

## **WEA West Midlands Region Fee Policy 2007/08**

### **1. Introduction**

1.1 The Regional Committee needs to agree a 2007/08 fee policy by February 2007 for submission to the Association.

1.2 The policy has to follow a format proposed by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and enable us to conform to Association policy on increasing fee income and discontinuing age-related concessionary fees.

1.3 The fee policy needs to take into account fees charged by neighbouring and rival providers. These fees vary greatly; there is ample evidence of some other providers successfully charging £3+ an hour for comparable courses but there remain significant pockets of low-fee and free provision in areas where WEA provides. The WEA faces competitive pressures from voluntary and freelance sources such as U3A, book clubs and informal provision organised by tutors. Policies designed to increase fee income will have to be accompanied by success in convincing current and potential students of the 'added value' of taking part in WEA classes as opposed to 'do-it-yourself' provision.

1.4 This policy has been agreed by the Regional Committee following consultation with staff, branches and members.

### **2. Current position**

2.1 Learning and Skills Council (LSC) policy announced in Autumn 2005 in *Priorities for Success* progressively increases the 'assumed fee element' and expects providers to meet a fee target equivalent to the amount that would have been collected had all 'assumed fees' been paid. The 'assumed fee element' is the amount the LSC expects providers to raise through fees to complement the amount received from the LSC in order to meet the costs of the provision.

2.2 The WEA expects all regions to:

- § Increase fee income by 20% in 2006/07 and 15% in 2007/08, and
- § Close the 'fee gap' (where appropriate – not all regions have a fee gap) over a three year period ending 2008/09. The 'fee gap' is the gap between the total amount that the LSC expects the provider to raise through fees and the amount it actually does raise.

2.3 For the West Midlands region the 'fee gap' represents a particular challenge mainly because the bulk of our 2005/06 provision was free community learning with only one third of students being eligible for LSC fee remission. We estimated our 'fee gap' for 2005/06 at £250,000 and agreed a range of measures to begin reducing it in 2006/07. These included:

- § Introduction of low fees on selected previously free community education courses
- § Improved targeting of free provision to attract more 'fee remission' students and partner support, financially or 'in kind'. 'Fee remission students' are those on means tested benefits (evidenced via the enrolment form); the LSC pays the WEA the fee on their behalf.
- § Expansion of LSC fully funded provision (Skills for Life and TUC learning aims)
- § Reduction in provision to avoid exceeding ILR target. ILR target is the student volumes we have to achieve to meet our contract with the LSC.
- § Encouragement of a 'guideline fee' of £2 an hour and phasing out of age-related concessionary fees for branch and other liberal adult education provision

2.4 The implementation of these policies is being monitored by managers and voluntary officers and progress so far is very encouraging and we are making some progress towards reducing the fee gap.

2.5 The fee policy for 2007/08 continues this policy shift, codifies some existing practices and agreements and addresses certain changes that have arisen since the 2006/07 policy was agreed.

### **3. Tuition fees recommendations**

#### **3.1 WEA branches**

The region values and wishes to maintain its current level of branch provision and recognises the pressures currently on branch activists and committee members. The setting of fees is delegated to branch committees in the following context:

- § The branch meets the cost of accommodation and remits to the region the tutor costs
- § In setting fees branch committees consider the 'guideline fee' of £2.20 an hour as well as fees provided by other local providers
- § Where fees are reduced because of partner or LEA contribution (in cash or in kind) this should be acknowledged in the publicity.
- § Branches operating age related fee concessionary policies should discontinue them from 1<sup>st</sup> August 2007. This is in line with Association policy and is designed to remove our vulnerability under age discrimination legislation.
- § The region will remit to branches the course fee on behalf of LSC fee remission students where appropriate enrolment information is provided. The cost of this concession is met by the LSC
- § The region will remit to branches the course fee on behalf of students claiming Disability Living Allowance or Incapacity Benefit where appropriate enrolment information is provided. The cost of this concession is met from regional funds.
- § Branches requiring financial support to continue a course that is educationally viable and with a minimum of ten fee paying/fee remission

students may approach their programme area manager for support from her/his budget

### 3.2 *PAM directly organised liberal adult education*

The region wishes to develop its provision of liberal adult education courses directed at the general public. In doing so we need to ensure affordability for a diverse range of potential students and take account of the fees of alternative providers as well as the existence of a large and growing informal, freelance and voluntary sector.

The fee structure is as follows

- § Student fees are based on £2.20 an hour
- § LSC fee remission is applied
- § No concessionary fees are offered

This structure may occasionally be varied subject to Regional Management Team (RMT) agreement in order to take into account partnership arrangements and/or fee policies of other local providers. Where fees are reduced because of partner or Local Education Authority (LEA) contribution (in cash or in kind) this should be acknowledged in the publicity.

### 3.3 *'Community Learning' concessionary fees*

The region has a powerful commitment to widening participation in adult education; a vision that embraces a range of economically disadvantaged adults in addition to those on means tested benefits. We therefore offer a range of targeted courses at a low fee significantly below the assumed fee element.

Community learning concessionary fees may be offered to students on courses designed to attract:

- § Adults returning to education
- § Residents of disadvantaged post-code areas
- § Adults without L2 qualifications and/or IT skills
- § Those in low paid employment, dependent upon low fixed incomes and other economically disadvantaged adults

Regional managers and the regional committee will monitor the success of this provision in meeting its target groups.

The fee shall be based on £1.20 an hour.

LSC fee remission will apply

No additional fee concessions will apply

### 3.4 *Block fees paid on behalf of students*

The region wishes to develop arrangements through which partner organisations (such as trade unions, local authorities or Primary Care Trusts) pay a block fee on behalf of students on specified WEA courses.

In such cases the block fee will be based on at least the assumed fee element with a minimum number of twelve. Contracts and Service Level Agreements will make it clear that the WEA is drawing down LSC funding in support of this provision.

### *3.5. Free courses*

The region will continue to provide a number of free courses as part of its widening participation strategy. Decisions to provide free courses will always be in the context of overall fee policy and budgetary requirements and will depend upon a robust assessment of the provision's contribution to widening participation.

Skills for Life Literacy and Numeracy courses will be provided free of charge. Charging policy for ESOL courses will be decided in the light of funding guidance and Association policy; it is the region's aim however to retain free ESOL provision for economically and socially disadvantaged students.

Free courses should either be 'First steps provision leading directly to provision within the National Qualifications Framework' or the following criteria will need to be met:

- § Partnership provision that is clearly targeted and where the partner makes a significant contribution
- § Significant percentage (at least 60%) of LSC fee remission students
- § Within curriculum areas addressing public policy priorities: family learning, social cohesion/race equality, health improvement, IT literacy and e-awareness

Regional managers and the regional committee will monitor the success of this provision in meeting its target groups.

### *3.6. Examination and Accreditation fees*

Students on courses leading to CLAIT and BSL qualifications will be charged the cost of examination fees.

### *3.7. Ineligible Students*

Ineligible students may be enrolled on courses that are otherwise viable on payment of a fee equivalent to the LSC National Base Rate. The National Base Rate is the amount paid by the LSC for teaching that student including the assumed fee element.

### *3.8 School Students*

Advice should be sought from Regional Office

## **4. Consultancy and non-ILR provision**

#### *4.1. Provision of consultancy by regional staff*

Where regional staff provide expert consultancy to external organisations this shall be charged on the basis of full daily employment costs plus a 40% contribution to regional overheads. This rate applies only to charities and public organisations.

#### *4.2. Short courses and events*

Where the region administers and assists in promoting short (less than 14 hours) courses and activities, the fee income must meet the direct costs plus a 20% contribution to overheads. In the case of these activities a streamlined process for registration and quality improvement will be agreed.

### **5. Administrative issues**

5.1. Fee payment for termly courses shall be made in advance of, or at the beginning of the course.

5.2. Students on branch courses are entitled to a refund up to and including the second week of the course. Subsequent refunds will only be considered on other courses in exceptional circumstances following written request to the WEA branch committee.

5.3. Refunds will only be considered on other courses in exceptional circumstances following written request to the Programme Area Manager.

### **6. Learner Support**

The Learner Support Fund (LSF) can provide or contribute to additional support (child-care, travel, materials, accreditation and course fees) for students on means tested benefits or low household income. The fund is reducing and is likely to reduce further in 2007/08. The fund available will be devolved to Programme Area Managers and eligible students on LSC funded provision will be entitled to apply for support.

Pete Caldwell 21/2/06