

Healthy, Wealthy and Wise:

The impact of adult learning across the UK

Report of the Wales Impact Forum, 2017



Wales

Context

Responsibility for adult learning policy, funding and commissioning is a function of the Welsh Government. In Wales, there is a mix of provision through both publicly funded providers (including Adult Community Learning, Further Education Institutions, Higher Education Institutions, and in work-based learning) as well as through trade unions, cultural organisations and the voluntary sector. Further, there are increasing examples of learning delivered to tenants by housing associations and by schools to parents and families.

Policy Drivers

In Wales, adult learning policy is being shaped through many of the same drivers as elsewhere in the UK, including:

- **the continued squeeze on public finances;**
- **an older workforce and population** (with a third of the Welsh workforce expected to be over 50 years old within the next five years);
- **high levels of economic inactivity** in many communities, with more than a quarter of a people not in education, employment or training;
- **demand from business** for a workforce with higher level qualifications, where by 2024 more than half of the workforce will be qualified at level 3 or higher;
- **uncertainty over the potential impact of Brexit** on the availability of skilled migrant labour and how the Welsh economy can meet the net requirement of 607,000 workers by 2024.

The more specific policy context is now being led by a **new adult learning policy**, which as well as a continued focus on ESOL and Essential Skills now recognises the positive impact of learning on the health and well-being of older people and those furthest from the labour market. The policy better locates adult learning policy as part of an integrated response to health and well-being. It also identifies the impact of adult learning on the attainment of school children by encouraging schools to develop services to encourage parents to engage in the learning of their children and to develop their own skills and qualifications.

Alongside the new policy is the new **all-age employability strategy** and the continued commitment to 100,000 all age apprenticeships. Together these policies open up the prospect of better links between work, health and communities and the co-location of services to reduce barriers to participation for individuals.

Regionally based schemes, such as City Region deals in Cardiff and Swansea, the potential for a North Wales Growth Deal, and the work of the Valleys Task Force, all present opportunities to integrate adult learning into locality based strategies to raise employment levels, improve well-being and reduce inequalities.

Alongside these policy developments is a commitment from the Welsh Government to establish a single planning and regulatory body for the post-compulsory sector in Wales. Legislation will create the Tertiary Education and Research Commission for Wales. One potential impact will be to create progression routes for adult learners through providing **greater coherence between sectors and providers**.



Key Challenges

- **Widening Participation.** There remain significant barriers to widening participation in adult learning, including the continued funding restrictions across the public sector, including for adult learning and particularly for part-time, flexible provision and for the ACL sector. The cuts have led to a substantial fall in part-time provision in recent years, making accessing learning more difficult for adults and potentially restricting progression to higher levels and the improvement of skills for work. The decision of the Welsh Government to give part-time undergraduate students parity of support on a pro-rata basis to full-time undergraduates will however likely have a positive impact for adult learners in higher education.
- **Outreach and community engagement.** The ending of the Communities First programme will likely also see a knock-on impact on the outreach capacity for adult learning providers and make it a more significant challenge to engage those furthest from education and the labour market.
- **Demographic factors.** With an ageing workforce and a potential squeeze on migration in future years, the need to better support in-work progression is emerging as a key challenge for the future. A lack of support for progression to support people in work has been identified as a factor in Wales' lower productivity growth and for individuals remaining in low paid work.

- **The Welsh language.** Despite significant commitment to building a bilingual nation there are still limited progression opportunities to study at post-16 through the medium of Welsh. For example, less than 3% of learning and assessment in FE and WBL is through the medium of Welsh or bilingual, demonstrating the barriers to meet the target of a million Welsh speakers by 2050.

Action Required

1. **Develop and implement a lifelong learning policy** to enable access to learning for people of all ages and recognise the benefits on health, well-being, work and communities.
2. **Develop coherent pathways** to better enable in-work progression to address low productivity and improve access out of low paid work.
3. **Rebalance funding** to offer greater support for adult learning opportunities and address the decline in part-time provision across sectors.
4. **Establish links between the NHS and adult learning providers** to maximise the impact of learning on health and well-being, including through formal social prescribing routes.
5. **Extend opportunities for adult learning in school settings**, building on the work of the schools such as Monkton Priory Primary School.



Julie James, AM, Minister for Skills and Science speaking during Adult Learners' Week.

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