

East Suffolk Adult Learning Report August 2017

Compiled by Christopher Elmer, Intern at Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils, Summer 2017, edited by Joanne Powley, Suffolk County Council (Adult and Community Learning Development manager)



Contents

1. Background 3

2. Analysis of current Learning 5

3. Analysis of Venues 7

4. Analysis of Survey 9

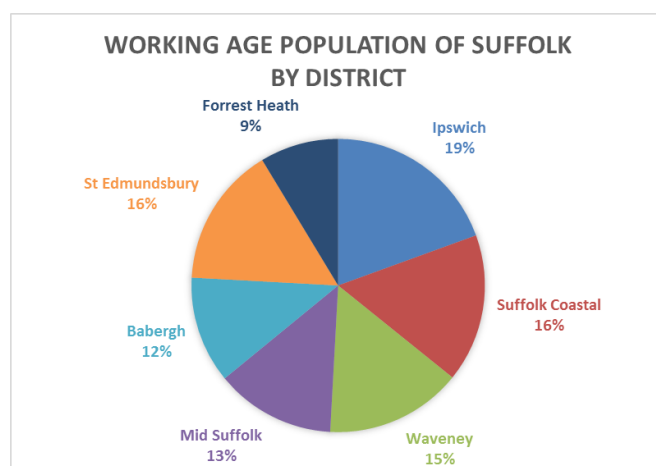
5. Limitations..... 14

6. Conclusion..... 15

7. Recommendations 15

1. Background

The aim of this report is to understand the current adult learning provision in East Suffolk and ensure that its residents have sufficient opportunities to access relevant training provision.



Adult learning is defined as the entire range of formal and leisure and community learning activities which are undertaken by adults since leaving compulsory education and training, and which results in the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. Formal adult learning is that which results in the learner attaining a recognised qualification, unlike leisure and community learning where no

qualification is received. Formal learning is seen more as a stepping stone to employment whereas leisure and community learning is about social inclusion and gaining new knowledge that doesn't necessarily lead to employment.

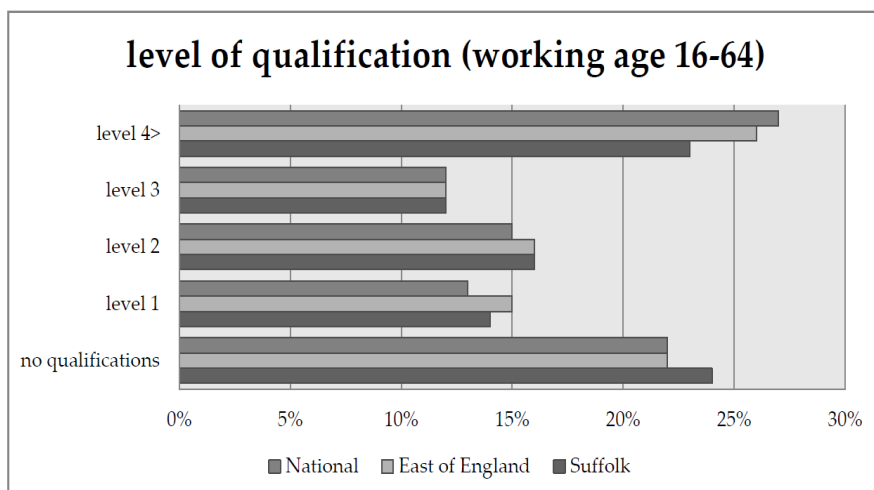
Suffolk is a largely rural county and is made up of 7 districts (Babergh, Forest Heath, Ipswich, Mid Suffolk, St Edmundsbury, Suffolk Coastal and Waveney). Suffolk has a population of approximately 745,300¹. Within Suffolk the proportion of the 19+ population across all districts is between 76% and 79%, therefore the approximate 19+ population, and thus the number of potential users of adult learning, is 577,600. Additionally, population estimates from The Office of National Statistics suggest that by the time of the next Census, due in 2021, the population of Suffolk may have increased to 778,000, with notable projected increases in the older age groups.

Suffolk has a working age population of 440,500 with 16% in Suffolk Coastal and 15% in Waveney². East Suffolk (Suffolk Coastal and Waveney combined) has a total working age population of approximately 136,500. Currently Suffolk as a whole is experiencing a skills shortage of more highly qualified staff. This is demonstrated by the following illustration

¹ NOMIS

² 2018 Adult Learning Contract

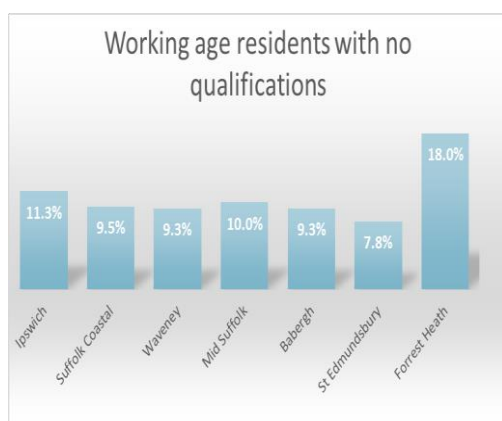
which indicates that Suffolk has a disproportionately high level of residents with lower levels of qualifications when compared to the rest of the country.



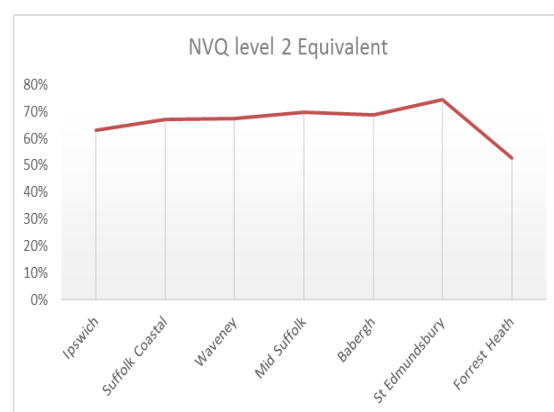
50.8% of 16-year-olds in Suffolk achieve a full level 2 qualification³. This is 5% below the national average and leads to young people coming out of education with little or no qualifications and joining an overall workforce that is

already less well qualified than the average across England. This is further exemplified by the estimate that 3% of the adult population has literacy levels below entry level 1 and 6.5% do not have sufficient mathematics skills to operate effectively at work or for their personal life⁴.

The illustrations below breaks down the information by districts⁵:



East Suffolk has a working age population of which approx.9.4% have no qualifications and 68% have Level 2 qualifications or above.

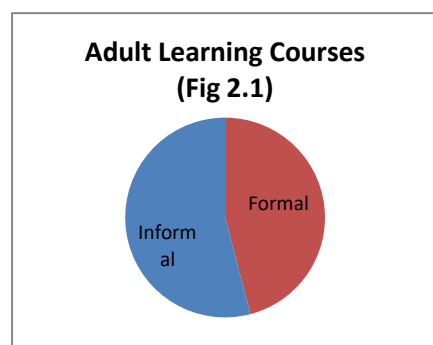


³ Suffolk Adult Learning Strategy

⁴ NOMIS

⁵ 2018 Adult learning Contract

2. Analysis of current Learning



During this investigation a total of 834 adult learning courses were found in East Suffolk and Ipswich. All of this course information was obtained by contacting training providers, searching online or by visiting East Suffolk libraries. Of these 834 courses, 383 of them were formal learning courses and 451 were leisure and community learning courses. This data suggests that there are more leisure and community than formal learning courses on offer in the area, however data on courses from Workers'

Educational Association (WEA), a major provider of formal learning courses in the area, was unobtainable.

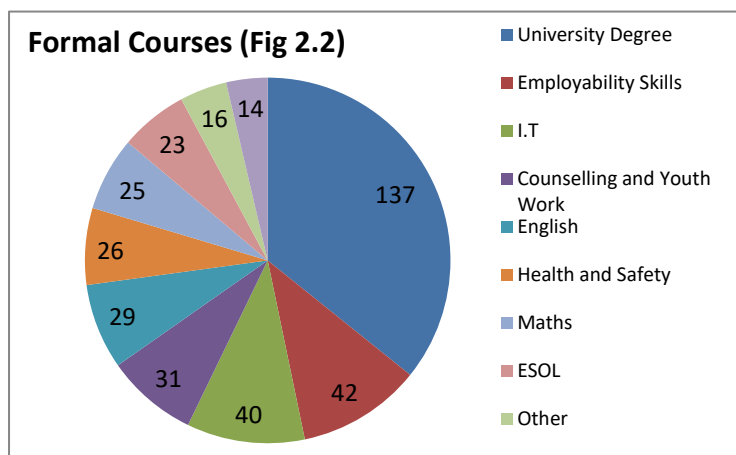
Educational Association (WEA), a major provider of formal learning courses in the area, was unobtainable.

Formal learning:

The data on formal adult learning courses was split into 10 subject categories and is as follows in order of frequency:

1. University Degree (137)
2. Employability skills (42)
3. I.T (40)
4. English (29)
5. Counselling and Youth work (31)
6. Health and Safety (26)
7. Maths (25)
8. ESOL (23)
9. Other (16)
10. First Aid (14)

Figure 2.2 shows that there is a much higher frequency of 'university degree' courses available than other subject areas but this is to be expected as this category covers a wide range of courses on offer from University of Suffolk. If this category is discounted the data



shows that there is a relatively even spread of courses when it comes to formal learning. However, without the university there are only a total of 246 formal learning courses remaining. 'Other' includes a number of courses in areas such as customer services, construction, education, floristry, football coaching and social care.

Leisure and community learning:

The data on leisure and community adult learning courses was split into 9 categories and is as follows in order of frequency:

1. Arts and Crafts (164)
2. Other (65)
3. Languages (59)
4. Wellbeing and Safety (51)
5. I.T (36)
6. Music (29)
7. Reading and Writing (22)
8. Cooking (13)
9. Wild learning and Gardening (12)

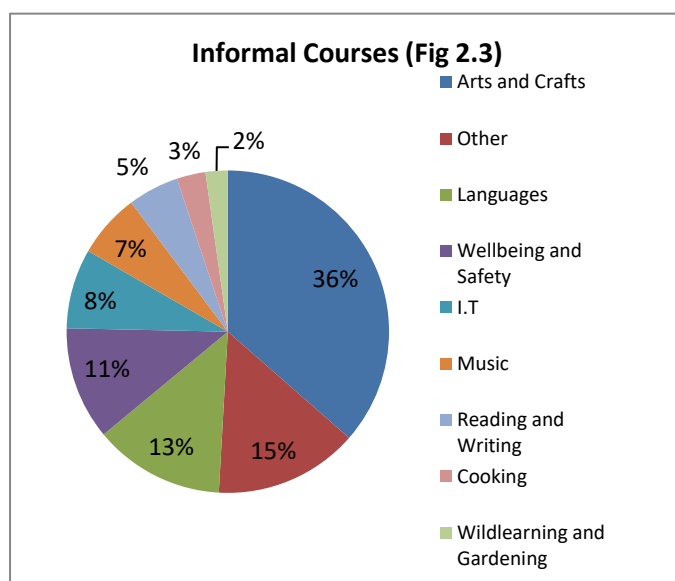


Figure 2.3 shows arts and crafts is by far the most popular category of course on offer making up 36% of total leisure and community learning courses. There are also a high percentage of leisure language courses available in a number of languages including French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish. The spread of subject areas is not as even in leisure and community learning when compared with formal learning, as the four largest categories make up 75% of the total leisure and community

learning courses. However, the second largest category is 'Other' because of the extremely broad variety of leisure and community courses available, this includes subject areas such as geology, philosophy, psychology and many more.

While undertaking this part of the investigation into leisure and community learning it became clear when speaking to providers that a number of them are struggling financially due to lack of funding for leisure learning. If these providers were unable to survive it would lead to a major reduction in the number of leisure courses available in the near future.

N.B: Some leisure and community courses were not included in this report as they were outside the scope of the project. These include leisure and community courses in dance, fitness, bridge, backgammon, Kung Fu, Tai Chi and Chi King.

3. Analysis of Venues

Figure 2.4 shows the venues at which the adult learning courses discussed in the previous section took place. The locations have been illustrated in different colours to highlight which venues hold formal learning courses and which venues hold leisure and community learning courses. This can be seen via the key.

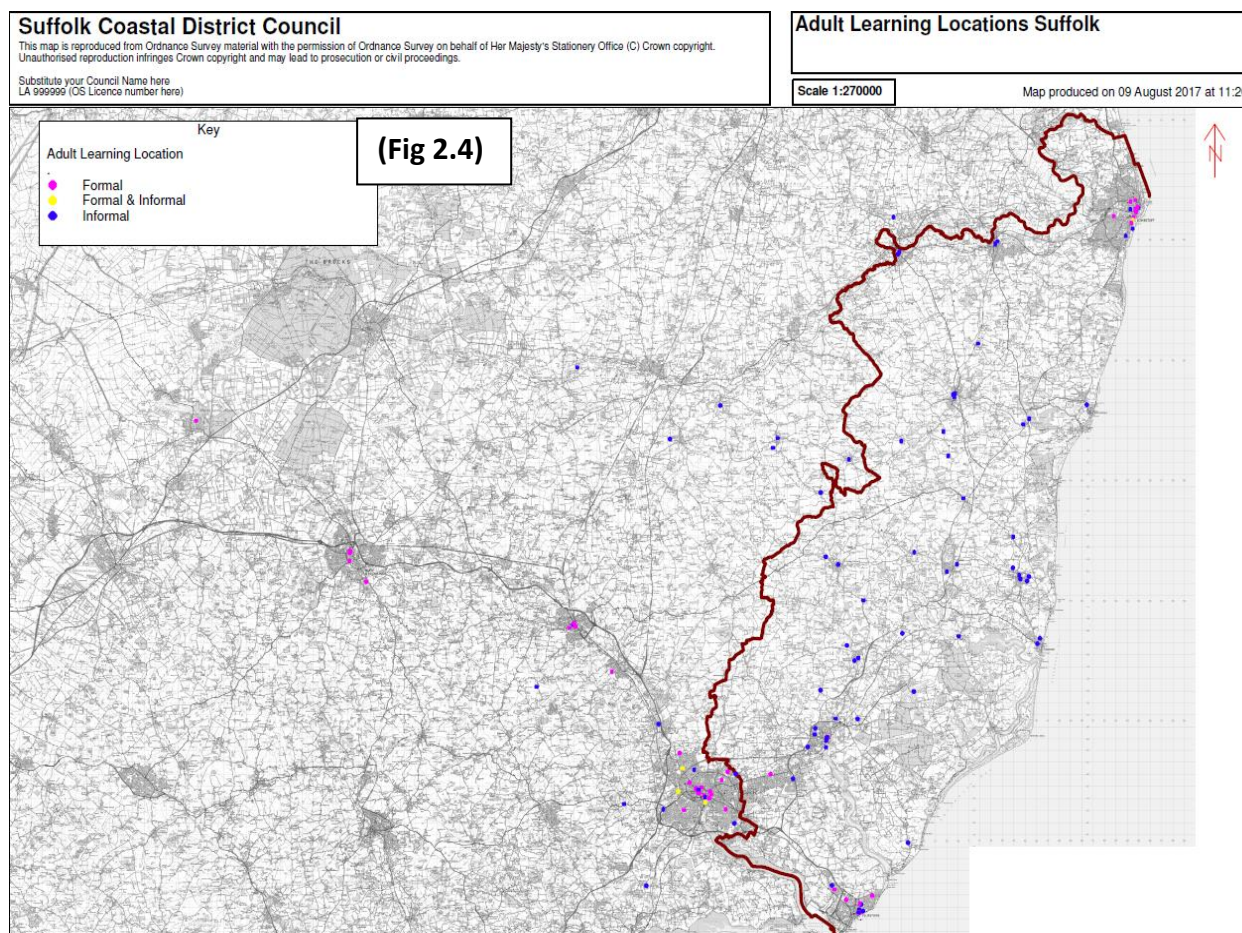


Figure 2.4 reveals that there are adult learning locations all across East Suffolk and in the surrounding area. It shows a wide spread of leisure and community learning locations including in more rural areas of East Suffolk. However, this only informs us where the learning locations are and not whether the courses being delivered at that location correlate to the demand of the learners. Furthermore, formal learning locations only appear in clusters in the larger settlements such as Ipswich, Felixstowe, Lowestoft and Bury.

It can be seen that there are no formal learning locations between Ipswich and Lowestoft meaning that, for those learners who live in more rural areas, it is imperative to have access to good transport in order to be able to attend these formal learning courses. This is a challenge facing East Suffolk as some learners may be unable to drive themselves and reliable public transport in the area is lacking. This may lead to some learners being unable to attend these courses due to their geographical isolation.

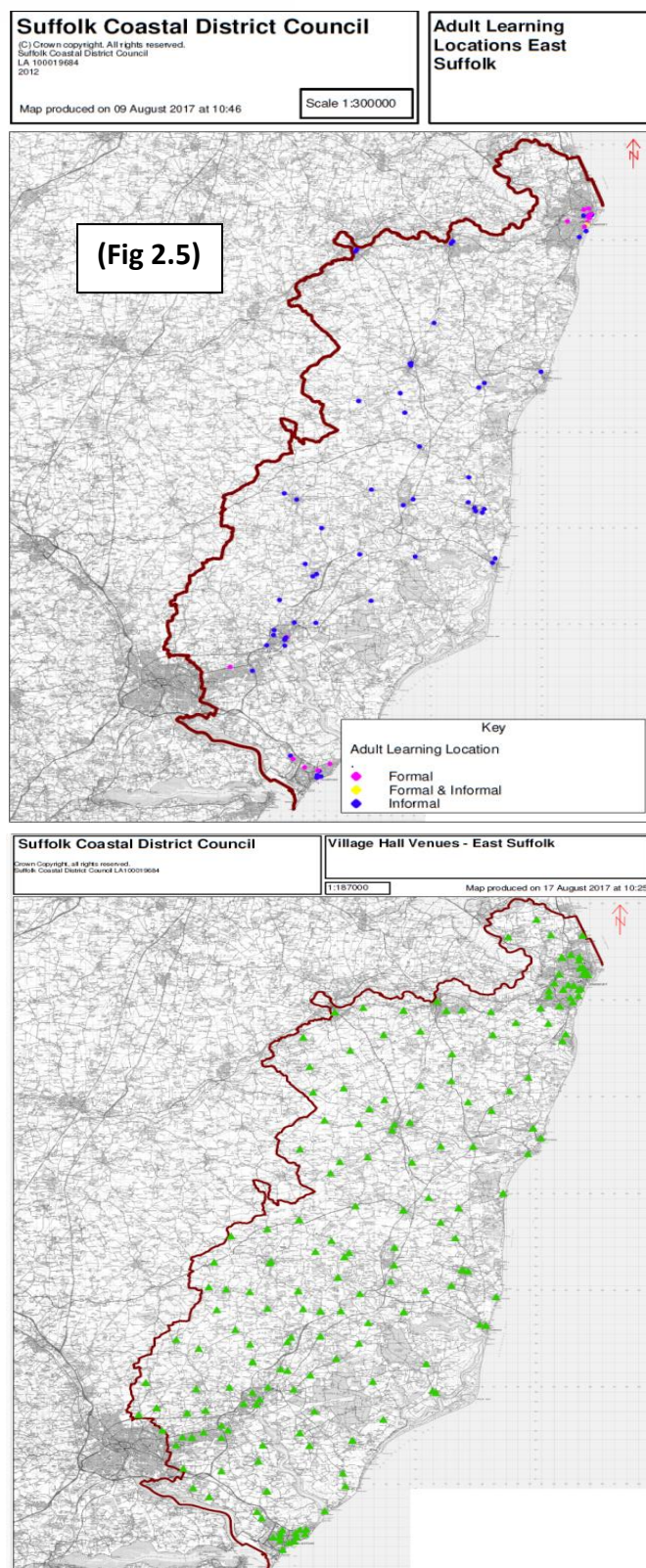


Figure 2.5 looks more closely at the locations within the East Suffolk boundary:

A significant amount of the formal learning offered in the area occurs in Ipswich and when this is discounted and only those learning locations that lie within the East Suffolk boundary are included a lack of formal learning is highlighted. This may be due to a perceived lack of suitable locations to deliver learning in more rural areas. However, Figure 2.6 shows the locations of all polling stations and community halls in East Suffolk and it can be seen that there are a significant numbers of potential learning locations across the region.

These potential learning locations would have to be investigated further to understand which locations have the facilities required to host formal learning courses.

4. Analysis of Survey

A survey was undertaken to understand the needs of the residents of East Suffolk for Adult Learning provision. This was conducted by an online survey and paper based forms distributed through local libraries.

The responses are detailed below:

1. What is your age?

Age	No. of responses	%
19-29	9	10
30-39	10	11
40-49	20	22
50-59	31	35
60-69	13	15
70-79	4	5
79+	2	2
Total	89	100

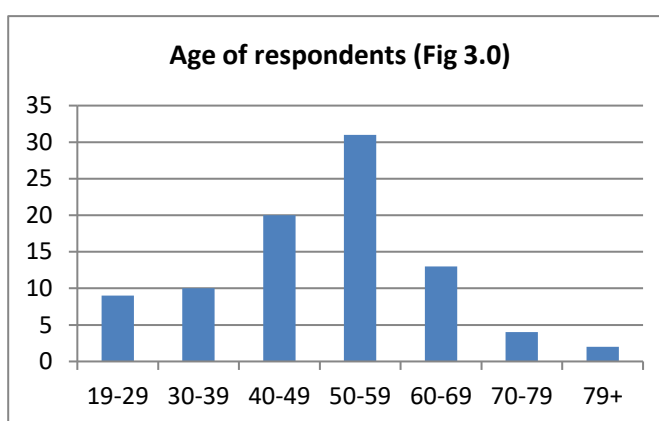
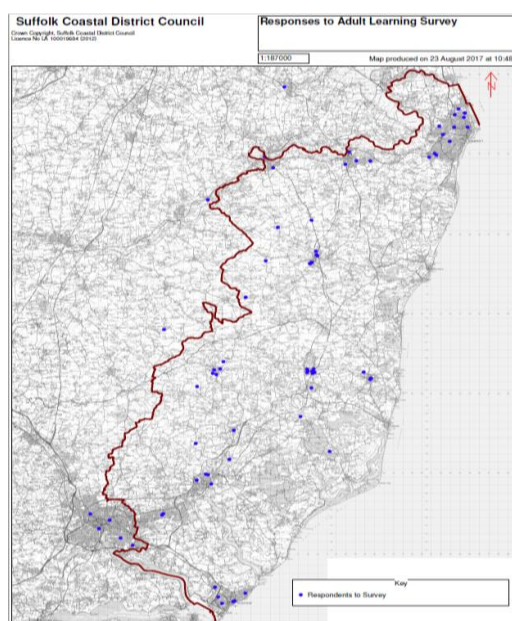


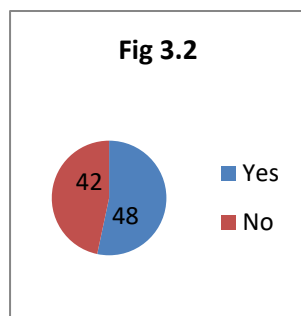
Figure 3.0 shows that the majority of survey respondents were aged between 40 and 59. There were a small number of younger respondents between the ages of 19 and 39, and only 6 respondents over the age of 70.



2. What is your postcode?

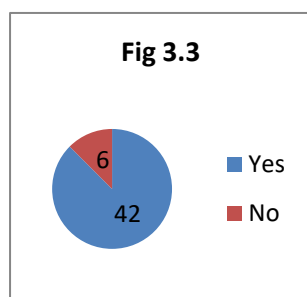
Figure 3.1 shows that most survey respondents live within the East Suffolk boundary and a number are from the more rural areas of East Suffolk.

3. Have you previously participated in adult learning in your local area?



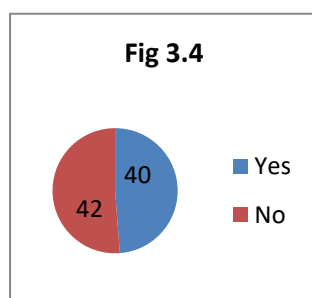
A marginal majority of people have accessed adult learning before in their local area covering a wide range of formal and leisure and community courses in subjects including English, Maths, I.T, Languages, Arts and Crafts and many more. However, a significant proportion of respondents had never accessed any form of adult learning before.

4. Were you satisfied with your last learning course?



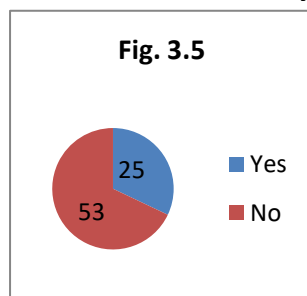
Of those people who had accessed adult learning in the area, there was an 87% satisfaction rate. Respondents put this down to good quality tutoring, suitable learning locations and interesting content.

5. Are you planning to attend any future learning?



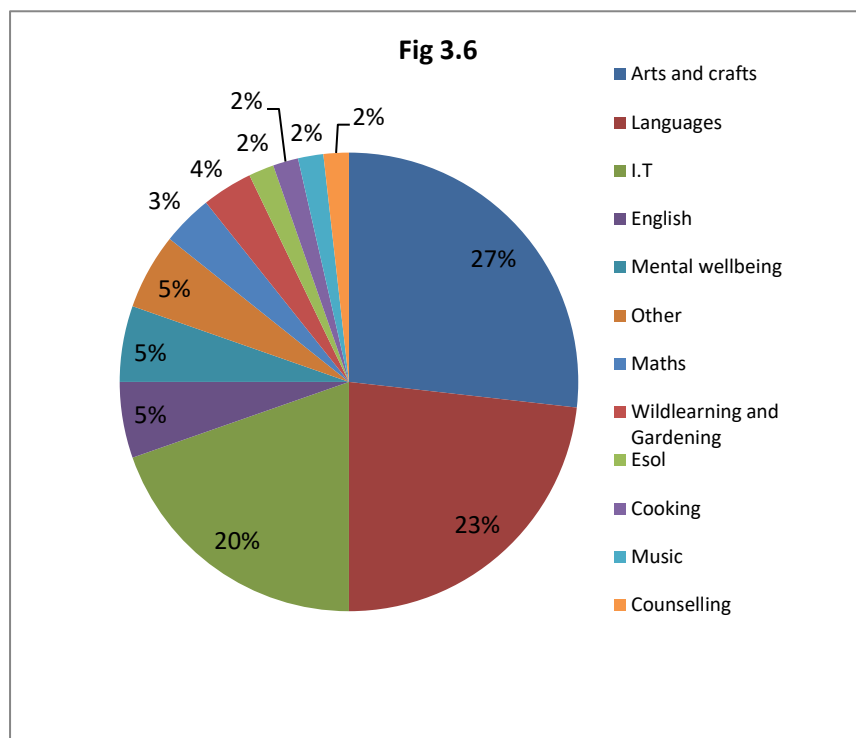
A slim majority of respondents were planning to access future adult learning opportunities in their local area, however comments made in response to this question highlighted that there was a lack of knowledge as to what adult learning opportunities were available. A number of people stated that they did not know what learning was on offer or left the question blank.

6. Are there currently sufficient adult learning opportunities in your area?



Over two thirds of respondents believe that adult learning opportunities in the area are not sufficient. This is very concerning, however the lack of access to information about adult learning, as highlighted in the previous question, may contribute to this result.

7. What courses would you like to see available in the future?



The supply of adult learning courses can be seen earlier in this report via Figures 2.2 (Formal courses) and 2.3 (Leisure and community courses). The top five most requested courses were courses in the areas of Arts and Crafts, Languages, I.T, English and Mental Wellbeing. Arts and Crafts and Languages are the two most available course areas when it comes to leisure and community

learning; this again suggests that a lack of access to information on available courses is a major issue as respondents are requesting courses that are already in high supply.

Furthermore, courses in I.T was the third most requested course area while the supply of I.T courses is relatively high, being the second and fourth most offered course area in formal and leisure and community learning respectively. Therefore, the data appears to show that the course areas currently being offered correlate with the learners' demand for courses.

8. Which factors are important to you when accessing adult learning? (1=Not important, 5=important)

The table shows each factor's average score in descending order (most important to least):

	1	2	3	4	5
Location	5	3	7	21	50
Transport	29	13	12	11	19
Cost of training	3	7	18	19	39
Someone to go with	45	12	15	9	5
Time	5	6	16	16	42
Accessibility	25	11	14	10	24
Language	32	5	22	8	17
Childcare	62	4	6	4	9
Accessible Information	24	8	16	14	22
Suitability	2	2	12	21	42

- 1) Location (4.3)
- 2) Suitability (4.3)
- 3) Time (4.0)
- 4) Cost of training (3.9)
- 5) Accessible information (3.0)
- 6) Accessibility (3.0)
- 7) Transport (2.7)
- 8) Language (2.7)
- 9) Someone to go with (2.0)
- 10) Childcare (1.8)

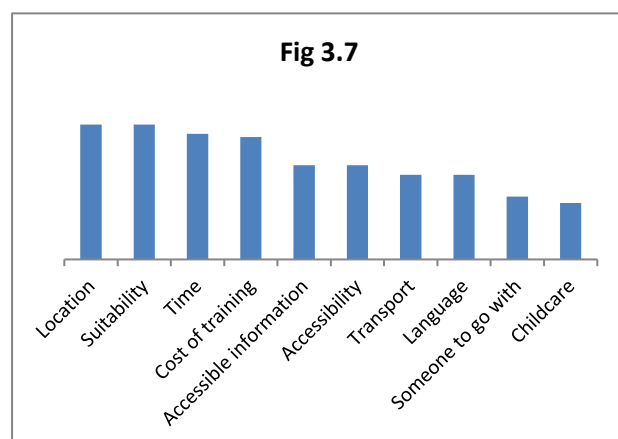
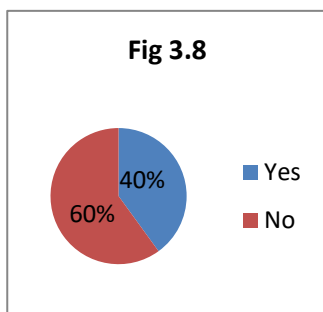


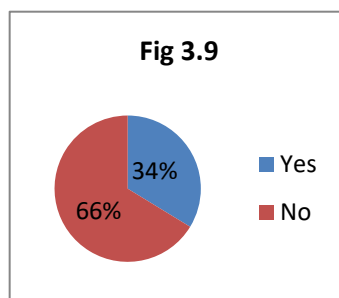
Figure 3.7 shows that location is the most important factor to learners when accessing adult learning and highlights the importance of improving adult learning opportunities in rural areas. Time is also a major factor for learners and it became clear through comments from respondents that there is a high demand for courses held outside working hours, such as evening courses, so that those learners who work full time can attend. Cost,

accessible information and transport were all seen as factors of mid-range importance while having someone to go with and childcare were less important to learners. Childcare scored very low, but this may be because the 73% of respondents who gave it a score of 1 do not have a child.

9. Have you participated in any online learning?



10. Are you planning to take part in any future online learning?



Question 9 and 10 both concern online learning and the results show most respondents have not accessed any form of online learning in the past, nor do they plan to. Online learning could become very important as learners can gain access to learning from anywhere that has a computer and internet connection thereby eliminating location as a barrier to learning. However, this may be more difficult for older learners who may not have the necessary computer skills to access online learning.

5 Limitations

There were a number of limitations when conducting this investigation into adult learning:

- Due to the limited timescale of the project, it is likely that not all adult learning on offer in East Suffolk was recorded.
- Data from WEA, one of the region's largest providers of formal adult learning, proved to be unobtainable.
- Other training providers who provided some data were reluctant to share more sensitive data such as learner home postcodes.
- Due to the vagueness of the term 'adult learning' it was difficult to decide where to draw the line regarding which courses to include and which courses not to include in the investigation.
- A small number of survey respondents skipped questions because they did not have the relevant knowledge to answer them.

- The survey was self-selecting therefore it may be the case that only those with a previous interest in adult learning completed it.
- Two thirds of the surveys were completed online and therefore some of those learners who do not have access to the internet may have been overlooked.

6 Conclusion

There is currently a satisfactory spread of leisure and community learning in both types of courses and location, however funding is an issue for leisure training providers and many are unsure of survival. Furthermore, during this investigation it became clear that there is a lack of formal learning in the more rural areas of East Suffolk with formal learning only occurring in larger towns. The fact that location is the most important factor when accessing adult learning highlights this.

This report found that the current learning on offer in East Suffolk is of good quality and learners were mostly satisfied with the courses they had previously completed in the area, however, there is an obvious lack of information provided to East Suffolk residents as to what adult learning opportunities are available as residents clearly do not know what is on offer despite being willing to access adult learning. This is supported by the fact that the majority of survey respondents did not think there was currently sufficient adult learning provision despite their course requests aligning with what is already on offer.

Location, time and cost were very important factors when accessing learning opportunities as learners want affordable classes at a location and time that is suitable for them. Lastly, it was found that online learning is not widely used in East Suffolk despite the potential for it to eliminate some of the existing barriers to accessing adult learning.

7 Recommendations

- Support leisure learning providers to access funding.
- Review of the geographical spread of formal learning
- Accessible information on all adult learning in the area that functions as a 'one-stop shop' for learning opportunities. Currently, InfoLink is recommended as the source of information and is useful when searching for something already known of but it is a challenge when trying to browse all available opportunities
- Promotion of online learning as a useful tool to access relevant adult learning opportunities throughout East Suffolk.

- Potential creation of an Adult Learning network in East Suffolk which would support training providers to effectively communicate with one another to bridge the gaps in provision and avoid duplication. An additional benefit to such a network could be providers working together to apply for funding.