

SUNDERLAND CITY COUNCIL

LEARNING AND SKILLS SERVICE

DIGITAL INCLUSION POLICY



Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to:

- set out the Learning and Skills Service intentions around establishing a digital model of delivery within Adult and Community Learning to sit alongside existing face to face provision as part of a package of blended learning
- set out our implementation plans for achieving this and how we will address barriers to learner inclusion and other wider constraints
- provide a framework for the safe and effective use of digital technologies within the Learning and Skills Service.

Background

The Learning and Skills Service's main goal is to work with those often furthest away from employment and society to ensure they are able to progress in life and work, our aim being to provide education, skills and learning that gives adults a second chance and supports their employment prospects and wellbeing, which in turn improves productivity and creates the circumstances for economic success. We try to ensure that the most disadvantaged can gain essential basic maths and English qualifications, and digital skills, as well as pre-vocational qualifications and mental wellbeing programmes to aid their progression into further learning and sustainable employment.

During the Covid pandemic when face to face teaching was limited, the Learning and Skills Service worked with training providers to ensure that learners had access to alternative methods of support to help them to achieve their learning and personal goals. Delivery of courses took place through a variety of digital formats including Teams, Zoom, WhatsApp and virtual sessions live streaming on YouTube with workbooks and resources made available to support learning. This has been very successful for many learners and we acknowledge the benefits of the forced move to online learning. Therefore, we are now looking to continue to provide online or blended curriculum models of learning as the way forward. However, the reliance on remote learning has highlighted the extent of digital poverty in Sunderland and learner inclusion has been impacted significantly due to the lack of technology available to many people from areas of high deprivation. All of our subcontracted learning providers have highlighted this as a prime barrier to reaching out to those most in need of support.

Our Vision

Our vision is to provide access to a wide range of learning programmes to those who, for many different reasons, are furthest away from employment and society to enable them to turn their lives around and achieve their personal and learning aims.

Our Mission

- Whilst face to face teaching and learning is an important part of community provision, it is our mission to enhance the learner experience through the effective use of digital technologies to bring real benefit to the learning and overall educational experiences of our learners.
- We will seek to tackle social isolation and contribute to the creation of resilient communities via curriculum provision that encompasses digital inclusion.

The digital curriculum

Intent

The current curriculum is heavily influenced by local education, skills and employment needs, aligning closely with NELEP priorities as well as the objectives embodied in the Local Area Action Plans and Sunderland Council's City Plan for a vibrant, healthy and economically active place to live and work.

The Service delivers a wide range of programmes around employability, health and wellbeing, self-esteem and resilience, vocational qualifications, community and environmental engagement, maths, English and digital skills. It is our intention that, wherever possible, these programmes will be delivered both in a classroom setting and online, ensuring that learners have a choice of delivery models to suit their individual circumstances and preferences. To achieve this, we will need to address issues including:

- a) The need for learners to have adequate digital skills before they can begin to take part in online learning
- b) The need for learners to have access to devices and internet connection
- c) The difficulties providers may have in setting up online programmes and difficulties for tutors in delivering online learning effectively when they are used to classroom teaching

Implementation

- a) Digital Skills programmes have been a priority within our provision for many years and have been delivered at levels from basic introduction to IT to accredited IT User courses. Although learners are able to choose classroom learning if they wish, they will be encouraged to attend our Digital Skills courses to equip them for online learning, thereby giving them more choice over how they learn. Once they are ready to embark on an online programme, learners will be provided with training and support to be able to use the equipment, platforms and software used for the programme. They will also be provided with training and support to ensure that they are able to remain safe in their learning. In addition, guidance for effective online learning will be issued to set out clearly learner and provider responsibilities and commitments.

- b) Where learners do not have the equipment, they need to access learning opportunities, the Service will work with learning providers to support them in sourcing appropriate equipment which can then be loaned to learners. All of our providers are small community enterprises or charities and, as such, are able to access community funding from sources such as The Good Things Foundation, Make it Click and the Harrison Foundation for Social Mobility. The Learning and Skills Service will support them with any applications and will actively identify and provide links to other organisations who can supply the technology needed. In addition, the Service will work with Sunderland Council's Area Arrangements team, the Area Committees and the Neighbourhoods Technology Forum to secure funding from the Community Chest, Area budgets and any other Council sources on behalf of providers. Providers will be expected to ensure that strict conditions for the loan of equipment will be in place and that processes are in place for its safe use and return.
- c) The vast majority of providers have developed the skills to set up online training courses effectively and tutors have gained experience and confidence, adding to their skills sets over the past year. Ongoing CPD, including face to face or online workshops and sessions will be provided for tutors by both the Service and the providers themselves to ensure that online delivery skills are regularly updated and tutors are familiar with how to use all learning technologies effectively to deliver high quality learning.

Impact

The impact on learners will be measured in the same way as face to face learning, using the Service's rigorous quality assurance processes, including review of achievement and performance data, observation of learning sessions, learner feedback and reflections, learners' progress towards employment and other destination data. Materials used for on-line or blended learning should be of a high-standard, in line with those which would be used in a classroom.

We will also evaluate the effectiveness of the technology used, the use of different equipment, platforms and software to ensure that it meets the needs of staff and learners and genuinely enhances learning. In addition, we will evaluate the impact of the use of online learning in comparison with classroom learning in terms of increased learner take-up and inclusion and also to ensure that good quality learning is delivered by both delivery models with new knowledge, skills and behaviours being attained which help learners to make good progress towards their individual goals.

Safeguarding and Prevent

The Learning and Skills Service has always been fully aware of the obligation to ensure that learners are kept safe and aware of the risks to their safety throughout any learning programme they undertake, and this is particularly relevant to the use of

technologies which may increase the risk in terms of accessing inappropriate materials or threat of radicalisation. A comprehensive Safeguarding/Prevent framework is well-established, comprising a suite of policies, guidance, processes and monitoring procedures which will continue to be reviewed regularly to ensure fitness for purpose within all of the provision we commission.

All staff, both internal and external, and learners will receive appropriate training and guidance in reducing the risks associated with the greater use of digital technologies and particularly access to the internet.

Policy Review

A review of this policy will be undertaken annually.

Links

- City Plan
- Curriculum Plan
- Contract Management Plan
- Safeguarding/Prevent/E-Learning policies

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