



Update Report on ACL Essex for the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee November 2020

Introduction and Background

ACL is Essex County Council's adult (aged 19+) learning service and it is the third largest Adult Community Learning service in the country. It sits within the Place and Public Health Function, and as of January 2020 has moved from the Economic Growth and Localities Directorate to the Public Health and Wellbeing Directorate.

In March 2020, Cllr Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, and Katherine Burns, ACL Principal, presented a paper on ACL and its work. That paper provided an update following ACL going through the Organisational Design process, and consequently launching its new service design in September 2019.

All of ACL's learners have many different backgrounds and experiences, as well as different challenges that they have faced. ACL's purpose is to provide its learners with as many ways to flourish as possible. To be there in communities across Essex, to make a difference to residents and businesses, so they can make a difference for themselves and to the places that they live in. This purpose has become even more important in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, where lifelong learning is a key part of supporting health and wellbeing, and economic recovery.

ACL DELIVERY AND COVID-19

- During lockdown ACL moved swiftly in successfully transferring roughly 66% of its total classroom offer to online, where it was appropriate; with learners completing both qualification-based and non-accredited classes.
- During this time ACL Centres have remained open for vulnerable learners. In addition, Supported Learning managers also worked very closely with Adult Social Care so that ASC teams could effectively contact learners. This was to enable a joined up approach which ensured the welfare of ACL's 550+ Supported Learning learners.
- It is ACL's intent to resume classroom-based provision through a safe and staged approach. ACL will also continue online delivery wherever appropriate to support flexibility and accessibility. In the early stages of reopening it is prioritising Centre delivery for those curriculum areas where classroom-based delivery is crucial for benefiting learning, including Supported Learning and basic skills courses.

The impact of COVID-19 has made ACL's purpose of 'Improving lives through learning' even more important. An example of this is embodied in the following example from Claire, a learner who has completed a number of ACL's online Mental Health and Wellbeing courses. Claire has recently shared her 'lockdown' experiences, highlighting the benefits of the wellbeing courses compared to traditional counselling, and how they have personally helped her connect with others and feel motivated to explore further self-development opportunities (Claire's story can be accessed by the links at the end of this paper):

"I find traditional counselling very counter-productive. Rehashing bad memories makes it harder to let go and move on. Doing classes is educational, social and fun. I am more proud to call myself a student rather than a patient. Doing virtual wellbeing courses with the ACL Essex, where I'm able to interact with others has been social and educational for me. It has improved my mental health and kept me stimulated and motivated for self-improvement."

International and National Context

The focus on lifelong learning has been seen internationally for some time, with the OECD prioritising lifelong learning approaches since at least 1996, where it is seen to provide ‘long-term benefits for the individual, the enterprise, the economy and the society more generally’. Indeed, countries like Singapore have put lifelong learning at the heart of their strategies for economic growth – creating policies, in principal, that both embrace new technologies, but at the same time focus on ensuring that support is in place for those at risk of displacement from those technologies. The intent is to create a culture where there is both the mindset and the resources to learn continuously at every stage of life.

As was noted in the previous paper in March, since at least 2017 there has also been an increased national focus on lifelong learning. Prior to the Industrial Strategy white paper, there was extensive research by the Foresight Teams in the government’s Office for Science around lifelong learning. Consequently, in the Industrial Strategy, the government ‘committed to supporting adults to secure meaningful and productive employment, and equipping them with the skills they need to maximise their earning potential’. It was noted that to drive up adult learning they would create the National Retraining Scheme (NRS). The NRS has slowly been developing, with its policy teams working closely with different localities (LEPs, LAs, businesses and providers) around the country, including ACL, in order to get a real sense of what is needed, instead of simply rolling out a national policy. The NRS has now been merged with the National Skills Fund and there will be an upcoming public consultation around how the allocated £2.5billion will be utilised.

The spotlight on lifelong learning has also intensified due to the impact of COVID-19, in terms of supporting re-training and upskilling. Lifelong learning providers are in a key position to help individuals, communities, and businesses. Whether through gaining new qualifications to transition into a new sector, support mental health and wellbeing, or supporting individuals and businesses to develop with quality apprenticeships.

This importance of lifelong learning has been seen across all political parties, think tanks, as well as other organisations like the Institute of Directors, the Confederation of Business Industry, and the TUC. Indeed, it was front and centre at a hearing of the Education Select Committee, with witnesses noting the need for a national lifelong learning strategy with a clear alignment with local ones, and linked with local industrial strategies. The Chair of the Committee, Robert Halfon MP, noted ACL Harlow, and that it was moving even further into the centre of the community co-locating with the library.

Essex Context

Essex, Southend and Thurrock combined have seven Further Education Colleges, two Universities, and a University College. Southend and Thurrock both have their own adult learning Centres.

What is ACL?

- Essex County Council commissions Adult Community Learning (ACL) Essex to deliver learning to the residents of Essex in order to support its strategic objectives. ACL Essex is principally a direct delivery service with a local focus. A small amount of delivery is carried out by sub-contractors to extend the reach of the service within the County.
- ACL Essex provision is delivered across the whole political County in 9 main centres. Provision in the unitary authorities of Southend and Thurrock is delivered by separate ACLs. In addition to the main centres, the Service delivers learning in community venues. Childcare for learners and staff is available in 3 centres.
- ACL learners have access to a diverse range of accredited and non-accredited courses which support them to achieve their goals and aspirations, encourage creativity, and promote safe and healthy lifestyles. The service offers qualifications to help people move nearer to, enter or progress within the workplace or gain skills to enhance life chances.
- As part of the Getting Britain Building Fund, via SELEP, ACL/ECC were successful in having the ACL and Harlow Library Co-location Project chosen as a ‘shovel ready scheme that will receive funding

for the work. The purpose of this project is to develop and renovate the existing Harlow town centre library and to relocate ACL into this newly developed space. The project is a key aspiration to enable Harlow residents to access skills and learning in a more centrally located site. ACL and libraries believe that this is an exciting opportunity for the services to align their offer for the people of Harlow and are looking forward to working together on the project. The work will also provide much-needed jobs, growth and the groundwork for further investment at this critical time.

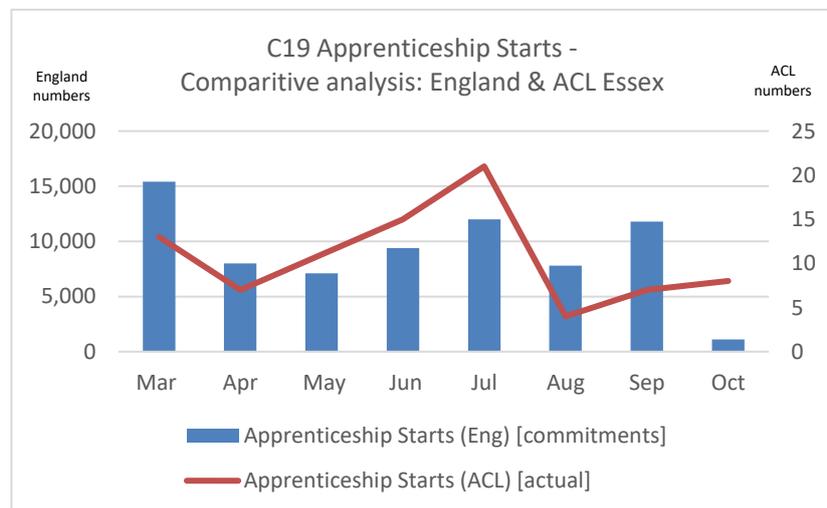
ACL Supporting Recovery

Near-Term

Supporting Essex Businesses

Over May to July, ACL bucked the national trend. Figures for England showed a decrease in apprenticeship starts of around 52%. However, ACL managed to sustain its apprenticeship provision over this time, as well as also attracting new apprentices in the pipeline. In August, ACL figures declined, which was due to various factors. These included some employers delaying recruitment over the summer, as well as apprenticeship starts in Schools/Nurseries and Care having slowed with a more staggered approach due to COVID-19. This said, ACL are starting to see an increase, evidenced by 70 more apprentices in the pipeline for November and December.

Indeed, more SMEs and new employers are coming on board because of the incentives and they are actively recruiting new employees/apprentices. Also, ACL have had an increase in demand for Customer Service apprenticeships because the Business Administration Level 2 framework is no longer available. New programmes are starting to recruit including Level 4 and Level 5 Health and Social Care Manager programmes, as well as increased interest in Project Management.



Data for England is from the DfE's statistical release: Apprenticeships and Traineeships, England: October 2020. When viewing DfE data, it should be born in mind that commitments to start may not potentially translate into an apprenticeship start in a high proportion of cases during the period affected by the pandemic. ACL data is actual starts.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

To specifically address the mental health and wellbeing impact from lockdown, furloughing and COVID 19, ACL further developed its programme of Mental Health and Wellbeing courses. The re-designed online programme started in April and has been continuously evaluated to ensure that the offer remains suitable and is adapted for people living through different degrees of turbulence and change: 17 courses delivered online with 152 learner registrations.

Supporting Communities

From April the Community and Family Learning team 'went online' developing a range of courses. Altogether there were 97 courses with 381 enrolments, which was a great achievement. The work of this team has been helping to support children and families, whether through mitigating risk of developmental delay, reducing family tensions, supporting children's mental health, and providing new skills for parents and carers.

Supporting Adults with Learning Disabilities and Difficulties

ACL has co-developed an Inclusive Apprenticeship in Customer Service (Level 2) qualification. Two vacancies for this were advertised by Essex County Council in August to provide new opportunities for those who had lived experience with autism and/or a learning disability.

Good Things Foundation (digital exclusion charity)

Everyone Connected Digital Devices Project

As part of additional collaboration with the Good Things Foundation, ACL has been successful in its application for 40 free Tablet devices preloaded with 25Gb of data to support vulnerable learner who are digital excluded. These devices are gifted to learners to own (in this case donated from Barclays) so that they can access learning, services, and re-connect with family and friends.

A key part of the work ACL has been doing has been around developing relationships with the NHS and working collaboratively with them through activities that support common outcomes.

<p>Supporting Health and Social Care #1</p> <p>ACL is now an approved supplier for the NHS to deliver Level 2 Customer Service Apprenticeships and the new Level 2 Healthcare Cleaning Operative Apprenticeships. Further supporting residents and NHS organisations across Essex.</p>	<p>Supporting Health and Social Care #2 - Nightingale Social Care Bursary</p> <p>ECC have awarded ACL with £299,730k to deliver training to staff currently working within the Health & Care Sector. The project will support 195 existing Health & Care employees who are ineligible for apprenticeships or full government funding to access qualifications without charge. Courses include Diplomas and Certificates from levels 2 through to 5. All starts will take place in the current academic year.</p>	<p>Supporting Health and Social Care #3 - Routes into nursing Pilot</p> <p>ACL has developed a local pilot with the Suffolk and North East Essex (SNEE) NHS trust to enable individuals in the Clacton/Tendring area to gain access to a career in Nursing. If successful, this will become a rolling programme. The pilot will start in 2020/21 academic year with 10 participants in the first tranche. This also includes upskilling maths, English and ESOL through the levels up to GCSE which is the entry requirement into nursing.</p>
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Short-Medium Term

<p>Apprenticeship Levy Transfer Service (collaboration with Economic Growth Team)</p> <p>There are multiple employers within Essex, including ECC, who are not fully utilising their apprenticeship levy funds. Levy paying employers are able to transfer (gift) up to 25% of their levy to other businesses to pay for the training (not the wages) of an apprentice. The service will enable Levy paying employers to ‘gift’ unused levy funds to Essex based SMEs.</p> <p>The ACL Employer Engagement Team will be working with businesses, colleges and training providers across Essex to maximise new apprenticeship opportunities for both new hires and existing employees. We have set an ambitious target of 200 apprenticeship starts funded by a levy transfer within the current academic year. This will go live in November 2020.</p>	<p>Mid & South Essex NHS Trust</p> <p>Delivering accredited courses in Health and Social Care (along with Digital, Maths and English) Launch was June 2020, with rollout across Essex.</p> <p>Tendring Health and Care Academy</p> <p>ACL are working with NHS colleagues to develop the Tendring Health and Care Academy. This will support adults and young people to access information, advice and guidance (IAG) so that they understand the broad range of careers available in the Health & Care sector. They will then be able to access training that they need (from soft skills to qualifications) to gain a meaningful career in the sector. This is a developing project, as such it is embryonic, but there will be a small launch of the IAG element in November 2020.</p>
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Good Things Foundation*Census Project*

ACL has been successful in its bid for 5 ACL Centres to become 2021 Online Census Centres (Colchester, Basildon, Chelmsford, Harlow and Clacton). These will be facilitation sites for the 2021 Digital Census, which will support residents unable to access or use technology sufficiently to complete the census.

ACL have been allocated some funding to help train and pay staff to be facilitators – supporting individuals who are digitally excluded. ACL will also support individuals to access further digital training.

Job Recovery Provision

Building on the work done over the summer, and in addition to its other qualification-based courses, ACL is developing a suite of provision to support those residents who have become unemployed or are at risk of becoming unemployed during the pandemic.

Examples include: how to effectively search for jobs, CV writing, digital interview and presentation skills, transferable skills, and new sector opportunities.

The Future of ACL

As part of the new service design ACL had developed its own Strategic Aim and Priorities to reflect both the intent for the Service, but also to align with these wider ECC Organisational Aims and Priorities. This was to ensure that there is a common language and a clear focus for impacting on residents, communities, and businesses in Essex.

In the March paper, it was reported that ACL was developing a new three-year strategy. This was because it recognised that lifelong learning is crucial to the economic success and healthy lives of residents, communities and businesses of Essex. And, following on from OD, it needed all staff to have a clear focus on what its aims and priorities were, the key drivers for the service, and linking that in with evidence-led activities that would make sure it's offer was relevant and meaningful, increase its impact, and embed a culture of collaboration.

This strategy development work progressed up to mid-March, but it was then stalled due to COVID-19. Once the impact of the pandemic started to become more apparent, ACL embarked on stress-testing the draft strategy against the national, regional and local insights around health, wellbeing, and the economy. The strategy held up well and found the key drivers ACL had focused on were even more relevant.

As part of this work, and from the focus on collaboration, the Senior Leadership Team have been engaging with all ACL staff so they have opportunity to buy into the Strategy and help shape it. This has included online staff engagement events, as well as teams having the opportunity to feed in ideas to the five key sub-strategies/plans (e.g. Curriculum Strategy and action plan). The main intent behind this is that the strategy is not developed in isolation; it is OUR strategy and everyone in the ACL Service and wider ECC has their part to play in its success.

The draft Strategy is nearly completed, with members of staff pulling together the sub-strategies and action plans.

Fig 1 below shows the proposed key drivers in terms of opportunities and challenges, the Curriculum Delivery Areas, and the new Outcomes Framework Pilot that ACL has developed to evidence wider impact. All this is surrounded by the strategic aims of the service.

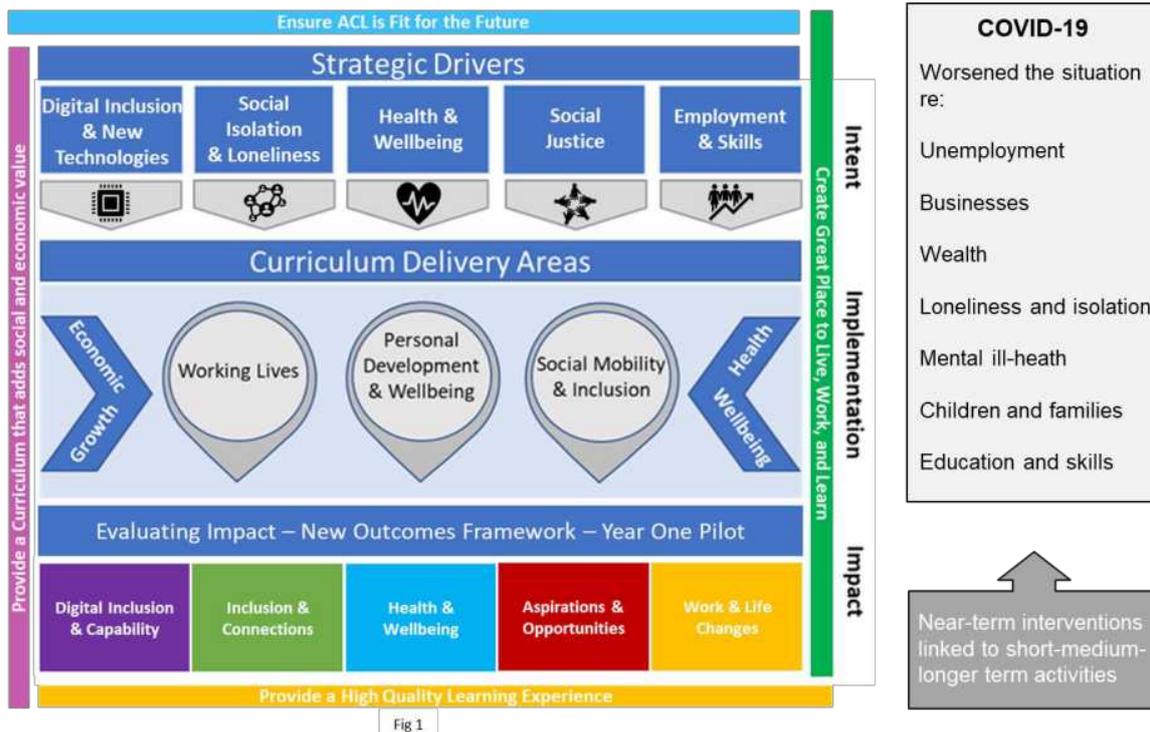


Fig 1

Supporting Lifelong Learning Nationally

Recognising the need to work together to meet the challenges caused by the pandemic, four members of ACL’s Extended Leadership Team were recently heavily involved in working on a national digital development programme to support adult learning providers. This was created by HOLEX, which is the national professional body for adult community learning providers. The programme itself was about creating guidance materials for six strands on digital technology in the lifelong learning sector. This Included advice on how to implement policies that support the needs of residents and business during Covid-19, as well as supporting the future adaptability and relevance of adult learning. So, whilst ACL is about improving lives through learning in Essex, it is also impacting positively across the country as well.

Additional Information

ACL Learner Success Stories:

Access to Higher Education - <https://aclessex.com/a-levels-arent-the-only-option-success-stories/>

Photography - <https://aclessex.com/where-could-a-camera-lead-you/>

Apprenticeships - <https://aclessex.com/apprenticeship-success-story-holly/>

Mental Health & Wellbeing Programme - <https://aclessex.com/claires-story/>

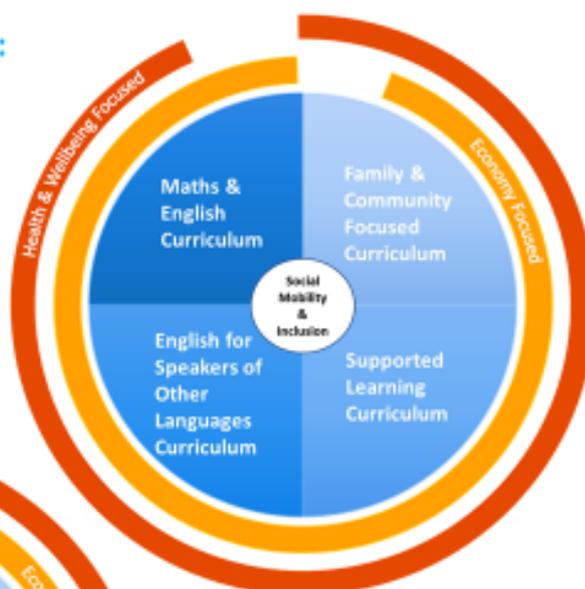
GCSEs - <https://aclessex.com/gcse-results-2020/>

Curriculum Delivery Areas: Details

The curriculum areas have been designed in such a way as to break down traditional silo working so that ACL moves towards a more joined up approach in order to be more effective in tackling the often complex challenges that the people of Essex face, as well as creating opportunities for them to flourish.



ACL recognises that it is in a unique position where it is able to directly impact on both economic growth and health and wellbeing agendas.



Economic factors highly correlate with health outcomes. And according to research, socio-economic status is a major determinant of both life expectancy and healthy life expectancy. It also finds that increased level of education is strongly and significantly related to improved health.

