



Literacy, numeracy and digital skills in adult learning in the community

September 2025

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Executive summary

This report focuses on the provision for literacy, numeracy and digital skills for adults – a significant part of the offer in the adult learning in the community (ALC) sector. For many learners it is a ‘second chance’ to develop these foundational skills, or to improve their job prospects, support their children or build the confidence to participate fully in society.

The report draws on visits by inspectors in late 2024 and early 2025 to eight of the 13 adult learning in the community partnerships, and to Adult Learning Wales. We carried out an online survey for ALC tutors. We analysed data from the official data set, and data returned to us in a request to individual partnerships. We drew on evidence from our inspections and annual link visits of ALC partnerships.

Engaging learners

Learners face numerous barriers that inhibit them from re-engaging with education. These appear to have increased over recent years. The biggest single barrier is learners’ confidence. Learners may feel reluctant to admit they need help or feel anxious about the thought of attending a formal learning setting. Other barriers include access to digital devices, financial constraints, mental health issues, undiagnosed or unsupported learning difficulties; or where English or Welsh is not their first language. Learners also report that difficulty in finding information about courses can be a barrier. Partnerships have improved their websites to allow learners to search for courses more effectively but, on the whole, partnerships’ websites are still complex to navigate or use language or formatting that may not be accessible to learners, or potential learners. We include a recommendation for partnerships to ensure that they have straightforward and accessible ways for potential learners to find out about their provision.

Partnerships have a good understanding of these barriers and have attempted to reduce many of the obstacles. However, partnerships have challenges in engaging learners, and restrictions and lack of clarity about how they spend their funding on engagement or family learning provision reduce their ability to recruit hard-to-reach learners. Providers also report significant challenges in funding their community venues. We include recommendations for Medr / the Welsh Government to develop clear and flexible guidance for providers about the range and type of provision they can fund through the community learning grant (particularly about engagement provision - for those needing first steps towards formal learning); and to improve the availability and consistency of family learning programmes.

Teaching and professional learning

We found that teaching was effective in most of our observations for this thematic review, consistent with our findings from inspections. Tutors personalise their approaches to meet the needs of individual learners, taking into account learners’

preferences and individual strengths and weaknesses. Most tutors give highly effective one-to-one support and use this to tailor their delivery and give feedback that helps learners know how to improve.

In the few examples where teaching was less effective, there were two general areas for improvement. The first is where tutors did not build effectively on the learner's prior knowledge and experience and did not have a wide enough understanding of the range of methods that can be used to perform, for example mathematical operations. The second is where tutors were over-reliant on workbooks as their main resource for teaching. In these cases, tutors did not include enough variety in their teaching and learners became bored, demotivated or disengaged. We include recommendations for the Welsh Government, Medr, partnerships and tutors to improve the professional learning for tutors in the sector to support their subject-specific teaching skills.

Provision and progress

Providers use a wide range of accredited and non-accredited courses to deliver adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills and we give examples of the range of courses offered. Published performance data indicates that around 84% of learners in all ALC provision successfully completed their courses and qualifications in 2022-2023. However, at both partnership level and system level, information collected about learners' enrolment and retention on programmes is not used effectively enough to evaluate how learners progress through their courses and develop their skills over time. The current data collection and analysis model is of limited value in drawing insights about the patterns and effectiveness of provision. As a result, there are important gaps in understanding of the impact of provision on learners' long-term outcomes. We recommend that a clearer focus is placed on how effectively provision supports learners to progress. We recommend that Medr helps develop methodologies to measure learners' progression into, within and beyond literacy, numeracy and digital skills provision. We recommend that partnerships ensure that they plan pathways for learners and evaluate, using a wide range of information, how effectively learners move through them.

We have been critical of ALC partnerships in inspection reports where poor partnership working or planning has meant that progression routes for learners have not been clear, and learners have not been given enough good-quality information to help them think about their next steps. We include recommendations to improve partnership working to engage new learners and plan for clearer progression routes.

The UK Government's Multiply initiative significantly influenced numeracy provision in partnerships across Wales from mid-2023 to March 2025. With a notably large funding allocation (£100m across Wales), partnerships were able to develop new collaborations with community groups, engage new learners whom they previously had not reached, and were creative in developing non-accredited, numeracy-focused courses. These demonstrated that there was a demand for this kind of provision. However, partnerships frequently expressed frustration at the 'feast and famine' nature of the Multiply funding and, having only recently set up provision with the Multiply funding, were in the process of transitioning away from it.

Digital learning plays an important role, both as a distinct area of provision and as an integrated teaching tool. Digital skills courses are often less intimidating for learners and serve as accessible entry points into literacy or numeracy education. Tutors also integrate digital tools into core literacy and numeracy lessons, which enhances learners' engagement and the sessions' relevance. The challenges include learners' differing digital abilities, time constraints, and the need for reliable technology. Tutors commonly use tools like the Wales Essential Skills Toolkit (WEST) online assessment for literacy and numeracy, but these can pose difficulties for those with low digital confidence.

Most learners expressed a clear preference for in-person learning over online remote learning approaches, and we found that most partnerships had an appropriate balance of in-person to online remote learning, with typically about 5 – 15% of provision offered online.

Bilingual and Welsh-medium provision

Overall, we found very little provision was carried out through the medium of Welsh, and generally low demand from learners or potential learners. In naturally bilingual areas like Gwynedd and Ynys Môn, delivery was often bilingual, but assessments were usually in English. Learners tended to prioritise skill acquisition over the language of delivery, with many preferring to improve English literacy rather than Welsh. There was greater interest in learning numeracy through Welsh due to familiarity with mathematical terminology. Welsh-speaking learners taking digital skills courses, especially courses designed to support typically older learners in using their devices, expressed in general, a stronger demand for Welsh-medium delivery.

Successful Welsh-medium delivery often results from collaborations with community groups such as the Mentrau Iaith. Family learning programmes also supported engagement with Welsh-language provision, particularly through schemes funded by Multiply. We include a recommendation that partnerships identify opportunities to work in collaboration with existing local organisations to offer Welsh-medium or bilingual provision.

Introduction

This thematic report has been written in response to a request for advice from the Cabinet Secretary for Education in the remit letter to Estyn for 2024-2025. The report considers how effectively literacy, numeracy and digital skills are delivered through adult learning in the community (ALC) provision. The report is intended for the Welsh Government, Medr, leaders and teachers and tutors¹ in adult learning in the community partnerships and others interested in the sector.

The report draws on visits by inspectors during the Autumn term of 2024 and the Spring term of 2025 to eight of the 13 adult learning in the community partnerships and to Adult Learning Wales, the further education college for adult learning. We carried out an online survey for tutors and managers in the ALC sector. We analysed data from the official LLWR data set, and data returned to us in a request to individual partnerships. We also draw on the findings of our inspections and our annual link visits of ALC partnerships.

Giving adults a ‘second chance’ to improve their literacy and numeracy skills and to improve their digital skills is a core part of the adult learning in the community sector’s work. These skills are vital foundations to help adults participate fully in society and in their communities, to work or to improve their job prospects, to support their children and to improve their confidence and self-esteem. In addition to literacy, numeracy and digital skills provision, ALC partnerships deliver a range of other programmes, which interconnect and are intended to engage adults with learning and foster their well-being. While the focus of this report is literacy, numeracy and digital provision, our findings and recommendations cross over into the broader scope of adult learning in the community provision.

The report is structured around four themes. The first is how partnerships engage potential learners in taking the first steps back into formal education. Many learners face considerable barriers to taking this step. The most significant is a lack of confidence – many learners had disrupted experiences of education or may not have enjoyed their education at school. Simply crossing the threshold of a learning setting can be daunting. We describe these barriers in more detail and how partnerships have tried to reduce them through the design of their programmes. We also discuss the challenges that partnerships face in planning and funding their programmes.

The second theme relates to teaching and professional learning. We observed numerous teaching sessions on our visits and spoke to many tutors. Over one hundred tutors and staff responded to our online survey. We discuss how tutors assess the starting points of their learners and tailor their delivery and programmes accordingly.

¹ See note in the Glossary about the use of the terms ‘teachers’ and ‘tutors’ in this report.

We outline the focus of tutors' professional learning and highlight areas where it could be improved.

In the third theme, we consider the range of provision offered and the progress that learners make. We present insights from the published official data but also draw attention to the limitations of the current data collection and analysis model; notably that it does not help partnerships and other stakeholders to evaluate progress learners make moving into, within and beyond ALC literacy, numeracy and digital skills provision. We look at the range of courses partnerships offer and consider the impact of family learning, digital learning and the recent UK Government-funded Multiply initiative.

In our fourth theme, we look at bilingual and Welsh-medium provision. Very little literacy, numeracy or digital skills provision is carried out bilingually or in Welsh, and even less is assessed. Where provision is most effective, it is offered in collaboration with local organisations who already work with Welsh-speaking communities. We explore the nature of the demand for this provision and the potential cross-over between adult learning in the community provision and Dysgu Cymraeg | Learn Welsh provision for adults wishing to learn or improve their Welsh-language skills.

We thank all the learners, tutors and managers from adult learning in the community partnerships who took part in our online survey, in observations and in meetings for their contribution to this report.

Background

There has not been a comprehensive survey of adult literacy and numeracy skills in Wales since 2010 (Welsh Government, 2011). That survey found that 12% of adults had entry level literacy or below, 29% were at level 1 and 59% at level 2 or above. A higher proportion of adults were assessed to have numeracy skills at entry level or below (51%), 29% were at level 1, and 22% at level 2 or above. Literacy and numeracy levels were lower in unemployed adults, those with lower levels of household income and those without higher qualifications.

When compared to the UK as a whole, qualification levels held by adults in Wales have been consistently lower than the UK average (Welsh Government, 2025). The gap between those qualified to level 2 or above compared to those with no qualifications has widened since 2008 (Welsh Government, 2025).

According to the 2023 Adult Participation in Learning Survey in Wales (Learning and Work Institute, 2024), Wales has the lowest participation in learning rate of the UK nations and regions. Around two in five adults (41%) said that they had learned over the past three years, compared to 49% in the UK.

Literacy, numeracy and digital skills provision for adults is a core part of the work of adult learning in the community (ALC – see Glossary) partnerships in Wales. For the purposes of our inspection activity – and for this thematic review – we recognise thirteen ALC partnerships, and the designated further education institution for adult learning in the community, Adult Learning Wales. See Appendix 1 for a list of the partnerships and their respective local authorities.

Membership of each partnership differs from area to area, but most include provision offered by the local authority, further education colleges, including Adult Learning Wales, and voluntary or community organisations.

Adult learning in the community normally takes place at venues such as libraries, community learning centres or schools. While most courses are delivered in person, nearly all partnerships deliver some of their provision in an online or blended way.

The most recent published official data on enrolled learners and their activities for the ALC sector (Welsh Government, 2024a) is for 2022-2023² and shows that number of unique adult learners engaged with this provision increased by 53% compared with the previous year, from 10,440 to 16,005. The increases seen since the low point in 2020-2021 have partially reversed a longer-term decreasing trend. Lower numbers in recent years may be due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

² At the time of writing (18 June 2025), the ALC sector data for 2023-2024 has not been published due to data quality issues (Medr, 2025a)

Medr (the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research) is an arm's-length body of the Welsh Government, established by the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 to fund and regulate the tertiary education sector in Wales (Medr, 2025e). It responds to the strategic priorities set out by Welsh ministers (Welsh Government, 2024c). Since August 2024, Medr funds ALC partnerships through the annual community learning grant, to deliver courses:

- for developing literacy, numeracy, digital skills
- in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)
- for older learners promoting social engagement
- that develop employability skills;
- and other courses that help engage adults in learning

In 2024-2025, the community learning grant was approximately £6.6m in total for ALC partnerships across Wales (Medr, 2025c), with a similar amount, from the further education funding allocation, for Adult Learning Wales.

Since 2024, Medr has funded Bridgend College directly to deliver provision in the county.

Further education colleges also contribute to adult learning in the community provision through their participation in partnerships, either through franchise arrangements with the local authority where their provision is funded through the community learning grant, or through their part-time funding allocation.

Partnerships were also strongly involved with their local authorities' and further education colleges' bids for the UK Government-funded adult numeracy initiative, Multiply (UK Government 2022a). This funding was intended to develop a range of new provision to engage learners and develop numeracy skills.

Recommendations

Medr and the Welsh Government should:

- R1 Review the way in which data are used to measure outcomes for learners in ALC, with a new focus on how effectively provision supports learners to progress
- R2 Develop methodologies for measuring learners' progression and retention into, within and beyond ALC provision
- R3 Improve opportunities for partnerships to compare and benchmark their provision offer, learners' progression and outcomes with other partnerships
- R4 Develop clear guidance for ALC partnerships about the expectations for their provision, with a suitable and flexible local balance of provision for:
 - engagement, for those needing the first steps towards formal learning
 - literacy, numeracy and digital skills
 - skills to prepare adults for employment and job seeking
 - well-being and personal development
 - provision offered bilingually or through the medium of Welsh
- R5 Improve the availability and consistency of family learning programmes, as a means of engaging learners and potential learners in adult learning in the community provision of literacy, numeracy and digital skills
- R6 Ensure that partnerships have robust partnership agreements between their constituent providers, setting out clearly arrangements for leadership and accountability, funding, provision, progression and quality assurance
- R7 Promote professional learning – both accredited and non-accredited - which supports tutors to develop subject specific teaching skills

Partnerships should:

- R8 Ensure that learners or potential learners have accessible, straightforward ways of finding out about the full partnership's provision, which take account of the barriers that adults have in engaging in learning
- R9 Ensure that provision planning allows learners clear pathways to progress to further levels in their learning of literacy, numeracy and digital skills
- R10 Sharpen self-evaluation to focus more clearly on how learners progress into, through and beyond literacy, numeracy and digital provision
- R11 Use a wide range of information to evaluate how learners progress, including outcomes and enrolment data, but also information from individual learning plans, initial and iterative assessment information and learners' own aspirations

- R12 Maximise opportunities to work in partnership with community organisations, schools and statutory agencies to engage new learners in provision to support literacy, numeracy and digital skills
- R13 Identify opportunities to work in partnership to offer Welsh-medium or bilingual provision
- R14 Ensure that professional learning for tutors has appropriate focus on developing subject specific teaching skills so that tutors have a wide range of teaching tools to meet learners' needs

Tutors should:

- R15 Ensure that their teaching practice is informed from professional learning in the subject specific pedagogy for teaching literacy, numeracy and digital skills to adults

Theme 1 – Engaging learners

How partnerships identify and engage with learners

Over recent years we have frequently left recommendations in inspection reports for partnerships to improve how they communicate the range of provision for adults available in the partnership's area (e.g. Estyn, 2022a, p96; Estyn, 2024a). Where we have left these recommendations, it has been because the partnership's communications were difficult to navigate, were limited to membership-only social media sites, did not use language that would be clear to potential learners or did not give an overview of the full range of provision offered by different providers.

Across the sector, we have seen improvement in the way partnerships use their websites to inform learners and potential learners about their provision. However, a minority of partnerships' websites are still not straightforward to navigate or use language or layouts, which may not be fully accessible to potential or existing learners.

A few partnerships have redesigned their websites enabling users to search and browse courses offered by all providers in the partnership. Others have improved the visibility of links to their partners' websites so that users can navigate more straightforwardly between them to search for courses.

Examples of partnership websites that include one or more of these helpful features include:

- Swansea Adult Learning partnership – <https://learningswansea.wales> – allows learners and potential learners to search for courses and links partner providers' websites
- Powys Neath Port Talbot Adult Learning in the Community partnership – <https://www.powysneathalc.co.uk> – has a search facility and gives links out to partners' websites
- North East Wales Adult Community Learning Partnership (Wrexham and Flintshire) – <https://www.flintshire.gov.uk/en/Resident/Adult-Community-Learning/Home.aspx> – gives an overview of the partnership and links to the partnership's social media site
- Learning Pembrokeshire – <https://www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk/adult-learning> – hosted on the Pembrokeshire council's website and allows users to search for courses and apply online

Partnerships also use methods such as leaflet drops to residents, taster sessions, posters in libraries and community venues, community outreach events and open evenings. Learners are also referred to ALC partnerships through agencies such as Job Centre Plus or the Department for Work and Pensions, or through referrals between providers.

Learners frequently told us that word-of-mouth recommendation from a friend or family member remains one of the most effective ways in which they hear about a course.

Barriers learners face and how these are accommodated

We spoke with many learners and teaching staff on our visits to providers. In our online survey of tutors, 106 respondents (out of 114) commented on the barriers that learners face in re-engaging with learning to help them develop their literacy and numeracy skills. Several consistent themes from the visits and the survey emerged, concordant with other studies discussing adults' motivation and barriers to return to education (e.g. Estyn, 2020a; UK Government, 2018)

In the main, tutors and managers expressed the view that, over recent years, the barriers to learners' participation had increased, especially in relation to learners' confidence and to their initial willingness to engage in education.

A lack of confidence and self-belief was the single most frequently reported barrier. Learners can feel embarrassed about their perceived skill gaps and reluctant to admit they needed help. They may fear being judged, failing, or being compared to others. This lack of self-belief is particularly pronounced for those who have faced negative or traumatic learning experiences in the past, leaving them anxious about returning to education. For some learners, the thought of 'crossing the threshold' of a formal education institution – school or college - is enough to stop them applying. These learners particularly valued the opportunity to learn in settings perceived as less threatening, such as community centres, or where they entered a school primarily in the role of parent, carer or grandparent, rather than learner.

Notably, learners reported less concern about accessing support for their digital skills – poor digital skills not having the same perceived stigma as poor numeracy or literacy skills.

Access to essential resources such as digital devices, reliable internet, and transport pose challenges for many learners, particularly those in rural or economically disadvantaged areas. Financial constraints, including the cost of childcare, course fees, or transport, further limit participation. Unpredictable work schedules and family responsibilities may make it difficult for learners to commit to regular attendance.

Mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and low resilience, were also frequently mentioned. Both tutors and learners referred to lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, with learners and potential learners not having fully recovered from the effects of isolation, the longer-term impacts to their confidence and of having 'got out of the habit' of engaging with learning.

Undiagnosed or unsupported learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, autism, or ADHD, present obstacles for some learners and potential learners. These issues can be compounded if there is a lack of tailored support or unsuitable learning environment.

Similarly, learners with physical challenges can face additional barriers that hinder their ability to focus and make progress.

For those learners for whom English or Welsh is not their first language, limited proficiency in English, including low literacy levels in their first language, is a significant barrier. Migrants and refugees face additional challenges related to cultural differences, finding out information about courses, adapting to unfamiliar education systems, and managing other personal issues such as housing or legal matters.

The final category of barriers reported by tutors and learners relates to where programmes are poorly timed, for example if classes clash with school drop-off or collection times.

Overall, we found that providers had a good understanding of the barriers that adults face accessing education, and that they had attempted to anticipate and reduce many of the obstacles to participation. For example, nearly all providers had start and end times to their classes which allowed learners to drop-off and collect children from school if necessary. For example, Adult Learning Wales' adult literacy and numeracy classes generally start at about 09.30 and finish before 15.00.

Nearly all providers offered some elements of their adult literacy, numeracy or digital skills classes online. This was typically between 5 and 15% of their total literacy, numeracy or digital skills provision and was intended to cater for those learners who are unable to attend regular in-person classes, or prefer this mode of learning. Providers reported that learners, in the main, have a clear preference for in-person learning, and that the social and well-being benefits of learning are stronger when learners attend in-person.

Many providers supplied laptops or other digital hardware to learners, including dongles to enable access to mobile Wi-Fi for learners who otherwise may not be able to access the internet.

However, providers reported two big challenges. The first is how to engage learners who, for all the reasons identified above, were finding it increasingly difficult to engage with learning. Providers reported that, following the COVID-19-pandemic, learners were less interested in their 'bread and butter provision' of literacy, numeracy and digital skills courses and that learners needed something to 'hook them in' before they were comfortable to engage in these types of programmes. Many providers were using a range of engagement provision, presented in a variety of ways, to gain the attention of learners.

One example of this is family learning provision. This is discussed in more detail in Theme 3 of this report, but in essence it is usually informal learning, at a school, aimed at parents, grandparents and adult carers of children at the school. It is typically presented as 'learning with your child', or 'helping your child to learn' See, for example, the case studies from the North East Wales ACL partnership (Estyn, 2022b) or Merthyr Tydfil ACL partnership (Estyn, 2020b). Family learning can be a very effective hook for

adult learners who may be unwilling to sign up for a course directly aimed at adults with poor literacy skills, but when presented as a course to help your child at school, it becomes much more palatable. Once engaged, providers reported that parents on these courses were often willing to sign up for their other literacy- or numeracy-improver programmes, or were able to give word-of mouth recommendations to friends or family who might take part. This process of ‘crossing the threshold’ appears to be a key component of reengaging adults who may otherwise be reluctant to engage in formal learning. However, family learning programmes are not funded directly through the Medr community learning grant, and there is very patchy provision across Wales. In some areas, for example Cardiff or Pembrokeshire, there are well-established programmes of family learning. In others, none at all.

Providers were able to use Multiply funding more flexibly than their community learning grant, and many used Multiply funding creatively to offer a range of engagement-type provision, or family learning programmes, related to numeracy.

The second major challenge relates to the affordability of suitable venues for this kind of learning. Learners reported finding familiar, local venues more accessible, and this reduced one of the main barriers to their engagement. Nearly all local authority providers used existing community venues, such as libraries or multipurpose community venues. Colleges who deliver ALC for local authorities often used town centre or community-based learning hubs, which are more accessible to learners. Nearly all providers – whether college or local authority – reported that the hire or running costs of the physical estate is a significant challenge.

Theme 2 – Teaching and Professional Learning

Initial assessment and the role of WEST (the Wales Essential Skills Tool)

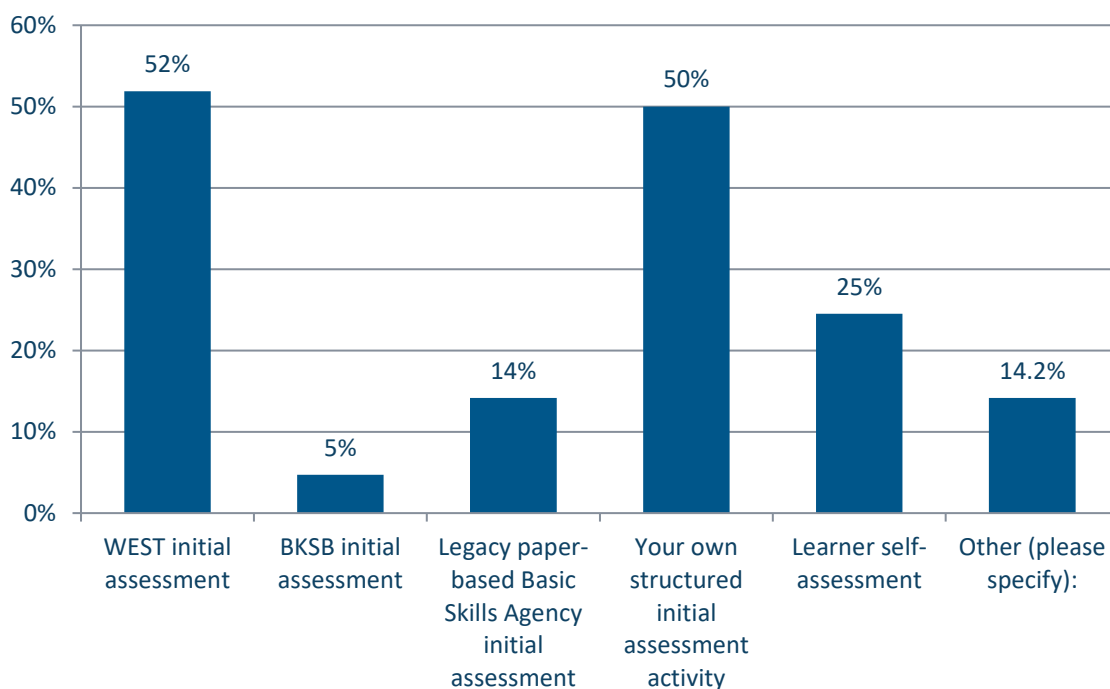
Overall, we found that tutors used initial assessments effectively and that these provided a valuable starting point for understanding learners' abilities. The term frequently used to describe a person's strengths and areas for improvement across the range of literacy or numeracy skills is 'spikey profile' – a learner may be strong in some areas but weaker in others. Initial assessments help identify a learner's spikey profile and inform the development of individual learning plans (ILPs). These assessments were effective for determining general skill levels and tailoring teaching approaches to individual needs.

Nearly all tutors used initial assessments to determine the starting points of their learners. Tutors frequently used a combination of assessment tools or varied their approaches depending on the learner. For example, tutors reported that formal assessments can intimidate learners, especially those who lack confidence or familiarity with digital platforms.

For some learners, lengthy or complex assessments can lead to them becoming bored or disengaged with the assessment process, undermining their accuracy. To help overcome this, tutors also used a range of supplementary methods, such as free writing tasks, practical exercises, or tutor-led conversations. These approaches help reduce anxiety, build rapport, and provide a nuanced understanding of learners' needs.

In our online survey of tutors, we asked how they assess learners' starting points. Of those who responded to the survey (114 respondents), 106 tutors gave information about the tools they used for initial assessment of learners.

Chart 1: Responses to “How do you assess learners’ starting points for when they come into your provision?”: Select all the options that apply.



Based on responses from 106 tutors

Chart 1, above, shows that about half of respondents used the Wales Essential Skills Toolkit (WEST) online initial assessment tools (WEST, 2025). A similar proportion used their own structured initial assessment activity, such as a short written or numeracy task. About a quarter used learner self-assessments, where learners rated their own ability. Fourteen per cent of tutors used paper based initial assessment, some of which dated to resources produced for the Basic Skills Agency in the early 2000s. About 5% of respondents reported using the BKSb IT-based initial assessment tool.

Tutors reported that effectiveness of initial assessment tools was reduced in learners with additional support needs³ (e.g., dyslexia or for learners with neurodivergent conditions).

While these tools provided a general indication of skill levels, tutors found that they often lacked the depth needed to accurately assess specific abilities such as writing and speaking. This can result in overestimation or underestimation of learners’ capabilities.

About a quarter of tutors used learner self-assessment as a part of their initial assessment. However, they reported that, while these were helpful to some extent, they may not always reflect true skill levels due to misinterpretation or learners’ lack of confidence.

³ See Glossary for notes on ‘additional support needs’

Tutors reported that WEST was overall a useful tool, but that it had a number of limitations that reduced its effectiveness. It does not comprehensively assess communication skills, such as writing or speaking, and relies heavily on digital proficiency, which disadvantages learners with limited IT skills. Additionally, the interface and process were often described as inaccessible or overly time-consuming, resulting in disengagement among some learners.

How tutors design their programmes to meet the needs of learners

We found teaching was effective in most of our observations for this thematic review. This is consistent with our findings from ALC inspections. One of the questions that we asked tutors in our visits to sessions was, ‘What teaching methods do you use when teaching adults literacy, numeracy and digital skills?’ In most cases, the tutor’s response was that their approach depended very much on the style of learning that the adult preferred and on a learner’s spikey profile. One tutor put it succinctly: ‘personalisation **is** the teaching method in adult community learning’.

Personalising learning – tailoring the style and method of delivery to meet the needs of an individual learner – is typical in adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills sessions. We outline below the ways in which tutors modified their approaches to accommodate individual learners’ needs.

One of the key strengths of tutors in the sector is the extent to which they know their learners. Nearly all tutors quickly get to know their learners and invest time in developing mutual trust and rapport. They usually knew their learners’ backstories, their motivation for returning to learning, their aspirations and their individual strengths and areas for development in skills. Literacy, numeracy and digital skills classes in ALC are typically small (fewer than 10 learners) and tutors have the time and opportunity to adapt their delivery according to learners’ individual needs. We found most tutors gave very effective one-to-one support to learners as they worked and used this to tailor their delivery and give feedback that was helpful to learners in knowing how to improve.

Adults nearly always have some prior experience of learning literacy or numeracy and at least some exposure to using digital technology. Adults who are improving their literacy or numeracy typically report experiencing interrupted learning while at school or simply ‘not getting it’ first time around. Nevertheless, they usually have literacy or numeracy strategies, which combine what they did learn at school with experience they have gained as an adult. The most effective tutors we observed built on the strategies that learners already have, even if those strategies may not have been the tutor’s own preferred approach.

In most classes we observed, learners had an individual learning plan (ILP). These varied in style and structure. In the most effective cases, they were working documents that were jointly ‘owned’ by the tutor and learner and set out clearly the short and medium-term learning goals of the learner.

Most learners we spoke to admitted to not enjoying completing their ILPs, but nevertheless recognised them as a useful tool to keeping them on track and helping them to focus on their current learning goals.

Where they were least effective, ILPs stated the list of accredited units that the learner was following but made little recognition of the actual steps of learning required to achieve them. In these cases, completion of the ILP became a bureaucratic exercise and added little value to learning.

Where tutors used ILPs most effectively, the ILP had been produced collaboratively with the learner. They used information from initial and diagnostic assessment outcomes, any support or additional support needs that a learner may have, and took into account the learner's motivation and goals for learning. Both tutors and learners referred to the ILP as a working document, and the document was used to help the tutor structure learning as appropriate for each learner.

Most tutors displayed flexibility and adaptability. They often adjusted lesson plans in response to unexpected challenges, individual progress or learner preferences. This included modifying teaching methods, simplifying or extending tasks, and offering learners choices in how they engage with activities. Frequently, tutors tailored the content of the session to meet learners' individual needs or interests. For example, in a digital session aimed at older adults on using their smart phones, the tutor structured the session around the learners' request to learn about how to install and set up particular apps, and to adjust the security features on their phones. In a different digital session, the tutor worked with a learner to apply finance calculations using a spreadsheet to support the learner's role as a community club secretary. Learners strongly valued tutors' willingness to modify their teaching to suit their interests and apply their learning to their own lives.

Many tutors supported learners who needed significant individual support or those with additional support needs well. Tutors used a variety of tools, such as dyslexia-friendly resources, larger fonts, coloured paper or assistive technology, to support learners. Supporting learners' additional support needs has been a focus of professional learning across the sector. Tutors frequently identified the need to continue to develop their capacity to support learners with additional support needs as a priority for their own professional development.

Spotlight: literacy through literature, with a group of neurodiverse learners in Carmarthenshire

A small group of tutors have been developing teaching approaches for their group of neurodiverse learners. In a mixed level essential skills class, learners have a variety of support needs, for example, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia or difficulty in concentrating due to pain. The tutor had shared information about neurodiversity and different learning styles with learners early on in the course. There were a series of posters on the wall explaining neurodiversity, with QR codes referring learners to more detailed information. The learners said that understanding neurodiversity helped them to understand their past difficulties with learning and to be more tolerant of their own and each other's difficulties.

Learners were encouraged to suggest the topics they would like to study to improve their literary skills, including literature and poetry. The tutor used a 'language through literature' approach to bring the underlying principles of sentence structure and grammar to life. One learner was interested in the weather. Using a video featuring the changing seasons in the countryside, interwoven with factual statements on the weather and clips of literary writing, the tutor encouraged learners to write imaginatively to recognise and understand the basic concepts of grammar such as paragraphs and punctuation, and to use rich vocabulary. As a group, the learners took walks into town and in parks and discuss what they had seen.

The multisensory nature of the work helped learners to remember the points of literacy and how these are transferred into other contexts, such as factual writing or dealing with official documents. The learners had grown in confidence and self-awareness, and developed a new interest in reading, literature and poetry.

On the whole, we found that teaching was effective in most of the sessions we observed. In the few sessions where teaching was less effective, there were two general areas for improvement. The first was where tutors did not build effectively on the learner's prior knowledge and experience. For example, a learner had used a valid method for multiplication that was effective for them, but the tutor tried to use a different method – perhaps the tutor's preferred method – which may also have been effective but required the learner to 'unlearn' their original method, leading to learners becoming confused. When we discussed this with tutors, it became apparent that in a few cases, tutors did not have a wide enough understanding of the range of methods that could be used to perform, for example, mathematical operations.

The second was where tutors were over-reliant on workbooks as their main resource for teaching. Workbooks help structure learning, particularly in programmes that have rolling enrolment, and where learners in a class may have very different strengths and areas for improvement. However, where they were overused, tutors did not include enough variety in their teaching and learners became bored or demotivated.

Tutors' views on the impact of literacy, numeracy and digital provision

As part of our online survey of tutors for this thematic report, we asked tutors to tell us about the successes and challenges in teaching this type of provision. Throughout this report, we have reflected the challenges that tutors identified, particularly in respect to the barriers that learners face and the actions that tutors and partnerships take to overcome them.

Tutors' own descriptions of their successes were often phrased in terms of the wider impact of learning on the adults they teach; not just in terms of academic achievement but also in growing confidence, improved well-being, and life-changing opportunities for learners.

A common theme was learners' growth in confidence. Tutors described how learners had overcome their fears and anxieties about education, leading to increased self-esteem and motivation. For example, they described learners who were now able to help their children with homework, use online banking, or simply feel more capable in their daily lives, with the positive ripple effect on their families and communities. These tutors responded:

Personally, watching individuals who haven't been to school beam with confidence when they have read or written something they are proud of will always be a success to me. When they achieve their first ever qualification after whispering on their first day they cannot read or write is a huge success, I believe.

The learners who suddenly 'get it', who have a certificate for the first time ever, who refuse to give up, who cry when they get that level 2 qualification meaning they can train for their dream job, who have a reason to leave the house, who couldn't read and now can, who can now help their children, who can go to college...

If people are enabled to express themselves with confidence in one area, this inevitably leads to greater confidence in others – so an increase in any of the three basic skills will create a bridge of opportunity to the other two.

Our successes can be lost in complicated data but at the heart of them are learners who have changed their lives by improving their essential skills: those who have committed to working through the levels and then progress onto Access courses and degree courses; those who become better parents to support their children's educational journeys and those who build the confidence and aspirations to break the cycles of poverty. Successes in essential skills cannot always be measured by qualifications but learners who improve their skills, even in small ways, improve their life prospects, health and wellbeing for the rest of their lives.

Beyond academic success, tutors highlighted the social benefits, including combating

loneliness, fostering friendships, and creating a supportive community within the classroom:

I think bringing groups of people together who necessarily wouldn't engage with each other in their normal day to day lives, then watching those individuals grow in confidence and gain that feeling that they have achieved something as a team will always feel like a success.

Successes are seeing the learners enjoy the lesson, mix with other people and build confidence whilst progressing with their individual learning skills.

Re engaging learners with others - the social outcomes and improved wellbeing. This leads to more likely progression on to further study better engagement with learning.

Tutors emphasised the importance of tailoring lessons to individual needs and interests, which helps learners feel valued and supported. The use of individual learning plans and real-life, practical activities were cited as key factors in maintaining learner engagement and ensuring progress.

Frequently, tutors referred to the professional reward of witnessing learners' growth and success or personal satisfaction they derive from knowing they have made a difference, whether through helping a learner achieve their first qualification or simply fostering improved confidence:

It gives me great pleasure and a sense of everything being worth it when my learners pass their exams and they are so thrilled to have achieved them. I have been able to give some of my skills and knowledge to others. It's the reason I became a teacher.

People realising they are able to learn anything they want with a bit of enhanced skills and a dollop of confidence.

Professional learning

From May 2024, tutors ('practitioners' using the terminology of the legislation) who deliver on Medr-funded adult learning in the community provision, have been required to register with the Education Workforce Council and attain minimum professional qualifications (EWC, 2025). On our visits, nearly all tutors and managers recognised the value of this in continuing to professionalise the ALC workforce. However, they raised concerns that, in a workforce which largely employs tutors on fractional part-time or hourly contracts, the additional overhead of paying for the annual registration fee (currently £45) may act as a disincentive for tutors to work in the sector. In at least one provider, the employer paid the annual registration fee, although in the main, tutors themselves paid the fee, through an annual deduction from their individual pay.

Tutors and managers also raised concerns about the list of recognised mandatory qualifications (EWC, 2024a). It contained a number of qualifications that didn't appear

to be relevant to the sector and didn't have sufficient focus on developing and demonstrating appropriate teaching skills in ALC contexts.

The EWC has recently begun collecting data about the ALC teaching workforce. The data from the first year of collection (2024) have not yet been published (EWC, 2024b). Tutors in adult learning in the community frequently describe non-traditional career routes into the profession. They have often had other careers before entering teaching in ALC: they may have worked in the community as volunteers, had other professional roles, or taught in other sectors (as primary or secondary teachers, for example) and taken early retirement from those positions, or changed sectors. They may have worked in work-based learning or employment-focused roles and transferred into teaching adults as their interest in the sector has grown.

Tutors in the sector displayed a strong commitment to their learners. They know their learners well, and tailor their teaching approaches accordingly. Class sizes in adult literacy, numeracy or digital skills sessions are typically small – which allows tutors to spend time with learners and give them the individual attention they need.

However, tutors in this sector are not always subject experts. For example, tutors of numeracy may not have a strong subject background in mathematics. In this study, we found that teaching was generally sound but in the few cases where there were areas for improvement, it was where tutors were not aware of the potential range of teaching strategies that might be useful for teaching a learner struggling with, for example, multiplication, dealing with decimals or reading complex words using phonetic approaches. Tutors did report that they undertook professional learning to deepen their subject specific knowledge and teaching, but many reported that there were too few opportunities to carry out in-depth accredited learning that focussed on subject specific teaching skills relevant to teaching adult literacy, numeracy or digital skills.

In our online survey for ALC teaching staff, we asked if respondents had taken part in professional learning specifically about teaching literacy, numeracy or digital skills within the last 12 months. Only around half of 107 respondents to this question reported that they had. In conversations with tutors on our visits, we found the proportion of tutors who reported taking part in recent professional learning to be rather higher. However, this is nevertheless a concerning response since it indicates that tutors in the sector are not universally taking part in professional learning relating to their core teaching practice.

In the survey, we asked respondents to tell us more about the professional learning they had carried out and its usefulness to their practice. There were 52 responses to this question.

Of those who mentioned accredited professional learning to develop pedagogy, the Agored Cymru level 3 Certificate for Essential Skills Practitioners (Agored Cymru, 2025) was cited as a useful example, with a helpful focus on subject-specific teaching. However, there were currently only a few centres offering the qualification.

Spotlight on level 3 accredited professional learning

Dysgu Bro – a member of the Ceredigion ALC partnership – offers the level 3 Certificate for Essential Skills Practitioners as distance learning provision to ALC tutors across Wales. Up to 20 tutors carry out the course at the provider annually. The course has four units which include: adults and young people as essential skills learners, the assessment of learners' skills, how to plan a programme of learning and exploring strategies for addressing the needs of learners.

From the online survey, tutors reported the following as being the focus of their recent professional learning:

- Training in literacy and numeracy. In addition to the level 3 Essential Skills Practitioner qualifications mentioned above, tutors reported attending a variety of courses focusing on the teaching of literacy and numeracy. These included internal and awarding organisation standardisation events or sessions focused on the assessment for Essential Skills Wales qualifications.
- Digital skills and emerging technologies. A range of training related to digital skills, including the practical application of artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality tools. These sessions helped tutors develop teaching resources, incorporate new technologies into lessons, and explore the potential for improving learner engagement. Training also included workshops on using digital tools for assessment and using virtual learning environments.
- Collaboration and sharing practice events. Tutors valued opportunities for collaboration through team meetings, standardisation sessions, and tutor conferences. Tutors reported cross-centre training days to be particularly effective in reducing isolation for tutors who may work independently in community venues for much of the time. They felt that they benefited from sharing practice and networking with other tutors.
- Training on supporting learners with additional support needs and other barriers to education has been well-received. Examples include autism awareness and trauma-informed practice. Tutors reported that these sessions improved their confidence in addressing learners' needs and have helped to foster more inclusive learning environments.
- Bilingual pedagogy. Tutors reported attending a range of training to develop their capacity to teach bilingually. A few tutors employed by further education colleges reported receiving beneficial training from Sgiliaith to develop their personal Welsh language skills and their awareness of bilingual pedagogies. (See Estyn, 2025c, for further discussion of Welsh language training for post-16 teachers.)
- Generic professional development and updating. Most tutors who responded reported taking part in generic training from their provider to support their broader role, for example in safeguarding and Prevent, equality and diversity, or health and safety.

On our visits to providers and from the responses to our online survey, those tutors who have carried out recent professional learning demonstrated reflective approaches and

found their training to be helpful. Many cited examples of how they have applied professional learning into their practice, in supporting learners with additional support needs, increasing their use of bilingual pedagogy or incorporating interactive tools to enhance learners' engagement.

Theme 3 – Provision and progress

Published data

Partnerships record their funded learning delivery using the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) data system. At the time of the preparation of this report, the most recent official published data for Welsh Government / Medr funded ALC provision was for the academic year 2022-2023. Publication of the 2023-2024 data has been delayed due to data quality issues (Medr, 2025b).

There is currently no standard, consistent methodology to identify courses or learning activities as ‘literacy’, ‘numeracy’ or ‘digital skills’. As a result, the type and quantity of provision indicated varies depending on the methodology used in the analysis, and analysis relies, to some extent, on manually categorising the provision based on the course title. This hinders the ability to understand the provision offered at a system level or to make comparisons between partnerships and providers. Overall, current data collection and analysis approaches through the LLWR are of limited value in providing useful insights into patterns and effectiveness of provision.

Learner Outcomes Report

Performance data for ALC is available in the public domain through the Learner Outcomes Report (LOR) (Welsh Government, 2024b; Medr, 2025b). The LOR shows, for each partnership, for each level and broad type of provision, the completion rate (of all the learning activities which started, how many were completed), attainment rate (of all the learning activities which were completed, how many resulted in the learner achieving the qualification they were aiming for) and the success rate (combines completion and attainment into a single overall measure: of all learning activities that were started, how many were successfully completed and achieved).

The LOR for 2022-2023 show that, overall, learners taking ALC programmes successfully completed their courses and qualifications at rate of 84%, slightly higher than the rate for 2021-2022 of 81%.

LLWR Inform

We used the Welsh Government’s ‘LLWR Inform’ secure web-based portal to view partnerships’ summary data, including the range of adult literacy, numeracy and digital courses that partnerships had returned in their LLWR data. This system uses the same underpinning data as the LOR but gives finer grained detail and is available to restricted users such as the partnership managers, Medr officials or Estyn.

Data on LLWR Inform indicated that in 2022-2023, partnerships recorded 8,691 learning activities for the subject area ‘Adult Basic Education’, which includes provision for adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills; and 1,372 learning activities for the subject area of ‘Information and Communication Technology’, which contains courses to develop digital skills. In that year, learners successfully completed their courses in these subject areas at rates of 84 and 81% respectively.

The rates at which learners complete, attain and succeed in their qualifications is of course important information, helpful in evaluating the sector's, or a partnership's effectiveness. However, these metrics give a very limited perspective, particularly when a substantial proportion of delivery of literacy, numeracy, digital or other types of provision in the ALC sector is not formally accredited; and achieving a qualification is often not a learner's primary purpose for study.

At present, neither the published LOR nor the more detailed LLWR Inform site give insight into the way in which learners are retained or progress through adult learning in the community provision.

Analysis of LLWR data set by Medr statisticians

In addition to the data reported above, Medr statisticians, with access to the full LLWR data set, carried out data analyses in support of this thematic report. Their analysis examined the LLWR data set for adult community learning (ACL – see Glossary) that is delivered by local authority providers and by further education colleges. It did not include part-time or full-time further education delivered by colleges that was not identified in the LLWR data set as ACL. We report the methodology in the 'Methods and evidence base' section of this report.

There were 3,000 unique learners who took at least one literacy, digital literacy, or numeracy learning activity or course in 2022-2023, of whom:

- 1,215 learners took literacy
- 1,170 learners took digital literacy
- 975 learners took numeracy

Some learners took multiple types of adult literacy, numeracy or digital skills courses.

Learners were more likely to be living in deprived neighbourhoods, based on the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD).

Of the 3,000 learners, 42% were aged between 25 and 49, 23% of learners were 65 or older, and 5% were under the age of 19. Older learners were more likely to take digital literacy. Overall, 70% of learners were female (concordant with the findings of the recent Adult Learning in Wales survey – Learning and Work Institute, 2024). Twenty per cent of learners self-reported a learning difficulty and/or disability.

There were 4,480 basic skills activities delivered in literacy, 'digital literacy' or numeracy in 2022-2023. Of these, 8% of activities were recognised qualifications in the Qualifications in Wales database. Another 46% of activities were units of qualifications. A further 46% fit neither of these descriptions.

Local authorities delivered 24% of activities directly. Another 69% were delivered by local authorities via a franchise arrangement with a college. The remaining 7% of activities were delivered by colleges. A large number of literacy, digital skills or numeracy qualifications were delivered by colleges as part-time further education, but this was not classified by the college as adult community learning.

A total of 94% of identified basic skills activities in literacy, digital literacy or numeracy, were delivered through the medium of English.

Where the level was specified, 53% of activities were entry level, 25% were level 1 and 18% were level 2. However, 1,405 activities did not have a specified level.

The range of literacy, numeracy and digital skills provision

In order to understand the range of courses being offered to develop adult learners' literacy, numeracy or digital skills, we asked the partnerships we visited to complete a data return for us identifying which courses they offered, at which levels. All nine partnerships or providers that we visited completed their data return, allowing us to gain a detailed insight into the range of courses offered. Note that this is the partnerships' own data – not officially verified data – and has not had the quality checks that would apply to verified, published data. Since only nine of the fourteen adult learning partnerships (including Adult Learning Wales) were included in this study, the data represents only a sample of the picture across Wales.

We did not specifically request information in the data return to include Multiply-funded courses. Four partnerships did in fact return information about courses funded by Multiply, and so for consistency, we will address the Multiply-funded provision of those partnerships separately.

The nine partnerships identified a total of 1,124 courses. In some cases, these included multiple versions of the same course but run in different venues (e.g. 'Maths for all (Venue 1)', 'Maths for All (Venue 2)', etc.) and so 1,124 is an over-representation of the total diversity of different courses that are offered.

Literacy, numeracy or digital?

We asked the partnerships to self-categorise their courses as 'Literacy', 'Numeracy' or 'Digital'⁴. Table 1 shows the partnerships' own categorisations of their courses. 347 were categorised as 'Digital', 420 as 'Literacy' and 259 as 'Numeracy'. 82 were categorised as a mix of literacy, numeracy or digital or not specified.

⁴ We have recoded the original data received from partnerships throughout this analysis to simplify and clarify.

Table 1: partnerships' own categorisation of their courses

Category	Number
Digital	347
Literacy	420
Numeracy	259
Literacy / Numeracy	17
Literacy / Numeracy / Digital	6
Literacy / Digital	24
Mix (not specified)	35
Not known	14
Other	2
Grand Total	1,124

The balance of accredited and non-accredited provision

We asked partnerships to identify which courses were accredited and which were not accredited. Table 2 shows their responses. A total of 457 of the courses identified were not accredited and 566 were accredited. There was no entry to this field in 101 cases – mostly from one partnership – and these have been described here as ‘Not known’.

Partnerships need to offer a balance of courses, which meet the needs of learners: some learners will not be ready to take accredited courses and are more interested in engagement provision; others are ready, or need to achieve qualifications such as Essential Skills Wales qualifications (see Qualifications Wales, 2025) or GCSE mathematics or English to progress.

The range of accredited and non-accredited provision indicated here suggests a reasonably well-balanced mix of courses that lead to a qualification and courses that do not.

Table 2: partnerships' own categorisation of their courses

Category	Accredited	Not accredited	Not known	Total
Digital	164	130	53	347
Literacy	207	188	25	420
Numeracy	149	90	20	259
Literacy / Numeracy	6	11		17
Literacy / Numeracy / Digital		6		6
Literacy / Digital	24			24
Mix (not specified)	10	25		35
Not known	6	7	1	14
Other			2	2
Grand Total	566	457	101	1,124

Awarding organisations

Partnerships and the individual providers in them choose which awarding organisations they use to accredit their provision. On our visits we asked partnerships about their decision making in the choice of awarding organisation for accrediting the courses they offer. Table 3 shows the range of awarding organisations⁵ in use for accredited courses. One provider did not return information about awarding organisations. Agored Cymru is the most frequently used awarding organisation and is used by all eight of the partnerships who returned information in this field. Both local authority providers and further education colleges use Agored Cymru.

In the main, providers told us they used Agored Cymru because there was a wide choice of accreditation options available, providers could tailor accredited units to meet the needs of their learners or develop bespoke accreditations where necessary. Partnerships also valued the options for accreditation at entry level and the ability to accredit very small units of learning and non-examined assessment methods – helpful for learners who are returning to formal learning and may be put off by the prospect of lengthy, formal or exam-based assessments.

⁵ See the website of the Federation of Awarding Bodies for information and links to individual awarding organisations – <https://awarding.org.uk/our-members>

City & Guilds was the second most frequently used awarding organisation. Providers in two of the eight partnerships that returned information in this field used this awarding organisation, mainly for accrediting Essential Skills Wales Qualifications. In both cases, the providers using City & Guilds were further education colleges, and the college used that awarding organisation to accredit Essential Skills Wales qualifications offered through its further education or work-based learning provision.

The WJEC was used by providers in two partnerships – one a college, one a local authority provider. In both cases, the courses being accredited were GCSE English or mathematics, or Essential Skills Wales.

BCS was used by one provider only, to accredit a small number of digital skills courses. Signature was also used by one provider only, to accredit a British Sign Language programme.

Table 3: Awarding organisations being used to accredit courses

Awarding Organisation	Number
Agored Cymru	478
City & Guilds	63
WJEC	19
BCS	4
Signature	1
Not known	1
Grand Total	566

The levels of the courses being offered

We asked partnerships to indicate at what level⁶ each of the courses they offered, both accredited and non-accredited, was being delivered. In only one case of the 1,024 courses identified did the partnership indicate level 3. This corroborates our findings from speaking with ALC partnerships that community-based provision for adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills has a ceiling at level 2.

Partnerships frequently entered a range of levels (e.g. ‘entry 2 to level 2’, ‘E1 – E3’) into

⁶ The term ‘level’, here, relates to the levels in the credit and qualifications framework. See <https://www.gov.wales/credit-and-qualifications-framework-cqfw> for detailed information.

this data field, indicating that learners were frequently taking a course at different levels – an appropriate approach indicating that partnerships are tailoring their provision to match the abilities of learners – an indication that is broadly corroborated by our inspection findings and our visits to providers.

The most frequent range of levels offered was at entry level and level 1, with about 90% of the courses offered at these levels. About 10% of courses specified level 2. These were typically GCSE Mathematics or English or Essential Skills Wales qualifications, or Agored units at level 2.

Range of courses being offered for literacy, numeracy or digital skills

Literacy

A total of 420 courses were identified by the nine partnerships as intended primarily to develop literacy skills. The highest level literacy qualifications offered were GCSE English (level 2), offered by a few partnerships. All partnerships offered the Essential Skills Wales qualification in Communication from entry level up to level 2.

Most partnerships also offered a range of smaller qualifications, from entry level to level 2, accredited by Agored Cymru. These included qualifications with titles such as:

- Reading information and instructions
- Working with letters of the alphabet
- Using phonics for reading - single consonants
- Writing to persuade
- Writing to communicate information
- Writing to describe
- Developing writing skills - autobiographical text
- Practical spelling
- Giving a presentation
- Taking part in formal discussions
- Punctuation and grammar
- Discussion skills
- Writing to communicate opinions
- Helping a child to develop their listening skills
- Using story sticks
- Reading and writing in the workplace
- Writing personal information

There was a range of non-accredited provision which indicated elements of engagement and family learning provision, including:

- Improve your English
- Conversation station
- English for employability

- Creative writing
- Story time
- Makaton
- Book club
- CV writing
- Wellies in the woods
- English for all
- Get skilled up
- Dyslexia awareness: reading and dyslexia, wellbeing, strategies and assistive technology
- Helping a child to read
- Communication through: psychology / astronomy / languages / music

Numeracy

In a similar pattern to provision for literacy and digital skills, there was considerable diversity across partnerships in the range of provision offered. Partnerships identified 259 courses primarily to develop numeracy. All partnerships offered key accredited qualifications of Essential Skills Wales qualification in Application of Number entry level up to level 2. A few also offered GCSE mathematics.

Accredited provision – usually with Agored Cymru – included:

- Common measures – length / weight / capacity
- Earnings and income
- Using numbers up to 100
- Multiplication and division
- Perimeter, area and volume
- Calculating with whole numbers
- Handling data
- The four rules of whole numbers
- Fractions, decimals and percentages
- Money management
- Understanding your bills
- Pre-GCSE preparation
- Shapes

Non-accredited provision included a range of courses, including:

- Let's cook on a budget
- Essential skills through cookery
- Improve your maths
- Numeracy through: cookery, jewellery making, sewing, dressmaking, carpentry, heritage crafts
- Household budgeting
- Cooking for parents

Digital skills

Of the 1,024 courses identified by partnerships, 347 were categorised as courses primarily to improve digital skills. Across the nine partnerships, there was a wide diversity of courses offered. All partnerships offered key accredited qualifications of Essential Skills Wales in Digital Literacy at entry level up to level 2. A few offered recognised IT qualifications at level 2 such as ICDL (International Computer Driving Licence).

There was a substantial diversity of smaller accredited digital units (usually Agored Cymru units). The range and diversity varied considerably between partnerships. To give a sense of the range of accredited provision offered across the nine partnerships, accredited courses were offered on:

- Desktop publishing
- Digital responsibility and online safety
- Word processing (mail merge, using images, editing)
- Microsoft Office skills
- Spreadsheets
- Using a mobile/tablet
- Exploring job opportunities online
- Using Google Drive
- Finding and exchanging information

There was also a substantial range of non-accredited provision, again, varying considerably between partnerships. Courses tended to be titled in learner-friendly language and included:

- Get online – PCs for beginners
- Tablets and mobiles for absolute beginners
- Digital drop ins
- Get to know your smartphone
- Social media workshop
- Using your tablet creatively
- Computers don't bite!

Digital learning – as an element of provision and as a teaching and learning tool

In all the partnerships we visited as part of this study, digital skills or digital literacy courses were an element of the standard provision offer for adult learners in the partnership. Digital skills and digital learning approaches were also used routinely by learners and tutors on courses primarily intended to develop adults' literacy and numeracy.

We have outlined above how partnerships offer a range of accredited and non-accredited digital literacy courses as part of their provision offer. Broadly these fall into three categories:

- Courses, typically non-accredited, typically for older learners who want to develop their digital skills to do practical things, such as place a food order with a supermarket, download and listen to audiobooks, use online banking safely, or connect via virtual meeting platforms with relatives. Learners often want practical, hands-on help from a trusted source on using their smart phones, tablet computers or laptops. While these courses always have an outline syllabus, tutors routinely tailor their sessions to learners' interests or individual queries. Partnerships also frequently offer 'digital drop-in' sessions in community venues where citizens can receive support in using their digital devices. Not all such classes are for older learners. For example, we visited one partnership where parents of children in a primary school had requested a session on using the school's web-portal for consenting to school trips, paying for school meals or reporting a child's absence.
- Courses that may be accredited or non-accredited that are intended to support adults seeking employment. These may be offered in collaboration with, or in response to referrals from JobCentre Plus and are intended to support adults to, for example, develop a CV or use online application or interview processes.
- Courses that improve adults' general digital skills and can be accredited or non-accredited. These are for adults of all ages and focus on skills such as using word processing, spreadsheet, accounting or presentation software. Typically, adults who enrol on these courses need to use these skills in work or to apply for a new job, or in voluntary or community work, or for personal interest.

As we noted earlier, learners are less self-conscious of having perceived poor digital skills and are more comfortable enrolling on a digital skills course than they might be about enrolling on a numeracy or literacy course. In this way, digital skills courses are a valuable entry route for some learners into literacy or numeracy provision. Tutors told us that when teaching on digital skills courses, they are able to identify learners who may be struggling with literacy or numeracy. In these cases, tutors can help learners directly but will also refer learners to specific literacy and numeracy support.

Tutors delivering sessions primarily intended for numeracy and literacy development routinely included digital tools in their teaching, and considered teaching basic digital skills an integral part of their role. For example, integrating digital tools into literacy and numeracy lessons can make learning more engaging and relevant by linking skills to real-life contexts: learners can write formal letters using word processing software, create spreadsheets to improve numeracy, or use online research for project-based learning.

However, tutors were also appropriately cautious that integration of digital skills does not overwhelm learners, particularly those at lower levels. They emphasised the importance of balancing the teaching of each skill to avoid losing focus on core literacy and numeracy objectives.

Frequently, tutors used the WEST online initial assessment tool as part of a literacy or numeracy programme. However, the links and digital resources that were associated with the WEST package are now largely out-of-date or no longer functioning correctly.

Tutors reported that, for learners with poor digital skills or confidence, completing an online WEST assessment can pose challenges. Learners unfamiliar with using computers, tablets, or specific software may find these tasks daunting, which creates barriers at the very start of their learning journey. In these cases, tutors used alternatives to the WEST assessment or introduced WEST gradually over a period of time.

Tutors frequently also used quizzes, games, and multimedia content as part of their sessions. Tutors were mindful of introducing digital components gradually in order that learners built confidence in their use over time. Tutors emphasised the importance of creating a supportive environment where learners feel comfortable experimenting with technology and making mistakes without fear of judgment or of inadvertently ‘breaking’ the technology. This approach helps learners overcome initial anxieties and encourages them to see digital skills as a valuable element to their ‘learning toolbox’.

Regardless of the approach, tutors identified several challenges in teaching digital skills alongside literacy and numeracy. These included:

- Varying levels of digital literacy within the same group, which can make differentiation challenging
- Limited time within literacy and numeracy lessons to provide in-depth digital skills training
- The need for reliable technology, such as adequate Wi-Fi and sufficient devices, to support digital learning

Effective integration requires tutors to be skilled in both digital tools and the subject being taught. This dual expertise is not always available, which can limit the feasibility of combined teaching. As we note in the section on professional learning, developing tutors’ capacity in the use of digital teaching tools has been a focus of providers’ professional learning activity.

Impact of Multiply on patterns of provision

The UK Government’s ‘Multiply’ initiative (UK Government, 2022b) has had a considerable impact on how ALC partnerships and providers have offered provision to develop numeracy. The dedicated funding for Multiply concluded in March 2025, having started in 2022, although partnerships and providers reported that, in practice, they had a window from mid-2023 to March 2025 to spend the funding from their Multiply bids.

This report is not intended to be an evaluation of Multiply and does not focus on Multiply provision. However, partnerships and providers have consistently raised it as a theme in our conversations on visits. Providers at all the partnerships we visited had bid and received funding for Multiply.

Partnerships drew attention to the comparatively large quantum of funding available through the Multiply initiative, approximately £100m across Wales (see funding allocations for Multiply at UK Government, 2022c), especially in comparison to the value

of the annual recurring community learning grant, which in 2023-2024 was approximately £6.35m in total for ALC partnerships across Wales (Medr, 2025c, 2025d) with a similar amount for Adult Learning Wales. The sheer size and the short window for spending the Multiply funding available presented a challenge to partnerships, and they allocated considerable resource to planning funding bids, marketing and administering successful bids and deploying staff to deliver them. In many partnerships and providers, new staff were recruited or existing staff redeployed to fill administrative or delivery posts.

Partnerships were creative in how they developed new provision, which previously they had been unable to offer through existing funding streams. Partnerships noted that Multiply had funding streams which allowed them to engage with groups of learners whom they had previously struggled to engage, or to deliver family learning. In particular, partnerships cited the W44 funding strand, which was intended to provide courses, ‘designed to increase confidence with numbers for those needing the first steps towards formal qualifications’ and the W45 strand, ‘for parents wanting to increase their numeracy skills in order to help their children, and help with their own progression’ (UK Government, 2022a). Partnerships reported that there was a market for learning about numeracy using this engagement approach, which they had not previously been able to reach.

Four partnerships provided us with information about the range of provision they offered, using Multiply funding. The kinds of programmes offered, particularly under the W44 strand, were typically non-accredited, engagement courses with a numeracy slant, offered in community locations, or in collaboration with existing community projects or groups, or through schools using family learning approaches. For example, courses included:

- Baking with your family
- Basic car mechanics
- Budgeting for Christmas / holiday / birthdays
- Cooking with an air fryer
- Crafting – turn your side hustle into a business
- Get money confident
- Easter Fun Day - egg physics eggstravaganza!
- Fun with numbers – lampshade workshop
- Running your own business
- Understanding your payslip
- Using energy in the home
- Smart spends - cost of living workshop
- Exercise for older people – using a step counter
- Numbers in nature
- Help a child with maths through play

During Spring 2025, partnerships worked hard to prepare for the transition away from dedicated Multiply funding and to develop a legacy from the benefits of the funding for

the longer term. However, partnerships frequently expressed frustration at the ‘feast and famine’ nature of the Multiply funding and, having set up provision with Multiply funding, were now in the process of transitioning away from it. One senior manager described his situation as “scrabbling around for cash to save losing the best of what we developed”.

While partnerships had records of participants who completed qualifications as part of Multiply-funded programmes, there was no systematic approach to recording participants’ progression onto further study or other ‘traditional’ ALC programmes. This reduces their ability to evaluate the longer-term impact of Multiply-funded programmes.

Partnerships were able to use some of their Multiply funding to invest in infrastructure for ALC provision in the future. For example, one partnership installed new or upgraded IT equipment into its community venues; another invested in tools and hardware for a multi-purpose craft workshop and classroom.

Most partnerships described the legacy from Multiply in terms of the new collaborations and connections with community groups, schools and other organisations. They told us that these will allow improved engagement with new potential learners in their community learning grant funded provision.

The impact of family learning provision

Family learning provision, where it is offered, is highly valued by learners who participate, but is not offered in all partnerships across Wales. We frequently report on the positive impacts of family learning in our inspection reports of partnerships (e.g. Estyn, 2022c, 2023c), in case studies (e.g. Estyn, 2020b, 2022b) and in thematic reports (e.g. Estyn, 2020c).

Family learning typically takes place in a school and is targeted at parents, grandparents and carers of the children at the school (see Learning and Work Institute, 2025). The format for family learning varies, but usually includes an element where adults learn without children present. This might be presented as ‘helping your child with maths/English’ or familiarising the adults in some aspect of the school curriculum in order that the adult may better to support the child in their learning. Often, a session also brings together adults and children, and they work and play together, practising some of the skills covered in the adults-only session.

This type of provision is very effective at reducing the barriers that prevent adults re-engaging in education. The format is non-threatening, and the adults are familiar with their child’s school. In effective examples that we saw on our visits and in our inspection activity, the school’s family engagement officer helped to identify and encourage the parents they know may benefit most to attend.

Family learning has positive impacts on the adults’ and the children’s well-being. The adults are motivated to help their children – and by doing so, often rediscover their own

interest in learning. The adults also meet fellow adults who are interested in learning, and this helps develop a sense of community. The children enjoy having their parents, grandparents and carers come to school and the novelty of learning with them in this way.

Where this kind of provision was most effective, it was linked to clear progression routes for the adults who engaged, and the partnership invested resources into promoting further courses with this group of adults, which had a more explicit focus on developing literacy, numeracy or digital skills.

Spotlight on progression week at Cardiff and Vale College

Progression Week is intended to encourage adult learners in the community to progress into higher-level courses at the college. It helps raise learners' awareness of the range of options at the college, to raise their aspirations and inspire confidence in their own ability and provides an opportunity to apply for courses if the wish.

Progression weeks take place termly. They include:

- Taster and information sessions from college departments (e.g. accountancy and bookkeeping, access, technology, ESOL). Taster sessions are practical, fun and give learners' insight into the expectations and benefits of the courses.
- Partnership collaboration – learners from the Cardiff and Vale Community Learning Partnership are invited to attend, with tutors if possible.
- Wider support services – support from the college's careers team, and input from well-being and pastoral services to reassure potential learners.
- Staff from the Family Learning team attend and act as trusted intermediaries and reduce the barriers of accessing the college campus for the first time.
- Success stories and testimonials from previous learners are highlighted to inspire and motivate new participants.
- The college has created an engagement officer role to support the engagement, retention and progression of adult learners.

You can watch Cardiff and Vale college's video about the June 2024 progression week here: [CAVC progression week - June 2024](#)

Many partnerships used Multiply funding to deliver numeracy-based family engagement provision in schools. For example, in the Powys-Neath Port Talbot partnership, adults participated in 'science experiments' with their primary-aged children. The partnership made sure that adults knew about their other available courses and possible progression routes for adults that were interested.

Spotlight – Multiply-funded family learning

In the Powys Neath Port Talbot partnership, Multiply funding was used to provide science and numeracy-themed sessions in schools. These explored the ways science and maths learning takes place in the school and parents worked with their children to carry out experiments and have fun together.

At the North East Wales ACL partnership, Multiply funding was used to fund numeracy and computer coding sessions in schools, where parents and children worked together to programme a robot to move around an obstacle course. The sessions involved measuring, and calculating distances, angles and time, as well as basic coding skills. The emphasis was on participation, fun, engagement, with numeracy and digital skills as embedded components.

Multiply funding opened a new funding stream that providers used to fund family learning provision. However, this funding stream closed in April 2025. The traditional funding stream for adult learning in the community, the community learning grant, has not funded family learning provision and hence, where partnerships have offered it, it has been funded through alternative means. This is partly the cause of the patchy provision of family learning programmes across Wales

In-course and post-course progression

The concept of progression for adult learning in the community provision is complex. At its most straightforward, progression can be considered as the academic progress that learners make over time. Considered in this form, for example, a learner may start at entry level in year 1, move up to level 1 courses the following year and move on to level 2 the year after.

For many adults who return to learning to develop their literacy, numeracy or digital skills, progression in this linear way is uncommon. Learners frequently describe their own progression not just in terms of their academic progress, but also in terms of their confidence, ability to apply what they have learnt in their everyday lives, or in their willingness to engage in further learning.

For example, older learners taking digital courses to support them in using their mobile phones, shopping online or using video conferencing software to stay in touch with their families frequently reported not being interested in moving up through any formal 'level' process, but continuing to learn, use and practise, and often revise and relearn skills over a period of several years. For these learners, maintaining and broadening their digital skills at a basic level is their primary interest in learning. These learners frequently described the value to them of attending learning as a means of avoiding isolation, accessing digital health or government services online, meeting and making friends, or drawing on the expertise of the tutor to help solve their IT problems.

At a national level, data about Medr-funded provision is gathered through the LLWR database system. But this is not used systematically to inform a national picture of

learners' progress into, within and beyond ALC provision. At a national level, policy makers therefore do not have important information about the impact of literacy, numeracy, digital or other ALC provision on adults' long-term outcomes: the extent to which they move into further or higher education, or into employment.

At a system level, stakeholders do not have potentially useful information about how many new learners enrol on literacy, numeracy or digital courses in ALC providers annually, the proportion who re-enrol from year to year, the extent to which they move up or between levels, how they move between providers in a partnership, or how and where they exit the partnership's provision.

At a partnership level, leaders are missing potentially useful evidence that would inform them of the impact of their provision and provide insights into what aspects they might need to amend or improve.

In our recent inspections of ALC partnerships, we have frequently left recommendations to partnerships and providers to improve how they evaluate their learners' progress into, within and beyond their provision. A few partnerships are beginning to analyse the data they hold more systematically. For example, one partnership recently employed a data analyst to improve how they use data from LLWR to monitor learners' progress. Other partnerships have carried out some early analysis of the extent which learners enrol, re-enrol or move between levels in their partnership.

Spotlight on using data to analyse rates of progression

The Conwy and Denbighshire partnership has recently begun to analyse enrolment and destination information to provide valuable insight. The partnership's records show that around one-third of the partnership's learners in 2022-2023 had undertaken adult learning in the community courses in the past. Around 40 per cent of that year's learners went on to enrol onto other courses within the partnership or to full-time or part-time further education courses. See the case study from the Conwy and Denbighshire partnership on the Estyn website (Estyn, 2025a).

Adult Learning Wales has carried out an analysis of learners' progression. In 2023-2024, they found a similar proportion (38%) had previously enrolled on literacy or numeracy courses at the provider. About 10% of learners had enrolled on similar courses the previous year. Of these, about 46% had re-enrolled on courses at the same level, 24% on courses at lower level and 29% at a higher level.

At the level of the classroom and how individual tutors work with their learners, a consistent feature of literacy, numeracy and digital skills provision in ALC is how well tutors know their learners and tailor their approaches to individual learners' needs. Most tutors used initial and diagnostic assessment tools, like WEST. These can be used by tutors to retest learners, or by learners as self-assessments, to gauge their progress.

Most tutors used individual learning plans (ILPs), and where these were used effectively, they give a fine-grained view of an individual learner's progress. Frequently tutors

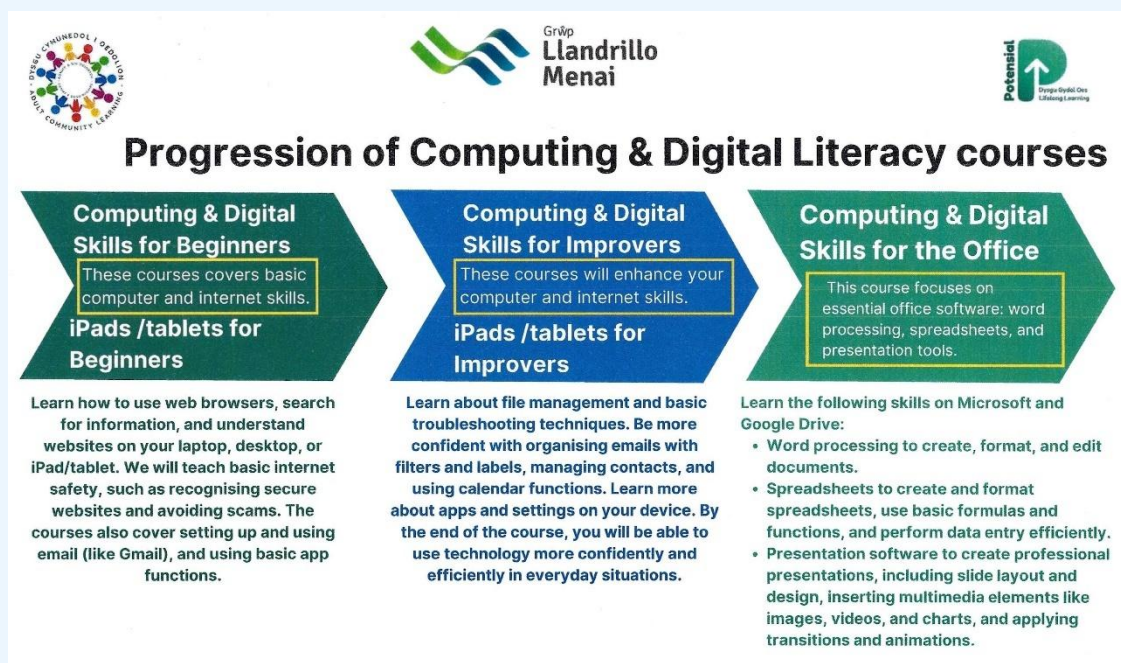
supplemented ILPs with records of learner work, progression trackers, or digital tools to monitor learners' development more systematically.

However, few providers used this fine-grained information on learners' progress to inform an evaluation of their provision, and it was rare to find any consideration of the information gained from ILPs or tutor-level analysis of progress in a provider's self-evaluation reports.

In our inspection reports, we have been critical of ALC partnerships where partnership working has been poor, or where partnerships have not had robust arrangements between providers. In these cases, leaders have not given sufficient thought to how learners can move through the partnership's provision, especially where this means moving between providers, and where learners have not been given enough good-quality information to help them think about their next steps. Partnerships have begun to address these issues by improving the extent to which providers in a partnership jointly plan their provision, and by developing clearer guidance for learners, for example, through improved partnership websites.

Spotlight on progression information for learners

At the Gwynedd and Môn ACL partnership, learners are provided with simple 'progression maps', which show the range of courses available at different levels and how a course at one level leads onto the next level.



At the Rhondda Cynon Taff ACL partnership, learners receive a presentation, also available as an [online video](#), explaining what the 'levels' of qualifications mean, how learners can move between the different providers in the partnership and how progressing through these levels can open opportunities for further training, education or employment.

Where do I go?

Level 3

Level 2

Level 1

Entry

Enhance abilities and pathways to advance to higher education

The majority of employers look for Level 2 qualifications including Maths and English

Build on your abilities and seize the opportunities to advance to the next level

Enhance Literacy and Numeracy

Progress to Next Level – Or Move Sideways To A Different Course

Progress to Next Level

Move to a Different Course

Check out our website on the link below:
[Adult Community Learning](#)

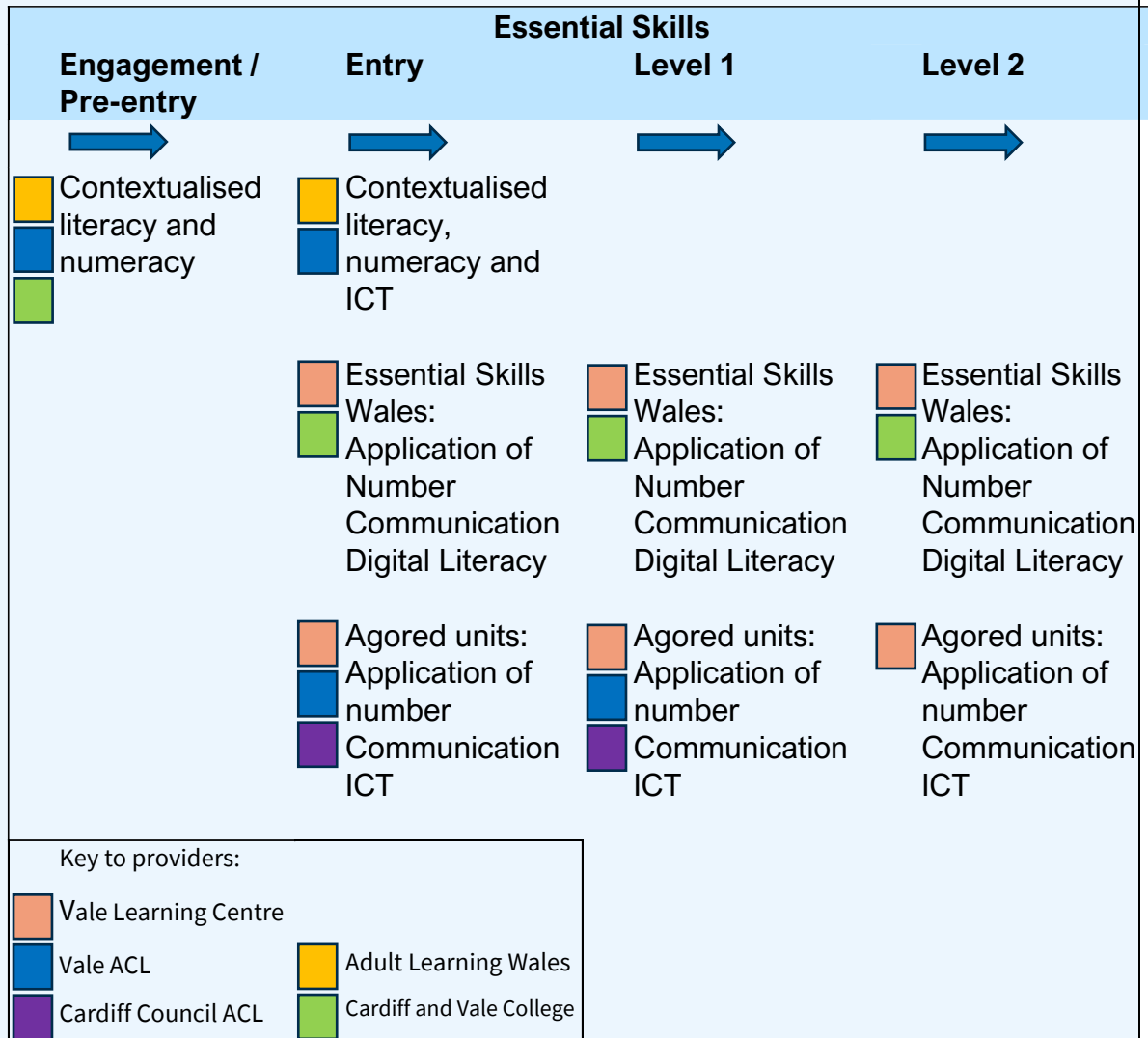
✉ AddysgOedolion@rctcbc.gov.uk
✉ adulteducation@rctcbc.gov.uk

These are examples of simple approaches that help learners understand the options available to them and how they can take their learning further.

There are a few examples of where a partnership plans and promotes progression opportunities very effectively.

Spotlight on provision planning

The Cardiff and Vale ACL partnership have a provision planning approach which identifies the roles of each provider, identifying and taking into account potential areas of overlap or gaps in provision:



Theme 4 – Bilingual and Welsh-medium provision

It is important here to clarify the kind of provision being discussed. Our focus is on literacy, numeracy or digital skills classes in the community where the language of learning or assessment is Welsh. Typically, these classes would be aimed at Welsh speaking adults who carried out their school education through the medium of Welsh or whose preferred language for learning is Welsh. There is a difference between this provision and provision offered for adults wishing to learn Welsh or improve their Welsh, offered by the [National Centre for Learning Welsh](#) using the brand, ‘Dysgu Cymraeg | Learn Welsh’. Estyn inspects the two different types of provision under separate inspection frameworks (Estyn, 2025b): the former under the adult learning in the community framework and the latter under the framework for Welsh for adults.

While Estyn draws a distinction between the two types of provision in our inspection frameworks, in practice, the picture is more blurred: adults who are Welsh-learners can attend ALC classes offered through the medium of Welsh, and Welsh speakers can attend Dysgu Cymraeg | Learn Welsh courses, including those for proficient ‘gloywi’ speakers to brush up on their Welsh literacy or improve technical aspects of their Welsh.

There is also a range of organisations which promote the use of the Welsh language and support Welsh-language communities, through engaging in cultural activities, informal learning and events, such as [The Mentrau Iaith](#), [The Urdd](#) or [Merched y Wawr](#).

In our inspections of adult learning in the community partnerships and across the range of partnerships we visited as part of this study, we found very little provision was carried out through the medium of Welsh. Providers reported that this reflects relatively low demand from learners for Welsh-medium literacy, digital skills or numeracy provision, and is consistent with our findings in other post compulsory sectors, including essential skills in apprenticeship programmes (Estyn, 2023a) or Jobs Growth Wales+ provision (Estyn, 2023b).

In areas where a relatively high proportion of adults speak Welsh as their everyday language, such as in Gwynedd and Ynys Môn, informal delivery was often bilingual and the language of learning was both English and Welsh, but the language of assessment was usually English. Very few learners, even in areas with a high proportion of Welsh speakers, chose to complete accredited components of their course in Welsh.

When we spoke to learners to explore the issue of the apparent lack of demand, a few themes emerged. In naturally Welsh speaking areas, adult learners expressed a desire to improve their English skills, rather than Welsh. These learners were comfortable with their spoken or informal use of Welsh as the language of daily life or the social language of the classroom, but felt that developing English for ‘formal learning’ was in fact more useful to them.

There was slightly more theoretical interest from learners who had been to Welsh-medium schools in studying numeracy through the medium of Welsh than literacy, because learners were already familiar with the technical vocabulary of mathematics in Welsh, and relearning it in English would be an additional barrier.

Welsh-speaking learners taking digital skills courses, especially courses designed to support typically older learners in using their devices, expressed in general, a stronger demand for Welsh-medium delivery.

Welsh-speaking learners also spoke in terms of priorities. For them, the priority was to improve, for example, their numeracy or digital skills and the language medium for learning was less relevant. In naturally bilingual areas, learners also expressed a desire to avoid excluding non-Welsh speaking learners in the classroom conversations if they were conducted in Welsh only.

Where partnerships were delivering Welsh-medium or bilingual programmes effectively, it was frequently through planned collaborative working with organisations such as the Mentrau Iaith or other community organisations that already cater for Welsh speaking adults. See our case study, *Welsh language opportunities for fluent Welsh speakers, learners, and the local community* from the Rhondda Cynon Taff ALC partnership as an example (Estyn, 2024b).

Family learning is also an effective strategy for engaging adult learners or potential learners in Welsh-medium or bilingual provision. As part of this study, we found examples, typically funded by the Multiply funding stream, where adults use Welsh language terminology as part of programmes to support children in school.

Spotlight on bilingual Multiply-funded provision

At the North East Wales ACL partnership, Multiply funded, non-accredited 'Strength in numbers' provision offered in schools to develop numeracy with parents and their children used Welsh-medium terminology, such as numbers and commonly used mathematical terms, to help parents support their children.

At the Merthyr Tydfil ACL partnership, learners said that they would like a course that helped them to learn and use simple Welsh language terms related to numeracy – both to develop their personal Welsh language skills and also to help them use Welsh in conversations and number tasks with their children.

In collaboration with Learn Welsh Glamorgan the partnership's Multiply team ran a non-accredited ten-week course in a community venue. Content included:

- Numbers from 1 – 100, playing bingo, describing everyday numbers (bus numbers, door numbers, phone numbers, business cards), telling the time
- Likes and dislikes – how many sugars in tea/coffee, how many biscuits with a cuppa, board games, dice, cards

Appendix 1 – ALC partnerships and their local authorities

Partnership	Local authority
Adult Learning Wales	n/a
Bridgend	Bridgend (Bridgend College funded directly for delivery)
Cardiff & Vale	Cardiff
Cardiff & Vale	Vale of Glamorgan
Carmarthenshire	Carmarthenshire
Ceredigion	Ceredigion
Conwy & Denbighshire	Conwy
Conwy & Denbighshire	Denbighshire
Greater Gwent	Blaenau Gwent
Greater Gwent	Caerphilly
Greater Gwent	Monmouthshire
Greater Gwent	Newport
Greater Gwent	Torfaen
Gwynedd and Môn	Gwynedd
Gwynedd and Môn	Anglesey
Merthyr Tydfil	Merthyr Tydfil
NE Wales ALC Partnership	Flintshire
NE Wales ALC Partnership	Wrexham
Powys-NPT ALC Partnership	Neath Port Talbot
Powys-NPT ALC Partnership	Powys

Partnership	Local authority
Pembrokeshire	Pembrokeshire
Rhondda Cynon Taff	Rhondda Cynon Taff
Swansea	Swansea

Methods and evidence base

The findings of this report are based on:

- In-person visits by His Majesty's Inspectors and Peer Inspectors to eight of the thirteen ALC partnerships and to Adult Learning Wales, the further education college for adult learning
- Responses to a data request to lead providers about their own partnership's provision
- Responses to an anonymous online questionnaire for tutors and managers at ALC partnerships
- Analysis of published data from the Learner Outcomes Report and analysis of the underlying LLWR data by Medr statisticians
- Information from our recent inspections and link inspector visits to ALC partnerships

Visits to providers

Visits took place during the Autumn term of 2024 and Spring term of 2025. They were usually based at the lead provider's premises and included representatives from the lead provider and other partners.

We visited Adult Learning Wales and the following eight partnerships: Cardiff and Vale, Greater Gwent, Gwynedd and Môn, NE Wales (Flintshire and Wrexham), Powys Neath Port Talbot, Pembrokeshire, Rhondda Cynnon Taff, Swansea.

Visits involved the following activities:

- Meeting with senior manager/s
- Meeting with curriculum leaders / operational managers with responsibility for literacy, numeracy and/or digital skills provision
- Meeting with teaching staff who deliver literacy, numeracy and/or digital skills
- Observations and/or learning walk(s) of literacy, numeracy or digital skills provision. These included conversations with learners and professional discussions with the tutor/s delivering the session/s.
- Meeting with focus group of learners

Overall, we spoke with about 120 learners.

We also asked the eight partnerships we visited and Adult Learning Wales to return a data request about their own partnership's provision including information on:

- The range of courses they offered for literacy, numeracy or digital skills
- The course titles and associated qualification title if applicable
- For accredited courses, the awarding organisation
- Whether the course was accredited

- The language medium of delivery (Welsh / English / Bilingual)
- The funding stream (e.g. FE, CLG, Multiply)

All nine partnerships/providers responded. Some manual recoding of data was required to allow consistent analysis.

Online questionnaires

We invited all partnerships to share a link to an anonymous online questionnaire for teaching staff and managers to complete. The questionnaire was open from 18 October to 29 November 2024. The questionnaire contained a mix of closed and open response questions, with the open responses being analysed to identify key themes. We received 114 responses to the questionnaire.

The sample was self-selecting, which means it is not representative and may be subject to self-selection bias (i.e. more likely to be completed by those who have ‘something to say’ and those who have access to the technology required to complete it, such as an internet connection). Copies of the questionnaire we used for this thematic review can be found on the publication page.

Methodology for LLWR data set analysis carried out by Medr statisticians

Medr statisticians carried out an analysis of the data in the LLWR data set. The data covers local authority adult community learning, and adult community learning delivered by colleges. It does not include part-time or full-time further education delivered by colleges.

The data is based on activities delivered in those areas. Activities were narrowed down to the following sub-sector subject areas:

- 2.2 Mathematics and Statistics
- 6.2 Digital technology (users)
- 12.1 Languages, literature and culture of the British Isles
- 14.1 Foundations for learning and life

14.2 Preparation for work was not included. AS and A levels, English for Speakers of Other Languages and Welsh Second Language courses were excluded.

All activities in 6.2 were assigned as digital literacy basic skills. All activities in 2.2 were assigned as numeracy basic skills. Activities in 12.1 and 14.1 were manually examined based on their reported title on LLWR, and identified as literacy, numeracy or digital literacy basic skills.

As the process involved manual identification, this will not have been a comprehensive dataset of literacy, digital literacy or numeracy basic skills. Some activities will have been miscategorised.

All data refers to the 2022-2023 academic year. There are known issues with some of the ACL data in that year.

Glossary

Term	Definition
Additional support needs	Learning needs which may or may not come within the scope of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Act (ALNET)(2018) but nevertheless require additional support
Adult learning in the community (ALC) / Adult community learning (ACL)	Estyn uses the term 'adult learning in the community' (ALC) to describe this sector. The term 'adult community learning' (ACL) is also widely used to describe the sector. For the purposes of this report, the two terms are synonyms and describe the same sector.
Awarding Organisations	Organisations that award and accredit qualifications. See https://awarding.org.uk/
Basic Skills Agency	A publicly funded agency that existed in the early 2000s to support 'basic skills' – "the ability to read, write, and speak in English (or Welsh), and to use mathematics at a level necessary to function at work and in society in general". It produced many resources, including paper based initial assessments for literacy and numeracy.
Essential Skills Wales qualifications	Formal qualifications from entry level to level 3 in Communication, Application of Number and Digital Literacy. See https://qualifications.wales/information-support/qualifications-available-in-wales/essential-skills-wales/
EWC	Education Workforce Council – the professional regulator for the education workforce in Wales. See https://www.ewc.wales/
Family Learning	Provision, usually based in a school or community setting, where adults and children learn together. Depending on the setting, both adult-only and mixed adult and children learning activities take place. Sessions can be focused on learning skills which are

then applied to support the children's learning or where the adults' own personal learning needs are also identified and supported through signposting or direct teaching.

ILP

Individual learning plan. ILPs define a learner's academic, personal, or employment goals and are intended to help structure and plan how learners work towards their goals.

LLWR

Lifelong Learning Wales Record – database that providers use to record information about learners and learning activity. Owned by Medr/WG. Informs funding and official performance and outcomes data.

Mentrau Iaith

The 22 mentrau iaith are community-based organisations which work to, 'create opportunities where anyone and everyone can enjoy using Welsh every day within their communities'. See <https://mentrauiath.cymru>

Multiply

The Multiply initiative was a UK Government initiative funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, from 2022 to 2025. Its overall objective was to increase the levels of functional numeracy in the adult population across the UK. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus/multiply-in-scotland-wales-and-northern-ireland>

Partnership / Provider

We use the term 'partnership' to describe the ALC partnership as an entity, which may consist of a number of 'providers' who do the delivery. A provider could be a local authority education department, a further education college a private education provider, or third sector body that delivers education.

Spikey profile

A learner's range of strengths and weakness. The term derives from the output of initial assessment software which shows in a graph format how well learners have performed against the various skills checked in the assessment. Strengths are shown as peaks, weaknesses as troughs – hence 'spikey profile'. The term recognises that all learners have things they can do relatively well, and others

relatively less well. If the initial or diagnostic assessment tool is accurate, tutors are able to use a learner's profile to concentrate learning on areas of existing weakness or build on existing strengths.

Teacher / Tutor

The terms 'teacher' and 'tutor' are both used in the sector. For the purposes of this report, for consistency, we have used the term 'tutor', with the intention that the term can be used interchangeably with 'teacher'.

WEST

Wales Essential Skills Toolkit – A set of online tools developed for use by education providers in Wales with support and funding from the Welsh Government. The toolkit was originally released in 2014. See <https://www.walesessentialskills.com>

WJEC

Welsh Joint Education Committee – Awarding organisation, which accredits Essential Skills Wales qualifications, as well as other qualifications. See <https://www.wjec.co.uk>

Numbers – quantities and proportions

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%

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