



Suffolk Adult Learning Strategy 2015 - 2019

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Suffolk Adult Learning Strategy 2015 - 2019

Suffolk County Council is a funded provider of adult and community learning in Suffolk and holds a contract with the Skills Funding Agency for the delivery of these services. In November 2012 Suffolk County Council subcontracted the delivery of adult learning service to a newly formed mutual, Realise Futures Community Interest Company. In July 2016 this agreement will end and the contract will be tendered on the open market. This document sets out Suffolk County Council's future strategic direction for the delivery of its Adult and Community Learning Service in Suffolk.

1. About Suffolk

Suffolk is largely rural and has a population of approximately 730,000. Its main towns are Ipswich, Bury St Edmunds and Lowestoft. The minority ethnic population is small, at 2.8%, but rising and concentrated in specific locations.

According to data from the 2011 Census, the population of Suffolk has risen by 8.9% since 2001, which makes it the fifth fastest growing shire county in England. By comparison, the population of England has only grown by 7.9% since the 2001 Census. The number of people over the age of 75 in the county has increased by 16%, while the number of young adults has increased by 15%. The Office of National Statistics population estimates suggest that by the time of the next Census, due in 2021, the population of Suffolk may have increased to 778,000, with notable projected increases in the older age groups.

Only 50.8% of 16 year olds achieve a full level 2 qualification¹, this is 5% below the national average and contributes to an overall workforce that is less well qualified than the average across England. Suffolk has too many young people aged 16-24 who are

The Suffolk Vision

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Suffolk County Council is committed to improving the lives of its residents. The key priorities that impact on adult learning are:

- Raise educational attainment and skill levels
- Support the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to increase economic growth
- Support those most vulnerable in our communities
- Empower local communities

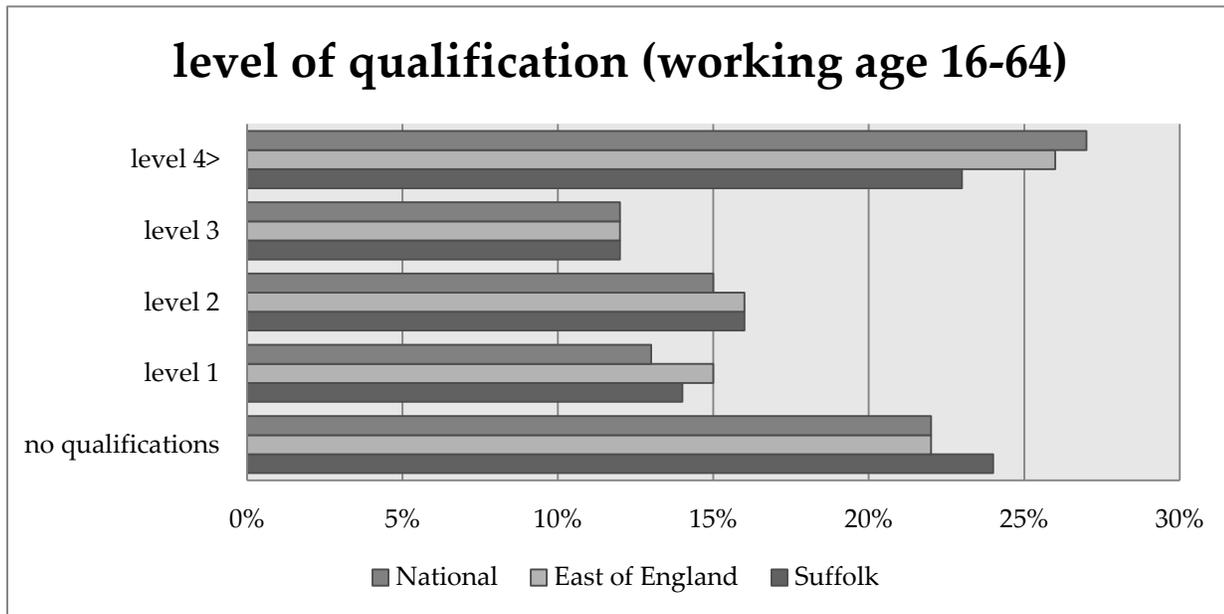
The policies that underpin these priorities also impact on how and what SCC wants to commission in the adult learning contract:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Suffolk Growth Strategy

¹ 5 A*-C grade GCSEs

Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), with 5.4% of 16-18 year olds not in learning or work.

In addition, Suffolk is experiencing a skills shortage of higher qualified staff. This is demonstrated by the chart below which indicates that Suffolk has a disproportionately high level of residents with lower levels of qualifications:



This is further exemplified by the estimate that 3% of the adult population has literacy levels below entry level 1 and 6.5% do not have sufficient mathematics skills to operate effectively at work or for their personal life.

The evidence suggests that people with disabilities in Suffolk are not gaining the skills to access meaningful employment.

1 in 4 people in Suffolk will have experienced a mental health problem that will impact on some aspect of their lives.²

These are all areas that we can better support through our strategic approach to adult and community learning.

² <http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/statistics-and-facts-about-mental-health/how-common-are-mental-health-problems/>

2. Suffolk's Priorities

We have drawn on the following County Council priorities as a basis for developing our future Adult and Community Learning Programme:

Raise educational attainment and skill levels

Our ambition is to further accelerate school improvement in Suffolk. Pupils' attainment in Suffolk remains below average, particularly for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. We need to build Suffolk as a learning county with high expectations and the potential to realise the economic opportunities we are working hard to develop, so that our economy has strong foundations for the future and the capacity for growth in the years ahead. Parents have an important role to play in supporting young peoples' learning, and programmes which help parents to improve their qualifications or focus on family learning will be a priority.

Support the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP's) to increase economic growth

The Suffolk Growth Strategy, developed in partnership with all of the district and borough councils, sets out our vision for how we want the economy of Suffolk to grow and develop over the medium-term. Working with the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership, we want to build on our existing strengths but also exploit new opportunities to accelerate economic growth particularly across Suffolk's key sectors: biotechnology; energy; food, drink and agriculture; ICT and tourism. We will look to prioritise learning that will lead directly to employment, and therefore support growth.

Support those most vulnerable in our communities

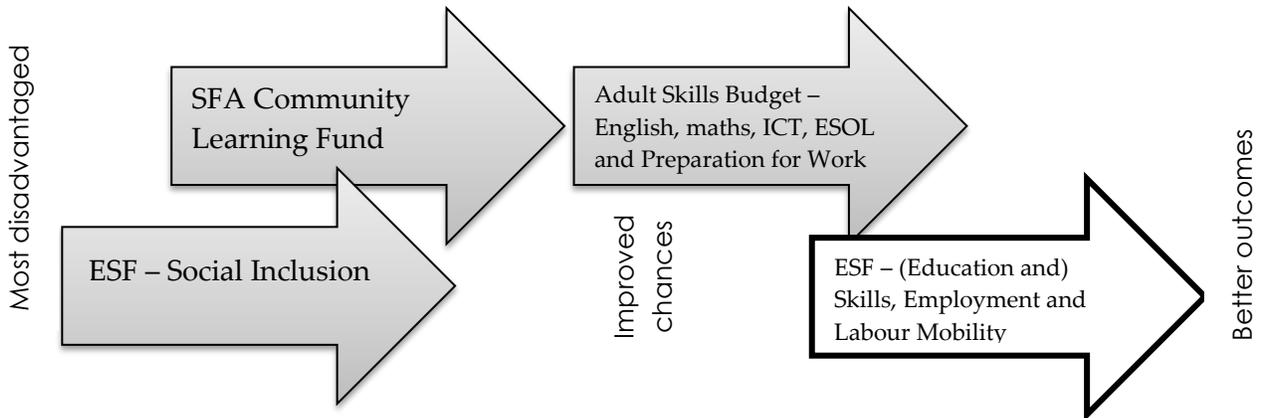
We take our responsibilities for the most vulnerable people very seriously. We are developing new operating models across our social care services for adults and children which have early intervention and prevention at their heart. In turn, this will enable people to live more independent lives and reduce the need for more intensive and costly interventions later on. Forging strong links with the NHS and the voluntary and community sector will not only help us offer a seamless, holistic approach to meeting the needs of Suffolk's most vulnerable, but also prevent those less in need falling into crisis by supporting them to remain living independently in their community. Learning has a key role to play in this approach.

Empower local communities

We want to empower local people to have more control over what happens in their communities, and, as the public sector contracts, to provide them with the tools to help them meet their needs and achieve their aspirations in ways that make most sense locally. We want to integrate activity, maximize local service and community capacity and make a positive impact on the ground that will encourage independence, reduce demand and deliver better value for money. Empowering people through learning that enables them to become more independent and economically active will also be an important aspect of our future approach.

3. Suffolk's vision for Adult Learning

Our vision is that adult and community learning should directly contribute to improving the lives of our residents by enabling them to gain in skills, qualifications and independence. Adult learning is a 'golden thread' that can support our key priorities and by maximizing the available funding, including European Social Funds, offer better pathways and options for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in Suffolk.



- We want to support parents and carers so that they can support their children to achieve and excel at school. We want to work with families to build a culture of learning across all ages.
- We want to support all adults to have good English, Mathematics and ICT skills and ensure that those for whom English is a second language are supported to integrate into the community and access employment.
- We want to support those who are unemployed or in low-skilled work to progress through developing both their vocational and employability skills, such as team working, communications and problem solving, that employers have told us are so important to them.
- We want to ensure that our approach to adult and community learning supports the ambitions of New Anglia LEP in delivering their strategic economic plan objectives to address the barriers to employment and training, and complements the LEP's European Funding Strategy.
- We want to ensure that all the available funds for adult learning are used to that we support improved progression to employment pathways for the most disadvantaged in Suffolk
- We want to offer informal learning opportunities for people who need mental wellbeing support either before or after intervention.
- We want to offer opportunities for those furthest from the labour market, including those with disabilities, more options to progress in a way and at a pace that is appropriate for them and a second chance to acquire skills and knowledge.

- We want to support the building of resilient local communities to have the skills to help each other.

4. Using the SFA funding to bring added value to our priorities

The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) funding is in the form of 2 separate funding streams - The Adult Skills Budget (ASB) and the Community Learning Fund (CL).

ASB is currently undergoing reform as part of the wider skills agenda and the Skills Funding Statement 2014-16³ outlines this in detail. The guidelines for CL were laid out in the 2011 document from the department for Business, Innovation and Skills - New Challenges, New Chances,⁴ that was evaluated in 2013⁵. The latest consultation - A Dual Mandate for Adult Vocational Education⁶ suggests further changes and reforms to Adult and Community Learning are in the pipeline.

The ASB has seen significant reductions in the past 2 academic years with some providers experiencing cuts of up to 24%. In Suffolk the reduction for 2015/16 is 16% with further reductions expected year on year. CL has been ring-fenced nationally for the last 9 years, resulting in a year on year decrease in value in real terms.

The 2014/15 allocation for Suffolk County Council was £2,874,918.

The ongoing reforms to adult learning have been taken into consideration and the strategy will adapt to any changes within the sector. We believe the approach that we are adopting for the next 3 years is in line with future reforms and is in the best interests for the people of Suffolk.

We plan to more closely align the funding from the SFA to Suffolk's priorities providing a second chance to those that need it in the following way:

The focus of the **ADULT SKILLS BUDGET** will correspond to the NALEP strategic growth plan and include the following:

- Learning opportunities for people who are unemployed or those working in low level employment to gain qualifications up to and including Level 2 in functional skills or employability skills that are likely to lead directly to employment or progression
- Learning opportunities for people who are unemployed or those working in low level employment to gain qualifications up to and including Level 2 in a vocational subject that are likely to lead directly to employment or progression
- Programmes that are specifically tailored to meet the needs of marginal and vulnerable groups, including those with a learning disability, who may find it difficult to access other types of mainstream provision

³ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/278529/bis-14-p172a-skills-funding-statement-2013-2016.pdf

⁴ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/145452/11-1380-further-education-skills-system-reform-plan.pdf

⁵ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/248709/bis-13-1234-evaluation-of-new-challenges-new-chances-further-education-and-skills-reform-plan.pdf

⁶ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/427342/bis-15-145-A-dual-mandate-for-adult-vocational-education.pdf

The objectives for the **COMMUNITY LEARNING FUND** in Suffolk that support the Council's priorities are:

- Family Learning in partnership with schools and children's centres (Raising the Bar)
- Mental wellbeing support in partnership with Norfolk and Suffolk Foundation Trust (NSFT), Public Health, NHS and community based organisations (Supporting Lives, Connecting Communities)
- Stronger Communities and active citizenship bespoke to each locations needs and challenges in partnership with local VCS organisations and community stakeholder (Our Place)

5. Investment approach – how we will commission

We will develop an approach to commissioning that brings together the right specialist skills for the delivery of our objectives. We want to support partnerships, especially with local organisations, that can harness a variety of funding streams to provide a total package of support, particularly for more vulnerable people. We will pay due regard to the Social Value Act⁷ and incorporate this in our specifications.

We intend to go to market with our funding for the start of 2016 academic year (1st August 2016) with a 3 year contract (including performance related and annual break clauses). The contract will be apportioned into lots as follows:-

- Community Learning funding will be split into 3 geographical locations (tbc) with the key themes of Stronger Communities, Mental Wellbeing and Family Learning
- ASB will be split into: Functional skills (English, Maths and ICT) and ESOL; employability and vocational skills, with geographical recommendations.

As the commissioning authority, we will ultimately be responsible for the quality of the provision subcontracted and the requirements for our Quality Assurance Process will be a separate document. However we want to ensure the highest possible quality of service for the residents of Suffolk, and this will be reflected in the Pre-Qualifying Questionnaire (PQQ). We want a provider that can offer added value regarding employment support and progression opportunities for learners.

6. Outcomes

Through this programme we will aim to achieve the following outcomes by 2019. The targets and measures of success will be developed following confirmation of the indicative funding from the SFA in March 2016. Our intention is however to:

For Community Learning

- Increase the number of parents/carers able to access help with English, Maths and ICT skills, to better able them to support children with school work and improve their own life chances

⁷ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/3/enacted>

- Increase the number of opportunities for people access stress management or confidence courses
- Increase the percentage of courses with embedded mental wellness strategies
- Support more people who have not engaged in learning for a substantial time to attend an adult learning course that is relevant to their community and/or personal needs and supports increased independence/progression

For Adult Skills Budget

- Increase the number of people gaining a qualifications in English, maths, ICT and ESOL (functional skills or GCSE)
- Support more people, who are in receipt of benefits, gaining a qualification in preparation for progression into work
- Increase the percentage of people with a declared learning disability gaining a qualification in preparation for progression into work

7. Revision and review of strategy

The strategy will be reviewed annually, or when policy changes occur that directly impact directly on Suffolk County Council or the Skills Funding Agency and Adult Learning.

Glossary

SCC	Suffolk County Council
SFA	Skills Funding Agency
BIS	(department for) Business, Innovation and Skills
ASB	Adult Skills Budget
CL	Community Learning (fund)
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
NALEP	New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership
ESF	European Social Fund
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
NHS	National Health Service