

## Coventry City Council Adult Education Service

### Guidance for Staff: Fee Policy 2025-26

This document sets out Coventry City Council's Adult Education Service (AES) course fees for academic year 2025/26. The Service is dedicated to ensuring all adults can access high quality education in an affordable and flexible way. Course fees are charged where learners' personal circumstances don't meet the criteria for full fee remission through the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) or West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). Charging a course fee is not only a requirement of our funders but also an important way to generate income to enable the Council to deliver its adult education strategy and be financially sustainable.

This Policy applies to all courses that are funded through either the Education Skills Funding Agency, or West Midlands Combined Authority grant and contracts. The ESFA and WMCA provide a list of eligibility criteria for fee remission or reduction, and a learner will be asked to provide evidence matched to these criteria.

#### Adult Skills Programme

Accredited courses where learning leads to a formal, recognised qualification certificated by an external awarding organisation.

In most cases courses will be free of charge.

Course Type/Category	Cost to Learner
English and Maths qualifications up to Level 2 (Functional Skills & GCSE)	Free
Digital Skills up to Level 1	Free
All courses for adults 19-23 years old	Free
All accredited and non-accredited formula funded courses for over 23 years old and unemployed	Free (some terms and conditions apply based on residency status and prior achievement)
Level 3 qualification	Free (as long as first full Level 3 and they have not achieved a Level 3 qualification, or higher, in the past)

#### In Receipt of Low Wage

If a learner residing within West Midlands Combined Authority area is in work or self-employed earning less than £32,000 per year before tax (£25,000 per year before tax for those residing outside of WMCA area), there is an entitlement to free courses up to and including Level 2. The learner must provide evidence of gross annual wages in these circumstances. This could be a wage slip within three months of the resident's learning start date, a bank statement showing the paid amount or a current employment contract that states gross monthly/annual wages.

**For eligible learners who need to pay a fee (co-funded)\*:**

Where the learner doesn't meet the criteria to be fully funded, they will be required to pay 50% of the weighted Adult Skills Fund rate for the qualification being taken (as recorded against the Learning Aim Record Service code); with remaining 50% paid for by the funding body.

**For non-eligible learners\*:**

We will charge the full LARS value for the qualification. Fees can be paid in a flexible way. Note that financial support may be available in certain circumstances to 'non-eligible' learners through the SEGRO Employment Access Fund.

**\*English Language Acquisition (ESOL):**

For learners who intend to study for the whole year, a single fee should be set based on £150 per half term multiplied by the number of terms they are expected to be enrolled on programme. For example, co-funded learners will need to pay £450 for the whole year. A non-eligible learner starting in September will be charged £900.

**Community Programme**

The Community Programme comprises learning opportunities that aim to meet one or more of the 7 purposes for Tailored Learning funding stream: Engaging and/or building confidence; Preparation for further learning; Preparation for employment; Improving essential skills (English, ESOL, maths, digital); Equipping parents/carers to support children's learning; Health and well-being; Developing stronger communities. These courses will also have learning outcomes that align to one or more of the seven purposes and evidenced through the Recording and Reporting of Progress and Achievement (RARPA) staged approach.

In most cases, the standard hourly rate a learner will pay for a community course in 2025/26 will be £4.40 per hour. There are variations in fees according to individual circumstances, and the charging structure for academic year 2025/26 is summarised in Appendix 1. The principles for fee setting are as follows:

- Course fees are set at the \*hourly rate x number of course hours. If there are any additional costs associated with the course they must be clearly shown separately to the learners (i.e., materials that the learners need to purchase and bring to the course).
- Courses which are charged at variable rates must be publicised as such.
- Fees must be entered into the appropriate place in marketing and publicity documents, course finder/adult education website.

**Leisure Programme**

The Leisure Programme comprises learning opportunities that do not aim to meet one or more of the 7 purposes for Tailored Learning funding stream. Rather, the courses are designed to meet identified needs around 'learning for learning's sake'. These courses are not funded by the ESFA/WMCA and therefore not included in the ILR. Whilst tracking of progress and achievement is still relevant, leisure courses do not

require robust Recording and Reporting Progress and Achievement (RARPA) arrangements that ESFA/WMCA funded provision requires.

### **Late joiners**

The full course fee is payable by late joiners, except where a place was unavailable to a learner at the course start date due to circumstances solely and exclusively within the Adult Education Service's control. In this case a pro-rata fee is payable based on the remaining course hours at the learner's joining date.

### **Places for carers**

Carers accompanying learners attend courses in a carer capacity not a learner one. Carers must not be asked to complete an enrolment form, be included in the course register, be counted in course learner numbers, or be charged an hourly course fee.

### **Funding Eligibility Criteria**

If one or more of the following apply, a learner will be entitled to fully funded learning with the CAES and across all ESFA and WMCA funding streams:

- receive Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), including those receiving National Insurance credits only
- receive Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- receive Universal Credit, and their take-home pay as recorded on their Universal Credit statement (disregarding Universal Credit payments and other benefits) is less than £617 a month (learner is sole adult in their benefit claim) or £988 a month (learner has a joint benefit claim with their partner)
- are released on temporary license, studying outside a prison environment, and not funded by the Ministry of Justice

In addition, if both of the following apply, a learner will be also entitled to fully funded learning:

- receives other state benefits (not listed above) and their take-home pay (disregarding Universal Credit payments and other benefits) is less than £617 a month (learner is sole adult in their benefit claim) or £988 a month (learner has a joint benefit claim with their partner), and
- wants to be employed, or progress into more sustainable employment, and their take-home pay (disregarding Universal Credit payments and other benefits) is less than £617 a month (learner is sole adult in their benefit claim) or £988 a month (learner has a joint benefit claim with their partner), and their learning is directly relevant to employment prospects and labour market needs

## Ineligible Learners

Learners who wish to access provision but who are ineligible for WMCA/ESFA funding will be charged £10.00 per hour for face-to-face delivery (in venue or online) assuming that the relevant course has met the requirements for minimum learner numbers. Note that financial help may be available in certain circumstances to 'non-eligible' learners through the SEGRO Employment Access Fund.

## Minimum learner numbers

To meet contract requirements, we typically need to have a minimum number of 12 learners. However, there is an expectation that most courses will recruit more than the minimum number wherever possible. Below are some guidelines for classroom-based delivery:

- a) Courses should typically have a minimum class size of 12; maximum size 24
- b) Where no discretion on learner numbers has been applied – courses with 8 learners or below at week three should be postponed or cancelled by relevant member of education staff
- c) Where no discretion on learner numbers has been applied – courses that reduce to below 10 learners during the course should be reported by the tutor to their line manager, and a decision will be made as to whether the course should continue or reduce in length of guided learning hours
- d) Curriculum teams should aim for an average class size of 14 wherever possible

## Refund Policy

If a learner has paid for a course or programme, refunds will be considered in the following circumstances:

1. Cancellation by the Adult Education Service due to:
  - a) Insufficient numbers of enrolled/paid learners for a course to run
  - b) Single class cancellation for adverse weather conditions
  - c) Single class cancellation for tutor absence, where a substitute tutor cannot be found to cover the session

**Note:** Learners who are on benefit and pay reduced fees for their course will only receive a refund if Adult Education Service cancel the whole course.

2. If a learner has paid for a course or programme but cannot begin it because:
  - a) They have commenced paid employment that clashes with the time of the course or programme.
  - b) The learner has become sick, and the period of sickness is expected to last for the majority of the course or programme.
  - c) The learner has moved away from the area.

For the above circumstances full refunds will be given on production of the receipt and evidence of the circumstance.

3. If a learner has paid for a course or programme but does not attend for other reasons, pro rata refunds will only be given to cover the remainder of the course in exceptional circumstances. Learners should submit a request stating the exceptional circumstance(s) to the appropriate education manager for consideration.

**Note:** If a learner requests a refund because the course does not meet their needs, refunds will only be considered if the course information was misleading or inaccurate in any way (in which case the Trades Description Act might apply). With a learner in this category, the relevant education manager will arrange a meeting to ensure that the learner's grievance is legitimate. The explanation 'The course was not what I expected' is not enough to justify a refund.

An Individual Refund form should be completed and sent to the relevant Education & Skills Area Lead for approval. When refunds are given, a note to this effect will be made in the register and on the office copy of the receipt. All refunds will be processed and issued by the Administration Team Lead.

## Appendix 1: Course Fees – Academic Year 2025/26

### Adult Skills/Accredited:

Category/Course Type	Fee per hour 2025/2026
English and Maths qualifications up to Level 2 (Functional Skills & GCSE)	Free
Digital Skills up to Level 1	Free
All adult skills courses for adults 19-23 years old	Free
All accredited and non-accredited formula funded courses for over 23 years old and unemployed	Free* *some terms and conditions apply based on residency status and prior achievement
Level 3 qualification	Free** **as long as first full Level 3 and they have not achieved a Level 3 qualification, or higher, in the past.
Earned Income Threshold (entitlement to free courses up to and including Level 2)	Free*** ***if learner lives within WMCA area is in work or self-employed earning less than £32,000 per year before tax; £25,000 per year for those residing outside of WMCA area
Other Where the learner doesn't meet the criteria to be fully funded through WMCA/ESFA	50% fee of the unweighted Learning Aims Record Service (LARS) code rate; 50% paid for by the funding body
Other Where the learner is not eligible for funding through WMCA/ESFA	We will charge the full LARS value for the qualification

### Community Programme:

Category/Course Type	Fee per hour 2024/2025
Standard Fee Rate	£4.40 per hour
English, Maths, English Language Acquisition (ESOL), Digital, Braille, Family Learning, Work Skills	Free of Charge
GoCV+ Rate	£1.00 per hour
Not eligible for WMCA/ESFA funding	£10.00 per hour

## Leisure Programme (not funded by ESFA/WMCA)\*

Category/Course Type	Fee per hour 2025/2026
Standard Fee Rate	£10.00 per hour
GoCV+ Rate	£5.00 per hour

\*One-to-one tuition for Piano lessons is available at £30.00 per hour (non-ILR). Please ask the Education & Skills Area Lead (Life Skills) for more information.



## Appendix 2: Messaging for Learners and Partners on Transition of some courses from Community to Leisure Programmes

### Overview:

Coventry City Council does not fund delivery of learning opportunities through the Adult Education Service. Currently, provision is funded through annually renewable grants received from the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) via the Department for Education (DfE).

The funding model for Community (Tailored) Learning programmes is undergoing a significant change. The primary purpose of this category of learning is to support learners into employment and to progress to further learning. So, courses that meet Department for Education (DfE) Tailored Learning criteria aligned to certain learning purposes and outcomes means that some course fees can still be subsidised.

However, courses that have a leisure-oriented focus (such as those geared around general interest or hobby) no longer receive central government funding. As a result, providers must decide whether they withdraw these types of courses from their offer or continue delivery and transition to a full-cost recovery basis to ensure they are viable and sustainable.

The Adult Education Service is committed to ensuring that there is a balanced programme that provides an opportunity for residents to benefit from a broad range of learning outcomes and progression routes in line with the Coventry Skills Strategy. Therefore, in academic year 2025/26 we plan to continue to offer Community Learning Programmes, whilst extending the Leisure Programme offer.

### Key Messaging for Learners about Leisure Programme:

1. **Funding Changes:** Due to the nature of changes to central government funding of Adult Education Budget provision, courses that have a leisure focus no longer meet the criteria that enable learning organisations to offer subsidised fees.
2. **Commitment to Quality:** Despite these changes, we remain committed to delivering high-quality learning opportunities that support social interaction, personal development, and lifelong learning.
3. **Value of Learning:** While course fees will increase, learners will continue to benefit from expert teaching, excellent resources, and a strong community learning environment, although courses will no longer require as much progress and achievement tracking for funders.
4. **Options for Support:** Where possible, we will explore alternative funding opportunities, or payment plans to support access to learning for those who may face financial barriers.
5. **Course Offerings:** We will continue to provide learning opportunities ensuring a balance between leisure and purpose-driven courses.

## Key Messaging for Partners about Leisure Programme.

1. **Policy Changes:** These adjustments reflect national policy shifts in adult learning funding and the prioritisation of specific skills-based education.
2. **Sustainability:** Moving to a full-cost recovery model ensures the long-term viability of leisure-oriented courses.
3. **Collaboration Opportunities:** We welcome partnerships to explore co-funding models, sponsorships, or localised support initiatives to maintain accessibility.
4. **Continued Engagement:** We remain committed to working closely with community organisations, employers, and local stakeholders to ensure learning opportunities remain responsive to demand.

### Next Steps:

- Curriculum staff to carry out face-to-face consultation and messaging with learners and partner organisations that are likely to be affected by the changes during Summer Term (in readiness for Autumn Term).

We hope that the above information is helpful and enables you to respond to residents who may approach you with feedback, queries and concerns about the changes that have been made to the service.

For any residents that are not satisfied with your response, please inform them that they are entitled to submit a formal complaint in writing through one of the methods below. This is the corporate complaints procedure, and it is the only way Coventry City Council is able to investigate complaints thoroughly.

Website: [www.coventry.gov.uk/speakup](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/speakup)

Email: [speakup@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:speakup@coventry.gov.uk)