

***BURY ADULT LEARNING SERVICE
STRATEGY 2015-18***

*Making Bury a great place in which to live,
work, study and visit*

Foreword

Learning is at the heart of civilisation and culture. The acquisition of knowledge and skills is fundamental to our development and opens up many more opportunities for improving life chances. However, a proportion of our population, often from communities that are already disadvantaged, are not able to take up these opportunities due to lack of formal qualifications or practical skills.

At time of writing, this country is going through major change. Expansion of digital services, changes in the labour market and the impact of austerity on public services are creating gaps in society and some individuals risk being left behind. It is against this background that we look to this Strategy to provide some hope to local people. We cannot change the economy but we can create an environment that encourages learning and makes residents less vulnerable to the changes that are happening around them. With this in mind, we have set a bold vision for maintaining and developing adult learning based on five key priorities:

1. Improving outcomes for learners
2. Improving outcomes for employers
3. High quality teaching and assessment – leading to effective learning
4. Strong leadership and management
5. An approach that supports sustainable communities

Delivering continued improvement will be challenging in these times of shrinking resources. We are also starting from a strong base position – Bury has more well educated residents than most other Greater Manchester authorities, is home to strong, distinctive and cohesive communities and the quality of learning provision is high in both in the Adult Learning Service and the Borough's two 'outstanding' colleges. Whilst this is a positive picture, we are not complacent. We live and breathe the Council's aims and values of empowering communities and supporting vulnerable people and, working through the Community Learning Partnership, we will seek to continue delivering better outcomes for local people.



Cllr Jane Lewis
Bury Council, Cabinet
Member for Communities

Basing our priorities on data analysis, self assessment and the views of learners has enabled us to target activity for maximum return. However, not everything is quantifiable. It is difficult to put a price on the increased confidence, reassurance and cohesion that adult learning brings. I am therefore proud that Bury has not only been able to retain a broad curriculum, particularly at a time of severe budget cuts, but is also planning for the future.

We must continue to promote learning, position the Borough to take advantage of opportunities that arise and be primed ready to support the economic growth in the Greater Manchester City Region as and when that occurs.

I believe this Strategy does just that. It is an excellent guide for responding to the current and future learning needs and it gives me great pleasure to introduce the Council's Adult Learning Strategy 2015-18.

Introduction and context

The Bury Adult Learning Service delivers a range of skills based provision leading to a qualification (including traineeships); adult safeguarded learning (ASL) which includes personal and community development, family learning and neighbourhood approaches; and a small amount of 16-18 provision. Funded largely by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) the service uses its resources to:

- Improve the skills levels of local people
- Deliver training to meet the needs of the local job market
- Alleviate disadvantage and promote social interaction
- Provide and promote high quality learning
- Support wider initiatives such as digital inclusion, community cohesion, health and well being to enable all residents to prepare for, and fully participate in, societal change

This can be paraphrased as helping individuals and communities to reach their potential – and there is work to be done. Whilst 38% of the Borough's 186,500 residents are qualified to Level 3 or 4, 23% (or some 42,000 individuals) have no qualifications at all. Compared to the 2001 Census (where over 29% of residents had no qualifications) this is an improvement with reductions being seen across the Borough. However, there are inequalities; East ward, Moorside, Redvales, Radcliffe East, Radcliffe West and Besses comparing unfavourably when it comes to qualifications held by residents. These wards also featured in the 10% most deprived wards in the country and have the highest rates of economic inactivity in Bury.

Low attainment affects employment opportunities. In Greater Manchester the employment rate for people with no qualifications is below 40%. There is also a correlation between low skills and job insecurity, quality of employment, lower pay and progression. Employers report a deficit of applicants with good English and maths skills – a factor which further impacts negatively on an individual's employability, growth potential and productivity.

Bury has a relatively small local economy as over half our residents commute out to work in other parts of Greater Manchester. As a result, the public sector remains the major employer in the Borough although the number of jobs will reduce in line with budget cuts. Other sectors are growing. Major investment in Bury town centre has boosted the retail industry and there has also been an increase in IT related jobs through O2 which is now the single largest private sector employer in the Borough.

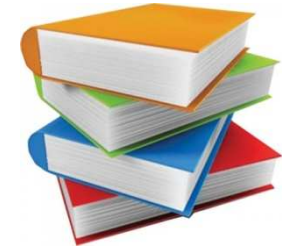
'Labour Insight' suggests that most employers in these sectors are not just looking for people with basic skills – they also require competence in the softer arts of customer service, communication and inter-personal skills. This suggests that learning needs to focus on social as well as technical skills when bringing people closer to the jobs market.

Improving outcomes for learners

The Adult Learning Service is committed to the development and well being of our learners, raising aspirations and supporting success.

Increasing basic and functional skills

Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills (2013) recognised the importance of basic skills to people's life chances especially their employability. Local statistics this bears out. Consequently, our long term ambition is to reduce the number of residents without functional skills (including maths, English and IT) to below 20% by the time of the next Census. This will not only support individuals to progress in the job market but also improves productivity in the local economy.



Accessibility and community cohesion



There is more to Adult Learning than gaining qualifications. It is a gateway to education, a means of building confidence and a less formal way of teaching skills. Through programmes such as ESOL and Brighter Futures, it also brings people together and helps them to participate more fully in society. Maintaining a balanced, community based curriculum is fundamental to building stronger communities particularly in more disadvantaged areas.

Creating a warm, welcoming and safe environment for learners

How we do business is important to us. Our ethos is to treat all individuals with fairness, respect and dignity. We will always aim to offer facilities that are fit for purpose, meet the needs of individuals with differing levels of ability and safeguard learners. Helping people to feel comfortable will provide a more effective learning environment.



We will:

- Increase take up in English, maths and functional skills provision.
- Work with partners to develop provision that meets the specific needs of individuals who are disadvantaged in the job market such as older people, migrant workers and people with mental health issues.
- Continue to monitor and refresh our procedures to protect vulnerable people and ensure individuals are safeguarded.
- Measure the impact of learning and use this intelligence to inform future provision.

Improving outcomes for employers

The Adult Learning Service will be responsive to the needs of employers to enable learners to effectively compete for workplace opportunities.

Matching supply with demand

There has long been criticism from employers about the skill levels of individuals entering the labour market. This needs to be addressed. We want to build on the good relations that exist with local employers in Bury to develop a better understanding of the local economy and tailor courses where this is appropriate to specific needs especially in the emerging sectors of retail, hospitality and IT.

With some individuals being less academic, we will pursue a variety of approaches to learning and skills other than purely class based provision. This will include traineeships, bespoke learning and work experience to help more people overcome any disadvantage when it comes to accessing employment.



Knowing what works

Perceptions of employers, learners and tutors are important but this has to be supplemented by more objective evidence. Some measurement of outcomes is already undertaken but it needs to be more systematic and comprehensive.

Tracking learners and the impact learning has on individual life chances will be expanded as part of our strategy for raising standards, improving outcomes for learners and targeting resources to maximum effect.

We will:

- Work with employers to understand and align their occupational and soft skill requirements to inform course design.
- Liaise with employers to integrate work placements into employability programmes.
- Support traineeships and progression into apprenticeship training to provide a pathway into employment.
- Track progression into work, volunteering or future learning (and review provision in the light of evidence).

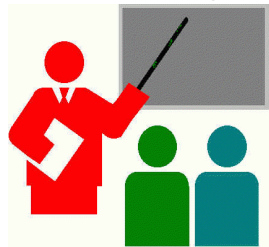
High quality

The Adult Learning Service is focused on providing high quality learning experiences which are accessible and valued by learners, employers and partners.

High standards

Reported outcomes, feedback and self assessment indicates that the service is good and meeting its objectives. Maintaining standards however takes sustained effort; the service needs to respond to cohort changes, curriculum guidance and current thinking on teaching styles. To achieve this, the emphasis on assessment and challenge will remain – including using national success rates to compare performance data, surveys and professional assessment to identify good practice (for sharing and transferring across the service) as well as highlighting areas for development. The service will continue to judge itself against the OFSTED Common Inspection Framework to evaluate how effectively provision meets learners' needs

Building on a strong track record for self awareness, the service has developed a positive culture of continuous improvement and this approach will continue as part of this strategy



Quality of teaching

Adult Learning is in the people business. This requires good people to deliver our ambitions. We will keep under review the workforce needs of the service to ensure that highly skilled, motivated and flexible tutors, capable of meeting the needs of learners, are retained – now and in the future. The content, length, timing and location of courses will also be closely monitored to promote accessibility and remove potential barriers that may discourage learners.

We will:

- Rigorously assess performance and outcomes making full use of comparable data where available to improve results.
- Improve the frequency of, and participation in, employer and learner surveys to inform course delivery and teaching methods.
- Ensure key skills are evident and addressed across all curriculum areas.
- Apply sound recruitment methods and employment conditions to attract the best tutors and maintain standards.
- Invest in training, resources and effective supervision to support the delivery of quality learning.

Strong leadership and management

The Adult Learning Service aims to deliver quality outcomes which will support the wider policy objectives for the Borough, within the resources available.

Making Bury a great place to live, work, study, and visit

It has always been a feature of Adult Learning that national guidance and local ambitions are embedded into service priorities. This is still the case. The actions in this strategy meets service contract responsibilities and Council expectations as well as promoting the wider economic and social well being of local people. Working with partners we are keen to see a similar approach operate across all providers in the Borough.



Resources

The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) is the prime funder of Adult Learning Services at over £1 million. As pressure on funding mounts, we will seek to diversify revenue sources. Whilst valuing our relationship with the SFA, this move is necessary to deliver our ambitions and reduce reliance on a single funding agency. Attracting new money into the service will also preserve provision to the community without the cost of learning to the individual becoming a barrier.

Recognising diversity

Adult Learning is a balance – between helping people to attain qualifications, offering opportunities for personal improvement and promoting social development. We want this to continue as it reflects the diversity of our learners and their needs. By taking account of learning abilities, cultural sensitivities and individual needs, the service is looking to assist learners and employees reach their potential.



We will:

- Actively contribute to national and local priorities with particular emphasis on the skills agenda.
- Strengthen and diversify the Community Learning Partnership to develop a strong learning culture in the Borough.
- Maximise the resources available to improve outcomes for local people.
- Set course fees at a level that reflects the cost of provision without being an undue deterrent to participation.
- Promote equality and diversity – valuing the contributions that different perspectives can bring to the service.

Sustainable communities

The Adult Learning Service is working to create an environment where residents are well informed, feel empowered and have confidence in their own abilities.

Bringing people along

Confidence is an issue for many people – some of whom have had difficult experiences with education in the past. We will make it as easy as possible for individuals to develop the learning habit by working with communities to increase take up and create a culture of lifelong learning. Understanding community networks and the information, advice and support that learners need to access provision and make real progress will be fundamental to success.

Communication



Reducing inequalities

Whilst proud of its townships and their distinct identities, Bury is aware of the significant inequalities that exist between areas. More effort is required in those areas where attainment and economic activity is low to engage people in learning. In particular we need to understand the reasons for lower skill levels and remove any barriers to learning that still exist.

The growth of online facilities is replacing many traditional ways of living. The pace and scale of this information revolution risks some people being left behind. We have to tailor our provision in the light of these changing needs so that issues such as digital exclusion and social isolation do not add to the pressures of modern living.

We will:

- Develop ways of identifying community assets, local networks and the learning aspirations of communities.
- Provide information, advice and guidance to support individuals to reach their goals.
- Increase take up from disadvantaged communities, particularly those areas where basic qualifications are low, economic inactivity is high and digital skills are under-developed.
- Offer a range of community based learning opportunities, through local centres, to help residents pursue an interest, gain skills and support their well being