



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

**A report on the adult learning in the community provision
of**

**Wrexham and Flintshire Adult Learning in the Community
Partnership**

**The Guildhall
Wrexham
Wrexham
LL11 1AY**

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by

**Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and
Training in Wales**

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Wrexham and Flintshire Adult Learning in the Community Partnership

The North East Wales Adult Community Learning Partnership was established in April 2021. It is a partnership between Flintshire County Council and Wrexham County Borough Council. The partnership employs five lead providers to deliver most of its Welsh Government-funded provision. These are Aura Leisure and Libraries (employability courses in Flintshire), Caia Park Partnership (employability courses in Wrexham), Coleg Cambria (essential skills in Wrexham), Deeside Community Trust (engagement courses in Flintshire) and Groundwork North Wales (essential skills in Flintshire).

In addition to the five lead providers, partnership has a wider partner base with representation from Adult Learning Wales, Coleg Cambria adult skills core provision, the Department for Work and Pensions, Communities for Work, the voluntary sector organisations and other providers for health and well-being support.

Provision for accredited English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses in the area is provided by Coleg Cambria, funded through their further education grant. The partnership provides a small amount of non-accredited ESOL provision to engage new learners.

The Office for National Statistics Annual Population Survey for 2020 reports that Wrexham has a population of approximately 136,000. About 20% of the population is aged 65 and over. Flintshire has a population of approximately 157,000. About 21% of Flintshire's population is aged 65 and over.

In 2021, the rate of employment in Wrexham was 75%, slightly above the Welsh average of 73%. In Flintshire, the employment rate was 78%, also above the Welsh average.

In 2021, in general terms, the working-age population in Flintshire was slightly more highly qualified than in Wrexham although in both areas the proportion of working-age adults with level 3 or 4 qualifications was lower than the Welsh average. Wrexham had a higher proportion of working-age adults without qualifications or with qualifications at level 2 than the Wales average. Flintshire also had a higher proportion of working-age adults without qualifications than the Welsh average, but matched the Welsh average for the proportion of working-age adults with qualifications at level 2.

In 2021, average (median) gross weekly earnings in Wrexham was £564. This was the 8th highest of the 22 Welsh local authorities. In Flintshire, the median gross weekly earnings was £574, the sixth highest of the 22 Welsh local authorities.

The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 2019 shows the proportion of small areas within each local authority that are in the most deprived 20% was 12% for Wrexham (eighth least deprived in Wales) and 11% for Flintshire (sixth least deprived). This indicates that both local authorities had areas of deprivation and disadvantage but had fewer than the majority of local authorities in Wales.

In 2021, the percentage of Welsh speakers aged three or over in Wrexham was 27%. In Flintshire, it was 24%. This compares to 30% nationally.

The Welsh Government has recently reorganised the funding allocations for adult learning in the community partnerships across Wales. In 2021-2022, both Flintshire and Wrexham received significant increases in ALC funding.

During 2021-2022, 2,100 learners enrolled on the partnership's courses.

Summary

The newly established North East Wales Adult Community Learning Partnership is well led and has strong support from both local authorities in delivering provision for adults in the community across Flintshire and Wrexham. Leaders set very high aspirations for the partnership, the providers and for learners. The vision for the partnership is ambitious, and reflects Welsh Government policies for community learning.

The partnership has venues in appropriate locations, including a new, well-equipped multi-purpose centre, Ty Calon, and centres in community venues in rural and urban areas across the two authorities.

There is a good balance and useful range of courses for adults who want to become re-engaged with education, to improve their job prospects, upgrade their English language skills (English for speakers of other languages – ESOL), develop their literacy, numeracy or digital skills or improve their health and well-being. There is also a small but growing family learning provision, where parents and their children play and learn together, for example through learning the heritage skills of wool felting, at the children's schools. The partnership's bilingual and Welsh-medium provision for learners is underdeveloped.

Learners make sound progress in their literacy, numeracy, digital and ESOL sessions. In health and well-being sessions, learners enjoy activities that promote good physical and mental health, make new friends and develop new skills. Through taking part in these courses, many learners experience an increase in their confidence and willingness to go on to more formal learning.

Tutors establish a good rapport with their learners. Most plan well for sessions, and support learners effectively to structure their individual development plans and set learning and personal targets. In many cases, tutors bring experience from other professions, which enhances their teaching. They are understanding and supportive of learners with complicated and vulnerable backgrounds.

The partnership provides useful information to prospective learners through hard copies of prospectuses and bilingual information online on social media platforms, although online access to information for prospective learners who do not use social media is limited.

Tutors and managers review and adjust support for learners with additional learning needs on essential skills and ESOL courses. Tutors in ESOL classes provide sensitive and valuable pastoral support when signposting learners who are refugees to agencies that can assist them.

The partnership has a realistic understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement and has clear quality improvement planning processes. It has identified appropriate areas for improvement including more consistent approaches to quality assuring teaching and learning and developing a data management system to track outcomes and learner progression.

Recommendations

- R1 Increase opportunities for adult learning in the community bilingually and through the medium of Welsh
- R2 Track, monitor and evaluate learners' long-term progress through the partnership's provision
- R3 Develop a partnership approach to self-evaluation and improvement of learning and teaching across all the partnership's provision
- R4 Improve opportunities for learners to receive advice and guidance about joining the partnership's provision

What happens next

The provider will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

Estyn will invite the provider to prepare two case studies on its work in relation to family learning and establishing a new ALC partnership, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main findings

Learning

In literacy and numeracy classes, many learners make sound progress in developing their skills from their starting points. Many learners, particularly those studying in familiar community settings, engage well with their studies. As a result of their formal learning, they become involved in wider community activities, including involving their friends and wider family in learning, engagement or community activities.

The majority of learners have individual learning plans, which identify their overall goals and learning aims. In a few cases, these are used effectively to identify learners' short term learning goals and help learners understand what they need to do to improve. In other cases, learners know what they need to improve through detailed written or verbal feedback. A few learners do not have a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve. A few are not clear about their strengths and weaknesses at the beginning of a programme of study in literacy or numeracy.

The partnership offers both accredited provision and informal engagement courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). In both accredited and informal provision, learners make solid progress in developing their English language skills, and, where appropriate, attain qualifications well. In engagement classes, learners also develop and attain additional useful skills and qualifications, such as the driving licence theory test and digital skills.

In the partnership's varied engagement provision, in addition to developing craft or practical skills, learners enjoy an opportunity to be creative and become aware of new learning opportunities. For example, in a wood craft session, learners combine an opportunity to chat and socialise with developing skills in using hand tools to repair and repurpose pallets and used furniture. They measure, follow plans and drawings and produce work of which they are proud. Learners use IT facilities at the session to research design projects, apply for jobs and manage their finances. In sugar craft, learners make and customise cakes for friends and family. In addition to learning these craft skills, they learn basic business skills and how they can sell the produce to supplement their incomes. In an art class for adults with additional learning needs, learners express themselves through art projects, music and performance and produce work of a high standard.

In family learning sessions, parents and carers study with their children in the school. For example, parents in one school learn wool felting with their children. Along with other skills, the parents learn heritage craft skills and how they might use these to make saleable gifts and craft products. The children have fun with their parents and develop hand-eye co-ordination and fine motor skills. Both parents and children benefit from learning and working together.

On courses with a clear vocational and employability focus such as nail care and beauty therapy, learners develop vocational skills well. They apply nail treatments confidently and competently, and attain qualifications in customer services and reception skills, which help prepare them for self-employment or further study.

However, a few learners on courses across the partnership do not fully understand the range of options for further study available to them.

In many sessions across the partnership, learners make good progress during the session. At present, the partnership's own systems do not record in sufficient detail how learners move between courses and between levels through the partnership over time. As a result, it is not possible to accurately identify, at a partnership level, the long-term progress that learners make.

In a few sessions, learners use or learn Welsh terms or receive some exposure to the Welsh language, for example through everyday conversational use of Welsh or through teachers' assessment comments and praise using Welsh terms. In a few ESOL classes, learners develop an awareness of everyday Welsh terms, such as the days of the week. However, the partnership currently has no provision offered bilingually or through the medium of Welsh. As a result, no learners study or take part in programmes bilingually or through the medium of Welsh and most learners do not develop their Welsh language skills significantly.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

As a result of the impact of the pandemic, the partnership reports higher numbers of learners with anxiety, low confidence, and wellbeing concerns. Many learners across the partnership report that their mental health has improved significantly through their learning and that they have overcome initial anxieties such as attending face-to-face sessions and meeting new people.

In comparison to previous years, learners' rates of attendance are lower due to the ongoing impact of the pandemic, especially for those learners with childcaring responsibilities. The majority of learners inform their tutors in advance if they are unable to attend or if they are to arrive late to class.

Most learners enjoy the social interaction of their learning experiences such as meeting people and making friends after prolonged periods of isolation. Learners from a few courses have arranged their own clubs and groups where they meet outside of their classes to support each other through difficult times in their lives. Learners with additional learning needs (ALN) have used their learning experiences to become more independent and socially confident.

Many learners use their learning experiences to enhance their lives, such as supporting their parenting and caring responsibilities or taking part in volunteering roles in their communities. The majority of learners in ESOL classes use their language skills to communicate with friends and colleagues.

A majority of learners have improved their employment and career prospects as a result of the new skills they have acquired through their learning. For example, learners studying a foundation counselling course use their skills to support their current employment in a mental health charity. Learners studying on the essential teaching assistant course aspire to improve their career progression.

A few learners, from the refugee community benefit from provision to meet their specific needs in helping them to integrate into their communities, for example

through bespoke courses in addition to their ESOL courses, on driving, family support or digital skills.

Most learners demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and nearly all enjoy their courses. They have shown a strong preference for returning to face-to-face learning and most engage enthusiastically in their classes, through contributing to discussions with their peers, answering questions and producing written work. In online sessions, many learners contribute by answering questions and through use of the chat function. In an online Welsh language and culture course, learners engage in lively discussions about Welsh history.

Nearly all learners feel safe, both in face-to-face provision and when participating in online sessions. Nearly all have good, mutually respectful relationships with their tutors. Many learners feel the sessions enable them to share opinions and speak openly and safely about their life experiences.

As a result of listening to learners, the partnership has developed its provision to include first aid courses and family history courses. However, very few learners are aware of the impact their views have in improving their experiences.

Teaching and learning experiences

As part of its formation, the partnership has carried out a useful review of adult learning in the community provision across its area. The review has helped the partnership to understand better where potential learners are located and the types of courses that stimulate learners' interest and meet their needs.

The partnership is proactive in putting on provision which aligns closely with the needs of the region and those of learners. It works effectively with its lead providers and a wider circle of partners, including voluntary organisations, to provide a diverse range of educational opportunities to meet learners' differing needs and aspirations. The partnership offers a good balance of accredited and non-accredited, short and long courses. The curriculum continues outside of traditional academic term dates, meaning that learners have better continuity in the learning.

The partnership uses non-accredited short courses well to attract hard-to-reach learners who are less confident about entering or re-entering education. These courses often focus appropriately, for example, on health and well-being while embedding literacy, numeracy and digital skills within the content. As well as advertising the courses through a range of methods, such as social media, leaflets and posters, the partnership encourages learners on non-accredited courses to share their experiences with their friends and families to encourage their future participation.

The partnership offers a range of useful accredited courses for learners who need to develop their qualifications' profile to enter work or to improve their positions within work. The accredited courses are mostly focused on the development of literacy, numeracy and digital skills and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). These courses are mostly 'roll-on, roll-off', which helps learners to learn at their own pace and takes account of their personal circumstances.

The partnership's provision for learners to develop their Welsh language skills is currently underdeveloped. However, the partnership has a clear strategy to increase the opportunities for Welsh language speakers to participate in adult learning in the community courses through the medium of Welsh.

The partnership is developing specialised provision with a range of providers beyond its core partners. For example, the work being undertaken with the Heritage Skills Trust provides skills training in shortage areas and employment opportunities, such as in the renovation of steam trains and the repair of masonry. Applying these heritage skills and being involved in employment increase learners' sense of well-being and pride.

The partnership has venues in appropriate locations. These range from new centres, such as the multi-purpose Tŷ Calon centre, to community venues in rural and urban areas across the two counties. Through its review, the partnership has identified the need to extend the range of venues located in communities to provide easier access for learners near their homes.

The partnership is gradually extending its family learning programme into primary schools across the two local authorities. The programmes include a range of different topics to engage parents and carers and their children. For example, 'Unwinding the Wool' introduces parents and children to the heritage skills of wet felting and dry felting. The activities bring parents and children together to share in fun activities in which are embedded literacy, numeracy, digital, creative and problem-solving skills, among others. Where parents wish, they can enrol on other courses to further continue their own learning. The success of the programme is encouraging other schools to request family learning specific to their situations; for example, one school has requested family learning sessions in English for speakers of other languages.

Nearly all tutors are well qualified in their subjects, have good subject knowledge and establish a good rapport with learners. In many cases, tutors bring experience from other professions, which enhances their teaching. They are understanding and supportive of learners with complicated and vulnerable backgrounds. Most tutors plan well for sessions, and they support learners effectively to structure their individual development plans and set learning and personal targets.

Nearly all tutors use a range of well-chosen resources which engage learners' interest and provide a scaffold for learning. In many cases, over the last two years of the pandemic, tutors have created online materials. This has allowed them to have a useful bank of materials with which to support learners who may have to miss a class at any time.

In most cases, tutors use questions effectively to challenge and to stimulate learners' thinking, and their speaking skills. They provide useful verbal feedback for learners during sessions. In other cases, tutors provide detailed written feedback in response to learners' written exercises. In a very few cases, tutors' session planning, questioning and pace in sessions are not effective enough to motivate and maintain learners' interest.

Many essential skills, family learning and ESOL teachers provide initial assessment for learners. However, the partnership's plans to use a single initial assessment tool

for all learners to ensure a consistent picture of learners' baselines in literacy and numeracy are not yet fully in place.

Care, support and guidance

The partnership provides useful and appropriate information to prospective learners through hard copies of prospectuses and bilingual information online on social media platforms. The partnership uses these media efficiently to inform and guide learners at different stages on their learning journey. However, the experience of learners who do not wish to create social media accounts to engage with the partnership is different from those who do have such accounts. The partnership recognises the need to create a one-stop portal online to ensure equality of access and experience for prospective and present learners.

The partnership's learner handbook provides learners with a useful range of information, including guidance on financial support and how to use and access online learning platforms. Many learners report that the courses offered are beneficial to their mental health and well-being and the partnership focusses clearly on providing a wide range of support for learners and removing barriers to learning, for example by providing a creche in the Tŷ Calon centre.

In the best examples, tutors provide very helpful individual assistance to learners in their sessions. Tutors and managers review and adjust support for learners with additional learning needs (ALN) on essential skills and ESOL courses in useful quarterly meetings. Tutors in ESOL classes provide sensitive pastoral support when signposting learners who are refugees to agencies that can assist them. In courses for learners aspiring to be teaching assistants, learning coaches offer valuable additional support outside of formal sessions to assist learners to set personal targets and assess their progress.

On the whole, individual providers in the partnership track and monitor the progress of learners suitably. However, processes to track the progress of learners across the partnership in an overarching strategic manner are at an early stage of development. This, and the development of a management information system, are recognised as action points by the partnership in its improvement plan.

Providers within the partnership promote healthy lifestyle choices positively. The partnership focuses relevantly on promoting online safety and provides beneficial advice and guidance to tutors and learners.

A few learners take on responsibilities and contribute positively towards learner voice activities. The partnership does not have a consistent and overarching learner voice and course evaluation framework across providers, although it is aware of this in its improvement planning.

The partnership's arrangements for safeguarding and for educating learners about the dangers of radicalisation and extremism are appropriate. Procedures for recruitment and safeguarding of all the lead providers align with the corporate safeguarding policies of Flintshire and Wrexham local authorities. The partnership's lead providers present regular and detailed updates in quarterly meetings on health

and safety, disclosure and barring service (DBS) compliance, staff safeguarding update training and issues relating to extremism and radicalisation.

Leadership and management

The newly-formed partnership has strong support from both local authority chief education officers and from elected members. Senior officials and partnership managers from both authorities play an important role in managing and overseeing the partnership. Leaders at all levels model strong leadership and high expectations of partners and all members share the partnership's vision. The needs of learners in their communities are at the heart of the provision. Senior leaders and partnership members work closely to develop provision that focuses on hard-to-reach learners and those in need of considerable support before they can progress to more formal learning opportunities.

The partnership has used a tendering and commissioning model to appoint five lead providers who, along with Coleg Cambria and Adult Learning Wales, provide nearly all the provision. Leaders set very high aspirations for the partnership, the providers and for learners. The vision for the partnership is ambitious, and mirrors Welsh Government policies for community learning and for Wales to be a country of a second chance for learning.

Partners work well together on a basis of frankness, openness and honesty that allows challenge. They understand their roles and responsibilities, and the nature of each other's provision. This avoids duplication of classes and unhelpful competition. The partnership is active at seeking out additional funding to innovate and to further enhance provision. For example, access to one-to-one coaching has been developed through the Reaching Wider initiative.

There is thorough planning to assess the needs of learners in the two local authority areas using a variety of demographic, labour market information and intelligence from the large number of organisations that make up the wider partnership. The partnership plays an active role in helping communities to develop, and in assisting learners to overcome barriers to learning.

The partnership plans for succession planning carefully and effectively, to ensure that the smooth running of the partnership continues. This is supported by robust policies, strategies, and development plans. The partnership meets on a quarterly basis to review progress and is flexible in changing and adjusting as the provision develops.

Senior leaders have a clear awareness of the partnership's own strengths and areas for improvement. They recognise the challenges that lie ahead, and display a commitment and determination to address these, for example in developing a data management system to track outcomes and learner progression and developing mechanisms to capture learner voice feedback across the partnership.

The partnership's quality assurance and self-evaluation processes involve quarterly meetings with all lead providers. The meetings discuss observations, performance management and safeguarding. The partnership uses information from these meetings to plan its priorities for professional learning across the partnership well.

Individual lead providers currently operate their own quality assurance processes, including lesson observations. However, the current methodology and effectiveness of lesson observations are variable across partners. As a result, the partnership does not have a clear oversight of teaching and learning across the partnership.

The partnership has recently established a quality committee to monitor and review the partnership's self-evaluation processes and report and quality improvement plan and evaluate outcomes across the partnership. The quality committee contains appropriate senior leader representation and membership from partnership organisations. It is too early to assess the impact of the committees' work.

The partnership has also established a curriculum group to increase collaboration and dissemination of information between partners. There are already examples of how partner organisations have benefited through this participation in terms of sharing of good practice, ideas and useful contacts.

The partnership provides effective professional learning for staff, including themes such as digital delivery, neuro diversity and understanding issues relating to extremism and radicalisation.

Evidence base of the report

Before the inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the learner and staff questionnaires

During the inspection, inspectors normally:

- meet the chair of the partnership, governors (where appropriate), senior and middle leaders and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the partnership's work
- meet learners to discuss their work, to listen to their views about various aspects of their provider
- visit a broad sample of sessions
- observe and speak to learners outside of sessions
- look closely at the partnership's self-evaluation processes
- consider the partnership's quality improvement planning and looked at evidence to show how well the partnership had taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a wide range of partnership documents, including information on learner assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body (where appropriate), information on learners' wellbeing, including the safeguarding of learners, and records of staff training and professional learning

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the partnership and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

The report was produced in accordance with Section 77 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

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