

A report on

North East Wales Adult Community Learning Partnership

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Date of inspection: November 2025

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About North East Wales Adult Community Learning Partnership

Name of provider	North East Wales Adult Community Learning Partnership												
Local authorities involved with the provider and key delivery partners	<p>The North East Wales Adult Community Learning Partnership is led and co-chaired by two local authorities, Wrexham and Flintshire.</p> <p>The main partners are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wrexham County Borough Council• Flintshire Council• Coleg Cambria• Adult Learning Wales												
Any significant changes since the last inspection	No												
Number of learners at time of inspection	During the inspection, 260 learners were enrolled at the partnership's Adult Community Learning Grant (ACLG)-funded provision.												
Number of learners in the previous full academic year	<p>During 2024-2025, the partnership's own data indicates that the following numbers of unique learners had enrolled:</p> <table border="1"><thead><tr><th>Provider</th><th>2024 - 2025</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>Groundwork (Wrexham)</td><td>1376</td></tr><tr><td>Groundwork (Flintshire)</td><td>549</td></tr><tr><td>Deeside Community Trust</td><td>80</td></tr><tr><td>Gwella</td><td>46</td></tr><tr><td>Coleg Cambria (ABE)</td><td>910</td></tr></tbody></table>	Provider	2024 - 2025	Groundwork (Wrexham)	1376	Groundwork (Flintshire)	549	Deeside Community Trust	80	Gwella	46	Coleg Cambria (ABE)	910
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	Coleg Cambria (ESOL)	852
	Adult Learning Wales	568
	The Little Learning Company	16
	Total	4397
Details of the partnership's programmes, in terms of Welsh Government funded courses (ESOL) and basic skills and range of other (leisure/cost-recovery) courses		<p>The two local authorities contract delivery of their Adult Community Learning Grant (ACLG)-funded provision to Groundworks North Wales, a charitable organisation which delivers a range of accredited and non-accredited essential skills, wellbeing and family learning programmes for the partnership. A small number of approved contractors and sub-contractors also deliver specialist provision.</p> <p>Coleg Cambria delivers essential skills, adult literacy, numeracy and digital provision (ABE), and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), funded through its part-time or full-time further education funding allocation.</p> <p>Adult Learning Wales delivers a range of health and wellbeing, essential skills and employability provision funded through its part-time further education funding allocation.</p>
About the learners on the partnership's courses	<p>In 2024-2025, 75% of the partnership's ACLG-funded learners were female. Four percent described themselves as fluent Welsh speakers, 18% as Welsh speakers but not fluent and 78% as not Welsh speakers. About 24% of the partnership's learners were aged 65 or over.</p>	

About the population of the partnership's area	<p>The Office for National Statistics Annual Population Survey for 2021 reports that Wrexham had a population of approximately 135,100 and Flintshire approximately 155,000. In both counties, females comprised just over half of the population at 51%.</p> <p>In Wrexham, about 20% of the population was aged 65 and over, and about 21% of the population of Flintshire.</p> <p>The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 2019 shows the proportion of small areas (LSOAs) within each local authority which are in most deprived 20% in Wales. Twelve percent of Wrexham's LSOAs were in the most deprived 20% (eighth least deprived in Wales) and 11% for Flintshire (sixth least deprived). This indicates that both local authorities had areas of deprivation and disadvantage but had fewer than the majority of local authorities in Wales.</p> <p>The 2021 census reported that the percentage of Welsh speakers in Wrexham was 12.2% and in Flintshire, 11.6%, compared to the all-Wales figure 17.8%.</p>
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	31/05/2022

Summary

This is a strong, mature and effective partnership, with solid and equitable support from the chief education officers of both Wrexham and Flintshire local authorities. The providers and non-delivery partners that make up the partnership form a committed network that contributes to the work and strategic direction of the partnership. Relationships between the partners are clearly defined, robust, transparent and collaborative.

The partnership takes a strategic approach to planning its provision, which is responsive to regional strategic priorities. There is a worthwhile range of provision that helps adults re-engage with learning, develop digital, literacy and numeracy skills, learn with their children in family learning contexts or learn English as speakers of other languages.

Most learners make strong progress from their individual starting points, applying new skills effectively in practical contexts. Many demonstrate improving English language, digital, literacy or numeracy skills appropriate to their level. Teaching quality across the partnership is consistently strong. Nearly all tutors demonstrate secure subject expertise and most plan and structure learning effectively, building carefully on what learners already know.

The partnership has a strong commitment to learners' well-being and personal growth. Learners appreciate and value the inclusive and community orientated curriculum offer, which positively impacts their lives educationally, emotionally and socially. Learners feel safe in their learning environments and well supported by their tutors. Venues are generally easily accessible in the community and are welcoming and friendly.

The partnership knows its strengths and weaknesses and what it needs to do to improve. This includes improving the range of opportunities for learners to use Welsh as part of their learning and to encourage them to do so, and to evaluate and improve how well learners progress from provision that re-engages them with learning on to taking vocational or skills provision at higher levels.

Recommendations

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

- R1 Evaluate the impact of the partnership's provision on learners' progress
- R2 Improve learners' progress from community provision to vocational or skills provision at higher levels
- R3 Encourage learners to use and develop their Welsh language skills in social and formal aspects of their learning, and increase the opportunities for learners to undertake their course through the medium of Welsh or bilingually

What happens next

The partnership is not in follow-up and will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations identified in the report. We will consider progress against the recommendations in our regular link inspector visits.

Main findings

Teaching and learning

Most learners make strong progress from their individual starting points and apply new skills effectively in practical contexts. Across the provision, learners build confidence and competence as they develop subject-specific skills that are relevant to everyday life. For example, in practical courses such as sewing and cookery, learners acquire increasingly advanced techniques and demonstrate growing independence in planning, budgeting and completing tasks. Learners often describe how participation has improved their confidence and willingness to take responsibility for their own learning.

Nearly all learners recall prior learning well and use it confidently to build new knowledge and understanding. For example, learners in expressive arts sessions successfully recap previous rehearsal content, while learners studying British Sign Language (BSL) count to 30 and describe colours from memory. Most tutors systematically revisit earlier learning at the start of sessions. As a result, learners consolidate their skills and can apply them in new and increasingly complex ways.

Many learners articulate clearly what they are currently working on and identify their next steps. They demonstrate ambition to progress to further learning, accredited courses or employment, including in professions such as midwifery and teaching.

Teaching quality across the partnership is consistently strong. Nearly all tutors have secure subject knowledge and plan learning carefully, building systematically on what learners already know. Tutors use relevant examples and practical activities to help learners understand new concepts. In family learning, well-structured sessions support adults and children to learn together effectively. In literacy provision, tutors design activities that strengthen both academic and vocational skills, including persuasive writing and problem-solving tasks. The partnership also works effectively with specialist providers to extend the range of courses available, for example in BSL and artificial intelligence (AI).

Spotlight: Engaging families in the world of AI

A highly effective family learning session on AI, delivered by a specialist provider, illustrates how the partnership engages parents and children in future-focused learning. The provider brought authentic industry expertise and clear educational insight, in a well-structured session intending to demystify AI. The session used laptops, videos and interactive tasks, with humour and hands-on exploration making complex ideas accessible. Families learned what AI is, explored its uses in healthcare, food production and daily life, and programmed a robot together. The lively, inclusive atmosphere and carefully targeted questioning sustained parents' and children's engagement, illustrating how specialist input can deliver innovative family learning that supports digital readiness.

Many learners demonstrate improving literacy and numeracy skills appropriate to their level. Learners on literacy courses research and construct reasoned arguments, while numeracy learners apply prior learning confidently to new problems. However, across the wider provision, a few tutors do not take sufficient advantage of naturally occurring opportunities to reinforce literacy or numeracy skills.

Learners make good progress in developing digital competence, often from very basic starting points. Many learn to use smartphones, tablets and laptops confidently, while others develop an introductory understanding of AI. ESOL tutors use digital tools effectively to structure lessons and monitor individual progress. Learners benefit from well-planned digital activities that help them develop increasingly complex skills.

Tutors create warm, inclusive and supportive learning environments. They adapt the pace and content of sessions effectively, drawing on learners' experiences, interests and aspirations. Tutors know their learners well and use reassurance, challenge and humour appropriately to maintain engagement. Learners value the calm, empathetic and non-judgemental approach of tutors and respond with high levels of respect towards staff and peers. The resulting learning environment is one of cooperation and enjoyment, where learners feel valued, safe to make mistakes, ask questions and they build confidence in both their skills and self-belief.

Spotlight: Independent Living Skills – Expressive Arts

Learners with additional support needs benefit greatly from weekly expressive arts sessions. Skilled tutors support them to write poetry, create music, sing, act and develop speaking and presentation skills. Learners participate enthusiastically in preparing an end-of-course show for friends and family, often adopting the persona of favourite stars such as Taylor Swift or Adele to answer questions and perform songs. They work together effectively, offering encouragement and constructive feedback. As their confidence grows, learners apply these skills in everyday life. For example, many now initiate conversations with visitors, and a few confidently travel to and from the venue by bus independently.

Nearly all learners engage fully in sessions and enjoy their learning. They maintain focus and enthusiasm and persevere when challenged. Learners respond positively to feedback and use it constructively to improve their work. Behaviour is consistently respectful and collaborative, with learners working productively both independently and in groups. For example, BSL learners practise purposefully in pairs, while ESOL learners support one another through peer translation.

Learners recognise and value the wider benefits of their learning. Participants in well-being and practical courses report reduced social isolation and improved self-confidence. Parents and carers involved in family learning develop a better understanding of how schools teach literacy and digital skills and at the same time, improve their own skills and gain confidence in supporting their children's learning at home. School leaders report that this engagement strengthens relationships between families and schools and contributes positively to community cohesion.

Tutors differentiate learning effectively to meet a wide range of needs, including those of learners with additional support requirements. They adapt questioning, grouping and activities to ensure all learners can participate and make progress. In ESOL classes, flexible arrangements, such as adjusted start times, support learners with caring responsibilities and help ensure equitable access.

Most tutors use questioning well to promote learning and stimulate thinking. They balance open and closed questions appropriately and target questions to ensure all learners can demonstrate their understanding. Opportunities for peer feedback are used effectively in some areas, supporting reflection and self-evaluation.

In a small number of sessions, tutors use basic Welsh phrases effectively to enrich learning and promote awareness of Welsh language and culture. However, across the partnership, opportunities for learners to develop Welsh language skills or engage bilingually are limited. Recent collaboration with Menter Iaith has led to early success in offering a course through the medium of Welsh, but overall take-up remains low.

According to the latest nationally published learner outcomes data, learner successful completion rates are strong and exceed national comparators across most subject areas and levels.

In order to improve further, the partnership should:

- Encourage learners to use and develop their Welsh language skills in social and formal aspects of their learning
- Increase the opportunities for learners to undertake their course through the medium of Welsh or bilingually
- Ensure tutors identify and use opportunities to reinforce literacy or numeracy through naturally occurring tasks

Well-being, care, support and guidance

The partnership has a strong commitment to learners' well-being and personal growth. Learners appreciate and value the inclusive and community-orientated curriculum offer, which positively impacts their lives educationally, emotionally and socially.

Learners feel safe and are well supported by their tutors. Learning settings are situated well, often in community venues, and are welcoming and friendly. Learners are supportive to one another and openly welcome new learners to groups.

Digital skills classes promote the well-being of learners. Adults learn how to use their mobile phones, laptops and tablets to enhance their lives. In particular, older learners develop digital skills which enable them to stay connected and feel that they are not being left behind by new technology. An awareness of staying safe online, scams and sensible use of AI all help these learners to feel more secure when using digital technology.

Tutors adapt the content of their sessions helpfully, in response to requests from learners. For example, one tutor introduces older learners to a variety of digital tools such as spreadsheets to support voluntary work or learning how to use a language translation app to enhance understanding of Welsh words and phrases.

ESOL learners gain in self-confidence and learn to settle into new places and meet new people. Highly successful and enjoyable cultural events such as one run by Coleg Cambria, celebrate different cultures and help learners across the partnership to develop inclusive communities. The partnership enhances learners' practical skills, such as learning to drive, by offering courses to support learners in taking the driving theory test.

Tutors support learners well in community classes. They are responsive, supportive and caring. They signpost learners to specialist support when needed. Learners consistently praise tutors for their empathy, openness and flexibility, and describe how attending a class has helped them overcome multiple difficulties in their lives, better support their children, make friends, and combat loneliness, anxiety and depression.

The partnership designs activities with cost for learners in mind, which reduces barriers to participation. This enables learners and their children to access classes that they could not otherwise afford, such as arts and crafts and cooking skills. Learners also have access to affordable activities that they can carry out with their families in the school holidays.

The partnership generally provides learners with good information about progression routes through partnership working with Careers Wales, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Communities for Work programme. The partnership advertises community learning classes on social media sites and through leaflets in public places such as doctors' surgeries. Learners report that classes help them to improve their health, mental health and general well-being. A few learners found out about their class through their GP's, social worker's or mental health support team's use of social prescribing.

Learners feel safe and say they know how to raise a safeguarding concern if needed. Learners value the beneficial and trusting relationships they have with their tutors. For example, learners expressed how these relationships give them the confidence to disclose difficulties they may be facing.

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

Spotlight: Family learning - "It doesn't look like learning, but it is" [learner in focus group]

In family learning sessions, adult learners begin to overcome the barriers to formal education that may have built up through their previous experiences. They feel welcomed into the school environment and form positive professional relationships with teaching staff. In a few cases, schools identify parents who would benefit from attending sessions, but generally any parents, grand-parents, or carers are welcome to join the sessions.

Adult learners take part in different types of family learning provision within schools. In some cases, parents learn how to read creatively with their children and use books as stimulus to their imagination. They are then joined by their children so that they can practise their new skills in joint activities. In other sessions parents and children work together making simple and inexpensive air fryer meals together. They become more confident and learn to encourage their children to try new foods such as mushrooms and peppers.

Adult learners, including those with language barriers, feel more connected, make new friends and improve their communication skills. They also become more involved in the life of the school, and a few go on to contribute by listening to children read, joining the school's parents' association or carrying out further study and training to become teaching assistants.

Leading and improving

This is a strong and mature partnership, with solid and equitable support from the chief education officers of both Wrexham and Flintshire local authorities.

The partnership uses a commissioning model to contract the delivery of its provision funded by the Adult Community Learning Grant (ACLG). This is a unique approach in Wales. The charitable organisation, Groundwork North Wales, provides most of the learning funded by the ACLG, with other smaller contractors adding capacity and specialist input where required.

Coleg Cambria and Adult Learning Wales are the other two main delivery partners, offering provision for adults funded through their further education grant allocation. These, and other non-delivery partners, form a committed network that contributes to the work and strategic direction of the partnership through a range of effective management, curriculum and quality groups. Relationships between the partners are clearly defined, robust, transparent and collaborative.

The lead operational manager at the partnership, supported by other senior officers at the two authorities, provides clear and effective leadership to the partnership, and liaison with the partnership's delivery partners.

The partnership takes a strategic approach to planning its provision, which is responsive to regional strategic priorities. The partnership has clearly defined which provision is offered by which partners. The resulting provision gives choice and a worthwhile range of progression pathways for adult learners and potential learners.

Delivery partners have worked effectively to ensure that provision is not duplicated unhelpfully across the area. The partnership's ACLG-funded provision, delivered by its contracted partners is diverse, well located in accessible community venues and offers an attractive range of courses. The offer is largely non-accredited or at entry level and is intended to act as a foundation, and to engage learners and potential learners to take the first steps back towards education. The partnership responds well to local requests for courses and tailors its provision to meet them. Provision includes a range of useful courses aimed at supporting adults to live independent and healthier lives such as using a smartphone, budgeting or slow cooker and air fryer courses. There are also helpful courses to support learners to improve their job prospects, such as interview skills and CV writing. There is a substantial element of family learning, delivered in schools, which is a very effective way for adults to reencounter education, develop their own skills and support their children. The partnership works well with schools' family learning contacts to tailor the offer to the needs of the schools' communities.

Coleg Cambria delivers nearly all the ESOL provision, and accredited level 1 and 2 courses that improve adult learners' literacy, numeracy and digital skills. Adult Learning Wales also offers a useful range of digital, employability, health and well-being provision, and a flexible online ESOL provision.

The partnership knows its strengths and areas for improvement and plans appropriately to address them. It structures its self-evaluation processes at both strategic and operational levels effectively and has wide representation across its quality and curriculum groups. This inclusive approach involves all key partners and informs quality improvement and provision planning helpfully.

Spotlight on focused themes in self-evaluation

The partnership chooses themes for focussed reflection through its self-evaluation and partnership working groups. Themes have included poverty, ESOL and literacy. The process encourages staff across the partnership to reflect on the theme and consider how provision or teaching practice may be improved. For example, the thematic focus on poverty highlighted concerns about the location of provision and learners being able to access some venues, and as a result the partnership decided to work with smaller group sizes at that venue, allowing learners to continue accessing education. A current focus is on literacy and how the partnership addresses the increasing proportion of learners with poor reading skills.

The partnership is developing its capacity to manage learner data and has invested in a new management information system and data analyst role. It is developing data analysis tools which will allow it to evaluate how well learners move through the levels of provision and across providers. This work is still in development but is beginning to give the partnership insight, for example, into how many learners are new to the partnership each year and how many return on different courses.

The partnership has recognised in its own self-evaluation that it needs to do more to bridge learners' progress from entry level engagement provision in the community to further skills or vocational provision at the college.

Staff at all the main delivery partners report being well-supported by their managers and receiving useful and timely professional learning. Partners contribute equitably to the professional learning offer available to staff and draw on each other's expertise where they can. For example, staff at Groundworks can attend professional learning sessions at Coleg Cambria supporting trauma-informed practice.

Professional learning is aligned well to the improvements identified in the partnership's quality improvement plan and to partner organisations' own organisational priorities. Recent professional learning includes: safeguarding, Prevent, domestic abuse awareness,

trauma-informed practice and mental health first aid. There is a suitable focus for staff who are new to teaching, though training which aims to improve tutors' ability to plan, teach, and assess adult and young learners.

In order to improve further, the partnership should:

- Improve the learners' progress from community provision to vocational or skills provision at higher levels
- Evaluate the impact of the partnership's provision on learners' progress

Additional information

Safeguarding arrangements

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

Evidence base of the report

Before the inspection, inspectors:

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

During the inspection, inspectors:

- met the chair of the partnership, officials of the local authorities, senior and middle leaders and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the partnership's work
- meet learners to discuss their work, to listen to their views about various aspects of their provider
- observed a broad sample of sessions
- observed and spoke with learners outside of sessions
- looked closely at the partnership's self-evaluation processes
- considered the partnership's quality improvement planning and looked at evidence to show how well the partnership had taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinised a wide range of partnership documents, including information on learner assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and, information on learners' well-being, including the safeguarding of learners, and records of staff training and professional learning

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

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

Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

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

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

Copies of the report

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

The report was produced in accordance with the Learning and Skills Act (2000).

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