



## Ideas for taster courses and events during the Adult Learners' Week Festival of Learning May and June 2015

Below are loads of ideas for your events, based on what has happened across the South-East region in recent years. Have a read through and let them inspire you!

### Open day events

The most successful open days provide information and advice from more than one organisation, to attract in more people - try mixing up learning providers, voluntary & community groups (including CVS), National Careers Service, emergency services, the armed forces, health organisations etc, or linking your activity into an existing community fair. This can turn an event into a "learning festival" or "community fun day". Remember to have something for children to do if your event is at the weekend. Previous offers have included a magician, circus skills, community singing, and stories / rhymes for under-5s.

Information (IAG) events work best when combined with some free tasters of learning, demonstrations, exhibitions of learner work, entertainment or other activity that attracts people in (e.g. book or plant sales). They also work well linked to competitions and prizes, or with awards ceremonies for learners and teachers (use local celebrities or politicians to give out prizes and certificates), and free food (use catering learners). Having tutors or existing learners there can help to provide "what's it really like" information.

Why not try some of the following elements to add to your event:

- Free beauty treatments provided by learners
- Activities such as games, grow your own vegetables, Bollywood dancing,
- Cultural diversity activities such as music, costumes, performances, food and crafts.
- Open up some classes to allow adults to pop in and see what is going on (this could go on all week).
- Remember to look at other venues, such as high streets, big local employers, rail stations etc. Pop Up sessions in different venues allow people to try things out before they enrol. You can do this with specific subjects, areas of learning, or have a "lucky dip" where you can turn up and do whatever is on.

### Learning for Work

These tasters can take place in the workplace, or at other venues, and can include preparation for work, or development while at work. Also check out **Learning at Work Week** resources for workplace learning at <http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/cfl/workplacelearning/lawday/overview/index.asp>

ICT-based learning works well in the workplace as it can be done at any time, but skills sharing events and short tasters in lunch hours are also a winner. Previous examples have included:

- Invite staff to run short tasters for their colleagues based on what their hobbies are. This works in a number of ways - it is free to offer (or just the cost of a few refreshments), it values the skills that your staff have, and it also help build new relationships within the workplace.
- Try some work-related tasters, for example sessions on apprenticeships, management, first aid, Functional Skills, food hygiene and ICT skills.
- Run personal development workshops such as presentation skills, time management, learning to learn, speed networking, team building, confidence-building, public speaking and managing stress.
- Remember that learning can be purely fun, so try sessions on languages, flower arranging, dance, singing and any of the other ideas in this handout. Tasters don't have to be long sessions.

**Other types of taster either for a workforce or for those looking for work could include:**

- Specific sessions around what it's like to study at the organisation, what qualifications are offered, what's involved, making the right careers choice, finding the right course and funding learning. Sessions on overseas qualifications and opportunities for mature learners can also work well.
- Provide focussed advice with information on routes into specific industries such as beauty, retail, care, business studies, construction skills, customer service, hospitality, teaching and accountancy.
- Target specific work-related skills such as job search workshops, CV writing, job search (including online), applications and interview skills, formal letters, coping with redundancy or restructuring, and a range of skills around seeing change positively and planning for the future.
- Business start-up skills are often popular, along with volunteering as a route into employment.
- If you use volunteers, why not hold some sessions on volunteering, including what it involves and how to use it for personal and professional development.

## **ICT**

Basic ICT skills are still popular, including getting online and learning how to use a computer (mouse skills, Microsoft Office etc). Many providers find it more useful though to look at using IT and the internet for specific purposes such as job-search, online shopping, Ebay, Skype, blogging, using Wordpress, accessing government websites, and social media such as Twitter, Linked In, Facebook and You Tube.

Other tasters that have been offered in the past include being safe online, web design, help for those applying for and using the new Universal Benefits, using IT to research family history, preparing for the driving test or citizenship exam, or improving typing skills. Work with Local Authorities or Housing Associations that make use of IT to run practical sessions for tenants and other users on such things as managing tenancy agreements online, reporting problems and repairs and giving service feedback.

Using IT to learn other things can also work, especially in libraries or at work - there are lots of sites offering free online learning, basic skills, languages etc. See <http://seedbedconsulting.co.uk/index.php/adult-learners-week.html> for examples of free resources. Additionally think about the uses of IT, such as drawing with an ipad, recording and sharing digital stories and images, creating animation with Adobe Flash, and using tablets to explore hobbies, create art, play games and use communication aids like Makaton's MyChoicePad.

Remember that many users, especially younger adults, need more advanced tasters to get them interested. Previous offering have included how to speed up a laptop and keep it healthy, Computer Numerical Control (CNC) and Computer Aided Design (CAD) tasters.

## **Photography and Music**

These tasters work well as classroom or outdoor practical sessions, and can include general introductions to digital photography and cameras, or targeting specific themes such as street photography, composition, lighting or indoor photography. Tasters in digital camera software are popular, with uploading, editing, printing and sharing photos using free software, transferring from phones, re-sizing, using paint.net (editing), Pizap (to create collages) and Photoshop Elements. Also look at using camera phones.

Music is an enjoyable taster to offer for either adults or families. Try various types of singing for fun or more specific offerings such as jazz singing, gospel and pop. Using musical instruments can also be popular, such as having a go at guitar, piano, drums and recorder, or why not teach basic music reading skills?

Music can also work really well as a background to other tasters or events, especially if you are having a "festival of learning" with lots of things going on at the same time (such as several drop in tasters in one hall or space). Use existing learners to plan and perform where possible - even if you don't run music classes, you will probably have learners with musical skills who may like to exhibit what they can do.

## **Languages**

Spanish and French are the most frequently run language tasters, but people are interested in the full range. Multiple language tasters work well, forming a "festival of languages" where people can have a go at more than one language or level (i.e. not just for beginners). Try languages for your holiday, for your overseas property, numbers, food and drink, or special sessions such as languages with national food, songs or culture. Existing/non-beginner learners also often like sessions in grammar, spelling or pronunciation.

ESOL tasters can help get in new learners, as do BSL and lip reading sessions. ESOL learners also like tasters in Citizenship, or sessions around communicating with schools or doctors. Conversation classes for more advanced learners both in foreign languages and ESOL can also attract new learners.

## **Health, wellbeing and physical activity**

This area of learning is great for working in partnership with local health services, supermarkets, sports clubs etc. In the past, some providers have run healthy eating tasters/demonstrations in supermarket premises, using their products and accessing local shoppers. This is also a good opportunity to hand out further information, and build a partnership with local retailers.

Healthy cooking has grown in popularity over the past few years, and previous offers have included making healthy snacks, healthy cooking with ESOL, smoothie making and healthy cooking on a budget. More sugary offerings are also popular, such as cake decorating, sugarcraft and baking. Various types of international cooking attract in new learners (and can give an opportunity for cross-linking with ESOL classes, or with sharing food from different cultures as part of a cultural diversity event), and they can also involve Fairtrade. Links to popular TV programmes can act as a good "pull".

Cookery is also a great family learning opportunity, and previous tasters have included general family cooking, dads and sons, cooking for babies, healthy sandwich fillings and packed lunches, cakes and sweets.

Offering short introductions to First Aid (including specific sessions for babies and young children) can help make new partnerships with health organisations (such as Red Cross and NHS Trusts), and general healthy living days which include fitness and dance, weight management, healthy eating, stopping smoking, massage and relaxation have been very popular. One organisation even attached a smoothie blender to an exercise bike so participants had to work for their reward!

Adults like practical well-being sessions such as learning simple massage techniques, including hand, head, holistic and general massage. You can also look at relaxation, reflexology, meditation, mindfulness and stress reduction. Tasters of classes such as yoga, pilates and keep fit attract in new "non-academic" learners, and these are also suitable for specific client groups such as ESOL, men-only or the homeless.

Personal beauty is often big draws, especially nail art, manicures, make-up skills, threading, hair styling and skin care. These work well if offered by current learners who give demonstrations and free sessions, either at your own venue or in other places such as shopping centres, community halls and the workplace.

For the more energetic, try out tasters in physical activity such as zumba, dance (e.g. belly dancing, African dance, latin fusion, sequence dancing, salsa and Bollywood), fitness (e.g. cardio tone, legs, bums & tums, boot camp, cycle training, aerobics, gentle movement, chair exercise, sessions specifically for the over 60s), plus interesting new sporty offers (e.g. archery aqua aerobics, rockclimbing, cycling and martial arts).

## **Gardening**

Gardening tasters are quite diverse, and can cover creativity (design, flower arranging, hanging baskets etc), practical aspects (propagating, pruning, compost making, growing flowers etc) or health (growing vegetables, getting outside, looking for wildlife). Tasters can be offered for city audiences (such as window box gardening or growing vegetables in a small space) or in larger outdoor areas.

This area can work well with special groups such as ESOL learners and those with learning difficulties, and it can also link into volunteering programmes. Some organisations also use it as an opportunity to sell plants propagated by learners to raise money for future activities.

## **Arts and Craft**

These are consistently the most popular tasters to run as they tend to be fun and interactive. They are an excellent way of showcasing existing learners' work, and of getting new adults into your buildings for fun and low-anxiety tasters. Once adults are there, you can let them know what else your organisation runs.

**Art:** try tasters or demonstrations in painting or drawing (e.g. cartoons, pencil drawing, botanical drawing, watercolours) or sculpture. Art talks and exhibitions are great to get people through your door, and are useful ways to link with partner organisations such as local galleries, libraries and museums. Other types of art on offer have included Chinese brush painting, drawing caricatures, printing (textiles, screen, mono etc) and calligraphy. Art, craft and photography also offer possibilities for competitions.

**Craft:** previous tasters offered have included:

Card making	Bunting	Pottery and ceramics	Millinery
Origami	Paper patterns	Glass painting	Mosaics
African mask making	Soft furnishing	Making personal books	Lacemaking
Jewellery making	Knitting	Crochet	Quilting
Embroidery	Bag making	Felt making	Beading
Other types of sewing (hand sewing, dressmaking, introductions to machine sewing)			

Craft is also a winner in terms of exhibitions of existing learner work, and previous examples have included silver work and ornate jewellery, quilting, floristry arrangements, photography, wood carvings, greenwood garden sculptures and a range of painting and drawing. Artwork from learners with learning

difficulties and disabilities is also a popular form of exhibition. These exhibitions can take place at your own organisation, or they can tour shopping centres, libraries, community centres or other venues to get maximum publicity. They should always include information on how to enrol on classes.

## **History**

History is often very popular, with illustrated talks, walks and visits to places of interest, sometimes linked into local stories or popular culture e.g. linking into anniversaries or what's on TV or in films (2014 for example could be a good year to do events around World War One or slavery.)

Practical tasters helping adults research their own family history online or use local ward directories and archives to discover the history of their house are also popular. Learning organisations can partner up with libraries and local studies archives to see a range of maps, photos, books and hand written documents.

Linking historical objects to creative writing can work well, and object handling along with talks from curators are popular. This can also suit specific groups such as ESOL and literacy learners, or older adults and residents in particular geographical areas (e.g. intergenerational memory sharing).

## **English and Maths (including creative writing)**

Basic skills are a great way to tempt in new learners, but they work best when they are very specific. Rather than run general sessions, try to look at things that sound either more practical or just fun. Previous tasters that have worked have included making the most of your money, budgeting tools, maths puzzles, maths for garden design, using apostrophes, spelling rules, calculating for cooking or sewing, reading a newspaper etc. One provider used fun films to build critical writing skills.

Remember that brush-up sessions don't have to be just for beginners - a lot of adults have 'O' Levels from many years ago but could do with help in remembering specific skills.

Adult Learners' Week is also a good time to launch a new book club, or run special sessions to attract in new members. Examples include non-fiction groups, ESOL groups, crime and mystery groups, e-book clubs and Quick Reads clubs (for emergent readers <http://www.quickreads.org.uk/>). Some libraries have promoted the use of a "book doctor" to prescribe books for individuals and others have used film or audio to awaken interest in reading books. Story-telling workshops can also encourage literacy and love of books.

Creative writing tasters are always very popular, whether of prose or poetry, and again work well when targeted, such as sessions for lower level learners, writing inspired by objects or photos, playwriting, or poetry (writing, sharing and listening). Libraries can also help organise visits from local authors who can give talks about their craft, recent books they have written, or help run creative writing workshops.

## **Other types of taster**

Some other more eclectic examples of taster sessions that have worked in the past include:

Bicycle maintenance	Deaf awareness	Horse handling and grooming
Film appreciation	Driving theory	Citizenship
Astronomy	Criminology	Traditional boat building
Marine engine maintenance	Egyptology	Stand up comedy
Parapsychology	Wine appreciation	Home energy awareness
Meet the characters in a book (with a local theatre)		

Games such as bridge, chess and scrabble

Learning and voluntary groups have also teamed up with local theatres to offer sessions on costume, wigs, hair and make-up, characterisation, physical storytelling, directing, stagecraft, scenic art, or just plain acting and drama workshop sessions.

### **Promote your event for free**

Once you have your event planned, remember to register it free of charge on the Adult Learners' Week website to benefit from free publicity <http://www.alw.org.uk/events>. You can also search this site for ideas or to find new local partnerships.

In the South-East region (including London and Essex), join the ALW E-Community to keep up to date with what's going on. Simply email your contact details to Amanda at [pavonlopez@msn.com](mailto:pavonlopez@msn.com) and ask to be added to the community to find out about what's happening, free resources, opportunities for partnerships and ways to get involved.

Or why not Tweet using [#ALW15](#) and follow ALW in the SE [@seedbedlearning](#).