



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

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

**Swansea Adult Learning in the Community Partnership**

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**by**

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

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

## About Swansea Adult Learning in the Community Partnership

The provision of adult learning in Swansea is co-ordinated through the Adult Learning Partnership Swansea (ALPS). The main adult learning funded by the Welsh Government is delivered by the Council's Lifelong Learning Service and Adult Learning Wales. Gower College Swansea provides a programme of adult courses delivered using part-time further education funding. The partnership brings together a range of other organisations providing adult learning including Swansea University, University of Wales Trinity Saint David's, Swansea Council for Volunteer Service (SCVS) and Learn Welsh Cymru.

The partnership delivers a wide range of courses for adults learning in the community. The majority of provision comprises English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and adult basic education courses, while the college and the Council's Lifelong Learning Service offer provision in the visual and creative arts.

The Office of National Statistics 2021 census reports that around 238,500 people live in Swansea and, according to data available, the population of Swansea declined between the 2001 and 2011 censuses by 0.2%. Of the current population, about 48,900 are aged 65 or over (20.5%). Swansea is the second largest local authority in Wales and accounts for 7.7% of Wales' total population.

In 2021, the rate of employment in Swansea was 70.3%, slightly below the Welsh average of 72.1%. In 2021, average (median) gross weekly earnings in Swansea stood at £549.50. The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 2019 identified 11.5% of Swansea's local areas as falling within the top 10% most deprived in Wales.

The majority of Swansea residents are of a white ethnic background (91.8%). The 2021 census indicates that the percentage of Welsh speakers in Swansea remained at 11.2% in 2021. In 2021 there were around 350 fewer Welsh-speaking Swansea residents (aged 3+) compared with 2011. The number of people who did not speak Welsh increased by 1,100.

In 2021, in general terms, the working-age population in Swansea are more highly qualified than the Welsh average. Eighty-three point eight per cent of adults (aged 18-64) are qualified to level 2 or above, which is 2.2 percentage points above the average for Wales, 65.9% are qualified to level 3 or above, which is 3.4 percentage points above the average for Wales, and 42.5% are qualified to level 4 or above, which is 0.9 percentage points above the average for Wales.

There are 1,639 learners enrolled on courses in the ALPS partnership.

## Summary

The Adult Learning Partnership Swansea (ALPS) works well to provide a broad range of accredited and non-accredited courses across the city and county of Swansea to meet the diverse learning needs of learners. In most cases, learners work together well and they make sound or better progress in their learning.

The network of adult learning in the community providers worked conscientiously through the pandemic to provide learners with the means and the help to combat isolation and maintain contact with learning. The partnership continues to work effectively with learners to support their re-engagement with face-to-face learning through, for example, discounted courses into which literacy, numeracy and digital skills are embedded. As part of being a City of Sanctuary, the partnership has responded quickly and effectively to the growing numbers of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) learners. The partnership has extended its higher level ESOL courses to include aspects of vocational education. This is aimed at providing ESOL learners with opportunities to apply their English in a working situation.

The partnership has a clear leadership and management structure. However, strategic leaders acknowledge the need for a new strategic direction to meet current challenges. The partnership's operational group works well together to co-ordinate provision. However, there is no overall curriculum plan and there is a lack of Welsh-medium provision. Welsh language and culture are not embedded into the curriculum. Additionally, there is no clear map of routes of progression.

Each provider in the partnership provides its tutors with regular professional learning to develop their face-to-face and online teaching. Each partner assures the quality of its own provision. However, the partnership does not undertake cross-partnership observation and monitoring to build shared understanding of the overall quality of its provision.

## Recommendations

- R1 Ensure that the strategic group meets regularly to provide clear direction for the Adult Learning Partnership Swansea and to monitor progress of its implementation
- R2 Implement a curriculum mapping system to clarify for leaders, tutors and learners the routes of progression within and across providers, and monitor learners' destinations
- R3 Ensure that Welsh culture and the Welsh language are appropriately embedded within the curriculum offer and courses
- R4 Implement cross-partnership observation and moderation to build shared understanding of the quality of teaching and learning

## What happens next

The provider will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will review the provider's progress.

Estyn will invite the provider to prepare a case study on its work in relation to its Floristry at Work course for dissemination on Estyn's website. This course is aimed at providing learners with the creative and entrepreneurial skills to either work in a florist's shop or set up their own businesses. Embedded in the course is work on improving learners' literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

## Main findings

### Learning

In classes for developing literacy, numeracy and digital skills, nearly all learners relate the concepts they are learning usefully to everyday life. For example, in numeracy sessions, learners apply concepts well to everyday tasks such as amending the proportion of ingredients in recipes or measuring material to make a tablecloth. In digital sessions, learners complete forms online, which helps them, for example, to apply for benefits.

In classes for developing literacy, numeracy and digital skills, learners carry out initial assessment to determine their skills levels at the start of their programmes. Many learners start with low levels of literacy or numeracy skills. Overall, learners make variable progress in the rates at which they improve their skills. A minority of learners make too slow progress. This is partly because the work set is not challenging enough. A few others make slow progress because they do not retain prior learning well enough to work independently on tasks.

Nearly all ESOL learners complete initial assessments and they start courses appropriate to their level. Most ESOL learners make sound progress from their starting points in their oral and written language skills. Most learners on pre-entry level courses listen carefully to spoken English and vocalise English sounds well. They develop clear intonation and pronunciation, and this gives them a sound foundation on which to progress. Entry level learners read and understand simple sentences related to everyday topics, such as food and shopping, well. They produce grammatically correct sentences. Higher level learners use a range of different verbs (do, play, go, read) and tenses correctly to express which activities they do and do not do. They can ask and explain whether activities are healthy or not. Most learners of all levels can read and understand English appropriate to their level. Nearly all ESOL learners engage well in their learning and work enthusiastically and respectfully with their peers.

In family learning sessions, grandparents, parents and their children work together at the children's school. Most family learning adult learners make good progress in sessions. They develop a good understanding of how to structure activities to make them fun and to develop their children's learning through storytelling, shared reading activities, counting and verbal reasoning. Many adult learners improve their understanding of what is taught in school and how it is taught and, as a result, they are better able to help their own children. A few adult learners who have experienced family learning sessions go on to take courses appropriate to their own needs and interests to improve their own learning and life chances.

Many learners enjoy a wide range of engagement provision, which helps develop personal interests. For example, in floristry and floristry for work courses, learners develop strong craft skills, and they create seasonal arrangements for weddings, festivals and Christmas celebrations. In floristry for work, learners develop a useful appreciation of the costs of materials and their own time and how to price their work. A few learners use these skills to set up their own businesses. In 'cooking on a

budget' courses, learners practise and develop cookery techniques and they broaden the range of food they can cook and cost effectively for themselves and their families.

The partnership delivers a very few classes online. Most learners engage well and are confident to use the partners' online learning platforms. However, in a few cases, learners struggle to recall prior learning and they do not demonstrate a secure understanding of underpinning IT skills. This slows their pace of learning. For example, in an online IT class, learners are not able to carry out file management tasks without the tutor's support and this hampers their ability to engage with the lesson.

The partnership offers no provision specifically through the medium of Welsh. A very few Welsh-speaking learners converse with fellow learners in Welsh or use Welsh as part of their creative work. For example, a calligraphy learner produces illustrated Welsh texts. Learners on family learning courses count in Welsh with their children. However, overall, very few learners practise, use or develop their Welsh language skills as part the provision.

The partnership's data indicates that learners who study over a period of time at the partnership progress on to higher levels of study at sound rate. However, the partnership does not evaluate the rates of learners' progression or their destinations at the end of a period of study systematically enough to inform provision planning effectively.

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

The partnership has a strong ethos of supporting learners' well-being. It has an overarching aim to develop learners as confident, well-rounded people who contribute purposefully to society.

Since the pandemic, many learners display a wide range of negative well-being issues, including health concerns, stress, anxiety, alcohol dependence, and a variety of financial and social problems made worse by the financial crisis.

The range of support offered by the partnership during the pandemic, which included keeping in touch with isolated learners and delivering food parcels, increased learners' ability to continue their learning and in many cases to combat isolation. These actions helped to support learners with significant challenges in their lives.

The partnership has continued its concern for learners' well-being into the post-pandemic recovery period. In a change to previously, part-time college learners now have full access to the college's pastoral coach and they can be referred to other college services, such as for counselling or financial advice. Learners appreciate facilities set up by providers in the partnership. At the engagement group and on the dedicated helpline, learners can talk to tutors about wider issues, such as how to claim fuel allowances or access food banks, as well as their learning needs, such as needing help to solve digital problems.

Family learning groups have supported minority ethnic women learners by providing safe places for them to learn. As a result of an offer to provide individual support to one woman, she attended, bringing five friends. The Lifelong Learning Service

responded by establishing and supporting the group. This had a considerable impact on the well-being of the women and it has opened up their lives to new opportunities.

Analysis of a variety of learner voice consultations show that learners on personal interest courses have a range of reasons for attending. In many cases, learners report that these courses increase their self-esteem and general feelings of well-being. There are many examples where learners have gained the confidence and skills on these courses to move into self-employment, to other levels of learning or into volunteering roles.

Older learners attending courses are highly motivated and talk eloquently and passionately of the physical, social and cognitive benefits to them. Such activities help them to continue full and active participation in society.

Nearly all learners reflect the partnership's aspirations for learners to be respectful, to be ready to learn and to stay safe. Nearly all learners are enthusiastic about gaining new knowledge and skills. Most learners attend well. They are appreciative of the opportunity to learn and they work attentively in class. They relate well to their tutors, and they value the educational opportunities and support offered to them.

Nearly all learners contribute to discussions and complete assigned tasks during sessions and for homework. They co-operate and support one another's learning. Learners in multi-ethnic ESOL courses work well together and respect diversity. Nearly all ESOL learners are keen to learn English so that they can be effective in the workplace, support their families and take part as members of local society.

Many learners contribute well to learner voice activities and the partnership has taken positive action to make improvements or develop new initiatives, such as the six-week loan of computers and Wi-Fi access for college learners.

### **Teaching and learning experiences**

The adult learning in the community partnership works well together to offer a wide range of courses to meet the needs of learners across the city and county of Swansea. Almost all courses the partnership offers are funded, and they allow learners to gain appropriate qualifications. Funded courses focus on literacy, numeracy and digital skills, ESOL, and family learning. The partnership also offers a wide range of useful engagement and personal interest programmes, such as garment-making, food hygiene, yoga, family cooking, ukulele playing and drawing. Learners taking personal interest courses, such as silversmithing, pay for these courses themselves. The partnership has made good use of additional funding to ensure that learners on lower incomes can also engage with personal interest courses, for example floristry. As well as developing new skills, the courses offer learners opportunities for social interaction with others and employment.

Most learners attend classes in a wide range of venues across the area. This provides learners with the option to access provision within their communities. Classes offered online or through a blended learning approach are limited. The online courses suit the needs of a few learners well as they help learners to blend their learning with their lifestyle, and allow learners from other parts of Wales and further afield to take part.

As a City of Sanctuary, the number of refugees in the area has risen significantly and the partnership has responded promptly by providing an increased number of ESOL classes and other activities that support well-being and social cohesion. The partnership works well together to plan appropriate ESOL provision. Part-time ESOL courses across the partnership have doubled over the past two years. The college introduced well thought-out ESOL Plus programmes in September 2022 to support those wanting to progress onto mainstream further education provision and to learn skills for work as well as the language. The new offer includes three vocational pathways: health and social care, business, and visual arts. The decision to offer these routes was informed by job opportunities and by popularity. The vocational elements of the programme are delivered by subject specialists. The courses take place in the areas of the college where mainstream provision takes place to help ESOL learners integrate with other learners and to support their transition.

The local authority lifelong learning service works well with a number of schools across the region to deliver family learning programmes in English-medium primary schools and an all-age special school. However, there is currently no activity in Welsh-medium primary or secondary schools or English-medium secondary schools.

Adult Learning Wales works effectively with schools and the African Community Centre to develop and deliver family learning programmes for those with ESOL needs. This helps parents to improve their English and to support their children of school age without needing to find childcare for younger siblings, which is often a barrier to learning for many in the ESOL community.

The partnership has the aspiration to engage learners more fully in the development and design of the provision. Adult Learning Wales has extended the representation on its health and well-being forum to include a class representative and a deputy to increase the depth of learner feedback on provision. Learners and citizens across the county have also contributed to the lifelong learning education debate through the 'Tree of Lifelong Learning' project, which seeks to understand learners' reasons for continuing their learning throughout life.

Course planning is comprehensive. In most cases, tutors plan effectively to meet the diverse needs of learners. For example, in an ESOL session, the tutor is mindful that many learners may not be literate in their first language and they may not be familiar with the English script. Therefore, the tutor introduces reading and writing carefully and at an appropriate level to support learning.

Tutors set up activities well in most sessions by sharing objectives, giving clear instructions, modelling expectations and tasks, and checking learners' understanding of concepts. In most sessions, resources are appropriate. In a floristry lesson, resources are abundant, of high quality and free to learners. In a community-based personal development session, the tutor makes effective use of digital tools that support learning. In a very few sessions, tutors prepare and deliver activities and resources within the context of Welsh culture.

Many tutors plan their sessions well to meet learners' needs. They use effective questioning techniques, and they allow learners appropriate time to respond and formulate answers. This encourages all learners to contribute. In a minority of sessions, tutors do not ensure that each learner has the opportunity to answer



questions. This results in a very few learners dominating the session to the detriment of others.

In almost all sessions, tutors give praise and encouragement appropriately, which supports learners to contribute confidently in class. In most ESOL and personal interest lessons, tutors encourage independent thinking and develop critical thinking skills by asking probing questions, encouraging learners to justify answers and opinions, and inviting learners to feed back to one another and to provide a review of each other's work. However, in a few skills sessions, tutors do not provide enough opportunities for learners to develop independent thinking and problem-solving skills, nor do they manage the pace of the session well enough to ensure all learners are sufficiently challenged.

Tutors deliver and manage feedback in a variety of ways including verbally, in written form, through live digital platforms, and via peer-to-peer activities. In a photography class, the tutor reviews learners' photos, offering useful advice and engaging other learners in constructively critiquing their peers' work. A few tutors give detailed individualised written feedback to learners to help them improve their skills in the subject area.

Many tutors have systems in place to track and monitor learner starting points, aims and progress to date. These systems include tools such as diagnostic tests to assess progress against accreditation criteria, in-class assessments, and tracking sheets. Where individual learning plans are used, tutors' comments and targets are often too generic and they are not as effective as a tool to support individual learning needs.

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

All partners within the partnership provide useful information to advise and guide prospective learners to choose the most appropriate courses for them. Providers' individual prospectuses and websites include valuable information on the expectations of learners, as well as the commitment and service they can expect from providers. However, there is currently no overall partnership website where learners can access all information about the courses offered from one point. A few older learners feel strongly that there is an over-reliance on electronic registration for courses, which can be confusing or difficult for them to use if they do not have internet access.

Individual partner organisations offer valuable personal and specialist support for learners and work together appropriately to continue supporting learners who move between them. The further education college has worked effectively to ensure that part-time learners receive the same support and guidance as full-time learners.

This strong and responsive suite of measures to support learner well-being has been made possible because of the effective partnership working at operational level. This includes a broadening and strengthening of the adult learning in the community partnership with a wider group of council services and external agencies. Working with other council departments, such as the Council's family action group, the Ethnic Minority and Youth Support Team (EYST), the Swansea Asylum Seekers Support, the Refugee Multi-agency support group, the REACH project, housing associations and the refugee council, providers can access support for disadvantaged and older

learners, which is practical and increases their well-being. There are numerous examples of tutors supporting the well-being of learners outside of sessions, for example by helping them access smart phones, tablets and data through the Council for Voluntary Services and Hafod Housing association. Partners offer financial assistance that helps learners overcome financial barriers to their learning or personal development. For example, the further education college is a college of sanctuary and offers beneficial assistance to asylum seekers and refugees. The Lifelong Learning Service in the local authority removed fees during the pandemic and it has reduced fees significantly since then to maintain learners' engagement. A majority of those who registered on courses during 2022-2023, at the time of the inspection, were new learners.

Individual providers within the partnership offer appropriate advice and guidance to learners regarding progression opportunities. The operational group meets regularly and considers progression appropriately. For example, partners signpost ESOL learners or adult basic education learners to classes that are suitable to their level and needs. They work together efficiently to assist learner progression to accredited courses, informal conversation groups, women-only groups, or sessions by Swansea Asylum Seekers Support. The partnership works well together to refer learners to the most appropriate ESOL provision at the earliest opportunity. However, overall, there is no cross-partnership mechanism to track progression to further study or into employment. In addition, the recording of progress on individual learning plans is inconsistent within and across the partnership's providers.

Many learners on ESOL courses benefit from their interactions with other learners from countries from across the world, as well as instruction on Welsh culture and values. This in turn develops their understanding of the local community and the wider world and the importance of respect for others.

Providers within the partnership promote healthy lifestyle choices usefully in courses on eating well and economically. Personal development courses improve learners' confidence and skills while promoting sustainability. For example, learners take pride in upcycling old bedding and clothing to create bunting.

The partnership offers valuable online safety guidance to learners and tutors, which reflects the growth and continued importance of online learning since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Individual providers operate suitable mechanisms to ensure that a wide range of learners contribute effectively to decisions regarding their learning. However, the partnership's approach to a consistent and partnership-wide learner voice process is underdeveloped.

Providers offer worthwhile training on safeguarding and issues regarding extremism and radicalisation. Their arrangements for safeguarding learners meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

## **Leadership and management**

The Adult Learning Partnership Swansea (ALPS) is made up of seven main providers in the city and county area of Swansea. There is a clear leadership and

management structure. The partnership has a good understanding of, and works effectively to meet, local, regional and national priorities, such as the drive for equity of learning and support in education to tackle the impact of poverty and deprivation. It has strong alliances with many other providers in the area, for example voluntary service organisations, with which it works well to meet the needs of learners.

In the recent past, the operational group has taken the leading role and responsibility to ensure that the learners could attend classes online through the pandemic. This work, and a recent series of adult learning events across Swansea, has led to an increasing number of learners returning to face-to-face learning.

The partnership's self-assessment is open and reflects honestly on progress in recent years. The partnership recognises the need to embed the new strategic direction that takes into account changes in economic circumstances. The partnership acknowledges that meetings of the strategic group have been less regular and that the strategic group needs to provide better scrutiny of provision to assure its quality and relevancy. It further recognises the need to establish groups to monitor and assure the overall quality of partnership provision and the development of Welsh-medium and literacy courses, the latter with which it has made little progress since the last inspection report. The quality development plan sets out the key shared issues that the partnership will address. However, both the self-assessment report and the quality development plan are recent documents and, as a result, the quality development plan does not provide evidence of the partnership's progress against the milestones.

Each provider in the partnership has quality assurance processes in place to assure the quality of its own teaching, learning and provision. Overall, each provider has a secure understanding of the quality of teaching and learning in their provision. Nonetheless, the partnership recognises the need to re-establish the cross-partner observation and moderation scheme to assure quality and equity across the partnership to better understand the quality of the partnership's provision as a whole.

Tutors working for the Adult Learning Partnership Swansea are well qualified and knowledgeable about their subjects. During the pandemic, providers supported tutors' health and well-being through a range of online courses. Most tutors took advantage of the professional learning opportunities offered by their provider to improve their digital and online teaching skills. Returning to face-to-face teaching, many tutors have transferred these skills to the classroom to help them offer a wider range of activities and presentation materials. For example, in a few ESOL classes, tutors use software that allows them to present good quality up-to-date pictures, which stimulates speaking work. A few tutors have also introduced software that allows learners to test their knowledge through good-humoured competition to see who has the most correct answers in the fastest time. However, there have been few opportunities for cross-partnership learning events, whereby tutors across the partnership benefit from sharing their teaching experiences and ideas with their peers.

Senior leaders in the Adult Learning Partnership Swansea have a sound understanding of financial issues surrounding the funding of adult learning in the community. Overall, partners use their individual funding streams in a complementary way to provide courses suitable to meet learners' needs and aspirations. The service

has used engagement funding from the Welsh Government effectively to provide courses and materials at very low cost to enable learners on low incomes to re-engage with learning and to improve their employability prospects.

Adult Learning Partnership Swansea has wide range of venues. Many are in located close to the city centre or situated in local communities, allowing learners easy access to classes. In most cases, venues are welcoming, well-appointed for adult use, well lit and accessible.

## Evidence base of the report

Before the inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the learner and staff questionnaires

During the inspection, inspectors normally:

- meet the chair of the partnership, governors (where appropriate), senior and middle leaders and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the partnership's work
- meet learners to discuss their work, to listen to their views about various aspects of their provider
- visit a broad sample of sessions
- observe and speak to learners outside of sessions
- look closely at the partnership's self-evaluation processes
- consider the partnership's quality improvement planning and looked at evidence to show how well the partnership had taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a wide range of partnership documents, including information on learner assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body (where appropriate), information on learners' well-being, including the safeguarding of learners, and records of staff training and professional learning

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

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

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the partnership and from the Estyn website ([www.estyn.gov.wales](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

The report was produced in accordance with Section 77 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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