

Review of the Impact of LSC's Agenda for Change on Adult Learning

Notes of meeting with learning providers

Middleton House

24 October 2005

Members

Councillors Anne MacDonald, Les Allen, Pauline Latham

Co-opted Members – Nasreen Iqbal, Tony Walsh

Witnesses

Cath Harcula Deputy Head Adult Learning Service

Joe McColgan Assistant Head and Director of Lifelong Learning, Lees
Brook Community Sports College

Officer Support Mahroof Hussain Overview Scrutiny Co-ordination Officer

Introduction

1. Councillor MacDonald welcomed members and witnesses to the meeting and explained that the Commission is reviewing the impact of Learning and Skills Council's Agenda for Change Programme on adult learning in the city. The Commission will be receiving evidence from a number of providers as well as the LSC.

Cath Harcula Deputy Head Adult Learning Service

2. Cath Harcula stated that the Adult Learning Service is part of the Derby City Council's Education Service and provides accredited and non-accredited provision from approximately 70 venues in the city throughout the year. The venues range from free standing centres such as the Rycote Centre, local community centres and also schools. There are approximately 10,000 enrolments every year taken up by 7000 learners with some learners enrolling on more than one course.
3. Funding for the courses is obtained equally for the two different types of provision, Further Education (FE) and Adult Community Learning (ACL).
4. The FE provision is regulated under 'Former External Institution' regulations. It includes all accredited provision and skills for life (literacy, numeracy and ESOL). Funding for the ACL is obtained through block grants from the Learning and Skills Council to the City Council for non - accredited learning and covers learning for pleasure. All funding streams will be changing in 2006/07.

5. Under FE provision the Adult Service can claim additional support funding for issues such as disability, personal support or language interpreting to help the learners to participate. For non FE provision the service can draw down from the LSC learning support fund. This can help with child care or other additional resources e.g. software for learners with visual impairment. It possible to assist learners on both types of courses to meet their needs.
6. Identifying the types of courses and engaging people in the learning process is quite complicated. Providers carry complicated data manipulation exercises to reach maximise funding and FE targets. They don't seek to either overachieve their targets as they don't get funding for the additional outcomes. They obviously don't want to fall short as they lose proportion of their funding on shortfalls. Some popular courses often have the same learners.
7. A common sense approach is used when developing courses. A popular course in modern foreign languages such as Spanish level 1 is likely to experience high demand in level 2 in the following year. The Adult Service also relies on partnerships such as Surestart, community groups and the Derby City Youth Service to help them identify training needs. It has for example run a project with the Probation Service to improve skills of the offenders as 10% of their sentence can be spent on improving their skills.
8. There is an element of risk involved in setting up and running training courses. It is pointless to set up a course that nobody actually wants even though the funding may be available from the LSC. It is not possible or viable to run every course. The Service can provide courses to meet specific needs of organisations.
9. The service runs English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses. This is the largest single subject area of the Service. Half of the total funding of the Service is for FE provision and 65% of this is spent on ESOL. This provision ranges from absolute beginners up to level 2, (GCSE equivalent). Classes held at various places including worship such as the Sikh temple. Adult Learning has also expanded into citizenship and provides courses in the cultural aspects of living in the UK and in Derby.
10. The Adult Learning Service works with a number of small employers and runs variety of courses including health and safety and accredited basic hygiene. To help people improve their attainment levels they are allowed to take Basic Food Hygiene exams in their own language if required. It has participated in Valuable Skills, a pilot project funded by the LSC to improve language skills of employees.
11. The level of provision of ESOL is insufficient in the city to meet the needs of the city and therefore the Adult Learning Service has

established links with other providers in the city, including the voluntary community sector.

12. Concessions for FE courses are similar across the country with LSC paying remission fees. The LSC makes no contribution to non FE course remissions and the concessions are paid by the City Council.
13. LSC's Agenda for Change Programme will not support ACL provision at the present level and the cost of these courses will need to be met by the learners.
14. The providers have the options to charge full cost to learners but this is often not feasible as it can have an adverse affect on participation. The level of the learners' contribution is expected to be in the region of 27% of the cost the course in 2006/07.
15. The LSC has the responsibility for co-ordinating adult learning in the city however it is carried out informally by providers through the Derbyshire Learning Partnership. For example the DCP's Skills for Life Network which runs an annual conference to bring tutors together.
16. The approach to provision is haphazard with no co-ordination by the LSC. There is no single prospectus for the city and many providers offer different types of courses. It can be very confusing for the learner which is often noticed in August and September.
17. LSC should produce a prospectus and share information on who is delivering what and types of courses in the city.
18. There seems to be a lack of understanding of the demand for learning for pleasure by the LSC. It is much better at addressing the skills agenda which is TEC model than learning. There is limited acceptance of the fact that recreational leads to other types of courses.
19. Under national priorities, there is an expectation from the LSC that adults will need level 2, equivalent to 5 GCSE's and workforce development.
20. The Adult Learning Service is looking at expanding into providing workforce developments and is working with the Council to improve its employee skill levels. This includes areas such as helping teaching assistants moving into becoming teachers and the European Computer Driving Licence course to improve IT skills.
21. The biggest impact of the change agenda for the Adult Learning services will be to:
 - maintain courses at affordable rates
 - Grow workforce training

- Balance neighbourhood wide agenda and community strategy as it doesn't want to lose the neighbourhood renewal perspective.
22. There is a strong link between leisure courses and the health of older people. Leisure courses can help to keep older people active, reduce isolation and maintain a healthy mind. It is important that these needs are not lost. There are exercise classes for over 50 being run across the city but these are not funded by the PCTs. There are also basic cookery classes that can help to improve diets. The PCTs have funded community interpreters which are meeting local need.

Joe McColgan – Assistant Head and Director of Lifelong Learning, Lees Brook Community Sports College

23. Lees Brook Sports College has been delivering adult learning since the late 1980's. It has developed a learning ethos that enables children to continue with their learning after school. The Community Sports College has increased pupil numbers from 650 to over currently 1200 and has also continued to improve pass rates for pupils attaining five GCSE's from just over 15% a few years ago to currently just under 50%. With the extended school operating on most evenings of the week, parents are also more involved in school life.
24. Lees Brook has developed close links with West Park School which is based in Spondon and is a specialist in IT and Maths. The two schools between them cover the DE21 area of the city which includes Oakwood, Chaddesden and Spondon. They also work closely with the Derby College.
25. Lees Brook has a contract with Derby College to deliver adult learning. The decision by the Derby College to cut funding in May 2005 affected approximately 5000-6000 learners in local schools including those at Lees Brook. Lees Brook successfully argued that it was in the interest of Derby College to maintain good relationships with schools especially in their new role in post 16 provision. However, Lees Brook's adult learning budget was reduced by 30%- 40% which has affected the ACL and some FE leisure provision. This caused Lees Brook to decide whether it should:
- Have no adult provision
 - Charge the full tuition costs
 - Subsidise some courses with the more successful
26. Lees Brook decided to continue offering adult learning with costs for leisure courses met through cross subsidies from other more popular courses, as the same rate is charged for all courses. Excess income from the popular Tai Chi for example, may is used to support other courses.

27. Innovative methods to attract and retain learners on its courses have been used. It has linked with organisations such as Derby County Football Association, Badminton England and Netball England to provide quality sports coaching. The trained coaches then go back into the community to train others.
28. Not all courses are funded by Derby College. Courses delivered under the Open College Network use alternative sources to subsidise the costs. The Sports College also taps into other sources of funding such as the National Lottery to help meet the cost of some courses. The types of courses available at Lees Brook include:

Qualification Courses	Leisure Courses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ GCSEs ■ OCR – IT qualifications ■ Sign Language - CACDP ■ Open College Network ■ Food Hygiene - CIEH ■ 1st 4 Sport – Football Coaching ■ Football Referees ■ Badminton England ■ England Netball 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Languages ■ Arts and Crafts ■ Sport and recreational ■ Family Learning ■ Tasters

29. It was stated that national priorities and local needs don't always go together. The national agenda focuses on level 2, which is not always what people want or are able to achieve within the timescale as it takes some people a number of years to achieve GCSE's. One learner took 11 years to build up her GCSE's to enable her to get onto a teacher training course.
30. The cost has an impact on the number of learners enrolling on courses. Lees Brook has managed to increase its number of adult learners from 300 to 350 over the last few years. It is anticipated that numbers will go down if the cost of courses is increased.

Determining Need

31. There are tensions between national and local priorities; LSC and Community needs; and qualification courses versus leisure courses. Lees Brook conducts regular survey of parents, current learners and other organisations to determine learner interests and needs. The experience of the college is that some people don't always respond well when forced into taking qualification based courses. The Sports College recently lost 13 learners from their courses as they were frightened to take exams.

Concession

32. Concessions are offered to the following groups

- Income based Job Seekers
- Working Tax Credit
- Other types of Tax Credit
- Income Support
- Council Tax Benefit
- Housing Benefit
- 16 to 18 year olds

- 100% reduction on Derby College courses
- 20% reduction on other courses

LSCs Agenda for Change

33. The Agenda for Change mainly focuses on:

- Mainly focuses on Post 16 Colleges and Skills for Employers
- Quality and Self Improvement
- Linking Funding to College Plans and LSC priorities
- Data, Business Excellence and Reputation

34. The effect on learning includes:

- Modest increases in 16 to 19 learning at an expense of a reduction of £55 million in adult investment
- NIACE – 1.5 million less adults taking part in learning if current funding position is maintained
- Public Purse focuses on Skills Agenda
- Pricing Shifts – Fee Increases and less concessions resulting in lower uptake on courses
- Narrower Curriculum focus
- Wider benefits of learning marginalised
- People outside the waged economy excluded
- Fewer opportunities to return to learn

35. There is currently little information on the level and type of provision available in the city. There is little dialogue between the providers and no consistency of fees being charges across for the courses. It would be useful for the learners to know about the courses being offered in there area and details on who is delivering them. This would also assist the providers to reduce duplication. It was suggested that a prospectus listing courses being delivered in the city is produced.

36. There are links between adult learning and health particularly for older people. It is important to explore opportunities to joint working and mutual benefit.
37. It was also mentioned that providers often have little time to prepare their curriculum programme due to late budget announcements by the LSC. Derby College for example didn't know heir budget early in April for this year which placed further on Lees Brook in preparing its programme. Ideally it would help providers if the budgets were announced a year in advance of the curriculum year.