

A report on
Adult Learning in the Community – Bridgend College

**Cowbridge Road,
Bridgend
CF31 3DF**

Date of inspection: May 2026

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About Adult Learning in the Community – Bridgend College

Name of provider	Bridgend College
Local authorities involved with the provider and key delivery partners	Due to changes in funding arrangements (see below), at the time of the inspection there is no adult learning in the community partnership in place in Bridgend County Borough. However, key education providers, Bridgend County Borough Council, Adult Learning Wales and Bridgend College, maintain a network which allows them to avoid duplication of provision.
Any significant changes since the last inspection	Since the last inspection, Bridgend County Borough Council took the decision to withdraw from using the adult community learning grant and its role as the lead partner for the provision. Medr, the body responsible for funding and regulating the tertiary education and research sector in Wales, subsequently invited Bridgend College to use to ensure continuity of adult learning in the community provision in the county. Bridgend College agreed to do this. This inspection has focused on the provision made under these arrangements.
Number of learners at time of inspection	191
Number of learners in the previous full academic year	644 (between April 2025 to May 2026)
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	Bridgend College delivers adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills courses, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Independent Living Skills (ILS) and personal development and engagement courses through its full-time, part-time and adult community learning funding.

About the learners on the partnership's courses	In 2025 – 2026 about 27% of learners on adult learning in the community courses were between the ages of 40 – 49, while about 18% of learners were aged 60 or over. About 4% of learners came from ethnic minority backgrounds. The proportion of learners who identified as speaking Welsh fluently or speaking Welsh at home was 1.83%, while the proportion of learners who identified as speaking Welsh but were not fluent was 4.02%. Around 94% of learners identified themselves as not speaking Welsh, but many of these were ESOL learners. 41% of learners came from the top two quintiles (the most deprived areas) in Bridgend County Borough.
About the population of the partnership's area	The Office for Statistics Annual Population Survey for 2024 reports that Bridgend County Borough had a population of 147,530. Females comprised just over half of the population at 50.5%. About 61.3% of the population were aged between 16 – 64. Approximately 3% of the population identify as coming from ethnic minority backgrounds. The 2021 census reported that the percentage of Welsh speakers in Bridgend County Borough was 9.2%, compared to the all-Wales figure of 17.8%. The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WMID) for 2025 shows the proportion of small areas (LSOAs) within each local authority which are in the most deprived 20% in Wales. Two areas of Bridgend County Borough were in the most deprived quintiles. This indicates that the local authority had areas of deprivation and disadvantage, but it had fewer areas of deprivation than the majority of local authorities in Wales.

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May 2026

Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	13/02/2023
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Summary

In April 2025, the local authority's allocation of the adult community learning grant was transferred to Bridgend College to help ensure the continued provision of adult learning in the community in Bridgend County Borough. In the initial year of this arrangement, Bridgend College offers adult learning in the community provision in easily accessible facilities on its main campuses and community venues across the county borough. The provider has a good understanding of national and regional priorities for adult learning, and it seeks to break down barriers which prevent adult learners from accessing learning which meets their needs. It provides suitable provision to meet the needs and interests of adult learners across the county.

Nearly all learners make good progress from their starting points, and they produce high standards of work. In many cases, they improve their literacy, numeracy, digital and business skills through such courses as floristry, digital photography and dog grooming, as well as developing their confidence and self-esteem. Nearly all learners enjoy learning and the camaraderie that being part of a class brings.

Nearly all tutors plan the curricula for courses carefully. They have a good understanding of teaching adults, and they ensure that they help learners develop new knowledge and skills, while supporting the individual learners to develop their own interests in the subject. Tutors promote the use of the Welsh language, for example through bilingual materials, and the heritage of Wales effectively in sessions. At the time of the inspection the provider does not offer courses through the medium of Welsh.

Learners benefit from effective care, guidance and support arrangements. They report that they feel safe and well supported by their tutors. Learners gain initial knowledge of classes from online sources or at the marketing events the provider puts on in places such as supermarkets, railway stations and schools. Many classes, particularly practical classes, such as sugar craft and dog grooming, take place in community venues which are easily accessible by bus, train or car.

Other classes are offered as online or hybrid (online/face-to-face) classes, helping learners to more easily combine learning with their home and working commitments. Tutors provide useful information to learners about how they can progress to higher level courses and pathways they may need to follow to gain employment or develop their careers.

The provider has planned to use the adult community learning grant effectively. It monitors the provision regularly to assure quality and it is well-informed about the strengths and areas for improvement of the provision. Attendance in evening and community provision is variable. The provider listens carefully to the feedback from its

learners, and it publishes information about the actions it has taken through ‘you said, we did’ posters.

Recommendations

We have made one recommendation to help the service continue to improve:

R1 Extend the college’s reach into community settings to help further reduce barriers to education

What happens next

The partnership is not in follow-up. In accordance with section 80 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 or section 62 of the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022, the provider will prepare and publish a written statement of their action plan in light of the inspection report. We will consider progress against the recommendations in our regular link inspector visits.

Main findings

Teaching and learning

Nearly all learners who attend adult learning in the community classes make good progress from their starting points and progress well to achieve their individual aspirations and goals.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners make good progress in developing their English language skills. They speak confidently about their future aspirations, including progression to further study and employment-related courses.

Across all levels, ESOL learners gain confidence in understanding and speaking English. Level 1 learners produce high-quality written work using complex sentence structures and ambitious vocabulary, while entry-level learners make effective use of a suitable range of tenses to recount their experiences and plans. Nearly all learners recall prior learning well. They apply their learning effectively to everyday life situations and they increase their understanding of Wales and Welsh culture and use simple Welsh vocabulary.

Learners in independent living skills (ILS) provision, talk confidently and with pride about the skills they develop during their courses. These skills include developing their confidence, becoming more independent, understanding job roles and employability.

They develop valuable communication and life skills through volunteering in the college and community.

In mathematics courses for parents of secondary school age children, learners make good progress in understanding of the mathematical concepts and skills required at GCSE level and how they are taught. As a result, they can support their children's learning effectively at home.

Many learners on the conversational Spanish course demonstrate a strong commitment to learning. They make progress in their speaking and listening skills and they are able to hold meaningful conversations. A few learners have progressed from elementary to advanced levels. A few learners extend their language learning outside formal sessions by meeting socially to practise conversational Spanish together.

Learners make very good progress in well-being and practical classes. They produce very high standards of work in floristry, sugar craft, digital photography, sewing pattern design and watercolours, for example. Many achieve accreditation for their work. A few learners progress to setting up their own businesses.

Adult learning in the community learners enjoy and value their learning highly. They support one another in class and when individuals are faced with challenges. Learners value the social interaction with their peers and many learning environments are full of fun and laughter. This contributes to their well-being. It helps to foster a love of learning, and it often bolsters their participation in other areas of life. For example, learners in cookery classes contribute cakes to family gatherings and external social events in their communities.

Nearly all ESOL learners engage enthusiastically in learning. They demonstrate a strong commitment to developing their communication skills to enable them to become part of their local communities. In class they participate confidently in discussions and collaborative activities. ESOL learners are highly respectful of one another, and they show genuine interest in each other's experiences, cultures and perspectives.

Learners in ESOL and mathematics classes for parents value the flexibility that online or hybrid learning brings. This enables them to study alongside their work and home commitments and to attend regularly. In community provision, such as basic skills and mathematics, learners enjoy meeting with one another and their tutor face-to-face in easily accessible community hubs.

Tutors are enthusiastic and dedicated to the needs of adult learners. Many have industry standard knowledge which helps learners to pursue a career in their chosen subject. They enjoy teaching their classes and they invest time in planning and developing the curriculum and materials which are suitable for adult learners.

In nearly all adult learning in the community classes, the curriculum is designed with the learner in mind. It is often developed in consultation with learners to reflect their needs and aspirations. Nearly all course materials are bilingual. Tutors use bespoke assessment tools to identify learners' starting points and course level. Tutors offer accredited and non-accredited courses which allow learners to progress at their own pace or to tackle accreditation in manageable steps.

Spotlight: Digital Photography

Learners in digital photography benefit from a well-thought-out curriculum. It includes developing technical knowledge of equipment, how to structure photographs, developing ICT skills, artistic appreciation of photographs and an understanding of the work of Welsh photographers and post-industrial landscapes and imagery in Wales. It also includes deepening learners' historical, sociological, psychological and political awareness through studying 'challenging' images.

The use of Welsh, Maths and ICT are integrated very effectively into the learning with the result that learners can construct a website to show their own photographic story and to connect with a wide geographical audience online.

In ILS, the individual needs of the learners are central to the provision. Tutors adopt a person-centred approach, and they offer a good range of teaching and learning activities. These include individual and group tasks, such as matching, sorting, developing learners' oracy and working in a team which contribute to reinforce core learning effectively. Tutors use group profiles well to identify individual motivations and aspirations. This supports independence, community, health and well-being and employability.

Tutors encourage collaboration between learners by adapting teaching and learning environments to the style of learning appropriate to adults. Many tutors use a wide range of learning resources, including IT equipment, digital software, digital aids and real-life materials that stimulates interest, broadens knowledge and individual skills. Tutors make suitable adaptations to improve the learning environment, for example, by rearranging furniture to better accommodate learners' sewing machines.

Tutors use appropriate teaching strategies for adult learners. They give individual support to learners and encourage them to critique their own work and that of their fellow learners in a supportive environment. For example, in floristry the teacher discusses the composition of a display that will challenge learner's skills from both an artistic and technical point of view. In ESOL, the tutor uses time effectively by providing purposeful independent learning activities for the group while conducting one-to-one tutorials. In many classes, such as dog grooming and digital photography, tutors use questioning well to test recall of prior learning and the background knowledge that learners have of their

chosen study area. In ESOL classes, tutors use questioning skilfully to extend learners' responses, deepen understanding and encourage more detailed spoken language.

In a very few classes across the provision, planned activities do not promote learner participation well enough and tutors rely too heavily on learners creating their own opportunities for discussion.

Nearly all tutors provide useful and encouraging feedback on learners' work. Homework is marked promptly with helpful comments and suggestions for improvement. In ESOL classes, tutors provide well focused written and verbal feedback that supports learners to improve their language skills effectively. In written work, tutors use correction codes well to promote learners' independence and self-correction.

In a very few cases, tutors do not structure their sessions well enough and learning activities do not provide opportunities for structured knowledge development. On occasions, tutors do not make learners aware that their course is accredited.

Tutors are creative in the way that they embed Welsh language and specific Welsh content and examples within their curriculum delivery. Many have a strong commitment to introducing learners to the Welsh language and culture.

In order to improve further, the provider should provide appropriate professional development opportunities to help a few tutors:

- strengthen their skills in developing learners' subject knowledge in a structured way, and
- strengthen their skills in promoting learner participation.

Well-being, care, support and guidance

Nearly all learners settle quickly and confidently into learning through personalised enrolment, induction and assessment arrangements. Tailored arrangements for ESOL, ILS and British Sign Language (BSL) learners help learners to understand the support available to them. In community venues, dedicated staff welcome new learners and provide encouragement, liaison and practical support to help them engage with provision. For example, staff support learners in digital classes to access wi-fi connectivity. Online enrolment is currently the only option available. For a few community-based learners, this presents a barrier as they do not always have suitable digital skills or access to enrol in this way. Where this is the case, the provider offers support to learners to complete the digital form.

Tutors and community venue staff create calm and respectful environments where learners feel comfortable participating and asking for support. Nearly all learners feel safe, valued and well supported within welcoming and inclusive classes. Many learners describe the provision as “like a family” and they value the strong sense of belonging created through supportive relationships with tutors, other staff and peers.

Tutors and community venue staff respond sensitively and flexibly to learners' personal circumstances and well-being needs. For example, tutors make contact with learners if they unaccountably miss a class to understand the learner's situation and to ensure the learner has an opportunity to catch up on missed work. Community venue staff ensure learners know which additional facilities are available to them in the venue, such as quiet areas, refreshment, library and parking facilities.

Learners attending classes in community venues particularly value the social aspects of classes, including enrichment opportunities. Many adult learning in the community courses provide learners with opportunities to go on theatre visits, take part in lunchtime library clubs, fitness activities, shopping trips to acquire materials, for example and they invite guest speakers to class to help widen learners' perspectives of their subject. ESOL learners appreciate opportunities to celebrate their own cultures alongside learning about Welsh and British culture. Most learners value flexible online and hybrid access to learning, which supports their attendance and continuity in learning despite demanding home circumstances, including childcare responsibilities. Overall, these mechanisms contribute positively to learners' well-being and engagement in learning. Nonetheless, regular

attendance across the evening and community provision is variable, although in most cases tutors know the reasons for learners' absence in advance. In a very few evening language classes, low attendance and declining class numbers reduce opportunities for interaction and negatively affect the quality of the learning experience.

The provider's links with external agencies and community organisations effectively support learners' wider well-being, employability and social integration. For example, ESOL learners access useful information about hate crime support delivered by a Police Community Support Officer who was a previous learner. Learners also receive helpful advice and guidance about next steps in learning, including progression onto higher level courses, volunteering opportunities and employment. Tutors, the careers team and external partners work together productively to ensure learners have a good understanding of the wide range of opportunities available and to suggest which courses and progression pathways are appropriate for a learner to achieve their goal.

The provider ensures a range of appropriate support is available to help reduce barriers to participation in adult community learning. Learners benefit from a counselling offer through an external platform that is available in multiple languages, alongside practical support such as pantry provision, heat and eat spaces, laundry facilities, free hygiene products, and access to breakfast facilities at the two main college campuses. Staff understand well the times of year when learners may require additional support, for example during school holidays. Learners benefit from Y Siop, which offers donated clothing at very low cost, and 'Working Wardrobe' which provides free, appropriate clothing for interviews or employment. In vocational areas, learners on a dog grooming course value being able to access college equipment, as this allows them to try out a range of tools before committing to their own purchases after completing the course.

Learners contribute positively to a strong culture of learner voice through student representative arrangements. Leaders respond positively to learners' feedback and requests. For example, following requests from learners, the ESOL department has included a full-time level 2 ESOL course within next year's curriculum offer, where previously this had only been available on a part-time basis.

Within the adult learning in the community provision, learners' support needs are identified appropriately through enrolment processes, subsequent assessments where relevant and tutor referral, where concerns arise after the course start date. Support needs are met effectively through the support available within the provision.

Leaders and staff promote a strong safeguarding culture across the provision. Nearly all learners know who to approach if they have concerns and confidently identify tutors and well-being staff as trusted adults. Staff understand safeguarding procedures appropriately and leaders monitor safeguarding concerns and learner engagement with support services carefully. Learners develop their understanding of personal safety, community support

and safeguarding issues effectively through informative sessions and engagement with external agencies. Arrangements for safeguarding learners meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

In order to improve the provision further, the provider should:

- review the enrolment process for adult in the community learners to make it more easily accessible to those potential learners who do not have digital skills or access to be able to apply online, and
- consult with learners in classes where attendance is inconsistent to find out if any adjustments can be made to encourage regular attendance.

Leading and improving

In April 2025, the local authority's allocation of the adult community learning grant was transferred to Bridgend College to help ensure the continued provision of adult learning in the community (ALC) in the Bridgend County Borough. The principal and her senior team have considered carefully how to use the community learning grant to complement their own adult learning in the community provision and to extend the provision in the next few years further into the community to reduce the barriers to learning. Bridgend College offers suitable provision for adult learners in the community and overall it meets learners' needs and interests well.

Both the principal and the deputy principal regularly attend the local authority's post-16 strategic steering group which meets every other month. This ensures that the college is part of the wider education network in the area and, as a result, it has an in-depth understanding of regional and local priorities for lifelong learning. The college has been proactive in maintaining links with other key adult learning in the community providers in the area, namely Bridgend County Borough Council and Adult Learning Wales. This adult learning forum meets twice a quarter to ensure there is no unnecessary duplication of provision, that provision is complementary and that providers can easily signpost learners to appropriate progression routes based on their needs. The network has introduced a useful live online system whereby they reference each other's provision in real time.

The college has put into place a well-thought-out engagement strategy which has resulted in increasing enrolment numbers. Members of staff visit supermarkets, train and bus stations and attend parents' evenings in primary and secondary schools across the region to provide information, answer questions and understand the learners' needs. This has resulted in provision which allows learners to progress from early stages in learning in the community to higher level qualifications, either in the college or elsewhere.

Spotlight: Provision to meet learners' needs

On discovering that many parents/carers want to support their children with their learning of mathematics, the provider has put in place classes for parents/carers of children of secondary school age to help them revitalise their knowledge of mathematics and to understand how mathematics is taught currently in schools. To understand the level of need a tutor attended parents'/carers' evening in secondary schools across the county borough. As a result, the provider has set up a series of classes focusing on the mathematics taught in Years 7 and 8, Years 8 and 9 and GCSE Years 10 and 11. The classes are offered as online and hybrid classes and at different times in the week which allows parents/carers to fit them in with their working and home lives. Parents/carers report that they benefit from these classes in several ways: they improve their own knowledge and understanding of mathematics; they have a better understanding of the mathematics curriculum and the way it is taught in schools; they can better support their children's learning; they can progress through the stages as their children progress through the stages; they feel more engaged with their children and their children's school lives; they feel more confident discussing their children's progress with teachers; they meet other parents/carers with similar age children and they are able to share their experiences in a supportive environment; they make new friends and, if they wish, they can take a GCSE in mathematics or be signposted to A level.

In this first year of receiving the adult community learning grant, the college has extended the number of venues in which it provides adult learning in the community. However, there remains a small number of deprived areas in the county where it has not yet been able to acquire a suitable venue. The college uses both its campuses at Bridgend and Pencoed. ESOL and ILS provision are accommodated on the main campus in Bridgend and Pencoed. The facilities at the Pencoed campus provide large and well-equipped classrooms which accommodate craft classes, such as sugarcraft, dog grooming and digital photography. In addition, the college delivers courses from the library in Pencoed, the town hall in Maesteg, the Bridge Community Hub in Bridgend, B-Leaf in Bryngarw Country Park, as well as Litchard primary school. These venues have good quality facilities for adult courses which are easily accessible by public transport or car. Most venues are well equipped with digital equipment allowing learners to access hybrid classes where learners can access in-person sessions online, as well as facilities through which to research. Hybrid courses provide a useful role in helping learners to balance the demands of their home lives and work commitments with that of learning. The college has tailored the start times for evening classes to early evening to accommodate learners' needs.

Venues have clear bilingual signage and both the college and the tutors promote the use of Welsh language effectively. Many tutors use Welsh and English in their sessions, as well as introducing learners to the subject terminology in Welsh. However, the provider does not offer courses through the medium of Welsh at the time of the inspection due to a low level

of interest among learners. In ESOL courses, tutors help learners understand life in Wales. During the election period, tutors helped learners understand how voting takes place, as well as understanding devolution through a visit to the Senedd.

The college has integrated the adult learning in the community courses generated by the community learning grant into its well-established quality assurance cycle. It gathers information on the quality of its courses through a wide range of activities, such as single and paired learning walks, reflective observations, listening to learners and tutors and learner surveys. The college makes considered use of artificial intelligence (AI) to analyse information which enables staff to act more quickly on issues identified.

The college includes governors appropriately in learning walks so that they can develop first-hand knowledge of the quality of the provision to inform their governance role. The information gained through all these measures is analysed on an on-going basis throughout the academic year. Staff provide feedback on action taken promptly to learners using a 'you said, we did' system. Where issues that are common to several areas are identified, these are considered at regular meetings by middle and senior leaders who draw up priorities for quality improvement planning. The quality improvement plan has measurable and timed actions for improvement which are frequently monitored. The college has addressed appropriately the recommendations from the last adult learning in the community inspection.

The college offers regular opportunities for professional development to all its tutors. Of three professional learning days offered, tutors can use one day to revisit their specialisms through visits to update their industrial knowledge. Staff can identify and undertake bespoke professional development, for example, in ESOL tutors can update their knowledge and skills through online courses. Staff identify the areas they wish to develop through the process of reflective observation. This system encourages staff autonomy in enhancing their own teaching practice. The remaining two days of professional development are organised around common issues which the college identifies from its quality assurance analyses and strategic or national priorities, such as anti-racism and positive behaviour management.

In order to improve further the provider should:

- Extend the college's reach into community settings to help further reduce barriers to education.

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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