
Tackling Health Inequalities Implications
NO
Human rights Implications
NO:
Environmental and Sustainability implications
NO
Economic impact
YES/
Community safety implications
NO
Human resources implications
NO
Property implications
/NO
Area(s) affected
ALL
Relevant Cabinet Portfolio Leader
Jackie Drayton
Relevant Scrutiny Committee if decision called in
CYPF
Is the item a matter which is reserved for approval by the City Council?
YES
Press release
NO

Adult and Community Learning - Fees Policy 2013-14

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report describes the fees policy for Adult and Community Learning, funded by the Skills Funding Agency (SfA) and organised by Lifelong Learning, Skills and Communities (LLSC).
- 1.2 The SFA funding is for the academic year, beginning in August. Funding can only be used for the purposes specified by the SFA, i.e. learning for adults who are 19+
- 1.3 These revisions are in response to national policy requirements by which the SfA stipulates that it will only 'co-fund' courses, in the expectation that the provider will make up the remainder of course costs through the collection of fees locally.
- 1.4 The key revision is that as from August 2013, learners and apprentices over the age of 24 and pursuing Level 3 (qualifications equivalent to the achievement of two or more A levels or Level 4 equivalent to undergraduate level) will be required to pay for the cost of their qualification. Learners will have the option to take out a loan to pay their fees.
- 1.5 National fee remission rules particularly impact on those citizens we most wish to encourage to take up our community learning opportunities, particularly learners of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).
- 1.6 The SfA has advised that providers, such as Sheffield City Council, that organise adult and community learning on behalf of an area, should deliver a 'Universal Offer' and charge fees accordingly. This means collecting fees from those who can afford to pay to 'subsidise' the delivery of additional courses.
- 1.7 This report is a summary of the national guidance. It describes the strategic approach to fee charging that LLSC proposes to take and sets out the implications for adult learners in Sheffield.
- 1.8 The proposed charging schedule for Sheffield City Council's Adult and Community Learning provision is outlined in Appendix A.

2.0 What Does This Mean for the People of Sheffield

- 2.1 Under the guidance from the SfA, only the following 19+ learners will be able to access courses free of charge:
 - those in receipt of Jobseekers' Allowance (JSA) or

- Employment Support Allowance (ESA)
 - those pursuing basic English and maths courses (Basic Skills)
 - those who have not previously achieved a level 2 qualification (equivalent to five or more GCSEs A* - C)
 - those who have not previously achieved a level 3 qualification (equivalent to two or more 'A' Levels).
- 2.2 LLSC, as a provider, also has the discretion to offer free programmes to those unemployed, adult learners on other means tested benefits that are seeking to improve their skills to allow them to enter employment.
- 2.3 The restriction of concessionary fees to those on JSA, ESA and the unemployed on means tested benefits is likely to impact disproportionately on some disadvantaged groups who are most in need of support. The majority of those are women ESOL learners.
- 2.4 Further education learners and apprentices who are over 24+ and are enrolling on a Level 3 or Level 4 course or apprenticeship will need to pay for their learning. Bursaries may be available.

3.0 Outcome and Sustainability

- 3.1 LLSC is obliged by the SfA to charge fees for its adult learning provision but will endeavour to hold fees at a level that allows those who are most in need to access adult learning. i.e. those adults who are in work, but are disadvantaged; have low skills levels and are most in need of access to learning to improve their life chances and their prospects of employment.
- 3.2 In making the decision to increase some of the community learning fees by 50p per hour all consideration was given as to whether this would deter potential learners. A comparative analysis of the proposed charges with those of other Local Authority areas suggested that this would not be the case. During the next academic year this will be monitored.
- 3.3 In response to the particular challenges associated with the delivery of ESOL, LLSC leads the Sheffield ESOL Forum which is made up of the main providers of ESOL learning in the city, including:
 - the Sheffield College
 - the Worker's Education Association (WEA)
 - the Sheffield Association for the Voluntary Teaching of English (SAVTE)
 - St Mary's Church
- 3.4 The forum is working collectively to review the ESOL offer across Sheffield to ensure that limited resources are deployed to best

effect and that the detrimental effects of the SfA regulations are mitigated as far as is possible. The forum is;

- planning a coherent offer with clear progression routes across providers to maximise coverage and avoid duplication
- identifying gaps in provision
- developing a common approach to referral and assessment of need
- increasing the city's capacity to deliver ESOL through a volunteering structure where learning is free at the point of delivery. This will be achieved by supporting SAVTE and other community organisations to develop the new structure.

4.0 Background

- 4.1 The funding for adult learning in community settings comes to LLSC from the SfA. It includes Family Learning, Basic Skills and ESOL, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and Leisure Learning. LLSC also receives an Adult Skills Budget (ASB) which provides further education and apprenticeships for adults. This is primarily delivered in LLSC training centres.
- 4.2 The SfA requires the providers of adult learning to 'increase contributions to the cost of learning from employers and individuals in line with their ability to pay and the benefits they receive'. The national fee assumption is that the public purse will continue to meet at least 50% of the tuition costs of adult learning with the remainder made up by the course fees paid by individual learners. The exception to this rule will be those categories of adult learners who will remain entitled to full fee remission and learners over the age of 24 who are enrolled on a course at Level 3 or above.
- 4.3 LLSC proposes only minor changes to the fees policy for the academic year 2013 /14.
- 4.4 Fees collected by LLSC will be re invested in the learning offer by contributing to the costs of either putting on more provision where it is most needed, or contributing to a bursary fund for those who cannot afford the fees or who have other hardship issues.

5.0 Proposed Adult and Community Learning Fees Policy 2013/14

- 5.1 The fees policy provides coherent, consistent and transparent guidelines that allow for the targeting of finite and diminishing resources at those likely to benefit most from the provision of adult learning, including those needing to access;
- ESOL

- Basic English and maths (was previously known as Literacy and Numeracy)
 - Family Learning
 - their first Level 2 (a qualification equivalent to five or more good GCSEs) or Level 3 qualification in order to progress to employment.
- 5.2 The fees policy complies with SfA guidelines but also seeks to limit the cost of courses provided by LLSC to reduce the impact on those vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals who previously benefited from fee remission.
- 5.3 Programmes have been redesigned to ensure as many people as possible are able to access ESOL. This would include those claiming JSA who may be referred by Jobcentre Plus and will be entitled to fee remission. In Adult and Community Learning, those who are in low paid work and entitled to working families tax credit or housing benefit and those pensioners in receipt of pension credit will also be entitled to fee remission.

6.0 Financial Implications

- 6.1 Targets are set for recruitment by the SfA against the funding that it provides to the local authority. Setting fees at a reasonable level for learners should ensure that these targets can still be met.
- 6.2 A small amount of hardship funding will be available from LLSC for those learners who are unable to afford the cost of learning.

7.0 Managing Risk and Governance

- 7.1 LLSC has extensive experience of managing complex SfA funded provision to ensure contract and audit compliance. The Service has a close relationship with the Finance External Funding Team to ensure risk and monitoring mechanisms are appropriate and to mitigate the risk of funding claw back.
- 7.2 A national toolkit has been produced to help providers plan effectively for the introduction of 24+ loans for Level 3 and Level 4 courses. The take up, where eligible, of the bursary that is being made available, will be actively encouraged by LLSC.

8.0 Legal Implications

The report proposes the revision of the fees policy for adult learning. The Council has power pursuant to sections 15A and 15B of the Education Act 1996 to secure the provision of full-time or part-time education suitable to persons for those who are over compulsory school age who have not attained the age of 19 and those who have attained the age of 19. This may include provision for persons from other areas. The Council may do anything that it considers necessary or expedient for the purposes

of, or in connection with, the provision of such further education. There are no further specific legal implications arising from this report.

9.0 Human Resources Implications

There are no immediate human resource implications arising from this report.

10.0 Consultations

- 10.1 The issue of changes to fee remission rules and potential responses to these have been widely discussed at meetings with local learning partnerships and community representatives and elected members between January 2013 and the present.
- 10.2 The changes have been discussed and a coordinated response organised by providers through the ESOL Forum.
- 10.3 Feedback from all these sources has been fed through to national government as part of the national consultation on the impact of fees for the most disadvantaged.

11.0 Economic Impact

The engagement of adults into learning and the provision of pathways into further learning, training and employment has a positive economic impact on the city's economy and the life chances of its most vulnerable and disadvantaged residents. The City Council will, with the support of the ESOL Forum, monitor and report on the impact of fee and other changes.

12.0 Equality of Impact Implications

An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken in relation to the changes outlined in this report and this assessment is appended.

13.0 Alternative Options Considered

The option of halting the delivery of those courses for which the charging of fees is now required was rejected as it would not allow equal access for those very vulnerable learners, particularly from the BME communities who need language support to help them to play a positive role in their community and to contribute to the local economy.

14.0 Reasons for Recommendations

The following recommendations will allow the city to secure its adult learning funding and allow the engagement into learning of as many vulnerable adults as possible.

15.0 Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- notes the contents of this report and
- approve the fees policy set for LLSC for the academic year 2013/14

1. Fee Criteria

The following provision will be free to all:

- Skills for Life – English (Literacy)
- Skills for Life – Maths (Numeracy)
- Family Literacy (English), Languages and Numeracy(Maths)
- Wider Family Learning
- A first, full Level 2 or Level 3 qualification for those aged 19-23 yrs
- A first, full Entry Level or Level 1 course as a step up to Level 2 (not including English, maths or ESOL programmes)
- JSA or ESA claimants will not pay fees for any courses.
- Those adults who are unemployed but in receipt of other means tested benefits will not pay fees for any courses.
- Those adults in low paid work in receipt of working families tax credit or housing benefit and those pensioners in receipt of pension credit will not pay fees for any Community Learning course.

2. Payment of fees and administration charges

- An administrative charge of £10 will apply to **all** learners within community learning where fees are remitted including English and Maths.
- Fees are payable either at the commencement of the course, or weekly.
- Employers will be expected to make a contribution to the cost of an apprenticeship programme for employees who are 19 years old or more. Some of this contribution could be 'in kind', for example time allowed for the release of the learner for off the job training.
- The full cost of provision will be charged for courses generally aimed at professionals wishing to retrain or to develop their skills, or employers wishing to engage in the development of their staff.
- From August 2013, student loans will be introduced for learners aged 24 + at Level 3 and above. The loans will be ring fenced within LLSC's allocation.

3. Fee charges

ESOL courses in the community

Fees will be £1.50 per hour for learners who need to pay. The administrative charge will be £10 (average length of course is 30 hours).

ICT courses in the community

Fees will be £2.50 per hour for learners who need to pay. The administrative charge will be £10 (average length of course is 20 hours).

Craft and Leisure courses

Fees will be £2.50 per hour for learners who need to pay. The administrative charge will be £10 (average length of course is 20 hours).

First full Level 2 or Level 3 qualification for those aged 19-23 yrs

These courses will be free to those learners who meet the fee remission criteria. The administrative charge will be £10.

First full Entry Level /Level1 as a step up to Level 2 (does not include Literacy, Numeracy or ESOL Programme)

Learners will be asked to sign a disclaimer stating that if they do not attend an exam for which they have agreed to be entered they may be charged the entry fee.

4. Evidence for fee remission:

Learners entitled to fee remission will need to have the following evidence:

- Job Seekers Allowance: a letter confirming JSA status from Jobcentre Plus/Benefits Agency. The letter must not be more than three months old
- Employment Support Allowance (active benefit): a current ESA Award Notice.
- Means tested benefits: a current letter confirming unemployed status together with a letter confirming their particular means tested benefit
- For Community Learning for those in low paid work, a letter confirming their particular means tested benefit.