



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

A report on
Neath Port Talbot and Powys Adult Learning in the
Community Partnership

Dwr-y-Felin Road
Neath
SA10 7RF

Date of inspection: May 2024

by

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

This inspection was undertaken as part of pilot inspection arrangements. As a result, this report may be slightly different in format to other published reports for providers in the sector.

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Neath Port Talbot and Powys Adult Learning in the Community Partnership

Name of provider	Neath Port Talbot and Powys Adult Learning in the Community Partnership
Local authorities involved with the provider and key delivery partners	<p>The core membership of the partnership consists of NPTC Group of Colleges (current partnership chair), Neath Port Talbot (NPT) County Borough Council (and its delivery arm, NPT Adult Learning) and Powys County Council.</p> <p>Adult Learning Wales also contributes as a 'core plus' member and provides further programmes and activities across the NPT and Powys communities.</p>
Any significant changes since the last inspection	<p>Since the last inspection in 2012, the separate Neath Port Talbot and Powys adult community learning partnerships have combined to form this partnership. The partnership has been in its current form since 2021.</p>
Number of learners at time of inspection	<p>Across all providers, including ESOL learners, there were 4046 learners at the time of the inspection.</p>
Number of learners in the previous full academic year	<p>In the academic year 2022-23, the partnership had a total of 4313 learners.</p>
Details of the partnership's programmes, in terms of Welsh Government funded courses (ESOL) and basic skills) and range of other (leisure/cost-recovery) courses	<p>The partnership offers a range of programmes funded by the Welsh Government's Community Learning Grant, the Welsh Government further education funding, and funding from the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund and Multiply initiative.</p> <p>Provision includes literacy, numeracy and digital literacy programmes for adults, GCSE mathematics and English programmes, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), British Sign Language (BSL), programmes to develop learners' employability, introductory vocational courses and a range of courses to promote</p>

	engagement, well-being and mental health.
About the learners on the partnership's courses	<p>From the partnership's own data, 29% of the partnership's learners are aged between 25 and 39, with a total of 77% aged between 20 and 64. Eleven per cent of the partnership's learners are aged 65 and over.</p> <p>Thirteen per cent of the partnership's learners described themselves as fluent Welsh speakers or Welsh speakers but not fluent.</p>
About the population of the partnership's area	<p>Neath Port Talbot Borough has a population of 141,900, about 4.5% the total population of Wales. The County of Powys covers a quarter of the land mass of Wales and has a population of 133,500, approximately 4.3% of the total population of Wales (Nomis, 2021).</p> <p>In Neath Port Talbot, the proportion of the population aged 65 or over is the same as the average for local authorities in Wales, at 21.5%. In Powys, the proportion of people aged 65 or over is slightly higher, at 28.2% (StatsWales, 2023).</p> <p>In 2022-2023, 13% of adults in Neath Port Talbot could speak Welsh, against the average for local authorities of 18%. In Powys, 14% of adults could speak Welsh (StatsWales, 2023).</p> <p>Neath Port Talbot is the 8th most deprived local authority area on the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD 2014). Powys ranks 21st out of 22 WIMD areas in Wales.</p>
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/11/2024

Summary

This is an effective partnership, offering a generally wide and well considered range of provision, in which many learners make sound progress from their starting points.

The partnership has purposeful leadership, and each partner understands its roles and responsibilities well. Service level agreements define the relationship between the two local authorities, Powys and Neath Port Talbot, and the lead delivery partner, NPTC Group of Colleges. Adult Learning Wales also plays a significant role in delivery and provision planning across the partnership.

The partnership's range of courses aims to meet the needs of the partnership's learners and potential learners. The offer is suitably focused on Welsh Government priority areas such as numeracy, literacy and digital skills. It also includes useful entry routes for adult learners into vocational learning, such as welding, plastering, catering, horticulture or childcare. It has a range of part-time courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), recently supplemented by full-time ESOL programmes.

It offers courses designed to support learners' well-being and mental health, such as felting, art therapy, or informal conversation classes such as 'chai and chat'. These act as effective engagement routes to bring learners into the provision and encourage them to progress onto more formal learning.

The partnership delivers learning in many appropriate locations across Neath Port Talbot and parts of Powys but does not offer in-person classes in some areas of Powys, notably the north-west of the county. The partnership currently offers no provision through the medium of Welsh, meaning that Welsh speaking learners or communities do not have the opportunity to benefit from adult community learning programmes in Welsh.

Partners have used the funding available through the UK Government's Multiply initiative to develop a range of new provision to engage learners and develop numeracy skills. Partners have worked well to co-ordinate their offer through Multiply, but face challenges in recruiting learners within the short timescales available.

Leaders and staff at all levels show a clear sense of moral purpose about the role of adult learning in the community and work purposefully towards the partnership's vision. There is a notable culture across the partnership's staff of planning learning flexibly to adapt courses and programmes of learning to meet learners' needs and individual circumstances.

Tutors across the partnership are enthusiastic and knowledgeable. Most use a wide range of strategies, and adapt activities effectively to motivate learners, suit their abilities and engage their interest. However, in a few ESOL sessions, tutors use a limited range of approaches and materials and, as a result, a few learners make very slow progress.

Learners enjoy their programmes, participate well, and describe the positive impact on their well-being and mental health, as well as improvements in their skills and

confidence. Many make sound progress, use and develop their skills well, and apply their learning to their wider lives. For example, they use their developing skills in their work, in social or community situations, or through being more able to help their own children with their schoolwork.

Overall, learners successfully complete their programmes at sound rates, although in a few areas, such as ESOL, GCSE mathematics and English courses, and from IT programmes in Powys, the rates at which learners drop out of their programmes is high.

Recommendations

We have made three recommendations to help the service continue to improve:

- R1 Improve the access to provision across the full geographical range of the partnership
- R2 Improve retention rates on courses where there is a high drop out
- R3 Improve the planning and teaching of ESOL provision to ensure that teaching is consistently effective, resources are engaging and relevant and learners' outcomes show measurable improvement

What happens next

The partnership is not in follow-up. In accordance with section 80 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000, the partnership will prepare and publish a written statement of their action plan in light of the inspection report. We will consider progress against the recommendations in our regular link inspector visits.

Main findings

Teaching and learning

Across the partnership, many learners make sound progress from their starting points. For example, in an introduction to welding session, learners can now make different types of joints to fix body parts on motorbikes and cars. In an art for mental health class, learners develop their skills significantly, and all complete an extended activity on box art to produce and showcase a finished product. However, in a few ESOL sessions, tutors use a limited range of approaches and materials and, as a result, a few learners make very slow progress.

Many learners use skills appropriate to their level, with a few working at a higher level, and produce work that is of a good standard. Learners in a needle-felting session produce high-quality 3D animals and needle-felt art from prints such as wildflowers. Learners with additional learning needs (ALN) in an essential skills session use their literacy and study skills well to allow them to move forward with tasks independently.

Many learners apply appropriate techniques and effective problem-solving skills. For example, learners in a basic skills lesson deal with unfamiliar vocabulary by breaking down the word into syllables, which enables them to work towards accurate pronunciation. These learners also confidently explain how they use a printed dictionaries to look up the meaning of new words. In creative coding, learners tackle complex coding tasks and collaboratively troubleshoot issues to identify solutions.

In many sessions, learners apply their learning meaningfully to real-life situations. For example, in Multiply sessions to develop numeracy, learners work out percentages for discount shopping or learn how to support their children with mathematics at home. Learners on British Sign Language (BSL) courses use their newly acquired skills confidently to support family members and fellow learners with hearing impairments.

Many learners reflect on their previous learning and apply their knowledge and understanding to current learning well. Learners in a creative writing class value both the process of writing and the finished product, recognising the importance of both aspects. In a level 2 childcare lesson, learners reflect on their answers in a recent test, identify questions they got wrong, and develop focused revision cards to support them in addressing their mistakes.

Where opportunities arise, learners apply their literacy, numeracy, and digital skills to support their learning. For example, learners in an essential skills lesson use a ruler correctly with the support of their teacher to measure out and plan a garden space. In a digital skills for ESOL session, learners use digital platforms to access English language learning websites, which they subsequently review in a template they created.

Overall, most learners exhibit positive attitudes and behaviours. On a BSL course, learners display clear enjoyment in their learning, listening attentively, practising their skills, and sharing humour and supporting one another. These learners are

self-motivated, having joined the group for diverse reasons, including teaching BSL in a youth group or coping with hearing deterioration.

Many learners listen attentively to their peers to develop knowledge and understanding. Peer learning is a strong feature in the partnership.

Spotlight on peer learning

Peer learning across the partnership is highly effective in creating a collaborative spirit. Learners engage well in activities such as peer marking, discussion, teaching, and support.

For instance, in a creative coding class, a more experienced learner leads a demonstration on coding activities, inviting questions from peers, who respond positively and encourage each other to complete the task. In an introduction to welding session, experienced learners assist peers with materials or equipment problems, creating a collaborative spirit and peer learning opportunities within the class.

This approach promotes active participation and social interaction. Peer learning supports progress and enhances the learner experience across the partnership.

Most learners across a range of programmes know what their next steps are, and frequently set themselves challenging goals. For example, a medical professional in an ESOL group who has recently arrived in the UK is motivated to develop their English language skills in their drive to return to their profession in this country. In an essential skills numeracy group, learners improve their maths, often from a very low base, in order to enrol on further training in areas such as health and social care, criminology and a master's degree in social work. Learners on a bakery course show a keen interest in advancing to higher levels of further courses often to support a family business or career progression.

Tutors across the partnership are enthusiastic and knowledgeable. Most tutors have an appropriate understanding of adult teaching methodologies, and they apply them effectively. Most tutors design coherent schemes of work and purposeful sessions. GCSE mathematics tutors in the college develop and share common schemes of work and resources, which supports tutors and learners across the partnership, while tutors for the Thrive programme have created imaginative and innovative schemes of work for vulnerable learners.

Tutors develop positive and productive relationships with learners. They understand learners' individual needs well and, in most cases, they plan carefully to ensure challenge and progression in learning. In the classroom, most tutors use a wide range of strategies, and adapt activities effectively to motivate learners, suit their abilities and engage their interest.

Spotlight on family learning

In family learning sessions, tutors are skilled at helping adults understand how their children are taught in school. Tutors typically begin by explaining to adults about techniques for helping their children, such as using phonics to sound out and read

words or developing ways of encouraging them to persevere with problems they find difficult. In the second part of the session, the children join the adults, and they work with each other. Both adults and children enjoy the quality time they have together: the adults, from developing insights into the curriculum and how their children learn, and from meeting and socialising with other adults whose children are at the school; and the children from having focused time with their parents/carers and working in small groups. Frequently, the adults are motivated to take part in courses about other aspects of the curriculum, or further their own education.

In a few ESOL sessions tutors use worksheets too frequently. They do not use enough authentic and up-to-date materials and it is not always clear how one topic links coherently to another, which impacts on progression in learning.

In family learning, tutors use Welsh terms and phrases for instructions and encouragement. In a few sessions, such as cooking on a budget, tutors introduce learners to the Welsh vocabulary for ingredients. However, in many other sessions there is very little use of Welsh or reference to bilingual terminology, or the usefulness of Welsh as a skill.

Nearly all tutors provide useful verbal feedback during teaching sessions. They ask questions and they make suggestions to help guide the learner to their next steps. Overall, individual learning plans (ILPs) are used appropriately across the partnership.

Overall, learners successfully complete their programmes at sound rates, although in a few areas, such as ESOL, GCSE mathematics and English courses, and from IT programmes in Powys, the rates at which learners drop out of their programmes are high.

To improve teaching and learning further, the partnership should focus on:

- the consistency of ESOL delivery, including the coherence of planning and the use of authentic and up-to-date resources
- the rate at which learners drop out from ESOL and GCSE mathematics and English courses, and from IT programmes in Powys
- the use of Welsh in sessions

Well-being, care, support and guidance

The partnership is effective in engaging learners who have complex needs, and who, for a variety of reasons, are harder to engage in learning. There is a significant number of learners with support needs in a wide variety of classes. Nearly all learners are appreciative of the efforts their tutors make to engage and support them with their learning. Tutors are dedicated to supporting learners and determined to find solutions to learners' barriers to learning. They help learners develop confidence, self-esteem and self-belief.

The strong relationship between the partnership members means that they can call on one another's strengths and areas of expertise to provide a wide range of support for learners. In one example, useful bereavement support materials have been

developed by one provider and shared across the partnership to help tutors support learners or other staff members who have been bereaved.

In many classes and groups there is strong sense of a learning community, where learners support one another and have fun as they learn. For example, in BSL classes, learners laugh frequently as they practise their hand movements and facial expressions. These learners and the tutor use their signing in a variety of situations outside class to benefit others, for example to calm young people in a school, in emergency first aid situations, to add to their skills as a foster parent or to cascade their skills in a youth group.

Attendance in classes across the partnership is variable and in a few programmes is low, but tutors are usually aware of the reasons for absences, such as exams, holidays, and illness. They mitigate the impact on learning by sharing resources and materials online. However, on a few courses in the programme areas of ESOL, GCSE resits, and IT in Powys, the rate at which learners drop out is high.

There are many examples of how learners pass on the benefits of their learning experiences to their families and the wider community. For example, learners who have been supported through their mental health issues, now, in turn, are motivated to volunteer to help young people or other learners with similar issues.

Spotlight on the Thrive project

The Thrive project supports women who are in profoundly disadvantaged situations to progress to become more confident individuals. The project not only allows isolated women from within and beyond the region to get to know one another but also to learn how to become self-reliant, grow their own vegetables and to budget and cook with very limited finances and equipment. They learn how to cook nourishing, economic meals for themselves and their children. They get to know one another, begin to cook communal meals and share their resources. These women, who have suffered abuse, often missed out on education and have been isolated by their relationships, begin to regain self-confidence and self-esteem.

The partnership publicises its courses through a useful range of methods, such as leaflets in libraries, posters and promotional events in town centres, the partnership website and social media, or by referral from other agencies, including school liaison officers. In particular, learners with little or no engagement in post-compulsory education, or who have previously had negative educational experiences, are supported to engage in taking up new activities and learning opportunities.

Programmes such as 'chai and chat' engage new learners and provide progression opportunities to enable them to re-engage with education. As a result of the strong support, learners increase their confidence, and this enables them to participate in a range of different classes. Learners describe being 'bitten by the learning bug', begin to thrive in more formal learning and progress to higher level courses. Strong support from tutors enables learners to progress towards the qualification levels they need to enrol on professional skills or academic courses.

The partnership offers useful support for ESOL learners, for example through the innovative role of an ESOL/refugee ambassador.

Spotlight on the role of the ESOL/refugee ambassador

The ESOL/refugee ambassador deals with learners' issues, and advocates on their behalf. Their role includes participating in drop-in sessions available digitally for learners on other campuses. This has resulted, for example, in the college setting up a catering course specifically for Ukrainian refugees.

The partnership supports many learners from across the provision to connect with their communities, develop friendships, and learn about one another's culture, including British and Welsh culture. This also improves learners' communication skills, and promotes tolerance of others, including those with neurodiversity.

Nearly all learners described the positive impacts of their learning on their well-being. Many develop a renewed sense of purpose in life, take up new activities or hobbies, learn new skills and combat social isolation by making new friends.

Learner handbooks contain appropriate, useful information on a variety of practical support issues. All learners are able to apply to borrow laptops and other equipment.

Many tutors offer advice about the range of education and training pathways available to learners. Although many learners are able to benefit from this, a few are unclear of their next steps. In a few cases, learners on GCSE courses do not receive adequate pre-course information or screening to decide if the class is suitable for them and, in these cases, the rate at which learners drop out of classes is high.

The partnership has a supportive safeguarding culture, which includes detailed procedures to comply with the Prevent duty. Learners receive useful information in the learner handbook, including a useful flow chart and lists of contact names and details of relevant staff members. There is an effective mechanism for sharing safeguarding information across the partnership.

Safeguarding documentation is thorough and communicated well to all staff, and visitors. On college campuses, safeguarding officers can be clearly identified by the yellow lanyard scheme, which informs learners who to approach with concerns.

All partners have safe recruitment processes, including for volunteers who work alongside tutors supporting learners in the classroom. Arrangements for safeguarding learners meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

To improve further, the partnership should focus on:

- improving learners' attendance in programmes where it is low
- ensuring all learners are aware of the full range of opportunities available to them or their next steps in learning
- improving pre course information and screening for GCSE mathematics and English programmes, to ensure learners are on the right level course and level of study

Leading and improving

The partnership benefits from purposeful and effective strategic leadership. It has a clear structure of strategic, management and operational groups, which guide its work at all levels. Service level agreements define the roles, responsibilities and expectations of the core partners and each partner understands its role in the partnership well. In addition to the funding received by Powys and Neath Port Talbot local authorities through the Welsh Government Community Learning Grant, the college contributes a share of its part-time funding towards engaging adult learners, and this adds to the breadth of the partnership's provision. Adult Learning Wales also plays a significant role in delivery and provision planning across the partnership.

Spotlight on service level agreements

The partnership has service level agreements (SLAs), which define the arrangements between NPTC Group of Colleges and each of its two local authority partners – Neath Port Talbot and Powys. Each SLA sets out the responsibilities of both parties and includes arrangements for provision offer, expected outcomes, quality assurance and remuneration. These formal agreements ensure that there is clarity between partners and continuity between organisations in the event that key personnel change roles or retire.

The Welsh Government's core funding for adult community learning, the 'community learning grant', is used differently across Powys and NPT. In Powys, the local authority allocates the grant to NPTC Group of Colleges to meet the ALC provision. In Neath Port Talbot, the local authority retains the entire community learning grant, which it deploys through its delivery arm, NPT Adult Learning.

Under the funding rules, the college is permitted to use up to 5% of its part-time funding for engagement across both counties and this has been used to finance the development of the partnership-wide website and a dedicated marketing officer.

Leaders and staff at all levels show a clear sense of moral purpose about the role of adult learning in the community and work purposefully towards the partnership's vision.

Partners are engaged with regional strategic challenges, such as in planning the support and retraining for adults who may become redundant as result of reconfiguration at the Port Talbot steelworks.

The partnership offers a wide and well-considered range of provision, intended to meet the needs of the partnership's learners and potential learners. The offer is suitably focused on Welsh Government priority areas such as numeracy, literacy and digital skills. It also includes well-focused entry routes for adult learners into vocational learning, such as welding, plastering, catering, horticulture or childcare. The partnership offers bespoke provision to support exceptionally vulnerable groups and is careful to maintain their safety and confidentiality.

The partnership offers a useful range of part-time courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). This has recently been supplemented by full-time ESOL programmes.

It offers courses designed to support learners' well-being and mental health, such as felting, art therapy, or informal conversation classes such as 'chai and chat'. These act as effective engagement routes to bring learners into the provision and encourage them to progress onto more formal learning.

The offer includes a small amount of online delivery that learners can access remotely, for example 'numeracy at home' programmes, GCSE English, or a range of creative courses available as part of Adult Learning Wales' pan-Wales online offer, such as garment making or creative writing.

The partnership has recently developed a new website, which allows existing and potential learners to browse the full range of the partnership's offer.

Spotlight on the partnership website

The partnership has a recently developed website – <https://www.powysneathalc.co.uk> – which acts as a shop front to the partnership's provision. Learners or potential learners can browse or search for courses based on the course title or category, the provider or the location. Search pages then link through into each provider's main website where users can find out more or enrol. The site also contains an 'About us' section and learners' success stories, giving background about the partnership and its learners' achievements.

There is a notable culture across the partnership's staff of planning learning flexibly to adapt courses and programmes of learning to meet learners' needs and individual circumstances. For example, in horticulture, managers and teachers tailor the accreditation so that learners get what they need from the course, rather than requiring them to fit in with the 'planned' accreditation.

The partnership currently offers no provision through the medium of Welsh, meaning that Welsh-speaking learners or communities do not have the opportunity to benefit from adult community learning programmes in Welsh.

Partners have used the funding available through the UK Government's Multiply initiative to develop a range of new provision to engage learners and develop numeracy skills. This is being used to complement existing provision and provide entry routes and engagement into more formal learning, such as through family learning programmes where parents and children learn together in their children's schools. Partners have worked well to co-ordinate the provision they offer through Multiply, but face challenges in recruiting learners within the short timescales available.

In the Neath Port Talbot area, the partnership offers provision at a range of suitable learning centres in community venues and on the college campuses. In Powys, provision is offered at the college's campuses in Newtown and Brecon and at community venues in Newtown, Brecon and Welshpool. However, there are some areas of Powys, for example in the north-west, where no in-person provision is offered.

The partnership has a self-evaluation process, which draws together a wide range of information from each of the core partners into a single self-evaluation report and

quality improvement plan. The quality improvement plan identifies priority areas for the partnership and relevant actions needed to improve quality. However, some issues are not given sufficient prominence or not recognised in the quality improvement plan, for example the coverage of adult learning in the community provision across the full geographical scope of the partnership, or trends of underperforming outcomes in a few courses or programme areas, for example the relatively high drop-out rate in some ESOL, IT or GCSE mathematics and English courses.

The partnership has a clear quality cycle that includes cross-partner teaching and learning observations amongst core partners. Staff from core partners jointly carry out observations and complete accredited training in lesson observation. The partnership has mechanisms in place to share best practice, which are becoming embedded in partnership self-evaluation practice as it matures.

There are supportive processes to follow up on underperformance. For example, underperforming programmes are reviewed by the partnership's quality and subject managers, detailed action plans drawn up and monitoring of progress reported through the partnership's quality group. Progress against action plans is reported appropriately through the partnership's structures to the executive board.

Staff from all providers have access to a useful range of continuous professional learning, including training for staff, which supports learners' mental health and well-being, training for vocational staff to support their dual professionalism and training for middle and senior managers to develop their leadership and management practice.

To improve further, the partnership's leaders should focus on:

- ensuring the geographical location of provision is appropriate, especially in areas where no in-person provision is offered, such as north-west Powys
- ensuring self-evaluation and improvement planning recognises and gives sufficient prominence to the relatively high drop-out rate in some ESOL, IT or GCSE mathematics and English courses and the range of in-person provision across the partnership's area
- improving the partnership's Welsh medium provision

Additional information

Safeguarding arrangements

The provider's arrangements for safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults do not give cause for concern

Evidence base of the report

Before the inspection, inspectors:

- analysed the outcomes from the learner and staff questionnaires
- reviewed the partnership's published performance data

During the inspection, inspectors:

- met the chair of the partnership, officials of the local authorities, 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
- observed a broad sample of sessions
- observed and spoke with learners outside of sessions
- looked closely at the partnership's self-evaluation processes
- considered the partnership's quality improvement planning and looked at evidence to show how well the partnership had taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinised a wide range of partnership documents, including information on learner assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and, 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:

- reviewed 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

Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. '*most learners...*' or '*very few learners...*'. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/>)

The report was produced in accordance with 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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