

Keep learning with ACL Essex

LIKE pretty much every business in the UK, we've been hard at work adapting the way we do things to keep the wheels turning.

This hasn't been easy, as I'm sure many of you out there will agree, having experienced similar situations. It has, however, renewed a sense of community within our workplace; sleeves have been rolled up and new ways of working adopted, pretty much overnight.

Twice daily meetings were happening with managers as staff and thousands of students moved to an online way of working. The safety of everyone was paramount, whilst ensuring that where possible learning wasn't interrupted.

We've achieved so much since we closed our doors to classroom and workplace learning on April 28. After keeping everyone safe, our focus was keeping everyone learning. Changes that ordinarily would have taken months to plan and implement happened within days. Where possible everything was moved to online delivery, although unfortunately we did have to cancel several courses that didn't translate so easily to digital (for the moment). Impressively, all our apprentices have continued to work on their programmes remotely supported by their

tutors. We've even had new apprentices starting their programme.

Confidence with new technologies has grown significantly and seeing both colleagues and customers, (as well as friends and families for that matter), through a computer screen or tablet is almost starting to feel like the 'norm'.

We've also developed new programmes to support people facing all manner of challenges. There are short courses designed to support families, six-week long mental health and wellbeing online workshops to support people at home, alongside creative subjects to simply brighten everyone's day. We've set up a weekly book club, a photography scavenger hunt and a creative writing competition, to name but a few. The #KeepLearning activities and ACL Shorts are free to participants – check out our website www.aclessex.com and ACL Essex Facebook page for all the latest info.

There are new online and remote level two accredited courses that will support those at risk of redundancy, or who have been furloughed, to gain qualifications that could support new job opportunities. Our 'Preparing to Work in the Adult Care Sector' certificate is proving popular and is fully subsidised by ACL Essex. Bursaries could also be available for some learners



Amanda Rawlins, Commercial Manager at ACL (Adult Community Learning) Essex, explains how adaptability has kept the learning show very much on the road.

to pay for books.

We're still recruiting for our September courses which include GCSEs in Maths, English, Biology, Chemistry and Computer Science; Access to Higher Education in Social Science and Science; Accounting; Counselling; Beauty and Hairdressing and many more. Advanced Learning Loans could be available to support any study at level 3 or above.

Details of everything we have available is on the www.aclessex.com website.

We don't yet know when we'll be opening our physical doors to learners, but for the time being the virtual door is wide open to help you #KeepLearning. We hope to see you soon!



Survival strategies and new risk considerations are key for Essex businesses, explains Matthew Collins, Managing Director of Chelmsford-based insurance broker, Ascend Broking.

TIMES are tough for most businesses right now. The University of Essex's Institute for Social and Economic Research has predicted a total loss of 6.5m jobs UK-wide.

1.3m are predicted to be in accommodation and food services. A 47.6% fall in jobs is expected in wholesale, retail and the repair of motor vehicles. Thankfully, job

Beware of new-era risks

creation is anticipated in health and social care.

This picture is far removed from the county's positive news of August 2019, when a £318m regeneration plan for Chelmsford and Colchester was revealed. In Chelmsford, where my office is based, the plan includes the creation of 800 jobs a year, up to 2036. It encompasses a new train station at the Beaulieu Park estate. A new bypass, connecting the A12 at Boreham to the A131 at Great Leighs, is also part of the project.

Both the Chelmsford and Colchester plans focus on reducing commuter transport issues. These Housing Infrastructure BID-funded projects must now be asking whether there will be anything like as many commuters on the roads and trains after lockdown. The AA and Professor Greg Marsden, from Leeds University's Transport Unit, predict a fall in commuting – a trend already evidenced in the pre-coronavirus world, with some employees

working one or two days from home each week.

And therein lies a dilemma. The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) says cyber attacks have soared during lockdown as criminals seek out weaknesses in the security of home-based devices. Cyber insurance has never been as relevant for all and, without it, the costs of reinstating websites, systems and even computer-driven machinery after a cyber attack can be huge. Most attacks also lead to business downtime – the last thing a business needs, if it has managed to get back up and running.

This is not the only risk businesses need to consider and it should be part of a planned survival strategy. It is all very well having business loans and rates payment holidays but what is it actually going to take to get things back on an even keel and survive in 2020 and beyond? My team is already guiding businesses needing to reduce costs, restructure their insurance pro-

tection to suit new circumstances and access premium finance. It is also assisting beleaguered transport managers needing to reduce their fleet exposure.

Our view is that all businesses should be strategising hard to protect cash flow and manage and safeguard their staff, equipment, plant, vehicles and business premises. We have created a free Survival Capability Review service to assist firms and have discovered many key aspects that those businesses who have benefited from our report had not considered.

Our concern is that all the businesses for which survival has involved 'pivoting' – offering new services, developing innovative ways of working and diversifying product ranges – have not considered the new risks involved, in their efforts to keep on trading. If that is the case, it could result in a lesson learned the hard way and deal a further financial body blow to an already fragile business.

For further information and advice, call 01245 449060 or visit www.ascendbroking.co.uk