



Thursday, 11 March 2021

SURREY ADULT LEARNING

Purpose:

The Committee to understand the role of adult and community education, including in respect of COVID-19 recovery, the available provision and how it is funded and delivered, and the challenges and opportunities faced by the council in this area.

Introduction

1. The overarching ambition for Surrey Adult Learning (SAL) is to support Surrey County Council's Community Vision that by 2030 everyone in Surrey has a great start to life, people live healthy and fulfilling lives, are enabled to achieve their full potential and contribute to their community and no one is left behind.
 2. SAL's aim is that, through engaging with the adult learning offer, every adult will be safe and have their education, social and emotional aspirations met. They will be able to contribute positively to their families and communities and lead healthy, creative and active lives.
 3. SAL is funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and as of this funding year, also in small part by the Greater London Authority (GLA), to deliver a wide range of high-quality learning opportunities for adults aged 19+. SAL delivers adult education in the north and south west of Surrey at its seven dedicated centres and runs classes in a range of community settings. The centres are at Guildford, Camberley, Farnham, Woking, Esher, Molesey and Sunbury. East Surrey College (ESC) delivers in the East of the county. SAL's Family Learning programme is the exception, where it delivers to priority families across the whole of Surrey.
 4. This has enabled the Service to work effectively across a wide-ranging network of schools and Family Centres and make important linkages within the Children and Families Directorate of the council. SAL provides a relevant local offer which includes a mix of high-quality employability, basic skills and wellbeing courses which are continuously reviewed and developed.
- The overarching expectations of the Department for Education and the ESFA is for Adult Education Budget (AEB) activity and curriculum to be influenced by, and to

demonstrate its relevance to national, regional and local economic, social, health/wellbeing, education and skills strategies - including how it will play its part in local COVID-19 recovery plans.

- There is an expectation that participation and achievement in adult learning will lead to more outcomes such as improved social confidence, more sustainable jobs, more pay for the least qualified and those on low wages, and further progression in learning. The aim is to ensure that all will benefit from a recovery and a changing economy in the 2020s. As part of this strategic approach, community learning has a vital part to play.
5. In addition, the inspection framework has changed to incorporate a clear learner journey that can articulate intent, implementation and impact - why learners are on the course, what they are being taught, what they are learning and where they are progressing to at the end of their course.
 6. For Surrey, it implies a more employer involved curriculum and a clear impact on AEB of the priorities set out in the skills strategies at the Enterprise 3 LEP and the South East LEP, as well as strategies affecting communities such as social mobility and loneliness. It requires a consideration and review of the adult skills accredited share of the AEB activity compared to community learning, which is presently 75:25 in community learning's favour. It is a complex conundrum with many tensions.
 7. The adult learning curriculum has to change, and any change must be based on evidence whilst simultaneously meeting the needs of community learners. The size of the community learning provision helps to generate a significant amount of fee income, so ideally, SAL would want to generate at least the same level of fee income from community learning, whilst establishing a more strategic and extensive, high quality adult skills curriculum.
 8. SAL subcontracts a small amount of delivery (maximum contract value £2500 for 100 learners) to the Daniel Spargo-Mabbs Foundation. These are parents' workshops for 'virtual' drug and alcohol awareness in schools where there is identified disadvantage.
 9. SAL is an Ofsted graded 'Good' provider and holds the 'matrix' standard for information, advice and guidance. The 'matrix' standard is the Department for Education's (DfE) standard for ensuring the quality of the delivery of information, advice and guidance, which ultimately supports individuals in their choice of career, learning, work and life goals. The matrix Continuous Improvement Check (CIC) with the independent assessor, which took place on 9 February 2021, was very successful and confirmed that SAL continues to meet the required matrix Standard and has maintained the delivery of quality Information, Advice and Guidance as a key feature of its learning offer throughout the last 12 months. A full re-assessment will be due in 2022 and this will be under the new framework currently being developed by the DfE.
 10. Since COVID-19, there has been a rapid and resourceful management and a whole-service collaborative response to develop a vibrant new remote offer for SAL learners. Prior to COVID-19, 100% of SAL provision was face to face (F2F). Following the COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020, SAL's delivery and assessment of

F2F learning ceased. The swift response to maintain contact and remotely support the learning and wellbeing of its learners enabled the successful implementation of the 2020 Summer Holiday pilot online offer, followed by the re-programming of the Autumn term offer – a blend of over 1,000 online and F2F courses available to Surrey residents. In particular, SAL ensured that English and maths core programme learners together with the apprentices were able to continue learning and achieve. This work ensured the outstanding English and maths GCSE achievement rate of 93.8% (2019-20).

11. Whilst social distancing regulations persist, SAL's term-on-term re-programming has focussed on 60% of course delivery online with 40% F2F (with social distancing). The latter has accommodated courses for learners in practical arts and craft subjects, where specialist equipment and resources are required, and prioritised learning for students with learning disabilities in order to support social inclusion and reduce the digital divide.
12. Ongoing planning has been incredibly challenging with the third national lockdown at the start of 2021. Looking ahead, the teams are reviewing the delivery model to find a balance between online and F2F delivery that would be appropriate for COVID-19 restrictions, whilst best meeting learner needs. Retaining and expanding online provision to support learner demand is a key focus, but learner feedback confirms that F2F is a lifeline for many, addressing opportunities for social interaction and loneliness. Additionally, SAL's unique selling point has been delivery of F2F learning, for which many Surrey residents are prepared to pay a premium above the cost of online learning.
13. SAL sits within the Education Service that resides in the Children, Families and Lifelong Learning Directorate. Performance is regularly monitored and scrutinised by the SAL Governance Board, chaired by Councillor Julie Iles, Cabinet Member for All-Age Learning. The Service's planning and review procedures are aligned with County Council strategic priorities. This promotes internal partnership working to support local priorities.

Role of Adult and Community Education

14. The recently published "Learning for Life: the role of adult education in developing thriving local communities - A Handbook for Councillors" clearly articulates the vital role that adult and community education (ACE) plays in supporting residents - "alongside the economic benefits, it reduces loneliness and makes people happier, healthier, more confident, capable and resilient – making places smarter and more inclusive". The role of adult education "is not just about what goes on in the classroom. It is about having the ability to support residents to develop wider outcomes for their own personal lives which, in turn, support and have an impact on their local communities, local businesses, and therefore the local economy." The Education Select Committee report, "A plan for an adult skills and lifelong learning revolution" (2020) described adult community learning providers as the 'jewel in the crown' of the nation's adult education landscape.

15. In line with the philosophy articulated above, SAL uses the Adult Education Budget (AEB) to provide flexible - programmes of learning, which include a qualification/s, to help eligible adult learners of different ages and backgrounds to improve and develop skills, confidence, motivation, fitness, resilience, independent living skills, life skills and/or enhance their wellbeing, including mental health. The wide variety of courses provides a range of opportunities and gives residents opportunities over and above a second chance to access learning.

16. The transforming impact of adult education on people's lives has been further highlighted during the COVID-19 crisis. SAL's rapid response to provide continuity of engagement and learning has provided a lifeline for many learners, including vulnerable and isolated residents:

"You have been as professional and organised as always and our learning hasn't been compromised in any way. In short you are a star!"

"A really interesting and supportive forum in an unsettled time. Great involvement from all and brilliant tuition in a new environment."

"Doing the course on-line has worked well (a good second-best to being physically present). The tutor has provided a good mix of activities and some useful homework and has been very encouraging throughout the course." (SAL Distance Learning Feedback July 2020).

17. Learner feedback from recent learner surveys (March 2020) showed learners considered they had achieved significant non-academic benefits from their courses.

- 87% of respondents Agreed or Strongly Agreed their 'course has improved my own wellbeing'
- 71% Agreed or Strongly Agreed their 'course has helped me maintain a healthy, active lifestyle'
- 94% Agreed or Strongly Agreed their 'course has motivated me to pursue my interests'.
- 98% said their course met or exceeded their expectations
- 88% considered their course provided good or excellent value for money

Funding

Adult Education Budget (AEB)

18. SAL is funded by grants provided by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), the Greater London Authority (GLA) and by learners' tuition fees.

19. The Adult Education Budget (AEB) grants provided by ESFA and GLA aim to provide adults with the skills and learning they need to equip them for work, an apprenticeship or other learning. The AEB funds learners who:

- are aged 19 or older; and
- are citizens of a country within the European Economic Area (EEA) or have the Right of Abode in the UK (new guidance is expected for the 21-22 academic year); and
- have been resident in the EEA for at least the three years prior to the start of their course.

20. The AEB is split into two principal funding models, Adult Skills (AS) and Community Learning (CL).

For the 2020/21 academic year, grant allocations are as follows.

Table 1 2020/21 Grant Funding by funding body and funding model

	2020/21
Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)	
Community Learning	£2,151,028
Adult Skills	£597,582
Total	£2,748,610
Greater London Authority (GLA)	
Community Learning	£88,000
Adult Skills	£15,627
Total	£103,627
Grand total	£2,852,237

Adult Skills (AS)

21. AS programmes are typically formula funded and involve learners working towards externally accredited qualifications, e.g. English and maths GCSEs and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) units and awards. Funding is paid per learner and according to outcomes. Full payment is only made when the learner has achieved the qualification.

22. Most Adult Skills courses are fully funded and thus provided free to the learner.

Community Learning (CL)

23. CL programmes are typically non-formula funded and do not lead to qualifications. Learners' progress and achievements are measured using the RARPA (Recognising and Recording Progress in Non-Accredited Learning) framework. CL programmes

aim to develop the skills, confidence, motivation and resilience of adults of different ages and backgrounds in order to:

- progress towards formal learning or employment
- improve their health and wellbeing, including mental health
- develop stronger communities
- improve their confidence and willingness to engage in learning
- better equip parents to support and encourage their children's learning
- improve/maintain health and/or social well-being
- increase volunteering, civic engagement and social integration
- reduce costs on welfare, health and anti-social behaviour

24. CL focusses public funding on people who are disadvantaged and least likely to participate, including in rural areas and people on low incomes with low skills. It requires that we "collect fee income from people who can afford to pay and use where possible to extend provision to those who cannot". ('New Challenges New Chances' – Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2011, P14).

25. CL comprises both fee-paying and free provision. It's important to recognise that SAL uses income from fee-paying learners on CL courses to cross-subsidise targeted provision with zero fees like Family Learning/Outreach/Passport to Wellbeing and courses with lower fees like Learners with Learning Disabilities and ESOL. Fee-paying CL programmes (e.g. Art and Craft, Foreign Languages, Healthy Living) account for about 85% of our offer. CL typically accrues over £2m in tuition fees. Free CL programmes account for about 15% of our provision.

26. Tuition fee income typically accounts for approximately 45% of our total income.

27. With the changing economic landscape since COVID-19, the Service is reviewing the need to increase the proportion of Adult Skills (AS) provision to support, for example, those in the hospitality or retail sector looking to retrain or upskill. However, it is important to point out that a change to the current balance of our programmes to reduce fee-paying CL courses and offer more qualification based AS courses (free for learners), is likely to impact the net budget return to SCC.

28. Based on current learner feedback, there is a strong appetite among residents to return to face to face learning, in particular the practical subjects such as Art, Craft, Exercise and Cookery. The feel of your hands on the clay on a Potter's wheel in an adult learning centre can't be reproduced in a virtual class on Zoom! There is a huge opportunity for SAL to increase its commercial income post lockdown. Many learners are prepared to pay for specialist F2F courses. SAL must grasp the opportunity to react to the post lockdown effect, where people will be keen to get back to updating their skills and supporting their health and wellbeing. Much of what SAL can offer at times and locations conveniently accessible to residents is not readily available from other sources. If SAL transitions a portion of the existing CL programme to full-cost/commercial provision in order to repurpose some CL funding for free provision, tuition fees would have to be raised considerably to make up the lost CL subsidy. This would need some market research to see if the market could bear the increase. SAL would consider increasing fees for those who could afford to pay and continue

with its policy to waive or discount tuition fees for those who can't (e.g. those on low wage or state benefits).

Course provision and curriculum focus, learner numbers and tuition fee income

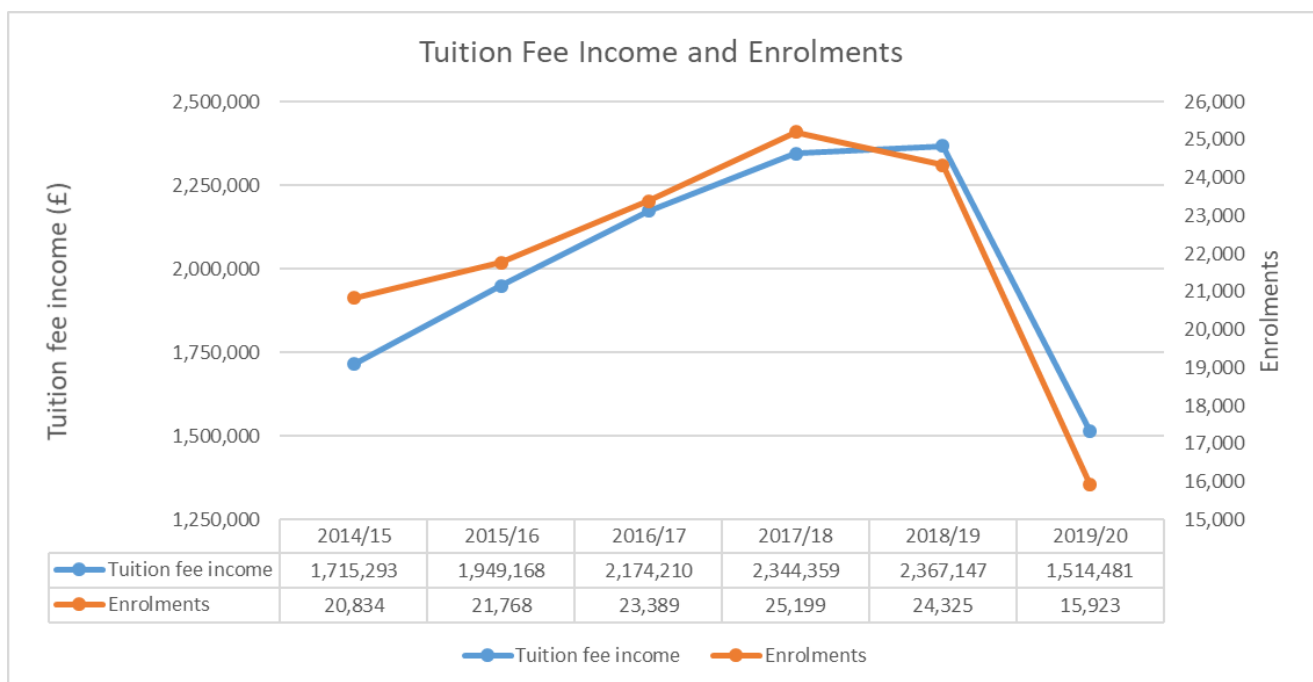
29. SAL uses AEB funding to provide a curriculum which is categorised into four broad themes:

- Adult Skills courses and apprenticeship programmes leading to a qualification to improve the employment prospects of adults in Surrey. This comprises English, maths, ESOL and some Supported Learning; and the new Essential Digital Skills qualification as a direct response to skills needs post COVID-19.
- Universal programme community learning non-accredited courses to improve and learn new skills to enrich lives and contribute to wellbeing, which may also improve employment prospects. This includes arts, crafts, exercise, modern foreign languages, cookery, -non-accredited work skills and IT courses. These courses help to cross subsidise the targeted provision.
- Community learning targeted provision to improve the life chances of:
 - Disadvantaged families, particularly where parents/carers of children need help with parenting, following healthy lifestyles, wellbeing support or have English or maths needs (Family Learning). This includes a small subcontract to one provider (Daniel Spargo-Mabbs Foundation) to extend the reach of the programme. These are parents' workshops for 'virtual' drug and alcohol awareness in schools where this is identified disadvantage.
 - Adults with learning disabilities or the physical disability hearing loss (Supported Learning)
 - Adults with low-to-moderate mental health issues (Passport to Wellbeing)
 - Hard to engage adults who are unemployed or low skilled and who may be or have been homeless (Outreach)
 - 'Skills for Work' programme in response to COVID-19
- Non-ESFA-funded commercial courses responsive to demand to enrich lives, contribute to wellbeing and support community cohesion. These courses help to cross subsidise the targeted provision. This includes Dance, Pilates, higher level modern foreign language courses, Antiques, Wine Appreciation, Complementary Therapies.

30. Over the last decade, national funding for adult learning has reduced substantially in real terms with no inflationary increases. SAL has been innovative in creating new courses to generate additional tuition fee income, where learner demand was high. Additionally, in 2020, SAL was successful in bidding for some new funding (£103,627) from the Greater London Authority (GLA).

31. Although nationally the adult learning sector saw reduced numbers of learners enrolling over the last few years, SAL saw a 16.8% growth in enrolments over the five years from 2014/15 to 2018/19. However, after five years of rapid growth, learner numbers stabilised in 2018/19 in line with national trends (see graph and table below).
32. In 2019/20, due to forced COVID-19 closure of the adult learning centres towards the end of spring 2020 and for all of summer term 2020, learner and enrolment numbers were down by approximately a third on the previous year.
33. Recovery plans for a phased return to centres put in place for autumn 2020 (with 60% of classes delivered online and 40% in centres with social distancing measures in place) saw a promising start to the academic year with enrolments and income better than expected at 50% of the last pre-COVID-19 autumn term.
34. In response to the third national lockdown, the service has rapidly revised its spring 2021 offer to deliver all classes online wherever possible.

Figure 1 - Tuition Fee Income



35. Learner numbers during the same period are shown in the table below.

Table 2 - Learners by academic year and funding model

Funding model	Learners					
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Community Learning	8,125	9,707	10,565	10,751	10,227	7,660
Adult Skills	697	574	542	594	566	509
Commercial	809	1,258	1,193	1,597	1,625	1,339
Apprentices	-	-	-	33	51	63
Total*	9,179	10,875	11,781	12,241	11,785	9,001

* A learner is an individual attending at least one course in the stated academic year. An enrolment is a start on a specific course, of which each learner might record more than one per year. We have some learners who attend 10 or more, but an average learner enrolls on two courses in each academic year.

Some learners attend CL, AS and commercial courses. Grand total of learners (i.e. headcount of unique individuals) thus not equal to a sum of the subtotals.

COVID-19 recovery

36. Surrey's 2030 Economic Strategy Statement was approved by Cabinet on 15th December 2020. The Statement builds from the work undertaken by Lord Phillip Hammond through the Surrey Economic Commission and provides the economic framework for the One Surrey Growth Board's 'Plan for Growth' and the aim of driving sustainable and inclusive economic growth for Surrey.
37. The Surrey Economic Growth Statement priority three is **Maximising opportunities within a balanced, inclusive economy**. The aim is to develop a longer-term, demand-led, approach to workforce skills, with a focus on inclusion, linked to health inequalities and wider health outcomes. The statement highlights that "... our economic 'system' will need to remain diverse: direct personal services, for example, are vitally important, and will become more so in the context of our ageing population and growing health and social care demand." The Economic statement is currently under consultation with partners, including representation from SAL. One fundamental challenge within the economic statement is to develop a better joined-up Surrey Skills System, using existing assets/resources (schools, colleges, universities, adult learning), to prepare the future workforce with skills required to meet the demand of future jobs.
38. The SAL offer is central to this agenda. It provides adults with a starting point to return to learning within a supportive community and a dedicated adult learning environment. Learners gain fundamental skills and confidence needed to help them begin their journey to upskill and/or reskill in order to progress at work, find a job or change career. This includes progressing from SAL's Maths and/or English GCSE courses to further/higher education including apprenticeships. This support is vital at a time when many residents are losing their jobs in sectors such as retail, hospitality and aviation due to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and are being forced to move sector and job role in order to find work.

39. The focus and proposals of the Further Education Skills for Jobs White Paper, published on 21st January 2021 is also about giving people the skills they need, in a way that suits them, so they can get great jobs and boost productivity. It places emphasis on preparing the workforce of the future, and on enabling the existing workforce to retrain and upskill for the opportunities and challenges facing them. SAL is currently investigating delivery of Level 3 provision under the new Lifetime Skills Guarantee, one of the proposals in this paper.
40. There are significant challenges ahead including an ageing population, health and wellbeing post COVID-19, and preparing the workforce with skills for the future. SAL is working to support and contribute to these challenges for COVID-19 recovery. SAL's committed and specialist teams have demonstrated capability, capacity and staff expertise to adapt quickly and are well positioned to support COVID-19 relief and social isolation and to reach out to those who would benefit most from learning. Together with the Surrey Economy and Growth Team and the SAL Governance Board, SAL is working towards linking and contributing more closely to the LEP's local plans. Effective engagement with learners continues post COVID-19, and this enables their feedback to contribute to the development of remote delivery.
41. SAL leaders and managers have led a whole Service approach to re-planning of the 2020-21 and 2021-22 course offer post COVID-19. The Service is continuing to build on its high-quality English and maths programme in response to identified demand. Excellent achievement rates and learner feedback make SAL the provider of choice for many adult applicants looking to upskill in these core areas. A new online Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) process has been developed since the first lockdown in March 2020, to ensure all applicants are placed on the course most appropriate to their level and career aspirations. The offer includes qualification courses at lower levels (including Stepping Stones and Functional Skills) for those who need to brush up their skills before embarking on a GCSE course in September 2021. A second intake of learners at Functional Skills level enabled more residents to begin their learning journey during the current academic year. These learners will then be ready to embark on a GCSE course in September 2021. SAL GCSE courses are one-year intensive courses which support learners to progress quickly to the next stage of their learning journey or into employment. English and maths are also embedded into all CL courses as appropriate.
42. Like English and maths, the ESOL programme is also being successfully delivered remotely until courses can return to face to face learning. The effective online IAG process developed during the summer has been further developed for the December/January IAGs to make the process easier to access for potential learners while continuing to ensure the robust process places learners on the course most suited to their needs. Work is in progress to partner with Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum (SMEF) to provide first step weekly ESOL classes for participants in their "Many Hands" community integration project.
43. With all Apprenticeship End Point Assessments going ahead remotely since COVID-19, the programme continues to focus on the delivery of Customer Service and Business Administration apprenticeships and is working in partnership with the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service to support and monitor the Operational Firefighter Apprenticeship programme. Having gained approval from the Institute of Leadership

& Management (ILM) for the Level 5 Diploma for Managers, this course commenced in Nov 2020. Collaboration with the Surrey County Council Leadership and Management (SCC L&D) team to commence the Level 5 Coaching Professional Apprenticeship continues over the spring/summer terms, as does reviewing of opportunities to address the skills gap to enable those who have recently lost their jobs to study for qualifications which will increase their employability. Staff turnover in SCC L&D team has presented a challenge to date, but a new consultant is now in place to progress planning, which will include digital skills.

44. In consultation with NCS (National Careers Service) and Job Centre Plus the development of a new programme of short Employability 'Get That Job' courses was launched in the autumn term aimed at increasing confidence and building job search/interview skills for those recently unemployed or wishing to return to the job market. The existing Skills for Work courses such as Manual Bookkeeping, Computing and IT skills have been further extended by the introduction of the new free "Essential Digital Skills" qualifications during the spring term aimed at adults who do not have the digital skills needed for life and work. In order to further address the skills gap, SAL is exploring subcontracting opportunities with Learning Curve Group Limited, an Ofsted Grade 2 provider, to extend the range of qualifications provided from February/March. This will include Health and Social Care.
45. SAL is continuing to work with partners within and external to SCC to review provision and curriculum intent to widen opportunities for the most disadvantaged Surrey residents. A meeting is scheduled with Surrey's Race Equality and Minority Achievement Service (REMA) to explore how SAL's Outreach team can provide first step learning opportunities for the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community. First meetings have been held with 'Surrey Choices' to explore partnership working on Supported Internships. Through a January Schools Covid bulletin schools were reminded that SAL could support parents needing to upskill to enable them to better support their children access digital remote education. Work is underway to investigate the demand for specific workshops for parents on the basics of using/navigating some of the various learning platforms being used by school for example, Google Classroom and Zoom.
46. Family Learning provision has been rapidly developed into an online course offer of over 70 choices on themes including Managing Child Behaviour, Anxiety, Storytelling, Mini Scientists (STEM), Maths and English. Target parents are those designated L2 in need of Early Help and L3 Targeted Help on the Surrey Effective Family Resilience Windscreen, many of whom are only able to access learning on their mobile phones. To ensure reach to the right families, SAL is continuing to build on partnerships at a strategic level within SCC e.g. Family Information Services, Early Years team, School Improvement team, SAfE.

Figure 2 - Extract from Effective Family Resilience Surrey Dec 2020v7

The Surrey Effective Support Windscreen



47. Following consultation with a number of partners SAL prioritised F2F courses for learners with learning disabilities at centres for autumn 2020. With the closure of our adult learning centres in January 2021, learner engagement is continuing through both live, real time learning and the posting of learning packs. The Supported Learning team is continuing to link with Surrey Learning Disability Partnership Board and has redesigned an online IAG process as part of their reprogrammed 2020/21 offer.

48. Self-employment rates in Surrey are high (12.5% self-employed compared with 9.8% nationally). Many SAL non-accredited courses offer opportunities for self-employment, personal development and career progression, as can be seen from the feedback from a learner on a Psychology course:

“This has been life changing for me and has helped me understand and explore my own mental health problems, that of my autistic daughter with learning disabilities and my Mum who has Alzheimer’s. It also led me to seek a new job in Adult Health and Social Care. I have found a subject that fascinates me that I want to continue. It is also time for me!” (Learner ILP Dec 2020).

49. Many learners in SAL Arts & Crafts classes take up opportunities to exhibit and/or sell their work, take on commissions, progress to higher level courses or qualifications or have written work published. For example, a pottery learner gained enough confidence working with her tutor that she applied for a place and has been accepted on an Art Therapy course to further her career. Many learners are members of local art groups and display work with the group, including Molesey Art Society and Sunbury Art Group, amongst many others. Other learners take part in exhibitions and competitions, including the prestigious Royal Academy Summer Exhibition. Learners with learning disabilities take part in ‘Mini Enterprise’ projects and gain skills needed to become as independent as possible in their everyday lives.

50. Across the non-accredited personal development provision, learners derive very good benefits from course attendance which supports the key priorities of the Surrey Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The loss of face to face learning during the lockdown periods and reduced provision as a result of social distancing, poses risks to mental health and wellbeing for many learners for whom non accredited learning provides a lifeline.

"It's been great being able to keep up the weekly class and I've really enjoyed it but as soon as we can go back to face to face I would,"

"online learning is fine but what is missing are the one to one relationships that occur in real time"

"Online learning does not replace the interaction created in the classroom...My first choice would always be face to face in the classroom" (SAL Distance Learning Feedback July 2020).

51. Following discussions with external partners such as supported living agencies, care home providers and parents, courses for adults with learning disabilities were prioritised for return to F2F learning when SAL's adult learning centres re-opened in September. The closure of centres in January due to the current lockdown and move to online delivery has resulted in a drop in engagement with this cohort of learners. This is in part attributed to digital poverty. SAL continues to work hard to mitigate this and continues to enable learner engagement for example by posting learning packs and bulletin newsletters. Engagement with online learning is also a barrier for other disadvantaged groups particularly the hard to reach learners who pre COVID-19 would engage with community-based Outreach courses.

52. Findings from the 2020 Adult Participation in Learning Survey (Learning and Work Institute) found that there had been high levels of participation in learning during lockdown, but participation varied enormously across different groups with those who could most benefit being least likely to take part. Adults in lower socio-economic groups (29%) were half as likely to take part in lockdown learning compared to adults in higher socio-economic groups (57%)

53. Additionally, as cited earlier and based on SAL learner feedback, many learners in practical subjects such as Art, Craft, Exercise and Cookery are very keen to return to F2F learning and derive significant health and wellbeing benefits from non-accredited learning.

54. A previous report from the Learning and Work Institute (January 2020) highlights that adult participation in education has fallen to a record low during the last decade. "The decline should be a real cause for concern given the many benefits of participating in lifelong learning... Beyond the economic benefits, evidence also shows that adults who take part in learning are more likely to have better health and wellbeing, and to be active in their communities'. In the same report, Robert Halfon MP and former chair of the education select committee said, 'We must also ensure that we have Adult Community Learning Centre in every town in the country". Another report - Levelling up Adult Community Education (2020) states "The

pandemic has demonstrated that many adults turn to learning a new craft skill as a way of dealing with loneliness and anxiety in a lockdown”

55. Improving the balance between online and F2F delivery and increasing F2F incrementally is therefore a strong element of SAL’s planning for 2021-22 in order to best meet learner needs. There is a recognised need for SAL to develop a robust sustainable business model for the future and plans are in development to support this. Objectives are to review the current budget and business plan in response to the significant loss of income over the last 12 months following the pandemic and also to review the curriculum intent and offer, ensuring that SAL is a good contributor to council priorities. This includes supporting economic wellbeing and skills development, addressing loneliness and opportunities for social interaction including mental health and supporting the ‘poverty challenge’ through skills provision and family learning.
56. An external consultant/sector expert has been engaged to support the SAL Leadership Team and the Assistant Director Education to perform the organisational review over the next three months. Working with the Transformation team, a paper will be delivered setting out the options for the future with clear recommendations. Additionally, the council’s prioritisation to a “whole place” approach and co-location presents a real opportunity for SAL and other services to explore and review the future possibility and scope to relocate to hub settings.
57. SAL is currently working on projects in Sunbury and Camberley regarding co-location. In both instances, potential sites have been identified and the Service is exploring accommodation requirements with Libraries and Cultural Services colleagues. This could be an opportunity to have updated and fit for purpose accommodation as well as enhanced cross working with other services and increased presence in the area. Challenges would be to assess impact on enrolments and therefore income. In the Camberley instance the number of rooms in the new hub is likely to be significantly fewer than the current Adult Learning Centre. In addition, there is need for consultation with learners and local residents, who are passionate about the local adult learning provision.
58. With the first lockdown in March 2020 managers and lead tutors rapidly upskilled both on the pedagogy for online teaching and learning and the necessary digital knowledge and skills to teach online. This was achieved through personal research and the attendance of webinars such as those provided by the Education and Training Foundation and Hoxex our sector’s professional body as well as collaboration with other adult education providers in our quality improvement network. The curriculum teams then cascaded training to course tutors in preparation for the 2020 autumn term. Between 1/4/20 -31/12/20 staff completed 317 sessions of IT related training of which 238 were about remote digital delivery. Training and further support continues both informally and by tutors and managers attending specialist webinars and events.
59. There are plans to carry out a staff digital skills audit for all staff. This will support SAL to further identify where support is needed to enable staff to grow in their

current teaching or administrative roles and further support the new models of course delivery.

Conclusions:

60. SAL continues to play an integral role in the Local Authority, working to support and contribute to the aims for COVID-19 economic and social recovery.
61. The last year has been incredibly challenging, but SAL's committed and specialist teams have demonstrated capability, capacity and staff expertise to adapt quickly and are well positioned to supporting COVID-19 relief and social isolation and to reach out to those who would benefit most from learning.
62. The pandemic has exacerbated some of the learning gaps for the most vulnerable groups. SAL is continuing to work to ameliorate the 'Covid gap' through engagement with stakeholders.
63. SAL will continue to provide essential skills, learning and retraining opportunities for those who thrive in a dedicated adult environment.

Recommendations:

- I. Work with partners, within and external to SCC and with the Surrey Economy and Growth Team to develop a coordinated plan for the future, to ensure that the Adult Learning Service remains responsive to changing health, social and economic needs.
- II. Continuously review the Service delivery model to ensure sustainability and that the Service meets the needs and aspirations of the local community.

Report Contact details

Anu Chanda, Principal, Surrey Adult Learning
anu.chanda@surreycc.gov.uk

Sources/background papers:

Handbook for Councillors – ACE – Oct 2020

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