

MAYOR OF LONDON

ADMINISTRATION OF THE LONDON LEARNER SURVEY – LESSONS LEARNED

Since August 2021, at least 120 providers have been administering the London Learner Survey (the survey). These providers include large FE Colleges, London Boroughs, Institutes of Adult Learning and Independent Training Providers. These constitute of providers who receive a regular grant from the GLA as well as organisations who have successfully bid for funding on a competitive basis. Many of these providers work with learners with specialist needs, some deliver very short courses, and increasingly, learning is taking place online or through blended approaches. These are just some of the reasons why administering the survey can be challenging for providers.

It has been clear that some providers have struggled more than others to encourage learners to complete the survey. As a result, there have been a number of webinars and conversations to explore the reasons behind it. This has highlighted various challenges and areas where the survey has been improved over time such as translating the survey into additional languages and implementing approaches to supporting learners with additional needs. Providers and the GLA have worked together to find solutions and build on lessons learnt about what works well in administering the survey.

We recognise that there are always likely to be challenges in administering the survey to large cohorts of learners spread across several campuses and monitoring of those who have not completed the survey has proven difficult. Some providers, however, have found effective solutions to these challenges which might benefit other organisations even providers often face unique circumstances.

The three sections below namely Working with Learners on the Survey; Championing the Survey and Supporting Learners with Additional Needs, contain the insights of providers across a range of different settings on their experience of embedding the survey into their systems, and the application of various approaches to meet and exceed the minimum participation rate. Hopefully these will prove useful to all providers who are currently experiencing difficulties in administering the survey in attempt to improve participation from learners.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

WORKING WITH LEARNERS ON THE SURVEY

The baseline London Learner Survey must be administered to all groups of AEB-funded learners, including provision delivered by third parties and distance learning. Although we expect providers to allocate time and support for learners to complete the survey, providers have the flexibility to determine the most effective method of administering the survey under these conditions.

From our discussions, it seems that the most effective ways to deliver the survey are:

- Enrolment/ Induction
- Classroom
- Distance Learning
- Subcontracted Provision.

At Enrolment / Induction

Larger providers that set up enrolment centres on site at the start of term, have found that embedding completion of the survey into these procedures has been particularly effective in boosting learner participation. Informing learners about the survey in admission letters has been one way of building awareness of the survey before learners start at the beginning of the academic year. Many providers have also included information about the survey in enrolment packs sent out to learners before their course starts.

As one of the scheduled tasks during enrolment, learners have been shown to a bank of computers after completing their registration. They are then allocated time to complete the survey before moving onto the next stage. It has also helped to have staff support at the enrolment centres to support learners such as learning assistants, volunteers, or tutors. It is clear from feedback that learners are more likely to complete the survey in full if they have someone to assist them.

In the Classroom

Many of the providers who are achieving high levels of participation are administering the survey with learners in classrooms in the early weeks of their course, often with the support of tutors. Whilst this can be difficult to arrange and take up tutor time, feedback has shown that completing the survey in this way was often the only way to ensure that the survey was completed. Tutor support was also invaluable in explaining the purpose of the survey which encourages learners to understand why it is so important for the GLA, Mayor of London. Tutor support in the classroom also helps learners feel safe and confident to take part in the survey.

Some providers have made efforts to extend the learners' first induction session to give them time to complete the survey alongside an introduction to their course. It has helped if this can be located in an IT suite to enable the tutor to support the learners to logon and complete the survey online. Tutors also found that their support was welcomed where learners had access to smart phones, and the institutions Wi-Fi, as they could use their phones to complete it.

Creating a fun atmosphere when completing the survey along with clearly explaining its purpose was the key to participation at some providers (including providing food) and this encouraged learners to speak up when help was needed.

Through Distance learning

Many AEB funded learners are taking their course through Distance learning which has presented a challenge to administering the survey because it has not always been possible to provide the same level of support compared to classroom-based provision. For learners enrolled in distance learning, an effective approach has been to bring all learners together in one short online session. The survey can then be explained by a tutor in detail, and learners given the opportunity to complete the survey, in a similar way to being in a classroom environment.

This worked particularly well where tutors were able to share their screens with learners to take them through the detail of the survey. Using tools within the online classroom environment such as polls, breakout rooms and drawing tools have also been effective in sharing the purpose and importance of completing the survey.

Using breakout rooms for discussion has encouraged learners to share their views and has been great as icebreakers. The use of the poll function has provided learners with an interactive way

of participating, helping them to get to know their peers and gain a better understanding of the survey.

Involving Subcontracted provision

Subcontracting can often add a layer of complexity to administering the survey where the prime provider relies on the subcontracted organisation to ensure that learners complete the survey. To ensure compliance of subcontracted partners with the conditions the AEB Funding Rules, many providers have updated, or were planning to update, their contractual requirements with their subcontractors to include specific terms relating to the survey.

Communicating regularly with subcontractors to check the status of their participation and sharing vital information has been key to securing completions. Where a provider has multiple subcontractors, creating trackers for each partner to track completions based on the number of enrolments has been essential.

CHAMPIONING THE SURVEY

Taking a Whole Institution Approach

One of the most important points of 'what works' has been getting all staff to see the survey as a priority and understanding its importance. Providers often have identified the survey as a strategic priority at the start of the academic year, and participation in the survey has been a regular standing item at leadership meetings. Some providers have appointed an informal Senior Management champion to keep everyone focuses on the importance of the survey.

Equipping tutors with the right information at the beginning of term is important to ensure they are well informed to support learners. Holding a briefing session for tutors on the survey at the beginning of the academic year was particularly effective. Other providers shared that designating a lead tutor to champion the survey and track completions was a good way to manage the survey at a subject area level.

Regularly raising the survey at weekly tutor meetings, where they cascade information around response rates has really helped to keep tutors motivated. One provider mentioned that administration of the survey is something they may include in future tutor appraisals.

The involvement of staff responsible for management information systems (MIS) was also identified as important as these staff were able to provide insight into the number of eligible learning aims which was needed to understand provider participation rates and how they were changing.

It was clear over the course of the year that the providers who were achieving high participation rates in the survey had identified the survey as a strategic priority and that this was visible throughout the organisation from the leadership down to tutors administering the survey in the class along with support from MIS staff with insights around performance.

Linking the survey into the curriculum

Several providers have now started to include the survey in lesson plans so that it can become part of a lesson plan. This approach of embedding the survey into the curriculum has been helpful to support learners in understanding questions in the survey. It also helped to embed this into classroom learning so that tutors can use their scheduled teaching time more effectively.

The typical areas of curriculum the survey has been linked to by providers are the following:

- Keeping Safe Online & Digital skills
- Wellbeing & Self efficacy
- Social Integration
- Student voice, empowerment, and routes for change.

Using videos and resources, provided by IFF, to present to learners has been effective in developing understanding of the survey. Discussing social integration and the importance of student voice has provided an interactive way to encourage learners to take part.

Providers have highlighted that informing learners about how their course was funded and the significance of the survey to shape future policy had helped learners understand why it is so important. Providers reported that learners felt empowered in the knowledge that their participation was helping to shape the future direction of adult education and skills.

Other providers have used this as a way of tackling concerns that learners had about providing personal information online and using the completion of the survey as an exercise has provided an opportunity to learn more about this subject. Some providers had used learners' scepticism about providing personal information through the survey to discuss issues around data protection online including what to look out for and what to consider suspicious. The assurance provided in the survey around how the learners' data will be used and the detail of who was requesting it (GLA / Mayor of London) were shown to be indicators that it was safe to provide personal data in this instance.

Working with students on an individual basis with the aid of teaching or learning support assistants has provided learners with the time and encouragement needed to complete the survey, ensuring that any queries or concerns raised by learners can be answered in a safe environment.

SUPPORTING LEARNERS WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS (ESOL, LLDD and Basic Skills)

Many providers have a large volume of ESOL or Basic Skills (English) learners who often have higher support needs, which can be a challenge to getting them to complete the survey. This includes barriers such as the length of the survey or complexity of the questions and often these learners have lower confidence in their use of English. It has been noted that the survey takes longer for ESOL learners and that they cannot be expected to complete the survey on their own. Sometimes to reach the less-confident learners, providers have to run courses in local community venues without access to WiFi or PCs and this can make these challenges even greater. Without access to the online survey, providers have used paper copies as a last resort.

These are some of the ways in which providers have sought to tackle these challenges and increase the participation rate:

- Recruiting volunteers with language skills to support with induction process and guide learners in completing the survey
- Allocating additional time for ESOL learners to complete the survey has also proved helpful in allowing tutors to support learners on an individual level
- Clustering ESOL learners in groups to overcome language barriers and provide peer support

- Using volunteers from those past learners who completed the survey last year to guide students and provide extra support
- Tutors have also found that breaking down what the survey is, informing learners that it will not be shared with external organisations or government departments, like Home Office/Department for Work and Pensions, has been helpful in allaying concerns that some learners have had regarding immigration status.
- Providers have found the IFF resources (listed below) have been helpful in explaining some of the questions to learners and providing clarity

More than 10% of AEB funded learners are classified as with learning disabilities and/or difficulties (LLDD) and providers have been trying to engage these learners with the survey. There is a very wide variety of literacy and comprehension needs among these learners so that some of them are able to complete the online survey although often with additional staff support. To make it easier for LLDD learners to access the survey in 2022, the GLA introduced a paper-based Easy Read version of the survey which incorporated more pictorial illustrations. However, these have not been available in enough quantity for some providers and the use of paper-based versions of the survey is very expensive. As a result, it is likely that an online version of the survey intended to make the survey easier to complete online for LLDD learners will be introduced.

IFF RESOURCES

There are several valuable resources available on request from IFF liaison staff which some providers have found to be helpful. These include:

- **Information sheet** is for learners and includes a **personalised QR code** unique to your institution which can be handed out to students
- An **email text** drafted by IFF which can be adapted for SMS
- A **FAQ document** for tutors which explains what the survey is about and includes guidance on how to answer potential questions that tutors may receive from learners.
- An [animated video](#) which explains what the survey is student friendly terms and answers some frequently asked questions.
- **Posters** which can be displayed in classrooms which includes basic information and the **personalised QR Code** for your institution

OTHER FORMATS AND LANGUAGES

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