



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Adult Learning in Wales

2017

Audience

All bodies concerned with post-16 education and training in Wales.

Overview

This document sets out the Welsh Government's policy for adult learning in Wales.

Action Required

None – for information only.

Further Information

Helen Scaife, Welsh Government, Tŷ'r Afon, Bedwas Road, Bedwas, Caerphilly, CF83 8WT

Tel: 0300 025 3895

e-mail: Post16PlanningandFunding@wales.gsi.gov.uk

Additional copies

This document can be accessed from the Welsh Government's website at www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills

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Ministerial Foreword

Taking Wales forward 2016-2021 set out our vision for a society which is ambitious and learning. Our future prosperity and stability depends on the skills and values of the people of Wales, and we believe that everyone deserves the opportunity to achieve their potential. Also as a society I want us to value learning.

Adult Learning supports the development of skills, improves health and well-being and is a catalyst for social engagement and integration.

Skills are vital to our economy and we want to support adults to gain the skills they need to find employment; or to progress onto further learning. We want to ensure every person in Wales has access to good basic skills to help them to survive and thrive in our communities.

Adult Learning has benefits much broader than skills. We want to encourage all adults to enjoy learning.

The value of Adult Learning lies in its potential to reach individuals 'close to home', particularly those who might not otherwise engage in learning. We will focus our public resources on helping those who are in greatest need of our help; to ensure that everyone can access opportunities to learn and to progress. We believe that this is an important and worthwhile investment in individuals and communities.

Learning is a lifelong activity. We want communities that thrive, not just survive. This policy statement sets out our priorities for Adult Learning and reinforces our commitment to providing learning opportunities to people throughout life. We want to ensure that our society continues to learn, to challenge and to improve.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alun', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Alun Davies
Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language.

Introduction

This policy statement sets out the Welsh Government's priorities for adult learning during this Assembly Term; and explains how it contributes to the ambition outlined in *Taking Wales Forward* which is of a Wales that is prosperous and secure, healthy and active, ambitious and learning, united and connected. Our aim is to support adults to play an active role in the economy and society through enhancing their learning opportunities.

We have faced significant reductions in funding for adult learning over the past few years. Future funding for the sector remains vulnerable to additional cuts. We must be realistic about the funding that will be available to us and make the best use of it. As such it is imperative that we have a policy that clearly states the value and impact of adult learning and which supports a sustainable and equitable future for this vital area of delivery.

In order to get a clearer picture of the issues facing the adult learning sector in Wales, we commissioned two reviews - both of which have informed the development of this policy statement¹.

The review undertaken by ARAD Research highlighted the inequitable and unsustainable nature of the current funding and structure of ACL in Wales, and made a clear case for change. It highlighted the inequalities in the funding and provision available across Wales, and the lack of a coherent and clear strategy from the Welsh Government. The review resulted in six recommendations – all of which will be addressed either as part of this policy statement or as further work is undertaken to improve the funding and delivery structures within the sector.

The Estyn report on *Adult Community Learning in Wales 2015-2016* provided us with a clearer picture of current ACL provision in light of the cuts to funding. As with the ARAD report, Estyn raised some clear concerns about the sustainability of the adult learning sector, the vulnerability of the funding, and the lack of a coherent strategy for improving the employability skills of adults in Wales. Estyn also made a clear case for change within the sector.

This policy statement is a direct response to the recommendations within these reports. It aims to address issues relating to the lack of vision for the sector, and to provide clarity over the support available to adults within Wales. This is the first step. More work will be needed over the coming months to improve the funding and delivery structure in Wales. This work will commence following publication of this policy statement.

Our vision is clear:

A Wales where learning is at the core of all we do; where participation in learning is encouraged and rewarded; and where people have equal opportunities to gain the skills for life and work that they need to prosper.

¹ A Review of Adult Community Learning in Wales – Arad Research – October 2016; and *Adult Community Learning in Wales* – Estyn – November 2016

The benefits of adult learning

Lifelong learning supports the development of skills, improves health and well-being and is a catalyst for social engagement and integration.

Participating in adult learning has a significant impact on individual health and well-being; as well as improving skills.

Helping people to gain the skills they need to enter the workplace is a clear priority for Welsh Government.

23 per cent of the population of Wales continues to live in relative poverty. This is the highest proportion in the UK outside London. Wales also has the highest percentage of children living in poverty - one in three - of any nation in the UK.

Evidence shows that well-paid work is the best route out of poverty; and we aim to provide the support that people need to access work.

But it is not enough to simply help people into work. Latest figures show that 55% of people in poverty live in working households. In addition, according to the Office for National Statistics, more than two-thirds of children in poverty in the UK are in working families. We must ensure that we continue to offer support to those already in work to improve their skills and to prosper.

We will be publishing our Employability Delivery Plan in the autumn which will set out how we will support people to develop the skills and experience they need to gain and maintain sustainable employment.

We will also continue to progress the co-design of the Work and Health Programme for Wales, working in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Jobcentre Plus to ensure that provision is integrated. We will also work with the DWP's Work and Health Unit on trialling new innovative approaches to support people with health conditions back to work and to remain in work.

Whilst adult learning has a clear role to play in supporting our Employability programmes; and the Work and Health Programme, the benefits of engaging in learning are far wider ranging than the development of skills alone.

In *Valuing the Impact of Adult Learning*, Daniel Fujiwara showed the positive effects of adult learning on a number of key areas of life²:

- a greater likelihood of finding a job and/or staying in a job;
- improvements in health;
- better social relationships; and
- a greater likelihood that people volunteer on a regular basis.

²Valuing the Impact of Adult Learning (Daniel Fujiwara) NIACE 2012

Priorities for Wales

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) believe that education is a human right for all throughout life and that access must be matched by quality.

We agree. Everyone deserves the opportunity to reach their potential and education changes lives and drives economic growth. We also believe that learning should be a lifelong practice. We will promote an adult learning sector that supports our adults to continue to learn throughout their lives.

To do this, we will follow some specific principles to guide our delivery:

- **Fair and equitable** – all learners should have equal access to provision and it should be delivered in an environment where they feel safe and secure. We will strive to ensure provision is offered locally and makes the best use of available venues – including schools, community halls and libraries etc.
- **Quality Assured** – Our provision will remain of the highest quality. We want a consistent approach to delivery across Wales, at a standard that is recognised across the sector. We will continue to work with Estyn (Her Majesty's Inspectorate in Wales) to assess the quality of delivery and learner experience.
- **Funded fairly** - We will ensure that our funding is distributed in a clear and consistent manner, and targeted at the learners in greatest need of our support.
- **Local** – we will empower our providers to deliver provision that addresses and targets local needs.

Our focus

Our focus will be on supporting those in greatest need of our help.

We will expect our providers to work together to identify and address the needs of their local communities, whilst avoiding duplication. But in doing so we will expect them to consider and prioritise the following key areas of national importance:

Essential skills

We want to support all adults to improve their Essential Skills so that they are best placed to access work opportunities or progress while in employment.

We will fund the provision of:

- Essential Communication Skills – including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL);
- Essential Application of Number Skills

These courses will be free to all learners up to the level of functionality³.

Digital skills

We live in an increasingly digital society, and it is important that we support people to engage fully with the technology used today.

We will fund the provision of:

- Essential Digital Literacy Skills up to Level 2 – to help learners to become better accustomed to and confident in the use of digital technology and how to use it safely, securely and responsibly.

Employability skills

As well as formal qualifications in numeracy and literacy, evidence shows that employers want staff with good communication, team working and problem solving skills that make them ‘work ready’⁴. We know that earnings are linked to skill levels. On average, the most important factor influencing an individual’s earnings is their level of qualification. To increase prosperity across Wales we need a coherent skills approach.

We will continue to support the delivery Essential Employability Skills up to Level 2 to help people to be ready to enter the workplace – including supporting the delivery of the new Essential Employability Skills qualification.

We will work with the Welsh Government’s Employability Programmes and DWP to ensure our adult learning supports, complements, but does not duplicate our wider employability provision.

Older learners and Social engagement

Learning for older people has a range of benefits.

Our population is increasingly ageing and the retirement age is rising. As people are required to stay in work for longer, it is essential that they be able to continue to improve their skills and employability.

It is predicted that over the next 10 years UK employers will “need to fill an estimated 13.5 million job vacancies...but only 7 million young people will leave school and college over this period. Migration alone will not fill the gap ... employers will have to rely on older workers to fill these vacancies”.⁵

We must also recognise the impact of learning on the wider health and social well-being of older people. As our population ages, dementia is one of the most significant health and social care issues we face. *Together for a Dementia Friendly Wales* sets out the ways in which we intend to address some of the issues raised by dementia in Wales. Research suggests that people who take part in activities that stimulate the brain are less likely to

³ Functionality is the ability to read, write and speak in English or Welsh, and to use mathematics, at a level necessary to function and progress both in work and society. We aim to establish Level 2 Essential Skills as the aspiration for the majority of adults without an appropriate level of qualification – as set out in the Policy Statement on Skills (Welsh Government, 2014),

⁴ *What Employers Want*, National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) 2014

⁵ CIPD (2012) *Managing a Health Ageing Workforce: A National Business Imperative*.

develop dementia, compared with those who do not engage in these activities.⁶

Learning as a form of social engagement and mental stimulation is extremely important for older learners not only to help them to stay active and to stay healthy; but also to help to address loneliness and isolation – which is a clear ambition for the Welsh Government in *Taking Wales Forward*.

We will support the provision of social engagement courses through clubs and self-directed learning groups, enabling people to continue to participate in learning in an informal way whilst having a positive effect on their health and wellbeing.

Engagement Activity and ‘hook’ courses

People return to learning for a number of reasons. Many return in the hope of gaining new skills to help them to find work or stay in employment.

For others, becoming a parent can be the inspiration needed to return to learning. Our *Education begins at Home* campaign states that the home environment is the single biggest factor in a child’s educational attainment⁷. By creating an environment that values education and supports a child’s learning, parents and carers can give their child a significant head start in life. This can only work if the parents and carers themselves have the skills to help their children. It is of paramount importance to us that we support our families to prosper.

Many schools utilise their Pupil Development Grant (PDG) funding to open up their classrooms to parents and carers during or after school hours to encourage them to learn. We will continue to work with schools to engage with Adult Learning providers, and to utilise programmes such as the PDG, to deliver provision that impacts positively on both adults and children.

We will support the provision of softer engagement activity as a means of attracting learners who might otherwise hesitate to get involved.

Welsh Medium Provision

Improving access to Welsh Medium education is a key aim of the Welsh Government. We want to increase the availability of our essential skills and employability courses through the medium of Welsh in line with demand and according to the Welsh Language standards.

We will continue to support the work of the Mentrau Iaith⁸ to encourage learners to engage in activities through the medium of Welsh to improve their language skills.

⁶www.alzheimers.org.uk/info/20010/risk_factors_and_prevention/737/how_to_reduce_your_risk_of_dementia

⁷ <http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/parents/education-begins-at-home/?lang=en>

⁸ The Mentrau Iaith (Language Initiatives) are voluntary community organisations that promote the use of Welsh throughout Wales - www.mentrauiath.org

Funding, co-investment and full cost recovery

We will make the most of the funding available to us by prioritising support for those in greatest need of our help, but there will be a clear steer towards improving access to Essential Communication skills; Essential Application of Number Skills, Digital Literacy and ESOL as a first priority.

For some adults, returning to learning can be a daunting prospect, and they may need to be re-introduced into learning gradually. We will support the provision of softer engagement activity as a means of attracting learners who might otherwise hesitate to get involved.

Providers will be expected to work together to identify and address issues that are most relevant to their local needs; and to manage the funding provided to them to address these needs.

We will continue to support a curriculum of leisure and recreational courses for learners on the understanding that, where possible, learners will be expected to contribute to the cost of their learning themselves through the payment of fees. Providers have already shown their commitment to offering as wide a selection of opportunities for people as possible. We will help providers to ensure that courses continue to be affordable and accessible.

Once demand for the most critical priorities (Essential Skills, ESOL and Digital Literacy) has been met, providers will have the flexibility to utilise any remaining funding to offer concessions to help learners to engage in activity. We will leave it to providers' own discretion to determine the level of support they offer.

Employers too have an important role to play in funding some of this provision. Employers have a duty to provide training which ensures their workforce complies with statutory requirements; or that individuals are required by law to undertake in order to do their job. But we are also encouraging them to ensure they continue to improve the skills of their employees by supporting their learning – either within or away from the workplace.

Progression and outcomes

Learners engaged in the provision we fund will be expected to have very clear planned outcomes for their learning and progress towards employability, further learning, or improved social integration.

Where individuals have been encouraged back into learning through engagement activity, they will be expected to move onto more mainstream provision, to ensure that they do not get caught in a cycle of engagement activity.

Regardless of the type of learning, we will expect providers to work with learners to ensure there are clearly defined outcomes for all learning and that these outcomes are monitored effectively.

Qualifications and accreditation

Where appropriate, providers should encourage learners to progress onto accredited courses, to enable them to achieve the qualifications needed to help them to find work or progress onto further learning.

Accreditation is a useful way of evidencing the skills levels achieved, but we must ensure that people are studying for qualifications that are relevant and useful to their future development. The revised Essential Skills Wales qualifications are designed to assess the skills that learners need for successful learning, employment and life.

Progression is not always about gaining qualifications, and softer outcomes are no less relevant to some individuals. We will continue to support providers to use systems such as RARPA (Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement) and Open Badges⁹ to monitor and evidence informal learning outcomes to ensure the progression of learners is not overlooked if they do not attain a formal qualification.

Our aim is to support individuals to develop their skills and move on – whether that is into work, further learning, enhanced social integration, or improved health and well-being.

Taking Adult Learning forward

In order to ensure the future of adult learning in Wales, we will commit to the following:

The Welsh Government will:

- In consultation with the sector, introduce a new funding and delivery structure to ensure public funding reaches those in greatest need;
- Work collaboratively with the different departments within the Welsh Government to join up policy initiatives relating to employability, health, and communities;
- Work with the Third sector to ensure learners have access to all provision available to them and that there are clear progression routes into mainstream provision where appropriate;
- Work with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Job Centre Plus (JCP) and the new Work and Health Programme provider in Wales to align support and maximise the benefits for learners in Wales to ensure a smooth transition into employment;
- Continue to develop performance measures and benchmarking data to help Adult Learning providers to evaluate learner outcomes;

⁹ Open Badges are digital rewards which can be stored inside a student's 'digital backpack'. The badges can be achieved by completing tasks and goals set by an issuer, such as a learning provider.

- build on RARPA principles to support the measurement of ‘soft’ outcomes for non-accredited learning; and
- Work with Higher Education Institutions, in particular the Open University, to ensure that there are improved progression pathways from adult learning to and through higher education.

Providers will be expected to:

- Ensure funded provision is targeted at those in greatest need with a clear emphasis on addressing Essential Skills, Digital Literacy and ESOL needs;
- Work with the Welsh Government to develop a funding and delivery structure that ensures public funding reaches those in greatest need;
- Work together in formal or informal partnerships (including the Regional Skills Partnerships) to ensure local needs are identified and addressed;
- Continue to share good practice through the Adult Learning Partnership Wales Network to ensure the sector continues to improve and challenge itself;
- Continue to evaluate outcomes using statistical data, RARPA and learner views to ensure that quality of provision and delivery remains high; and
- Work together to eradicate duplication and improve learning opportunities and progression pathways.