

METROPOLITAN BOROUGH OF WIRRAL

CABINET – 20th JUNE 2007

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

WIRRAL LIFELONG AND FAMILY LEARNING CHARGING POLICY 2007/8

Executive Summary

1.0 Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service is funded by the Learning and Skills Council Greater Merseyside (LSCGM), through the Personal and Community Development Funding (PCDL) funding stream. The report details the proposed increase to fees for 2007-08, in the light of national and local policy and proposed LSC funding allocation.

Background

2.0 The LSC funding is allocated annually for local authority adult learning as a grant, contingent on fulfilling planning requirements in partnership with LSCGM. A requirement of the LSC is that the service should review income targets and the policy for charging fees for adult courses.

Financial and Staffing Implications

3.0 The Learning and Skills Council has indicated that the Wirral funding allocation for August 2007 to July 2008 will be the same as for 2006-7.

	2005- 6	2006-7	2007- 8
Adult and community learning	£429,088	£382,762	£382,762
Family learning	£273,915	£273,915	£273,915
Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities	£179,181	£179,181	£179,181
Total	£882,184	£835,858	£835,858
Reduction from previous year		£ 46,310	£0

The Lifelong and Family Learning Service is fully funded from the LSC grant. Annual adjustments including savings will be made from within the service. There is no impact on the Council's budget. The impact of the reduction is wholly targeted to the adult and community learning element of the funding allocation.

3.1 Within the funding allocation, there is an assumption that fees will be charged for adult learning. Following consultation with other local providers of adult learning, to compare fee rates and remission policies the service introduced fees for all adult courses in 2005. This had no apparent detrimental impact on recruitment of learners. Many learners are eligible for fee remission following LSC national criteria: learners who are unemployed or on means tested benefits are eligible for free tuition. Income

is predicted at around £20,000 for 2006-07 and this has been used to supplement courses. It is proposed to update the fee rates annually in line with other local providers of adult learning. An increase in fee income to approximately £30,000 is expected for 2006-07, which will be used by the WLFLS to help offset the reduction in funding from 2005-6. Any additional income could extend the number of courses offered.

- 3.2 To bring the service broadly in line with local colleges, it is proposed that for 2007-08, there is an increase of 10% bringing fees to £2.20 per hour for level two courses and a fee of £1.70 per hour for entry and level one courses. Non-accredited leisure courses would carry a fee of £3.30 an hour. Very short tasters would be free. Learners eligible for fee remission under LSC categories would receive free tuition. The average fee for all Local Authority adult learning in 2005-6 was £2.50 ph and £2.00 ph for Metropolitan Boroughs.
- 3.3 In 2007-8 nationally, provision in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) will no longer attract automatic fee remission. Free tuition will still be available to priority groups – primarily people who are unemployed or receiving income-based benefits.(LSC FE Funding Guidance 2007-8). WLFLS has approximately 100 ESOL learners each year, 70% are working full or part time. They study very basic level English up to Entry 3, progressing to Wirral Metropolitan College for Level 1. Many of these learners are on very low wages and the introduction of a fee would cause them hardship. The learners are likely to drop out of provision altogether and therefore be unable to progress to taking the Citizenship test, which is at Entry 3 level. It is proposed to introduce a new lower fee banding, of £0.85 an hour for ESOL up to Entry 3.

Equal Opportunities Implications

- 4.0 Lifelong and Family Learning play a valuable contribution to improving the skills of Wirral residents. Much of the provision is located in disadvantaged communities and encourages people back into learning

Human Rights Implications

- 5.0 Adult learning contributes towards an individual's realisation of potential, improves the learners' capacity to engage in local activities and be an advocate for learning and human rights.

Local Agenda 21 Implications

- 6.0 Adult learning plays a valuable role in the well-being of the community through developing the skills and confidence of adults to become involved in their communities.

Community Safety, Planning and Local Member Support Implications

- 7.0 There are no implications arising out of this report.

Background Papers

8.0 LSC Planning for success - a framework for planning and quality Dec 2005.

Recommendations

That the increase in Lifelong Learning Fees be approved.

Howard Cooper
Director of Children's Services

WIRRAL

WIRRAL LIFELONG AND FAMILY LEARNING SERVICE COURSE FEES POLICY 2007-8

Introduction

Wirral Lifelong Learning Service has had a policy of charging fees for courses since 2005. Fee remission is granted according to agreed criteria following LSC guidelines. The LSC, who fund the courses, expect us to set fees for all courses, the view being that all adults who can afford to pay for learning should pay and public subsidy should be targeted at the most disadvantaged learners. Nationally, people who are unemployed or on means tested benefits are entitled to fee remission on LSC funded courses. Skills for Life courses and a first full level 2 course are offered free for all adults who need them. A full level 2 would be 5 GCSEs at A*-C or a full NVQ level 2. Skills for life courses are Numeracy and Literacy at level 2 or below. Other courses are expected to generate fee income.

In 2007-8 nationally, provision in English for speakers of other languages will no longer attract automatic fee remission. Free tuition will still be available to priority groups – primarily people who are unemployed or receiving income-based benefits.(LSC FE Funding Guidance 2007-8).

Currently the lifelong learning service is unable to meet demand for courses. Income generated from fees would be used to fund more courses and growth. The suggested updated policy is based on a rate comparable to other local providers. Work continues to be done in partnership with local colleges and others, to look at proposed fee levels and remission policy. In order to extend opportunities for adult learning in Wirral, Leisure Learning opportunities will be extended. This can only occur if full costs are met, so courses can only run where there are a minimum number of fee paying learners.

Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service Policy

- Skills for Life - Adult literacy, and numeracy and family learning courses should be free (this is a national policy).
- ESOL up to Entry 3 level £0.85 per hour
- Entry and level 1 courses, are £1.70 per hour
- Short taster 4 hours or less, could be free, as a marketing tool.
- ECDL & Level 2 courses carry a fee of £2.20 per hour.
- Non accredited leisure courses carry a fee of £3.30 an hour.
- For specialist courses and courses with sponsorship from employers, a higher fee should be charged to cover costs.

Typical costs will be:

Course	Number of hours	Full Cost 2006-7 £	Full Cost 2007-8 £
ECDL part 1	30	85 (+ £24 module test)	91 (+ module tests)
ECDL part 2	60	120 (+ tests)	132 (+ tests)
Intro 1 term courses in: IT, gardening, Arts, languages, psychology	20	40	44 (inc £10 accreditation)
Non accredited leisure – e.g. local history, water colour painting	20	60	66
First steps 4 hrs taster- e.g. Psychology, Spanish	4	0	0

Remission Of Fees

The policy regarding remission of fees is consistent with LSC guidelines.

Fee Remission policy

Most course fees are free to learners in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance or any other means tested benefit. Fee remission is also available in other circumstances:

LSC Categories

The categories of learners who are entitled to fee remission are (learners only need to be eligible under any single entitlement category):

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners studying their first full level 2 qualification (qualification as identified on the LSC LAD database) • Those in receipt of income-based benefits, formerly known as means-tested benefits, that is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a unemployed people in receipt of income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance b those in receipt of Council Tax Benefit c those in receipt of Housing Benefit d those in receipt of Income Support e those in receipt of Working Tax Credit with a household income of less than £15,050 f those in receipt of Pension Credits (Guarantee Credit only) • Unemployed people in receipt of contribution based Jobseeker’s Allowance • The unwaged dependants (as defined by Jobcentre Plus) of those listed above • Offenders who are serving their sentence in the community • Those taking learning aims that are funded as basic skills, excluding English for speakers of other languages • Asylum seekers eligible for LSC FE funding according to the <i>LSC Learner Eligibility Guidance 2007/08</i> and in receipt of the equivalent of income-based benefit (assistance under the terms of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999) and their dependants • Certain learners participating in LSC-funded projects where identified in the project specification. 	<p>Free (proof is required)</p>
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Other categories

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registered unemployed, not in receipt of benefit 	<p>Free</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under 16 • 16-19 	<p>Not eligible for subsidised adult education courses/ full cost to be recovered</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 60’s not in full time employment 	<p>25% discount</p>

Examination / Registration / Certification Costs

- Exam and certification costs to be covered by the learners, with the exception of Skills for Life qualifications.

Refund of Fees

The refund policy recognises that there are circumstances in which learners have a genuine reason to claim a refund. Refunds are offered in the following circumstances to all people who have enrolled on a class:

- Where the course closes as a result of lack of numbers to make the class viable.
- Where a class is cancelled by the service for any reason.
- The meeting times, venue or day of the class are changed so that it is no longer convenient.
- A learner enrolls in advance of the course starting and pays a fee but prior to the course starting their circumstances change so that they are entitled to a free class. Note this would not apply once the course has started.
- In addition a refund may be offered where personal circumstances change so that it is impossible to attend the class.

Installments

Installment payment options will be offered e.g. termly payments for courses of one-year duration. In circumstances where a learner is paying for a course by installments they are not paying for part of the course, merely spreading the payment. If they dropped out of a course they would be liable for the full amount of the course.

Appeals

In exceptional circumstances learners who are not eligible for fee remission can appeal, in writing to the Head of Service to be considered for fee remission.

Transfers

A learner transferring from one course to another where the fee is the same will not incur a cost.

Review

This policy should be reviewed annually in light of national changes in funding for adult learning.