

# **SELF MANAGED LEARNING HUB**

## **THE LEARNING GROUP**

Students will be placed into small groups with a Learning Group Mentor. The purpose of the group is to create a supportive environment where students can work toward their own personal goals while also helping others achieve theirs.

At the beginning of the term, each group will work through a series of questions together.

These questions are designed to help students explore themselves looking at their past experiences, who they are now, what they enjoy, and the kind of life they hope to lead. This process will help each student identify meaningful goals to work toward. These goals can be short-term or long-term, may relate to education, personal development, careers, or hobbies, whatever is important to the student.

Throughout the term, the group will serve as a source of support. Group members are encouraged to ask thoughtful questions, offer feedback, and share ideas to help one another stay focused and motivated on their individual learning journeys.

## **THE LEARNING AGREEMENT**

Each student will create a Learning Agreement, a document that outlines what they want to learn and how they plan to go about it. This agreement acts as a personal guide, developed by the student through answering five key questions that help define their learning goals. In effect, the Learning Agreement becomes the student's own curriculum. Once finalised, the Learning Agreement is approved by the group. This makes it a shared commitment: the student agrees to work toward their identified goals, and the Learning Group agrees to support the student in achieving them.

## THE DEMOCRATIC LEARNING COMMUNITY

At SML Hub, community building is not an add-on – it is an integral part of Self Managed Learning. We have consistently seen that when young people feel a sense of belonging, and shared responsibility, they grow in ways we could never have planned for on paper. Progress often happens in small, steady steps, but over time we see increases in confidence, resilience, communication skills, and self-belief.

In addition to being part of a Learning Group, every student also belongs to the wider Democratic Learning Community, which includes all participating young people and the adults who support them. The whole community meets together at the beginning and end of each day. Early in the term, these meetings focus on getting to know one another and agreeing shared needs, such as establishing ground rules for how we work together respectfully in a shared space.

As the programme develops, students are given meaningful opportunities to take part in real decision-making. This may include contributing to decisions about how a shared budget is used, helping shape activities, or addressing challenges through a Problem Solving Committee. Young people are supported to have a voice, listen to others, and understand how individual choices affect the wider group.

Through this process, students learn that community is something you actively take part in and care for. Over time, many young people who engage with this approach grow in confidence, develop resilience, and gain a deeper understanding of themselves and others – skills that extend far beyond their time at the Hub.

## **STAFF AT THE HUB**

At SML Hub, our team consists of three Learning Group Mentors (LGMs) - Jane, Doug, and Suzanne, and two operational leads, Mia and Jill, who work together to support a vibrant and growing community of young people.

Our Mentors work closely with the young people day to day, while, as operational leads, we oversee the running of the Hub, including day-to-day operations and wider administrative responsibilities. We occasionally bring in additional staff to provide extra support when needed and regularly draw on external expertise and local resources.

When students show interest in particular subjects or learning goals, we invite subject specialists to join the community and support their learning. In the past, this has included visits to a local bakery, a college, and a university, as well as sessions with visiting professionals such as a music teacher, a stock trader, a mechanic, a DJ and music producer, a Twitch streamer, a photographer, a professional footballer, and a fashion designer. We are a resourceful team who work hard to create meaningful opportunities shaped by the interests and learning goals of our students.

## **THE SITE**

In September, we moved to our new base in Waterloo, which has been transformative for the Hub. We are now minutes from the library and surrounded by a vibrant and diverse community of shops and businesses. Alongside building our own community, we actively support students to connect with the wider local area and explore where they fit within it.

Our current site is a tennis club, where we have access to the courts and, in time, a forested area. While the forested space is not yet fully suitable for use and requires clearing, it is something we are actively working towards developing as part of our longer-term plans.

## **STUDENT COMMITMENTS**

Upon joining SML Hub Liverpool, students are expected to commit to three non-negotiables: attending their Learning Group, creating a Learning Agreement, and attend daily Community

Meetings. These commitments form the foundation of being part of the hub community. Students may be required to take on roles as community members within the Problem-Solving Committee, Budget Committee, or other community initiatives. However, on a day-to-day basis, how each student chooses to use their time is entirely up to them, as they are responsible for managing their own learning journey. As adults, our role is to support and facilitate this process by creating an environment where students feel empowered to take ownership of their learning. This shift in responsibility can take time. Many students are not used to having this level of autonomy, and it may take a while for them to fully settle into this culture. Self Managed Learning can be a significant departure from their previous educational experiences, and as a relatively new setting, the culture of the hub is still evolving. We recognise that it will take time for both students and the wider community to fully settle into this way of working. With each session, however, students are beginning to realise that they have the power to shape the direction of SML Hub Liverpool, and that is where meaningful learning begins.

## **THE LEARNING GROUP MENTORS (LGM's)**

The role of a Learning Group Mentor (LGM) is to keep the group focused on learning; they help maintain the structure of the group and ensure that each student has dedicated time to focus on their individual goals. Peer support and constructive challenge are central to the group process. This requires students to actively listen to, understand, and support one another. The Mentor plays a key role in facilitating this, helping students to support each other through thoughtful questioning, offering perspectives to consider, and guiding students as they plan their next steps. We're fortunate to have 3 fantastic Learning Group Mentors working with our young people, each bringing unique skills and areas of expertise. While students work with their LGM within their Learning Group, they are also encouraged to connect with any of the Mentors on site whenever they feel it would be helpful.

## THE VALUE LIES IN THE PROCESS

We want to be clear that Self Managed Learning is a process. You may not always see immediate or visible progress towards academic or personal goals, and that is okay. This does not mean learning is not taking place. Much of the value of Self Managed Learning lies beneath the surface and unfolds over time rather than through instant, measurable outcomes.

As students settle into the community, they begin to develop a deeper understanding of themselves and their place within it. The questions explored through the SML process encourage reflection, self-awareness, and responsibility. Young people are given genuine choice and ownership over their learning environment, which supports the development of confidence, independence, and resilience. These internal shifts are not always visible from the outside but are an essential part of becoming a Self Managed Learner.

It is also important to clarify that SML Hub Liverpool is not a school and not a replacement for home education. It is an educational approach designed to complement home learning by providing a supportive community where young people can pursue their interests, practise self management, and develop lifelong learning skills. Students may choose to work directly on their Learning Agreement goals while at the Hub, or they may engage in other activities, as long as these do not interfere with the learning of others. Ultimately, how each student uses their time at the Hub is their choice. Goals may evolve, be reassessed, or change over time, and this is a valid and meaningful part of the learning journey.

SML Hub is not a quick fix. Some families arrive with previous experiences of education or home education, and these experiences can understandably shape expectations or perceptions. SML Hub is not like anything else currently available locally. At times, engaging with this approach can feel uncomfortable, particularly as families and young people adjust to a different way of learning and being in community. Young people may encounter challenge, disagreement, or emotional difficulty as they learn to navigate relationships, responsibility, and autonomy within a community. This discomfort is not a sign that the model is failing; it is often where the most meaningful learning occurs. Supporting young people to work through challenge, rather than stepping away from it, requires patience and trust from families, but we have consistently seen that when students are able to stay with the process, growth and learning follow.

## **CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

At SML Hub, conflict is approached as a shared responsibility and a learning opportunity. Young people are encouraged to address issues directly and respectfully with one another as they arise, rather than relying on adults to intervene immediately. Where support is needed, a mentor may facilitate a restorative conversation to help those involved understand each other's perspectives and reflect on the impact of their actions.

If an issue affects the wider community or cannot be resolved informally, it may be brought to the Community Meeting or referred to a Problem Solving Committee (PSC). Each PSC is formed independently for that specific issue and is made up of one adult and two young people who were not involved in, did not witness, and are not closely connected to those involved. This independence helps ensure fairness and balance in decision-making.

The process is designed to be reflective rather than punitive, with adults supporting rather than directing outcomes. While this approach can take time, emotional effort, and patience from both students and families, it allows young people to practise accountability, understand how their actions affect others, repair relationships, and develop the resilience and communication skills they will need beyond the Hub.

## **PARENT COMMUNITY**

We are fortunate to have a supportive and approachable parent community, some of whom have been on this journey with us from the beginning. Families within the community have faced challenges at different points, either directly or through their children's experiences, and this shared understanding creates a strong and unique network of support.

As the Hub has developed, we have worked through concerns together. Parents have joined the community at different stages and have experienced a wide range of feelings along the way. Our parent community understands what it can feel like to join something new and, at times, outside of your comfort zone. They are an open, non-judgemental group who are as invested in building this community as we are.

We recognise that when joining a new community, people can sometimes feel unsure about reaching out – worrying that a question might seem silly, inconvenient, or not aligned with the

ethos of the group. We want to reassure you that concerns will not be received in that way, either by us or by other parents. We view the wider parent community in much the same way as the Hub itself: as an open space to work through questions, challenges, and concerns together. While we may not always be able to offer immediate solutions or outcomes, we can at least provide understanding and context, which often helps families feel more supported and informed.

We encourage you to reach out at any stage if you feel the need to talk things through. Many families will have had similar experiences and are often happy to offer reassurance, perspective, and support.

Some of our families are also in the process of forming a Friends of SML group, which will support the Hub through fundraising, resourcing, and practical help wherever possible. This additional layer of involvement strengthens the community and allows families to contribute in ways that feel right for them.

## **IS THIS SETTING RIGHT FOR MY CHILD**

The most important requirement is that your child genuinely wants to attend SML Hub, attendance should never be forced. For them to take ownership of their learning, the model works best when they are willing and motivated to participate and engage. We operate as a learning community and cannot take on any young person who is not able to be part of the learning community.

SML has some strict non-negotiable aspects, which may be difficult for some of the students to conform to. Peer support, for example, is an integral aspect of the learning group structure, making it essential to maintain a cohesive bond within the group throughout the process. This dynamic will benefit not only the individual but also contribute to the overall success of the entire cohort. SML Hub is a democratic community where everyone works together to address shared issues. This process requires openness and vulnerability, and sometimes it requires the ability to engage in discussions within the wider community. If your child finds it challenging to take part in group discussions about their learning agreements or to talk about personal or

community issues, and will not participate in such settings, this environment may not be suitable for them.

As a small hub with limited resources, we are not able to accommodate students who may have requirements beyond what the model provides. We are not in a position to provide, for example, therapeutic support where students might need this.

It is essential to understand that we are not attempting to provide an alternative to school or any type of organisation that would replicate existing school-like structures. SML Hub empowers students to take responsibility for developing their community, their learning and this includes being a supportive member of a learning community for the time that they attend.

## **COSTS AND OPERATION**

SML Hub is currently entirely parent-funded. It began as an idea among a group of home-educating parents and was taken forward by Mia and Jill, the operational leads. Initially, the Hub was created to meet the needs of their own children and local community, but over the past year it has grown rapidly. Following the success of the previous terms, and through a dedicated team and the commitment of the young people attending, it has become clear just how powerful this model is. Once we saw the impact, there was no way we could pause or step away from this work.

At the same time, it's important to be open about capacity. The two of us are currently doing the work that would usually be shared across a much larger staff team. Alongside running the Hub, we also work in paid roles outside of SML, home educate our own children, and manage family life. The majority of the work we do for SML Hub is unpaid and voluntary. Because of this, we ask parents to understand that we are not a large organisation with dedicated administrative staff. While we do our best to respond promptly, there may be times when replies take a little longer, particularly during term time when our focus is on supporting the young people on site. There may be situations we have not previously encountered, and we continue to develop and refine our practice as the Hub grows. We appreciate your patience and understanding as we balance these demands and work to meet our responsibilities effectively.

Alongside these roles, we are also parents who pay the same as everyone else for our children to attend, so we fully understand the financial pressures that home education places on families. We are deeply committed to keeping SML Hub as financially accessible as possible, which is why we have absorbed so much of the workload ourselves. However, this level of unpaid work is not sustainable long-term, and we are actively exploring other ways to fund the project so it can continue to grow without placing additional strain on families.

## **TERM FEES - JANUARY - MAY 26**

**Total provision:** 15 weeks, 2 days per week (Tuesdays and Fridays, 9.30am–2.30pm)

**Weekly fee:** £73.33

Fees are paid in five monthly instalments as outlined below, or in advance if preferred.

- **31st December:** £219.99
- **31 January:** £219.99
- **28 February:** £219.99
- **31 March:** £219.99
- **30 April:** £219.99

We operate on the basis of goodwill, giving a significant amount of our time and energy to keep the Hub accessible for families. In return, we ask for the same level of goodwill and commitment from families. If, after reading all of the information, you decide that this setting is right for your child and accept a place, you are committing to that place for the duration of the term.

Because we operate on very small margins, once a place is confirmed we are committed to covering the costs required to run the Hub. In turn, this means families agree to pay the full contracted amount for the term.

This commitment remains in place regardless of attendance, illness, or if your child is offered a school place. By offering a place, we take on personal financial risk, and for this reason fees are not linked to attendance and are non-refundable, as fixed costs are incurred once a place is secured on your behalf.

## TERM DATES

Week 1	Tue 20 Jan	Fri 23 Jan
Week 2	Tue 27 Jan	Fri 30 Jan
Week 3	Tue 3 Feb	Fri 6 Feb
Week 4	Tue 10 Feb	Fri 13 Feb
<b>HALF TERM</b>		
Week 5	Tue 24 Feb	Fri 27 Feb
Week 6	Tue 3 Mar	Fri 6 Mar
Week 7	Tue 10 Mar	Fri 13 Mar
Week 8	Tue 17 Mar	Fri 20 Mar
Week 9	Tue 24 Mar	Fri 27 Mar
<b>EASTER HOLIDAYS</b>		
Week 10	Tue 14 Apr	Fri 17 Apr
Week 11	Tue 21 Apr	Fri 24 Apr
Week 12	Tue 28 Apr	Fri 1 May
Week 13	Tue 5 May	Fri 8 May
Week 14	Tue 12 May	Fri 15 May
Week 15	Tue 19 May	Fri 22 May

## WHAT OUR PARENTS SAY

*SML Hub has been transformational for our 12 year old who prefers to have full autonomy over his learning but also enjoys learning alongside peers. The holistic approach to the SML model has given him a deeper connection with himself and a strong sense of community and belonging with his peers. We feel very fortunate to have found a setting that meets his unique needs as there is nothing else around quite like SML.*

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*I've watched my 12-year-old transform before my eyes. He's grown in confidence, discovered his strengths and abilities, and genuinely loves going to SML. He truly values the sense of community, feels connected, and loves that his voice matters and can make a difference.*

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*This is the best thing we have ever done for our daughter. We've watched her blossom, become more independent and confident. More importantly she's happy and thriving!*

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*SML Hub came to us at a time when we were conscious that our 13 year old required something more befitting of his age and stage of life as he entered adolescence as a home educated young person. SML Hub created a unique learning experience, encompassing the foundation and strength of a democratic community whilst ensuring constant and consistent support for individual development and autonomy. This approach supported our son in feeling confident, seen, heard and respected and in turn, encouraged him to do the same for others.*

*This has led to him blossoming into a valued young person who can work well with others and seek out new opportunities for himself whilst supporting others in theirs. Where once he may have seen barriers & obstacles, he now sees solutions & opportunities. Most significantly, he has learned to work as part of a democratic team to effect change. SML Hub has been a positive, productive and joyful process for our son, we are hugely grateful for all of the efforts and endeavours of Jill, Mia & the team and incredibly proud of all the young people who were part of the pilot. May the SML journey continue to thrive.*

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