

To: Communities Policy Overview Committee -12 November 2008

By: Mike Hill, Cabinet Member, Amanda Honey, Managing Director, Communities

Subject: Kent Adult Education Service – enrolments and trends

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report provides a snapshot and analysis of enrolments for Kent Adult Education Service (KAES) courses; highlights new service developments and outlines challenges and opportunities for the medium term.

Recommendation: Members are asked to note the current indication of KAES performance; service improvements that have been achieved and those under development.

FOR INFORMATION AND COMMENT

1. Introduction

Enrolment for the 2008-9 programme commenced in June with 56% of planned courses scheduled to begin in September and October. With the launch of a new website scheduled for January 2009 the Service plans to bring new programmes to the marketplace throughout the year and will be using a variety of channels to increase numbers.

In so doing the service will be taking account of the increasing attention being given to the role local government can play in helping young people and adults develop skills to ensure sustainable employment. This will provide important context for future KAES service planning.

2. Adult Education Enrolments: as at October 2008

- 2.1 In difficult conditions for both the retail and service sectors enrolments are currently 8% short of target overall but with marked variation in the take-up of courses linked to skills and employment and those offering learning for pleasure and personal interest. (ref. Appendix A)
- 2.2 Course enrolments offering qualifications and employability skills have increased by 7% on 2007-8 whilst others show a decline of 13%
- 2.3 Increases are highest in Thanet (33%), Sevenoaks (30%), Tonbridge (27%) and Shepway (26%). An analysis of enrolments and income, by District, is given in Appendices B and C. This information gives total

numbers and will be adjusted in future to take account of population size in each District.

- 2.4 There is a pattern across the County of increasing demand for evening courses and particularly those which address employment related skills.
- 2.5 KAES Skills Plus (Literacy and Numeracy delivered in the network of flexible delivery Skills Plus Centres) is performing strongly with enrolments averaging a 12% rise on October last year. Through its network of Skills Plus Centres the service now provides 55% of all foundation skills qualifications achieved in Kent per annum.



- 2.6 There has been a significant increase in enrolments for visual arts courses. Following our decision to develop specialist and higher-level provision 40% of art courses (known as 'studio classes') now recover all direct costs and contribute significantly to overheads. This year shows an increase of 25% of these programmes and performance exceeded target growth. In the applied arts new approaches and styles have been extremely successful -for example the use of wire techniques in jewellery making have enabled classes to be run outside specialist workshops.
- 2.7 Health and Fitness courses have suffered the largest decline (22%) following a similar reduction in 2007. Our own research reveals that younger adults are turning increasingly to commercial fitness clubs and that the appeal of fitness classes among older people is linked to affordability. We have begun a far reaching review of this area of work with the aim of refreshing our offer to adults 50+ and are piloting initiatives including pay-as-you-go and membership schemes. Fitness as a pathway into learning is being emphasised in some of the Supporting Independence programme (SIP) wards; and in 2009 it is planned to halt the decline as new initiatives come on stream.
- 2.8 The opening of our new Centre - The Cube - in Folkestone has demonstrated that upgraded accommodation attracts new learners and there are waiting lists for embroidery, calligraphy and textiles courses for the first time.
- 2.9 There has been a fall in enrolments for beginners languages which feedback suggests is linked to the financial downturn with people deciding not to start this learning yet. Significantly we believe adult learners in Kent do not see foreign language skills as important in the employment market place. On the positive side however there is a 10% increase in the take up of minority languages such as Turkish, Russian and Chinese.
- 2.10 The reduction in enrolments in our popular Tunbridge Wells centre is largely due to the reduction in languages enrolments. In anticipation of

a continuing decline in foreign languages 2009 will see a renewed focus on Fine Arts and Crafts in Tunbridge Wells building on a high reputation and market research findings indicating growth potential.

- 2.11 Income from course fees is 5% less than at October 07 with the vast majority of course prices unchanged on 2007-8.
- 2.12 The service has revised targets for the remainder of 2008-9 and aims to consolidate enrolments to within 2% of 2007-8 levels.

3. Recent and current developments

- 3.1 The new Dartford Adult Education Centre opened in September in refurbished accommodation within the Dartford campus. This follows the opening of The Cube in Folkestone earlier in the year.
- 3.2 A new LSC funded Skills Plus Centre has been launched in Folkestone. It is located in the Library adjacent to The Cube and University College Folkestone. This brings our network of Skills Plus Centres to 12.
- 3.3 We are currently developing a school of Art in partnership with University College Folkestone. We are aiming to provide seamless progression from community learning to Higher Education within the Creative Quarter at Folkestone. The partnership will extend to KAES using the advanced facilities at the University and the introduction of media and performing arts courses for adult and families.
- 3.4 A new interactive website is under construction planned to go live in January 2009. It will represent a huge improvement over the current website and will be a source of news and information to students and the public in addition to offering online enrolment.
- 3.5 Other marketing developments include targeted use of direct mail, membership schemes and plans to enable students to enquire about courses and enrol in person at Libraries.
- 3.6 We are bringing together Key Training Services with the Adult Education Service to maximise market opportunities and public funding for vocational and work-based learning.
- 3.7 A new adult education unit has been established to provide training in foundation and employability skills to public and private sector organisations (including voluntary and community organisations).
- 3.8 We are revitalising the traditional Centre- based programmes through rigorous market research and the development of new courses addressing the demand for both leisure learning and personal development.

4. Business Transformation Project

In order to achieve the scale and necessary rate of change KAES has embarked on a transformational journey with staff to develop the new skills, attitudes and enterprising behaviours needed to adapt to ever

changing circumstances. This exercise, begun in July, is called TALENT (Toward a Learning Enterprise for Tomorrow) and invites every member of staff to contribute to the design of a revitalised service.



5. Innovation

- 5.1 A key theme of the TALENT programme is *supporting innovation* and there has been a series of successfully applied new ideas which are helping to drive change:-
- 5.1.2 **Highlight 1:** KAES been awarded a new NVQ training contract for Teaching Assistants in schools funded via an LSC Train to Gain contract (Value £360k).
- 5.1.3 **Highlight 2: Wide-Open Door** A new initiative in partnership with the KCC 14-24 Unit to bring training and employment opportunities to disadvantaged communities in Thanet and Swale. Due to start April 09. This builds on Pre-apprenticeship programmes developed by Key Training matched with family learning and volunteer Learning Champions from Adult Education.
- 5.1.4 **Highlight 3:** KAES with funding from Advisory Services Kent (ASK) is now providing foreign language courses to improve the skills of Primary School Teachers in readiness for the expansion of the foreign languages curriculum in 2010. 8 courses have begun in Ashford, Gravesend, Sittingbourne, Maidstone, Swanley, Herne Bay, Canterbury, Swanley and Tunbridge wells.
- 5.1.5 **Highlight 4:** English for Speakers of Other Languages – workplace classes for migrant workers arranged with various employers (including Howard Hunt at Dartford and Thermo Fisher in Ashford) who have recognised the benefits of improved language skills on productivity.
- 5.1.6 **Highlight 5:** The Service has recruited 50 learners from the ranks of catering staff in schools as part of an LSC funded drive to improve the basic skills of low-paid public sector staff.
- 5.1.7 **Highlight 6:** Skills Plus has teamed up with Charlton Athletic to prepare their community coaches to help youngsters improve basic skills. Writing in the *Valley Review* magazine Sean Daly the Charlton Football Development Manager praised our work and the 'excellent course' provided for his staff.



5.1.8 **Highlight 7:** In collaboration with Sittingbourne Community College and the KCC 14-24 Unit KAES is developing training in basic skills and employer focussed training such as First Aid and Health and Safety at the Skills Centre in the heart of the Eurolink Business Park. A programme of family learning will focus on vocational training to include engineering and construction skills.

6. Challenges and opportunities

- 6.1 KAES in common with other local authority community learning services is operating in an uncertain policy context as Government deliberates over the future of 'informal learning' and the role of adult education within the skills and employability agenda.
- 6.2 KAES with other local Government services is continuing to lobby Government through formal and informal channels to argue for funding for adult education.
- 6.3 There is a possibility that the £210 million Safeguard for Adult Learning which includes the funding available to KAES for learning for pleasure and personal development will diminish or cease in 2011 when the 3 year funding agreement expires.
- 6.4 We are currently increasing the proportion of courses which are self-funding (from student fees) and are targeting subsidy on priority groups with this in mind.
- 6.5 As the proportion of Further Education funding diminishes and the employer responsive pot grows KAES is positioning it to take

advantage of the opportunities this presents particularly with respect to our specialism and proven track record in Skills for Life.

- 6.6 With Key Training we are developing the capacity to meet training needs of public sector organisations including KCC. Some of this training attracts public funding via 'Train to Gain' providing a highly cost-effective means of upskilling the public sector workforce in Kent

7. Conclusion

Whilst the current performance on enrolments is mixed, with predictable pressure on learning for pleasure provision, the service is on track with plans to modernise its curriculum, accommodation and marketing. KAES is seeking to transform itself into a responsive and highly adaptable learning enterprise and is fortunate to possess a workforce committed to positive change and pride in its performance. There is increasing profile and attention being given to the role local government can play in helping young people and adults develop skills to ensure they find sustainable employment, and this will also provide important context for future KAES service planning.

8. Recommendation

Members are asked to note the current indication of KAES performance, recent service improvements and those under development.

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