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Briefing note

Adult Skills – Cornwall Council's Role as Commissioner and Provider

August 2025

Cornwall Council now has two separate roles in adult education:

- **Commissioner** – We are responsible for planning and funding adult learning across Cornwall. This includes deciding which providers receive funding and making sure the courses offered meet local needs and priorities.
- **Provider** – We also run our own Adult Education Service, which is one of several organisations funded to deliver adult learning in the county.

Our Role as Commissioner

From August 2025, Cornwall Council will take full control of adult education for learners aged 19 and over. This includes planning, funding, and managing contracts. It means we can now shape adult learning to better reflect Cornwall's geography, communities, and challenges.

We will use most of the funding (75%) to support grant-funded providers. The rest will be used to bring in additional providers where there are gaps or where we need more flexible or innovative learning options. This approach is based on feedback from consultations and ongoing conversations with partners.

We are embedding adult learning within wider support services, including People Hub, and other community-based programmes. This joined-up approach helps ensure fairness and accessibility, especially for those who are out of work or need to improve their skills.

Cross-Border Learning

We want to be clear about how funding works for learners who live near the Cornwall border. We can only fund learners who attend providers that have a grant or contract with Cornwall Council. City College Plymouth is one of our funded providers.

We are currently running a procurement process to bring in more providers where there are gaps in the current offer. We will also contact all providers who previously taught Cornish residents. If they are no longer funded by us, we will give them information about our current providers and how to refer learners.

At the same time, the Department for Education (DfE) will continue to fund providers in Cornwall to teach learners who live outside Cornwall (in non-devolved areas). We are working closely with Devon County Council and the DfE to make sure learners can still

access the right courses, no matter where they live. However, we know there may be some future restrictions on access to Devon-based provision, and we are looking at ways to reduce any disruption.

Cornwall Adult Education Service – Current Position and Next Steps

Cornwall Adult Education Service has a strong track record. It was rated 'Good' by Ofsted in 2024, and a review by the Further Education Commissioner in March 2025 praised the team's leadership and commitment.

However, the review also highlighted areas that need improvement. These include:

1. Updating governance and oversight arrangements
2. Better links between curriculum planning and financial management
3. Using data more effectively to track performance
4. Improving marketing and learner recruitment, including a refreshed brand and clearer messaging around our unique offer

Interim Arrangements

The service manager retired at the end of July. To keep things running smoothly and focus on improvements, we are putting temporary arrangements in place:

1. Appointing an improvement lead
2. Bringing in a dedicated finance officer
3. Sharing responsibilities across the existing management team

This will help us prepare detailed budgets, review how courses are delivered, and explore future options for how the service should operate. Our goal is to make sure the service fits with the wider commissioning plan and meets the needs of learners across Cornwall.

Marketing, Rebrand, and Unique Selling Proposition (USP)

We will enhance our marketing strategy to reflect a new identity for adult learning in Cornwall. This includes:

- A refreshed brand that highlights our unique offer: community-rooted, flexible, and inclusive learning
- Stronger digital presence and targeted campaigns
- Clear messaging around pathways to further learning, employment, and personal development

We will also work with Community Link Officers and local partners to promote learning in mainstream and community spaces, ensuring visibility and accessibility for all.

Outreach and New Delivery Approaches

We are reshaping how we deliver learning, especially in areas where centres have recently closed. We plan to use a **demand-led outreach model**, working closely with local partners such as:

- Jobcentres (DWP/JCP)
- Libraries and Family Hubs
- Town Councils and Cornwall Council locality teams
- Community Link Officers
- Other community organisations

This model is not just about delivering courses—it's about creating learning pathways. Outreach is embedded with other services, helping learners progress into further education, employment, and community engagement. We're prioritising areas like Saltash and Penzance, where provision has been affected, and ensuring learners aren't left behind.

We're working with trusted local partners—such as libraries, family hubs, town councils, and other anchor organisations—to deliver outreach provision in community spaces. This flexible model allows us to respond quickly to local demand while we carry out a full options appraisal on the long-term delivery model.

We're also preparing to go back out to tender through the procured element of the Adult Skills Fund, specifically to address notspots and delivery gaps. This will help us bring in additional providers where needed.

At the same time, we're being careful not to rush into reopening centres before we've completed the options appraisal. We want to avoid a situation where we reinstate provision in a way that isn't sustainable or aligned with the future model.

New Delivery Approaches

We are reviewing how courses are delivered. Key changes include:

1. Moving to fixed start dates instead of flexible roll-on/roll-off courses
2. Offering more intensive learning blocks
3. Focusing on Entry Level English and Maths, which are not widely available through local colleges
4. A 5% increase in online learning at Level 1 and above, offering more flexibility

We are also working to reach hardly accessed groups by delivering learning in mainstream spaces such as schools, libraries, and family hubs—places where people already feel safe and supported.

Early Outreach Already Underway

Outreach has already started. For example, two family learning groups are running at Carbeile Junior School in Torpoint as part of a parental engagement partnership. This supports our outreach model and encourages intergenerational learning. We'll be looking at how learners from these groups can progress into further learning, helping to build a more sustainable model over time.

Working with Members

We'd really welcome the opportunity to work with local Members to shape the outreach offer in a way that reflects local priorities. Your insight into what's needed on the ground

will be invaluable in helping us get this right. If there are particular venues, partners, or community groups you think we should be engaging with, we'd love to hear your thoughts.

In Summary

Taking control of the Adult Skills Fund gives Cornwall a real chance to improve adult education in a way that works better for our communities. We want to make sure our approach is fair, efficient, and meets local needs. By embedding learning within other services and working closely with communities, we aim to create a more inclusive and sustainable model.

Thank you for your continued support. We'll keep you updated as we develop the strategy and delivery options for the Cornwall Adult Education Service for Members to consider.

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