

Citizens' Curriculum Case Study: Rochdale Borough Council

About the Citizens' Curriculum

The Citizens' Curriculum is an innovative and flexible model for language, literacy and numeracy provision which places the needs of learners and communities at its core. Its aim is to develop new ways of offering learning which engages and motivates adults in all kinds of contexts to improve their English, maths and other 'life skills', resulting in better progression, outcomes and aspirations - into and at work, in learning and in personal, family and community life. The underpinning principles of the Citizens' Curriculum are:

- A holistic approach to provision for adult learners interpreted through the local context
- Learner involvement in determining the curriculum to meet their needs and interests
- An interlinked combination of literacy, numeracy, ESOL, financial, health, digital and civic capabilities

Background

Rochdale Council built an earlier Citizens' Curriculum pilot by extending their work to focus on older men, particularly those living alone and at risk of social isolation. The council's local needs analysis found a disproportionate representation of this group within the ESA cohort, which suggested that they were experiencing long-term barriers to work and education. By working closely with intermediary organisations and using the 'hook' of digital learning, the council developed strong pathways onto their pilot for the target group. They worked with an integrated team of local services to engage this cohort, and other groups they had previously found difficult to reach, identifying their learning needs and addressing them through learning. By engaging learners in a series of informal and unaccredited programmes or services, which were linked to digital, health and numeracy capabilities, Rochdale aimed to support learners to stay engaged in learning, move into employment and progress onto formal and accredited courses.

Citizens' Curriculum Principle	Locally-led learning, responding to the needs of the local community, economy or specific cohorts of learners	Learner involvement in determining the curriculum	An interlinked combination of capabilities
<p>How it worked</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot ran in Kirkholt, an estate with a high proportion of unemployed older men, often living in social isolation. This often led to individuals developing mental health problems or experiencing substance misuse. • Worked with an integrated team of local services to tailor the programme to the needs of the target group and address these through learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tutors guided learners through a tailored programme which addressed their individual needs and interests. • Learners could access provision when they wanted to, and could get the support they needed for their particular circumstances. • Gave learners confidence to direct their own learning, e.g. some learners developed their own digital learning project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital – learners searched and applied for jobs online. Some developed digital activities which they showcased on the digital learning day. • Civic – learners developed social relationships, confidence to engage with their community, and started volunteering. Learners also learned how to use public services more effectively, reducing police callouts. • Health – learners improved their mental health and reduced their instances of substance misuse.

Impact

Rochdale's pilot was hugely successful. They engaged over 50 learners who, as a result of participating in the programme, developed valuable social relationships, improved their mental health, reduced their instances of substance misuse and gained work-related and digital skills. Many have now progressed onto further learning, are actively searching for work or have started volunteering.

"I think it's shown me different pathways that I hadn't thought about to a longer-term career. What I particularly like about the project is the fun element of it. It doesn't feel like structured learning. So we'd have people that have come in to do the stuff they need to do that the Jobcentre told them they had to do, the practical side, and then they can come next door and build a robot... I made lots of useful connections when I was there as well." (Learner)

Furthermore, the council's use of a Cost Benefit Analysis Tool meant they could not only demonstrate learning and personal outcomes, but also the wider economic benefits of community learning, in their pilot. The cost-benefit analysis suggested that for every £1 the council spent, they achieved a £3.68 financial return, with the benefit accruing to the council and other local public services.

Critical Success Factors – Tips for Implementing the Citizens' Curriculum

- Identifying a relevant 'hook' within the Citizens' Curriculum – in this case, digital skills learning – can help engage learners and in turn be used to support their engagement with a wider range of support services, and progression to further learning and skills development.
- Robust outcomes and cost-benefit data can be used to highlight the wider benefits of adult community learning provision, supporting providers to make the case for sustained investment.