



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

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

**Conwy & Denbighshire Adult Learning in the Community  
Partnership**

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**by**

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

**This report is also available in Welsh.**

## About Conwy & Denbighshire Adult Learning in the Community Partnership

The Conwy and Denbighshire adult learning in the community partnership is chaired by Grŵp Llandrillo Menai and consists of:

- Grŵp Llandrillo Menai
- Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Conwy County Borough Council
- Cyngor Sir Ddinbych / Denbighshire County Council
- Addysg Oedolion Cymru / Adult Learning Wales

During the 2022-2023 academic year, the partnership had 446 learners who engaged in classes funded using the Community Learning Grant issued to Conwy and Denbighshire local authorities by the Welsh Government. Many of these classes were delivered by Grŵp Llandrillo Menai, and the remaining by Adult Learning Wales. A further 1,082 adult learners engaged in classes funded using Grŵp Llandrillo Menai's part-time further education (FE) funding received directly from the Welsh Government. An additional 878 learners across the two counties engaged in classes with Adult Learning Wales using the funding it received directly from the Welsh Government.

According to the [Office for National Statistics' most recent census data](#), Conwy's resident population in 2021 was 114,800, representing 3.7% of the population of Wales. Denbighshire's population was 95,800, which was 3.1% of the Welsh total. Within both counties the population density is highest along the coast, which is served by the A55 North Wales Expressway, with more sparsely populated rural communities further inland. The [proportion of the population who say they can speak Welsh](#) in Conwy is 36.3%, and in Denbighshire is 41.5%. These are above the Wales-wide figure of 29.2%.

Both counties are home to relatively elderly populations. Conwy local authority had the second highest proportion of residents aged 65 years and over in Wales at 27.4%, significantly higher than the Wales average of 21.3%. The corresponding figure for Denbighshire was 24.8%. The proportion of residents aged 15 to 64 in both local authorities was below the national average of 62.2%, at 57.8% in Conwy and 58.9% in Denbighshire.

The [Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation \(WIMD\) in 2019](#) showed that, overall, both counties were slightly less deprived than average across Wales. The percentage of areas within each county that were among the 50% most deprived in Wales were 46.6% in Denbighshire, and 40.8% in Conwy. This ranked them 11th and 16th respectively among the 22 local authorities in Wales (where rank 1 was the most deprived in Wales and rank 22 the least deprived). However, parts of the more densely populated areas in both counties fell within the 20% most deprived in Wales. These included parts of Abergele, Colwyn Bay and Llandudno in Conwy, as well as two areas of Rhyl in Denbighshire that were the most, and the second most, deprived areas in Wales.

Discounting students, the [proportion of residents aged 16-64 who were economically inactive](#) in the year ending 31 December 2023 was 21.0% in Conwy and 23.1% in

Denbighshire. These were slightly higher than the 19.9% rate across Wales as a whole. The [median of gross weekly earnings among full-time adult employees](#) in 2022 across the two counties was below the Wales-wide figure of £599.70p. For Conwy the median was £550.90p and in Denbighshire it was £543.30p.

The [Office for National Statistics' Annual Population Survey/Welsh Local Labour Force Survey](#) results show that in both Conwy and Denbighshire, the proportion of residents with qualifications at level 2 or above, at 84.2% in Conwy and 80.5% in Denbighshire, are below the Welsh average of 87.4%. In both counties, a higher proportion of adults than average have no formal qualifications; 13.3% in Conwy and 13.2% in Denbighshire, compared to the Wales average of 7.9%.

## Summary

Across the partnership, most learners are keen to learn, acquire new skills and develop as individuals. Many make strong progress towards their goals, listen actively and apply their knowledge and skills to new contexts successfully. Most recall prior learning well. Many reflect on their progress and identify areas for improvement and a majority venture beyond their comfort zones as part of their learning.

Learners develop valuable wider skills and behaviours during their courses. These include sustained engagement, independent working, time management and public speaking as well as broader social skills. Many learners are aware of the progression routes open to them once they complete their courses and a majority are keen to progress to further studies. The partnership provides helpful advice and guidance to engage prospective learners.

Tutors demonstrate patience, empathy and good humour, creating supportive environments for learners. They review and discuss with learners how they can be supported with their additional learning needs. Most learners with additional learning needs or disabilities play a full role in their lessons and make strong progress. A majority of learners are proud of how their learning has helped them in their daily lives and in their job roles.

Most tutors plan their classes well and build effective working relationships with their learners. Many skilfully adapt their lessons when beneficial, for example by exploring topics of interest or using different resources in response to learners' progress and feedback. Most tutors provide clear explanations and use high quality resources to successfully engage their learners. Many tutors provide appropriate support and challenge to learners, making use of effective questioning techniques. They provide valuable feedback that highlights strengths and how learners can improve. Teaching spaces are well resourced and tutors make seamless use of digital technology to enhance their lessons and support learner engagement.

The partnership offers a good range of provision that is aligned with the Welsh Government's priorities. The partnership's two delivery partners, Grŵp Llandrillo Menai and Adult Learning Wales, plan the provision effectively and collaboratively, avoiding duplication and ensuring a broad curriculum offer. However, the partnership does not make enough use of its wider partners to contribute to the planning process or to deliver specialist courses. The partnership does not offer any fully Welsh-medium provision and there is limited use of bilingual teaching methods, even in classes where a number of Welsh speakers are present.

The partnership has effective leadership and management. Staff members at all levels demonstrate the inclusive vision of the partnership. They feel well supported by leaders and have access to valuable resources and professional learning opportunities. A worthwhile strategic plan sets out the context, objectives and terms of reference for the partnership, but does not make use of key performance indicators to help measure progress. The partnership has useful and detailed service level agreements that clarify the roles, responsibilities, funding and provision offer across both counties. The partnership has effective self-evaluation and improvement

processes that draw together information from both delivery partners and identify strengths and targets for improvement. However, some targets do not have clearly defined outcomes, which makes it difficult to evaluate the impact of actions.

## Recommendations

- R1 Increase the availability of provision and teaching that supports learning in Welsh
- R2 Widen the range of partners that contribute to provision planning
- R3 Strengthen strategic planning to include key performance indicators and targets to evaluate impact of actions

## 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 case studies on its work in relation to:

- effective use of digital technology to support engagement and progress in adult learning in the community
- tracking and planning for progression of adult learning in the community learners for dissemination on Estyn's website

## Main findings

### Learning

Across the partnership, many learners make strong progress towards the goals they have set for themselves. In classes, most learners are keen to learn. They acquire new knowledge and develop their skills well.

Nearly all learners listen respectfully to their tutors and their peers; many listen actively, asking pertinent questions to explore ideas further. Most learners recall prior learning well and many can apply their knowledge and skills effectively to new contexts, advancing their practice as they do so. For example, learners on introductory British Sign Language courses draw on what they have learnt over several lessons to competently converse with each other and describe a visit to a local attraction. Where they are unsure, learners are comfortable in turning to their tutors and each other for guidance. For example, learners on craft courses explain to each other how to frame pictures and how to dye fabrics.

Many learners in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes make strong progress with their English language skills. They are able to recall a good range of vocabulary and synthesise structured sentences using, for example, the simple past and the past perfect tenses. In the best cases, they also develop an understanding of basic Welsh terms and phrases. This provides them with valuable skills that help them integrate into their communities, participate in the workforce, and progress in their careers.

Overall, only a few of the partnership's learners use or develop their Welsh language skills as part of their courses as, too often, classes are conducted entirely in English. In the best cases, learners show interest in the language and, encouraged by their teachers, draw on the knowledge of their first language Welsh-speaking peers. For example, learners from different countries, preparing to become classroom assistants, turn to their fluent Welsh-speaking peer to check and discuss their knowledge of basic words, such as colours and days of the week, to use with young children.

Most learners with identified additional learning needs or disabilities play a full role in their classes and make strong progress. They are open and happy to tell others about the ways in which they are different. Using the insight of a wheelchair using learner, a sociology group worked well together to research the effects of disability on family relationships, and to integrate this into their course.

A majority of learners are proud of, and keen to share, how their learning has helped them in their daily lives and work. For example, learners on confidence building courses organise their own gardening club and volunteer with different charities and services. Learners on basic digital literacy courses explain how they have been able to show work colleagues and family members how to use file management and document sharing functions.

Encouraged by their tutors, a majority of learners venture beyond their comfort zones, for example in speaking and presenting to groups or in consciously planning

how to tackle particular challenges. Older learners on digital literacy courses not only develop the skills they need to participate online, but also competently discuss the potential benefits, risks and ethical considerations associated with artificial intelligence. Learners on British Sign Language (BSL) courses work together very effectively to quickly develop a basic grasp of the language and nearly all develop their confidence in presenting in front of groups.

Many learners regularly reflect on the progress they make in their learning. They value the knowledge and skills that they are acquiring and insightfully identify aspects they need to improve. Across the partnership, a few learners struggle to reflect meaningfully on their progress.

Many learners are aware of the progression options open to them once they complete their courses. A majority are keen to progress and the partnership's own records show that at the end of the last academic year, around 40% went on to enrol onto other courses within the partnership or to full-time or part-time further education courses.

### **Well-being and attitudes to learning**

Learners across the partnership develop valuable skills and behaviours that help them in their work and personal lives. This includes the ability to sustain engagement and focus for extended periods. For example, BSL learners immerse themselves in signing throughout their lessons, resisting the temptation to speak to each other aloud. ESOL learners acquire vital language skills, which allow them to support their families to integrate more fully into the local community, for example through improved communication with essential services workers.

Nearly all learners participate enthusiastically in their learning. They show a high level of interest in their chosen subjects and they often complete work at home to consolidate their learning or to prepare for the next lesson. They listen carefully to one another and comment thoughtfully on other learners' contributions. Learners work together effectively in groups and, in many cases, produce good work in response to the tasks they are set. In many cases, learners develop useful independent working skills, researching issues and presenting coherent arguments to support their views.

Nearly all learners on well-being courses report positive changes in their lives thanks to their classes. For example, they learn how to plan their time to ensure a sustainable work-life balance that includes relaxation time and healthy eating choices. Nearly all learners on well-being courses gain the confidence to socialise and express their views in group settings. They take part in a wide range of activities that encourage them to expand their experiences, for example by volunteering in the community. One learner explained 'I am learning about myself, gaining awareness of my strengths and learning to push the negative feelings aside'.

Learner attendance is strong and many learners arrive punctually to classes. Learners benefit from the partnership's willingness, wherever practical, to take learners' work and personal commitments into account when scheduling their learning activities and classes. This helps learners to maintain their engagement and make progress in their learning.



Many learners following literacy, numeracy, digital literacy and ESOL courses report that they improve their employability and entrepreneurial skills thanks to their studies. For example, a few learners gain the confidence to begin selling their own art and craftwork.

A very few learners who find it difficult to leave their homes welcome the opportunity to learn new skills and to socialise with others by taking part in small-group classes near to where they live. As part of these, learners are supported to reflect on their lives and skills and to create plans with graduated steps to make progress, for example by meeting new people and accepting compliments.

Nearly all learners feel safe and secure in their learning environments, and they know what to do if they have any concerns. Learners show a good awareness of online protocols; the partnership's online safety courses help them to keep themselves safe while using the internet.

### **Teaching and learning experiences**

The partnership offers a broad and well-balanced range of provision that is aligned closely with the Welsh Government's priorities. These include supporting adults to develop their employability, literacy, numeracy and digital skills, and enabling people who are not fluent English speakers to improve their grasp of the language. The provision is also aligned with the Welsh Government's broader aim of supporting citizens' mental health and well-being. There is a suitable mix of accredited and non-accredited provision and a small but appropriate programme of online provision.

The provision includes a useful series of introductory courses that give learners a taste of vocational learning through programmes such as hairdressing, enterprise skills and introductory training to become a classroom assistant. Valuable ESOL provision ranges from informal entry level courses at community venues for learners with very limited English language ability, to accredited level 2 courses at college campuses for those with a more developed grasp of the language.

To support learners' mental health and well-being, there are a variety of courses available that integrate well-being aspects alongside skills development. Learners can progress to other such courses to broaden their experiences, for example Adult Learning Wales's suite of creative writing and associated courses.

Provision is offered at a suitable range of locations across the two counties, including college sites at Rhyl, Rhos-on-Sea and Abergele, as well as at several smaller community venues. All venues are well resourced, with ICT equipment, classroom space and facilities suitable for adult learners. The use of community venues, including libraries and dedicated community centres such as Hwb Dinbych, means that learners have on-site access to wider community services or sources of advice and guidance. However, little in-person teaching provision is available in the largely rural centre of the partnership's geographical footprint.

The partnership's two delivery partners, Grŵp Llandrillo Menai and Adult Learning Wales, plan the provision effectively and collaboratively, and this helps to avoid duplication of provision and ensure a broad curriculum offer. However, the

partnership does not make enough use of its wider partners to contribute to the planning process or, for example, to deliver specialist courses.

The partnership does not offer any fully Welsh-medium provision even in communities where a high proportion of the population speak Welsh. Promoting bilingual methods of teaching has been a focus of the partnership's professional learning but, even in classes where Welsh speakers are present, there is limited use of bilingual teaching methods.

The partnership has planned how it uses the UK government's Multiply funding to support citizen's numeracy skills well. The funding is used to flexibly engage new learners at an introductory level as well as to support others to attain valuable level 2 qualifications such as GCSE mathematics.

Most tutors plan their sessions well, taking account of learners' starting points and the progress they are making. They plan activities that develop their learners' understanding, knowledge, skills and competencies effectively, in line with the course aims and the learners' own short- and long-term goals. Most tutors know their learners well and use this knowledge to plan for individual needs. For example, a pre-GCSE mathematics tutor prepares individualised learning activities for each learner based on their skills profiles and learning preferences. Many tutors break tasks and objectives into reassuringly manageable 'chunks' to meet the needs of their learners.

Many tutors are responsive and adapt their classes when beneficial. For example, digital literacy learners expressed curiosity about artificial intelligence and their tutor adapted, supporting the group to explore the topic in more depth over several lessons and even achieving a relevant accredited qualification unit.

Most tutors provide clear explanations and instructions and many helpfully model the skills that learners are working to develop. For example, a BSL tutor carefully demonstrates and describes new signs, shortened signs, regional variations, and how sign language can be used by Welsh speakers, so that learners can communicate effectively both within the classroom and out in the community. However, across the partnership overall, very few tutors make use of activities to help learners develop their Welsh language skills.

Most tutors use high quality and purposeful resources that engage and stimulate their learners. Many tutors provide resources that support learners to work independently. For example, IT and digital literacy tutors produce clear booklets for each course that learners use to recap and to catch up if they miss any classes.

Most tutors have built effective working relationships with, and between, their learners. They understand the needs, preferences, strengths and development areas of their learners. Most tutors demonstrate patience, empathy and good humour and, as a result, have created supportive environments for learners to practise new skills as well as to ask and answer questions. For example, in ESOL classes, learners openly talk about real-world examples from their own lives to supplement the hypothetical scenarios of their textbooks. This means that learners are using English to articulate and share their own experiences as well as to practise the grammar and vocabulary as planned for the session.

Many tutors use digital technology seamlessly to enhance their teaching, making routine use of large clear display screens and other digital resources available to them in the well-equipped centres. In art classes, the tutor uses a live visualiser camera to display watercolour painting techniques clearly to the group. In the few cases where learners are unable to attend classes in person, tutors manage a hybrid mode of delivery very well, ensuring that all learners participate, with some present in the room, and others joining online.

Most tutors leading online classes ensure that learners have effective learning experiences that are tailored well to their needs. A numeracy tutor delivering online to a group of vulnerable learners prepares and delivers personalised learning for each individual. Most tutors make good use of a range of strategies to maintain the pace of online teaching and learning. For example, in an online BSL session, the tutor makes purposeful use of breakout rooms not only to allow learners to practise new signs, but also to enable them to form strong working relationships and create group cohesion.

Many tutors provide appropriate support and challenge to individual learners whilst circulating between learners as they work independently or in groups. Most tutors use effective questioning techniques and in the best cases tutors challenge learners to explain their thinking, for example when justifying the choice of pastels as a base in a watercolour painting class. In a few instances, tutors use less effective questioning methods and rely too much on leading or closed questions.

Most tutors offer valuable support and guidance through verbal feedback during sessions, pointing out the strengths and weaknesses in learners' work. Many tutors provide written feedback that highlights strengths as well as identifying specific areas where learners can improve. Many tutors encourage learners to respectfully identify each other's errors and to work together to correct them, helping each other to improve.

### **Care, support and guidance**

The partnership provides appropriate impartial guidance and support to individuals who wish to enrol on courses to further their learning. It engages prospective learners effectively using a range of methods, such as advertising on social media, word of mouth, leaflets, individual partner prospectuses and taster courses. Both delivery partners have websites enabling prospective learners to search for courses available in their areas. Most tutors have a good knowledge of learners' aspirations and they provide helpful advice by signposting them to other courses through which they can further their learning.

The partnership's website <https://communitycourses.wales> provides a single landing page for prospective learners to find out more about the partnership and the courses on offer. At present, the site is in the early stages of development with minimal content, but it does link out to both delivery partners' main websites where prospective learners can find more detail and apply online. The partnership is developing a methodology to analyse learners' progression over several years of learning. Early analysis indicates that around one third of the partnership's learners have undertaken adult learning in the community courses in the past, with two-thirds of learners being new to the partnership's provision.

The partnership caters well for learners who are referred to health and well-being courses by medical practitioners. They have recognised the value of education in improving health and resilience as an alternative to, or to complement, other treatments. Learners enrolling for these reasons report discernible, positive benefits to their mental health and they grow in confidence. Additional activities, such as trips to see volunteering in action, are a strong feature and enhance classroom learning. Learners have developed the confidence to take part in, and to even lead, new activities such as by starting a gardening club, organising a luncheon club and taking up volunteering opportunities. Learners on digital literacy courses report the beneficial way that the skills they develop enable them to break down barriers. They can communicate more easily and frequently with friends and family, and can carry out everyday tasks, such as paying bills and ordering groceries online, creating posters or recording meetings for social groups to which they belong. In developing these skills, one learner commented that they felt that they had 'rejoined the world'.

Tutors are mindful to plan sessions that allow learners from diverse backgrounds to share their views and experiences in respectful and safe surroundings. One learner explained how helpful they found encountering a range of perspectives and commented that 'these classes just open your mind'.

Each partner has policies and procedures focused on supporting learners with additional learning needs (ALN). Tutors review and discuss with each learner how they can be supported with any ALN that they have declared on their enrolment form. Nearly all tutors know their learners well and, where they observe that learners may have an unidentified learning need, they offer the learner suitable adjustments to their course or their learning materials. On occasion, if a learner needs more specialised support, the partnership works well with other organisations to meet the learner's needs. However, for a very few learners, the process of reviewing and addressing their support needs is too slow and this impinges on their progress.

Before courses begin, the partnership gives learners helpful induction handbooks that provide clear information about their responsibilities as learners and the behaviours expected of them. Learners are given advice on health and safety and how to stay safe online, as well as what to do and whom to contact should they experience or see acts of harassment, bullying, trafficking or radicalisation. To support learners and staff, the partnership has a series of appropriate policies in place. It applies safe recruitment procedures when appointing staff and it provides suitable training for tutors in the different aspects of safeguarding.

The partnership's arrangements for safeguarding learners meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

## **Leadership and management**

The Conwy and Denbighshire Adult Community Learning partnership is an effective collaboration between the two local authorities and their two delivery partners, Grŵp Llandrillo Menai and Adult Learning Wales. The partnership has effective leadership and management structures, including the operation and scrutiny groups, that guide its work. The partnership draws helpfully on the existing infrastructure of the lead delivery partner, Grŵp Llandrillo Menai, and that of Adult Learning Wales. For

example, this enables them to conduct data analyses and self-evaluation, and to provide professional learning for staff.

The partnership has a worthwhile strategic plan, which sets out the context for the partnership's work, its key strategic objectives and the terms of reference for its leadership groups. However, the plan has no key performance indicators that the partnership can use to measure its performance against its strategic objectives and evaluate their impact.

Useful and detailed service level agreements set out the nature of the relationship between the local authorities, Grŵp Llandrillo Menai and Adult Learning Wales. This ensures that the roles and responsibilities of all parties, the funding arrangements, and the provision offer, are clear. These arrangements contribute towards strong partnership working and mean that useful progression pathways are available for learners to move from introductory community-based learning into further education programmes, should they wish.

Leaders, managers and tutors at all levels across the partnership demonstrate the inclusive vision of the partnership in their work. On the whole, staff feel well supported by their managers and that they have adequate access to resources and professional learning opportunities.

The partnership has an effective self-evaluation process, which draws together a range of information and data from both delivery partners into one self-evaluation report and quality development plan. Partners have their own individual quality cycles in place including a programme of observations and learning walks, learner voice activities and learner attendance monitoring. They successfully integrate external quality assurance arrangements as part of these cycles.

The partnership's scrutiny group has oversight of the self-assessment process and is responsible for monitoring the full range of the partnership's targets. It has an independent chair who adds rigour and challenge to the planning and performance monitoring processes, for example by questioning the effectiveness and consistency of target setting across the partnership.

The quality development plan is evaluative and identifies strengths and high-level targets for improvement with three review points each academic year. The targets and associated actions are useful and aim to improve the partnership's provision and outcomes for learners. Targets include increasing bilingual delivery, tracking in-year progress of learners with ALN, developing progression opportunities for learners, and sharing data between partners. However, a few targets in the quality development plan do not have clearly defined outcomes and, as a consequence, it is difficult to evaluate the impact of the associated actions.

Both delivery partners offer appropriate programmes of professional learning, which respond well to training needs identified through a range of methods including observations and staff feedback. Observation reports are moderated and usefully support the sharing of best practice and key areas for development for the whole partnership. Partners have their own designated times within the academic year for professional learning activities that provide valuable opportunities for tutors to access

tailored training with a focus on themes such as differentiation and artificial intelligence.

## 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' well-being, 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](http://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 publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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