



Business Continuity Plan

Ensuring the provision of adult education and employment support projects

Most recent update: 09 September 2025

1 Scope

This policy statement applies to all Cheshire West and Chester (CW&C) Skills and Employment provision:

- adult education
 - internal delivery
 - delivery from sub-contracted partners, supported by Adult Skills Fund (ASF) funding
- employment support projects

This policy covers sub-contracted adult education where there is the delivery of full qualifications, units and non-accredited learning by the sub-contracted partner. CW&C retains the full accountability for contract delivery and the quality of the learners' experience.

2 Policy Statement

Cheshire West and Chester Council delivers an adult education programme across the borough using both direct and sub-contracted delivery through a range of trusted learning provider partners. We believe in the value of sub-contracting as a significant methodology for delivering adult education across the borough as our contracted providers are already in the communities where the learners are; responding to their needs in venues which are comfortable, safe and familiar places for learners. Through good leadership and management, CW&C's Skills and Employment (S&E) Service can deliver this community-centric, sub-contracted learning within a robust framework of quality assurance in harmony with our own directly delivered teaching and learning. Having a mix of our own tutors and venues, and some sub-contracted provision allows us to respond to local needs flexibly and responsively and to spread the positive impact of participation in learning as widely as possible.

This model of delivery relies on a central management team overseeing a wide range of disparate partners all operating within their own set of circumstances. As well as the administration of sub-contracted partners, the central management team oversee Skills and Employment (S&E) direct delivery sites, which can deliver adult learning, employment support and some sub-contracted provision. This policy statement details our overarching approach to minimising the impact of any disruption or potential disruption to service delivery. There is a specific focus on ensuring continuity for the learners' journey. Disruption to service continuity can potentially arise from:

- key national or international events (such as Covid-19)
- the loss of key personnel
- loss of a sub-contracted partner
- quality issues or instances of learner data falling below Department for Education minimum standards relating to a specific sub-contracted provider and potentially threatening the viability of the full ASF contract





3 Overarching Principles

CW&C adult education sub-contracted provision is considered by the local authority as its own provision. Our sub-contracted partners are considered both as both providers and contract holders. As a provider, a sub-contracted partner benefits from being part of their own distinct organisation; as a CW&C contract holder their compliance with that contract must be performance monitored and quality assured. We do not see these positions as contradictory; instead they work together to bring added value from CW&C as the primary contract holder along with the values and operating model of the sub-contracted partner.

We have a framework of overarching assurances built in from the commissioning stage to the closure of the contract. These assurances minimise risks to the viability of the contract as a whole but there may be in-year circumstances that could threaten business continuity and additional actions are required to minimise contractual risk.

Learners' and programme participants' safety and success will be our overriding principle in ensuring business continuity and we will work to ensure that any business risk does not impact negatively on any individual's development.

4 Key National Or International Event

Events such as the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown are, by their nature difficult to plan for in detail. However, the recent Covid-19 crisis has shown that flexible resources, blended delivery models and strong management and communication are key to being able to weather and then overcome a crisis.

In the event of a crisis CW&C will take all necessary actions to ensure learners and programme participants, along with both CW&C and sub-contracted partners' staff are kept as safe as possible. We will minimise disruption to participants and programmes by managing close-down arrangements on an individual basis and switching to online support to ensure engagement and achievement. We will utilise a virtual learning platform and other technologies to provide blended models of delivery to work safely within government guidelines. The Skills and Employment management team will meet more often (online if needed) to co-ordinate and control emergency responses. These responses will take local council directives and central government requirements and guidance. S&E management will then develop and implement a Recovery Plan.

5 Business Continuity – Loss Of Key Personnel

All members of the central local authority management team have succession contingencies built into their teams as well as taking a 'shared leadership' responsibility for the service, so the loss of a key member of the team could be managed successfully in the short term. For any longer absence, the team may need to secure additional support from outside of the team. In some areas, this additional capacity would come from the wider council e.g. Finance. There may be a case specialist support is required that has no equivalent within the wider council, for example, the management of our learner and participant data systems. In these cases, we have partnership networks with all North West local authorities where we could source additional capacity as required.



6 Business Continuity – Quality Assurance Issues

For delivery of adult education under Cheshire West and Chester Council, S&E partner contracts set out quality assurance requirements. All partners are allocated a support officer from our Quality, Performance and Commissioning (QPC) team who provide day-to-day support and challenge to assure the quality of the learning experience. Sub-contracted partners are monitored against a key set of performance indicators and this process is managed on central portal. All remedial actions required by a sub-contracted partner are logged here and monitored for completion. We operate a partner assurance system that monitors performance across 3 dimensions: contract performance (including finance), quality assurance (of teaching, learning and assessment) and learner data. All sub-contracted partners are given a mid-year position and notice to improve as required. Any failure to meet the required standards and could result in the ending of the contractual relationship with the council or future funding bids being rejected.

7 Business Continuity – Contractual Under-Performance And Minimum Standards

We strive to ensure that our sub-contracting procedures are as flexible and responsive as possible to local need and we monitor contract performance on an ongoing basis. Partners are contracted at the start of the academic year and their performance is monitored regularly against clear contractual profiles. Through the QPC Senior Officer, S&E provide day-to-day support and performance monitoring with partners; we become aware of any potential issues early in the contracting year. In addition to this, we have rigorous ongoing data checks. For Tailored Learning providers, we receive learner data at the end of each term, if not more regularly. At this point we will address any contractual under-performance following discussion with the partner. We would then either reprofile the contract to increase the following period's performance requirements or if we felt that the partner could not make up the under-performance, we would pay for the delivery that had taken place, reprofile the contract down accordingly and would make the additional funding available to other partners.

In the case of accredited provision, performance is paid on an ongoing basis and according to actual learner levels i.e. in real time. Qualification success rates are monitored on a monthly basis. Although the Department for Education (DfE) no longer use minimum standards as a threshold for intervention on 19+ education and training, we will continue to use the previously set thresholds within the bi-weekly Skills and Employment team meetings and benchmark against best- and worst-case scenarios. The QPC officer responsible for a sub-contracted partner causing concern would investigate the cause of any identified problem and support the partner to bring achievement rates up to the required standard, ensuring that annually published overall Achievement Rates are unaffected. Remedial actions may include Quality Assurance support for teaching and learning, reprofiling the contract down, ending delivery on a particular learning aim for a given partner or ending the whole contract at the nearest point that does not disadvantage any learners still on programme.

We operate a 4 year framework re-procurement of partners so have a pool of partners we can call upon. We also have the facility to procure short term contracts under £25k outside of the normal procurement framework. This can be used to ensure sufficiency of provision as required with the minimum of time and administration needed to secure the new provision.



8 Business Continuity - Loss Of Data Or Loss Of Access To Data

Our Management Information (MI) team deal with thousands of learner and participant records per year.

All data transfer between sub-contracted adult learning partners is via a secure server, Cryptex. All hard copies are stored according to data management best practice and our process is compliant with GDPR 2018. Electronic input is on a local secure server with full back up and also on the DfE server via the Individualised Learner Record. All staff receive annual Data Protection training.

For employment support projects, data is kept on secure servers belonging to either CW&C or the funding providers, such as the Department for Work and Pensions or the National Health Service.

For temporary breaks in service, for example due to council server malfunction, the Management Information team operates dual IT systems to ensure we can continue operating. If our adult learning database provider (Terms) systems failed, we hold the return data set outside of Terms (on AWS servers in London) so we could reconstruct the data set on an alternative platform.

The Skills and Employment management team operate flexible and mobile working that includes home working using communication technology under the council's systems. Outside of this we have a personal WhatsApp group to ensure we maintain contact regardless of council telephony system failure; any short-term actions that need taking can be communicated.

8 Business Continuity – Loss Of Sub-contracted Partner In Year

There are rare cases of a partner withdrawing from a contract or ceasing to exist mid-way through the delivery of an adult learning qualification programme. If unable to fulfil their contractual performance (with learners still enrolled on the programme and their learning goals not yet achieved), we would work with the partner to collect all the learner paperwork and source another suitable partner to finish the learning programme in a convenient location. We would notify the awarding body concerned regarding any changes in personnel involved in the assessment and moderation of the qualification programme in question. In some circumstances, we may use our own teaching staff to finish any outstanding delivery to ensure no learner was disadvantaged by the original partner's closure.

In the most extreme case - and assuming we had no other choice but to transfer the learners to a different provider's ASF contract (e.g. a transfer to a Further Education college) - we would withdraw all the learners from our ILR so they could be re-enrolled on the new provider's ILR. We would inform the DfE that this was a transfer rather than a withdrawal so as not to impact on our success rates. We would notify the council's Legal department of any in-contract closures and seek support as required.

Our procurement processes include due diligence including credit ratings checks. We receive in-year updates via credit reference agencies regarding any negative changes to our partners' financial stability and we are able to increase scrutiny.

All in-year contractual changes would be subject to approval of the Skills and Employment Manager and administratively overseen by the QPC Senior Officer to ensure payments and contracting amendments were managed appropriately.



The DfE would be notified of any in-year changes to our sub-contracting arrangements by email and our Declaration of Sub-Contracting arrangements updated at the nearest opportunity via the Information Management Services Hub.