



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**

**Greater Gwent Adult Learning in the Community
Partnership**

**Coleg Gwent
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by

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

About Greater Gwent Adult Learning in the Community Partnership

The Greater Gwent Adult Learning Partnership, which is led by Coleg Gwent, was established in 1990. There are five main delivery partners, all of whom are local authorities. They are: Aneurin Leisure (Blaenau Gwent), Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport, and Torfaen.

The partnership offer includes provision that is franchised through the college, direct grant funded provision, and a range of full-cost recovery courses and clubs. The franchised provision includes courses in essential skills, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), independent living skills (ILS), and information communication technology (ICT). The grant funded provision includes essential skills and employability courses, non-accredited engagement programmes, and a range of personal interest courses.

As of mid-year 2022, the combined population estimate for the local authority areas within the partnership was 591,396, which is 18.8% of the total population of Wales. Caerphilly is the most densely populated area of the five authorities, followed by Newport. (Office for national statistics)

The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) shows that the partnership, which covers a wide geographical area, serves a range of learners from those living in some of the least to the most disadvantaged areas. Three neighbourhoods across two of the local authority areas, Caerphilly and Newport, fall within the top 10 most deprived areas of Wales. Conversely, Monmouthshire is the only local authority area in Wales not to have any neighbourhoods identified as falling within the category of the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods across Wales. (Stats Wales, 2022)

Stats Wales shows that 86.68% of 18-64 years old in Wales have qualifications at level 2 or above. Across the counties of the partnership there is considerable variation in the proportion of resident adults who have level 2 qualifications. The following data applies: Blaenau Gwent, 77.9%; Caerphilly, 85.3%; Monmouthshire, 93.1%; Newport, 85.3%; and Torfaen, 81.0%. The percentage of residents who are without qualifications is highest in Blaenau Gwent at 15.5%, which is the highest proportion in Wales and notably higher than the Welsh average of 8.3%.

Newport has a high number of residents who are non-UK-born, increasing from 8.5% in 2011 to 12.2% in 2021. This is in part due to the fact that the city was one of the original key asylum dispersal areas in Wales. (Office for national statistics). Added to this, a significant number of Ukrainian refugees have been accommodated in Monmouthshire over the past two years.

The percentage of people who say they can speak Welsh across Wales averages 29.7%. Within the local authorities served by the partnership, the proportion of people who say they can speak Welsh is generally lower than the Welsh average: Blaenau Gwent, 16.6%; Caerphilly, 25.7%; Monmouthshire, 16.6%; Newport, 20.9%; and Torfaen, 17.3%. (Stats Wales, 2022)

In 2022-2023 there were 5,839 enrolments across the partnership. Of these enrolments 3,983 were unique learners.

Summary

The Greater Gwent Adult Learning Partnership is a well-established and cohesive collaboration comprising of five local authority core providers, with the college taking a strategic leadership role. Leaders across the partnership exhibit a strong commitment to adult education, drawing on diverse funding sources and innovative approaches to meet the needs of varied communities by providing a comprehensive range of provision.

The leadership structure is well defined, with committees overseeing strategic direction, day-to-day operations, provision, and quality. This ensures representation from all partners thereby fostering cohesion. Each partner has a dedicated manager overseeing their authority's provision, maintaining visibility and accessibility. Regular updates from the leadership team ensure that teaching staff across the provision are familiar with the partnership's priorities.

Curriculum planning is collaborative, adapting to learner and community needs, employer input, and skills shortage data. The partnership is responsive, offering programmes in various venues and at times to suit learner needs. However, Welsh medium and bilingual provision is very limited.

Small class sizes, welcoming environments, and person-centred approaches create inclusive spaces. Tutors demonstrate a deep understanding of their learners, adapting tasks to individual needs and providing them with choices in their learning. Sessions are well-structured leading to meaningful engagement. Learners show strong progress across most programmes, developing practical skills applicable in real-life situations as well as growing in confidence.

The partnership has a strong focus on learners' mental health, offering support through health and well-being fairs and lesson content. Learners appreciate the impact on their overall well-being and confidence, recognising that these adult learning programmes give them a sense of community.

The partnership engages learners through various methods, responding promptly to queries and providing clear progression routes. Learners actively participate in providing feedback and share that they feel able influence change.

Professional learning opportunities are aligned with self-evaluation outcomes, fostering continuous improvement. Tutors value these opportunities and actively participate in partnership-wide initiatives. A notable example is the digital mentors group which has a focus on digital tools and artificial intelligence, exploring ways to incorporate these skills and knowledge into teaching and learning. The partnership also organises an annual staff conference, drawing attendance from tutors across the area. Recent conferences have included a focus on staff mental health and well-being.

Recommendations

- R1 Increase bilingual and Welsh-medium learning opportunities across the partnership
- R2 Identify where learners may be suited to higher levels of study or accreditation and provide opportunities to accommodate this

What happens next

The provider will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

Estyn will invite the provider to prepare case studies on its work for dissemination on its website, in relation to:

- Empowering tutor development through strong and collaborative partnership working
- A holistic approach to learner well-being, mental health, and online safety

Main findings

Learning

Most learners make strong progress from their starting points. They develop their knowledge and skills incrementally and use them in everyday situations.

In literacy classes, learners recall spelling techniques well and they apply them correctly in their written work. They develop a good understanding of words in English that sound the same but have different spellings and meanings such as 'knight' and 'night'. Completing theory driving licence forms and online banking applications helps learners to make useful progress in their working and personal lives.

In GCSE English classes, learners develop a good understanding of figurative language techniques. They work purposefully together to discuss the underlying meaning of similes and metaphors and they develop ideas on how to apply this language to enhance their speaking and writing. Learners of different nationalities and cultures usefully compare similes and metaphors that are used in their first languages. This helps them to develop greater language awareness and understand nuance in phrases such as 'get on like a house on fire'.

Most learners in numeracy classes show high engagement and confidence in exploring different ways of solving problems with numbers. In a mixed level class, learners tackle problems involving probability effectively. For example, they read statements and predict the probability using a meter rule. At a GCSE mathematics

drop-in session, learners seek additional tuition to help improve their understanding of number concepts and operations, which further develops their confidence.

In English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, nearly all learners speak confidently in simple English. They learn language which helps them to carry out everyday tasks, such as speaking to their child's teacher, making a doctor's appointment, buying tickets and asking questions to find out information. They engage in conversation with one another and use the simple past tense accurately to say what they did at the weekend. In higher level classes, learners build well on the language they have learned previously to use more complex language. They work well together and independently to check the accuracy and refine their written work. In an ESOL improvers class, learners make very good progress in developing their writing skills in a range of genres.

Most learners in independent living skills (ILS) classes make steady progress in developing everyday skills, such as manual dexterity and independent thinking. In a very few cases, learners struggle to complete work independently and their progress is very slow.

In digital skills, learners recap their knowledge and skills through online self-check quizzes which demonstrates their understanding of internet cookies, their significance, and how to regulate their use. Nearly all learners make very good progress in building their digital skills incrementally in line with their own needs and preferences. They competently design online presentations, use spreadsheets, collaborate synchronously online and use applications on mobile phones to fill in forms. They use their newly acquired skills in daily life and work with greater confidence. As a result of their learning, and presentations by the police, most digital skills learners develop a greater understanding of staying safe online.

In personal interest courses, learners return to subjects they have studied previously, or they take up new interests to challenge themselves or to relax. In family history classes, learners develop skills to research online databases, such as censuses and birth, marriage and death records, and they learn how to save their research to build their family trees. In woodturning classes, learners develop good skills in using lathes to create artefacts which they can display at home or give as gifts. In language lessons, such as French and Spanish, learners develop their linguistic skills to carry out everyday tasks and to engage in basic conversation about daily routines. In an art class, learners develop their skills systematically in portrait painting through a range of genres and mediums, such as pastels, water colours and oils. They make quick sketches of life models, and they develop their skills in capturing the proportions of the face and the skin tone realistically. Portfolio work is of a high standard and celebrates different nationalities and cultures creatively.

Across the partnership in many classes, learners learn about Welsh heritage and culture, for example through working with Welsh artists. In most classrooms, information is displayed bilingually. In numeracy sessions, learners use the English and Welsh town names Pontypool and Pont-y-pŵl to estimate the probability of picking an 'n' from a hat of letters. In digital literacy, learners are encouraged to use Welsh subject terminology within their tasks. Learners who have reached a good level in Welsh, or who are first language Welsh speakers, have the opportunity to

learn through the medium of Welsh where they indicate that they are keen to do so. However, there were no Welsh medium classes at the time of the inspection.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Learners appreciate the opportunity to learn in venues in the communities where they live. They describe welcoming, supportive spaces where their well-being, confidence, and sense of community are nurtured. For example, two learners state that they would be 'lost without the centre' which has become a lifeline after challenging life circumstances. They describe how being in the centres has led to them attending wider activities including performances put on by learners on independent living skills (ILS) courses. A few learners express anxiety about what they would do if they didn't have these opportunities and welcoming spaces.

Most learners recognise the well-being benefits of taking part in learning and they identify the development of other skills, including digital skills, personal confidence, and working with other people. One learner typified the impact of developing these wider skills saying, "I never thought that I would be able to help other people – especially not with IT skills – but I am not afraid to have a go at things now."

Learners in digital skills and international computer driving licence (ICDL) classes are particularly appreciative of learning about cyber security and what they describe as 'telephone safety' and the impact that has on safety and well-being in their wider lives. They value learning about how to keep themselves safe when browsing, banking, and shopping online and over the telephone. As a direct result of this learning, one learner has bought themselves a tablet and is confidently using it to make appointments and to shop.

Informal clubs provide affordable opportunities for members of the community to come together and enable the partnership to include programmes that would not fall under the remit of funded adult learning. Clubs are often learner-led and learners attending these clubs report that being part of the group has a positive impact on their mental well-being adding comments such as 'I wouldn't be able to manage without this support' and 'It's very important as it's the one day of the week when we know where we are'.

Personal interest courses such as pottery and cake-making, also help learners' mental well-being. In a craft session, well-being and mindfulness activities are included in the session. Parents in an ILS craft session talk positively about the impact of being part of this group, not just on their young people, but on themselves too.

Most learners speak highly of the support that they receive from their tutors during their sessions, and they describe being able to contact their tutors outside of sessions as well as being provided with a range of resources to consolidate their learning in their own time. Often learners identify their tutor as the first point of contact for wider issues around well-being.

Learners appreciate that their feedback is considered and acted on. For example, learners' feedback about class start times has resulted in changes that support

learners to balance their work and life commitments with their attendance at sessions.

Most learners demonstrate high levels of motivation, and they have clear reasons for their participation in learning. For example, in a British sign language (BSL) class, learners aim to develop their skills to enhance the services they offer in the workplace, to support family members, and for one learner, who performs the role of Santa in his community, to be able to sign with deaf children when they visit Santa.

Many learners demonstrate determination. When their learning or ability to make progress becomes challenging, they use their tutors and peers for support. In a very few instances, learners willingly travel to access learning in centres that are not in their immediate community.

Learners are highly engaged and demonstrate very positive attitudes to learning. Nearly all learners approach tasks enthusiastically, actively taking part in discussions and group activities. Their enthusiasm for learning spurs them on and most learners want to progress.

For most learners, their first experience in adult learning in the community was positive and led to further enrolments. They talk passionately about belonging to a community of learners and use phrases like 'we are learning buddies' and 'it's like family'. For example, learners in an ILS class have gone on to join other programmes at the centre totalling around eight hours per week. Prior to joining this programme, there was nothing available for them to access as their needs were considered too complex for college programmes.

When Welsh is brought into the classroom in meaningful ways, learners are positive in their attitude to learning words and phrases in Welsh. For example, in an ESOL class a useful homework task involved learners collecting commonly sighted words like Casnewydd and food signs in supermarkets.

Teaching and learning experiences

The partnership, which comprises of five local authority core providers, with Coleg Gwent taking a strategic leadership role, takes a collaborative approach to curriculum planning. Partners map provision to ensure coordinated planning, transparency, and the avoidance of duplication. Although the college and Adult Learning Wales (ALW) are not considered core partnership providers, they actively contribute to the annual curriculum planning meeting to share plans and identify progression routes.

The partnership's diverse provision includes fully funded essential skills programmes, fully or partially funded well-being and leisure courses, and learner-led informal clubs incurring just a room rental fee. These informal clubs, which enrich the overall offer, provide wider learning and social opportunities that local communities welcome. The loss of engagement funding is a challenge, and the partnership explores creative ways to sustain these engagement-focussed activities.

Collaboration with the region's Welsh for Adults provision, Learn Welsh Gwent, further enriches the partnership, providing structured Welsh courses, informal chat clubs, and coffee mornings in all local authority areas. However, there are very few

Welsh-medium and bilingual programmes included in the annual curriculum plan as providers share that demand is limited.

Curriculum planning follows historical patterns in the first instance but is adapted based on learner and community needs, employer input, and data that analyses skills shortages. For example, the partnership responded to the arrival of Ukrainian refugees by putting on ESOL courses in the hotels where they were accommodated, linking with a major employer in the area to promote work opportunities, and developing ESOL family learning programmes.

Progression mapping identifies clear pathways into additional adult learning opportunities, further education or higher education. For example, learners on a counselling course fed back their desire to progress from level three to a higher level. As a result, the partnership worked with the college to open up a progression route to level four. However, there are a very few examples of learners not being able to progress onto higher level programmes or achieving additional accreditation. This results in learners remaining in levels they have already completed or undertaking additional units at the same level.

The partnership is flexible and responsive, delivering programmes at times and in venues to suit learner needs whether that is in community education centres, schools, libraries, or the workplace. At the time of inspection, all class sizes were small, averaging around five learners per session.

Tutors create warm and welcoming environments that learners clearly feel comfortable entering. Spaces are vibrant and include engaging visual stimuli and samples of learner work such as Christmas pottery projects.

Tutors produce plans that are well-structured and person-centred. In most essential skills sessions, tutors work with learners to create meaningful targets such as “I am doing this to achieve my long-term goal of becoming a midwife”, “I am supporting my son to achieve GCSE maths”, “For personal growth and to help with employability skills”.

In most sessions, tutors set up tasks well, sharing clear objectives and modelling expectations where appropriate. They use a variety of suitable resources and digital technologies to effectively engage learners. These include digital spinners to select tasks, and digital noticeboards that provide learners with an opportunity to develop their use of online real-time tools.

Most tutors know their learners well and approach and adapt tasks to suit specific needs. They give learners choices in what they do. For example, in a maths session, tutors are flexible in relation to the methods learners want to use to solve mathematical problems. During an ILS craft session, learners are encouraged to make decisions regarding the items they wish to work on, such as selecting colours and approaches to displaying the products. Almost all tutors readily give praise, encouragement, and reassurance which makes learners feel at ease and helps to develop confidence.

In a few sessions tutors integrate Welsh language and culture in a relevant and meaningful way. For example, in an ESOL session the tutor sets a useful weekly

word of the week task with a focus on pronunciation. There are also examples of teachers giving instructions through the medium of Welsh such as 'edrych' to get the learners' attention.

Most tutors challenge learners well, setting high expectations. They maintain pace in sessions and provide extension activities to support learning beyond the classroom. They usually use effective questioning techniques, including open questions and useful prompts to extend knowledge. However, in a very few cases, the pace of teaching and learning is slow, and tasks and questioning techniques are not always appropriately differentiated to meet learners' needs in mixed ability groups.

Care, support and guidance

The partnership engages learners through a range of methods including leaflets and brochures, social media, word of mouth and advertising within community centres. The partnership has a useful central website which links directly to each of the five partners' websites where learners can find up-to-date information on courses available in their local authority area.

Nearly all learners report that they were easily able to access information when enquiring about courses. The partnership responds to queries in a timely manner and provides good initial advice and guidance, making routes to enrolment clear and accessible for learners. The partnership also provides helpful information to learners regarding progression routes within and outside the partnership.

Tutors create environments where learners from diverse backgrounds engage with each other and demonstrate mutual respect. In a numeracy course, learners with significant age differences demonstrate empathy and mutual care. They respect each other's preferred learning styles when working in groups or pairs.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the partnership has identified that learners need more support with confidence and participation as well as concerns related to their well-being. In response, the partnership has organised health and well-being fairs for learners. These events, featuring various external support agencies like local health boards, employment agencies, and mental health support charities, are well-attended by learners from all five counties.

The partnership offers a wide range of lifestyle and leisure courses such as cookery, woodturning & pottery to engage with learners who wish to attend a learning programme for their own wellbeing, social interaction or to learn a new skill. Learners on these courses speak positively about the impact attending them has on their everyday health and wellbeing.

In digital literacy classes, tutors help learners understand how to keep themselves safe online. Guest speakers such as the local police cyber security teams deliver guest presentations to help learners understand the importance of online security and the associated risks.

The partnership has taken positive steps to support staff in responding to learners' concerns about mental health. An annual tutor conference with a focus on well-being and mental health awareness is held, which tutors find useful both in having an

increased awareness of their own well-being and that of their learners. A minority of staff have become formally trained in mental health first aid with a few progressing to higher levels.

The partnership is aware of learners that have an identified additional learning need (ALN) through the initial enrolment form and a one-to-one discussion with the tutor. In most cases, tutors respond to needs by delivering tailored support themselves. In a very few cases, where more specialist support is required, the partnership lead sources additional funding for partners to provide it.

Nearly all tutors know their learners well, understand their needs and offer reasonable adjustments where required. Individual learners' needs are recorded on individual learning plans and tutors review learners' progress regularly throughout the course. Learners who pay fees for their courses do not complete individual learning plans, and reviews of progress for these learners is undertaken informally by tutors.

Nearly all tutors act as the first point of contact for learners' concerns around well-being. They care about their learners' progress and well-being, often making themselves available outside of sessions to support learners.

The partnership gathers the views of learners through a range of methods and its annual learner survey receives very strong response rates. The partnership responds to feedback from learners well, for example in offering courses at more flexible times to accommodate learners' everyday lives.

The partnership has an appropriate overarching safeguarding policy, and each partner has all the necessary policies and procedures in place. Procedures for reporting and managing safeguarding incidents are clear and all staff and learners know who to contact if they have a concern. The partnership issues every learner with a useful handbook which outlines all necessary information related to health and safety, safeguarding and radicalisation.

All staff across the partnership undertake appropriate safeguarding training as required by the partnership policy. However, the lead partner does not systematically check that training has been undertaken or updated across the partnership.

Overall, the partnership arrangements for the safeguarding of learners meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management

The Greater Gwent Adult Learning in the Community Partnership is a cohesive and mature partnership. Leaders across the partnership show a strong commitment to providing adult learning in the community. Partners draw on a range of funding sources, including direct funding from the Welsh Government to each unitary authority and provision funded through franchise arrangements from the college to each partner from its part-time budget. The partnership plans with the needs of its varied communities in mind, offering a suitable range of provision.

The partnership has a clear leadership structure, which is supported well by committees overseeing the partnership's strategic direction, day-to-day operation, provision, and quality. These ensure that all partners have a voice in the direction

and operation of the partnership and help maintain the cohesion of the partnership. Each of the five partners has a manager who has direct oversight of their own authority's provision and who represents the authority at the partnership committees. Managers at all levels within the partnership are visible across the provision and accessible to their staff and learners. Annual staff updates from the partnership's leadership ensure that teaching staff across each of the partners understand the key priorities and strategic direction of the partnership. Teaching staff share the ethos of the partnership and recognise their own contribution to their individual authority provider and as members of the wider partnership.

All partners have access to a recently developed data dashboard maintained by the college. This provides useful up-to-date information for managers to monitor their provision, such as trends in learner outcomes data, learner enrolment figures, and the number of early leavers. The college also produces, on behalf of all partners, reports relating to recruitment, outcomes, and financial management. These are monitored by the relevant committees within the partnership. The partnership is developing methods to evaluate the extent that citizens participate in its provision through postcode mapping, and how learners progress into, through and beyond its provision. However, information about learner participation currently has a limited impact on provision planning.

The partnership has a thorough and useful range of self-evaluation and quality assurance processes, and the culture of self-evaluation is well embedded. For example, teaching staff frequently keep ongoing evaluations of their sessions in the planning documents. The partnership has a clear quality cycle that entails a range of appropriate quality-focused activities throughout the year including cross-partner teaching and learning observations. These observation activities support the partnership in monitoring the quality of delivery, identifying good practice, and developing those staff in need of support. Observations are carried out by a team of observers from each of the partners who have completed accredited training in lesson observation. This helps ensure consistency but also serves to develop the capacity of the observers themselves and provides a useful mechanism to share good practice across the partnership. Examples of effective practice are shared across the partnership through standardisation events, the annual tutor conference, and through useful summary insights from effective teachers.

The partnership has a self-evaluation process which draws together a wide range of information from each provider into a single partnership self-evaluation report and quality development plan. The quality development plan identifies appropriate actions to help improve the partnership's provision and outcomes for learners, such as developing tutors' Welsh language capacity, or enhancing opportunities for learner voice.

The partnership offers a varied programme of professional learning which responds well to the training needs identified through self-evaluation. Tutors appreciate and value the opportunities to improve their skills and knowledge, and to develop expertise through contributing to partnership developments. An example of this is the digital mentors group that support tutors to integrate digital teaching tools into their practice, and leads on professional learning programmes in topics such as artificial intelligence.

The partnership holds an annual staff conference, attended by most tutors across the partnership. Recent events have focussed on staff mental health and well-being. This is a worthwhile opportunity for tutors to meet, make professional links and share practice.

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)

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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