



SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL Cabinet Report

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

Date: 1 August 2012

Subject: **Adult and Community Learning - Fees Policy 2012- 13**

Author of Report: Dee Desgranges 2296140

Summary:

1. This report details 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 Revisions to the existing fees policy have been made in response to the requirement of the SFA. The SFA 'co-funds' courses and expects the remainder of course costs to be met by fees that are collected locally.
 - 1.3 The key revision is that, as from August 2013 Level 3 (equivalent to A level study over the age of 24 will be required to take out a loan to pay their fees. They will be required to repay the loan if their earnings reach a certain point in the future. Further information about this new scheme is awaited from the SFA.
 - 1.4 National fee remission rules particularly impact on those residents that the City Council wishes to encourage to take up our community learning opportunities, particularly learners of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).
 - 1.5 This report is a summary of the national guidance, it describes the strategic approach to fee charging that the City Council proposes to take and sets out the implications for adult learners in Sheffield.
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Reasons for Recommendations:

The following recommendations will allow the city to secure its adult learning funding thereby providing access to learning for those residents most in need of improved skills levels and the qualifications needed for work and improved life chances..

Recommendations:

Cabinet to note the contents of this report and

- approve the fees policy set for LLSC for the academic year 2012/13
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Background Papers:

Category of Report: OPEN

* Delete as appropriate

Statutory and Council Policy Checklist

1 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS
YES/NO Cleared by: Tony Greenwood
2 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS
YES/NO Cleared by: Nadine Wynter
Equality of Opportunity Implications
YES/NO Cleared by: Bashir Khan
Tackling Health Inequalities Implications
YES/
Human rights Implications
YES/
Environmental and Sustainability implications
YES/NO
Economic impact
YES
Community safety implications
YES/NO
Human resources implications

NO
Property implications
NO
Area(s) affected
Relevant Cabinet Portfolio Leader
Cllr Jackie Drayton
Relevant Scrutiny Committee if decision called in
Children, Young People and Family Support
Is the item a matter which is reserved for approval by the City Council?
YES
Press release
/NO

Adult and Community Learning - Fees Policy 2012-13

1. Summary

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- 1.4 National fee remission rules particularly impact on those residents that the City Council wishes to encourage to take up our community learning opportunities, particularly learners of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).
- 1.5 This report is a summary of the national guidance, it describes the strategic approach to fee charging that the City Council proposes to take and sets out the implications for adult learners in Sheffield.
- 1.6 The proposed charging schedule for Sheffield City Council's Adult and Community Learning provision is shown at Appendix A.

2. What Does This Mean for Sheffield People?

- 2.1 Under the new guidance from the SFA, only the following learners over the age of 19 will be able to access courses free of charge:
 - those in receipt of Jobseekers' Allowance (JSA) or Employment Support Allowance (ESA), those who are unemployed and in receipt of means tested benefits.
 - those pursuing adult literacy and numeracy courses (Basic Skills)
 - those who have not previously achieved a Level 2 qualification (equivalent to five or more GCSEs at A* - C)
 - those who have not previously achieved a Level 3 qualification (equivalent to two or more 'A' Levels). From August 2013 all learners over the age of 24 will be required to pay fees.
- 2.2 These rule changes will have a significant impact on the lives of those adults who are in work but in receipt of benefits.
- 2.3 The implications of these rules and changes are:
 - there is less incentive than previously to deliver ESOL, providers will be more inclined to concentrate on offering courses for 16-19 year olds which remain free and where the market is more certain

- the restriction of concessionary fees to those on work-related 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 who are not claiming these benefits.
- the Discretionary Learner Support Fund is no longer available to help the most vulnerable of learners with such things as examination fees, travel and hardship.

2.4 In addition, the Discretionary Learner Support Fund that has allowed adult learners with the greatest financial need to receive a small bursary also ceased in 2011.

3. Outcomes

3.1 The City Council is obliged by the SFA to charge fees for its adult learning provision. The City Council will endeavour to hold fees at a level that allows those who are most in need to access adult learning. This relates to those prospective adult learners who will not be eligible for free provision under the SFA rules i.e. those adults who are in work, but who 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 With regard to the particular challenges associated with the delivery of ESOL, LLSC is leading 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

3.3 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 new SFA regulations are mitigated as far as is possible. The forum is currently :

- 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 the 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 using pump priming from the Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities fund.

4. Background

4.1 The funding for adult learning comes to Sheffield City Council is a grant from the SFA. It covers such things as First Steps informal learning, Family Learning, Basic Skills and ESOL, and courses leading to a first Level 2 or 3 qualification, and Level 3 qualifications.

- 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.
- 4.3 LLSC proposes only minor changes to the fees policy for the academic year 2012 /13 following the major revisions made in the last academic year.
- 4.4 Any fees that are collected by LLSC will contribute to the costs of either putting on more provision where it is most required, or contribute to a bursary fund for those who cannot afford the fees or who have other hardship issues.

5. Proposed Adult and Community Learning Fees Policy 2012/13

- 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
 - Literacy and Numeracy
 - Family Learning
 - A first Level 2 or 3 qualification aimed at progress to employment.
- 5.2 The fees policy complies with SFA guidelines but 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 LLSC, together with its partners, is establishing a picture of the hardship issues attributed to the introduction of fees for ESOL learning and is addressing these issues through the work of the ESOL Forum. The ESOL Forum is monitoring patterns of attendance and progression using data collected from providers.
- 5.4 The data will provide the basis for a collective and strategic approach to how reduced resources can be best deployed to deliver ESOL most effectively across the city. In support of this approach, Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding is being used to resource community-based learning champion activity, some of which will be directed to guiding new ESOL learners to appropriate provision and guiding those learners for whom further accreditation is not appropriate to conversation classes. Voluntary ESOL provision has been mapped and potential sources of financial support defined to aid this process. There is a full prospectus of ESOL provision in the city, both funded and non voluntary that is published each term.
- 5.5 Programmes have been redesigned to ensure as many people as possible are able to access ESOL. This would include those claiming Jobseekers Allowance who may be referred by Jobcentre Plus and will be entitled to fee remission.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 Targets are set for recruitment by the SFA against the funding that it provides to the local authority. This funding amounts to £2,135,687. Setting fees at a reasonable level for learners should ensure that these targets can still be met. Fees collected are estimated to amount to approximately £60,000 in the academic year 2012/13.
- 6.2 A small amount of hardship funding of £8,000 will be available from LLSC for those learners who are unable to afford learning. Some Community Assemblies have also expressed a wish to identify an amount of funding to cover hardship in particular individual cases.

7. Managing Risk and Governance

LLSC has extensive experience of managing complex SFA-funded projects to ensure compliance with external contract and audit requirements. The service has developed a close working relationship with the Finance External Funding Team to ensure risk and monitoring mechanisms are appropriate and to mitigate the risk of funding claw back.

8. 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. Human Resources Implications

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

10. Community Safety Implications

There are no Community Safety implications arising from this report.

11. Environmental and Sustainability implications

There are no environmental and sustainability implications arising from this report

12. Consultations

- 12.1 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 Assemblies between January 2011 and the present.
- 12.2 The changes have been discussed and a coordinated response organised by providers through the ESOL Forum.
- 12.3 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.

13. 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.

14. 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.

15. Alternative Options

The option of halting the delivery of those courses for which the charging of fees is now required was considered and rejected as it would not allow equal access to learning 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.

16. Reasons for Recommendations

The following recommendations will allow the city to secure its adult learning funding thereby providing access to learning for those residents most in need of improved skills levels and the qualifications needed for work and improved life chances.

17. Recommendations

Cabinet to note the contents of this report and

- approve the fees policy set for LLSC for the academic year 2012/13.

1. Fee remission criteria

The following provision will be free to all:

- Skills for Life – Literacy (English)
 - Skills for Life – Numeracy (Maths)
 - Family Literacy (English), Languages and Numeracy(Maths)
 - Wider Family Learning
 - A first, full Level 2 or Level 3 qualification
 - A first, full Entry Level or Level 1 course as a step up to Level 2 (not including English, maths or ESOL programmes)
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- Jobseekers Allowance or Employment Support Allowance 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.
 - An administrative charge of £10 will apply to **all** learners within community learning where fees are remitted including English and maths.
 - 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. A new grant of £1,500 is available to an employer who is taking an apprentice for the first time and who is an SME.
 - The full cost of provision will be charged for courses generally aimed at professionals wishing to retrain or develop their skills, or employers wishing to engage in development of their staff.
 - From August 2013, student loans will be introduced for learners aged 24 or above at Level 3 and above. The loans will be ring fenced within LLSC's allocation. Further information is awaited from the SFA

2. Fee charges

ESOL courses in the community

Fees will be £1.00 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 £2.00 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 £2.00 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

These courses will be free to those learners who meet the fee remission criteria.

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.

3. Evidence for fee remission:

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

- **Jobseekers 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 the particular means tested benefit

4. Bursaries

- Funding for these courses maybe available through bursaries granted to community organisations.
- Fees are payable either at the commencement of the course, or weekly
- Further details and guidance to follow when grants have been awarded.

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