



Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**Carmarthenshire ACL Partnership
Carmarthenshire County Council
County Hall
Carmarthen
SA31 1JP**

Date of inspection: March 2011

by

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



During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the provider's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

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 going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publication Section
Estyn
Anchor Court
Keen Road
Cardiff
CF24 5JW

or by email to publications@estyn.gov.uk

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.uk

© Crown Copyright 2011: This report may be re-used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re-used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the report specified.

Context

Carmarthenshire is a large county with a total population of 179,500, of whom 104,300 are of working age¹. The unitary authority has areas of both urban and rural deprivation. There are five area Communities First teams based in Felinfoel: Glanymor & Tyisha; Pantyffynnon; Llwynhendy; and Bigyn 4. All these are in the south-east and east of the county.

- The county has high levels of non-employment and economic inactivity (24% of working age population).
- Above 17% of the proportion of the working age population have no qualifications. This is 2% higher than in Wales overall and 4.4% higher than in Great Britain.
- Over 19% of its working age population are benefit claimants; 12.2% are on incapacity benefits (May 2008).
- Twenty-eight per cent of its population have literacy skills below level 1 (Basic Skills Agency 2004).
- Two per cent of its population are migrant workers (Home Office Worker Registration Scheme 2007).
- Two point eight per cent of its Year 11 school leavers are classified as not in education, employment or training (NEET; Welsh Assembly Government; March 2011).
- Fifty per cent of its population declare themselves to be Welsh speaking. (Estyn, 2009).

In the context of all providers facing budget cuts, the partnership states that it wishes to maintain the provision of vocational education and training that helps people to return to work. The partnership's mission statement recognises that, with increasing unemployment, it is important to maintain adult learning provision for the wellbeing of adults and families, particularly those disadvantaged by poverty.

The main providers in the partnership are:

- Carmarthenshire County Council;
- Coleg Sir Gar;
- the Workers' Educational Association South Wales (WEA(S));
- South West Wales Welsh for Adults Centre, Swansea University; and
- University of Wales Trinity St David.

Other partners include the County Voluntary Council – Carmarthenshire Association of Voluntary Service, (CAVS) and local universities: Swansea, Aberystwyth, and the Open University.

¹ see, Labour Market Statistics for 2007

Summary

The provider's current performance	Adequate
The provider's prospects for improvement	Good

Current performance

The partnership provision is judged as adequate because:

- more hard to reach learners have been recruited to the provision since the last inspection; and
- many learners use the provision as a stepping stone to further learning.

However:

- attainment in adult basic education (ABE) and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) has not improved since the last inspection
- the strategy to review the drive for quality improvement in teaching and assessment has not been effective enough to move adequate teaching to good or excellent; and
- there is no effective strategy to develop and promote the use of Welsh across the provision.

Prospects for improvement

The partnership has good prospects for improvement because:

- the recent review of delivery and funding of the provision to align them more closely with the partnership and Welsh Government priorities shows promising green shoots;
- there has been a recent track record of partners making difficult decisions in order to reshape the provision;
- senior managers of the partnership and elected members have the capability and capacity to make improvements and implement them; and
- there is a high level of trust and co-operation amongst the partners which gives good support to the partnership's strategic priorities.

Recommendations

In order to improve, the partnership needs to:

- R1 improve standards of learning and teaching, especially in ABE and ESOL;
- R2 make better use of data to set targets for improvement;
- R3 improve strategies for developing literacy and numeracy;
- R4 improve the monitoring and evaluation of training on safeguarding; and
- R5 promote and improve the use of Welsh as a medium of communication in class and across the provision.

What happens next?

A small team of inspectors will return in about one year for three days to review the progress made in implementing the recommendations.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Adequate

Standards: Adequate

Overall, adult community learners in Carmarthenshire achieve adequate standards in their work. Generally, they attain a majority of their learning goals at the same level as other adult learners across Wales.

Although learners' attainment shows a downward trend in ABE, it remains near to the national comparator. Learners' attainment in ESOL decreased over the last three years and is now well below the national comparator.

Learners' attainment on the local authority's accredited courses has improved over the last two years but is still below the national comparator. Learners on WEA (South Wales) and Coleg Sir Gar 'other adult learning' courses generally complete their courses well and attain good standards.

Around half of ABE and ESOL learners develop satisfactory skills in literacy, numeracy and speaking, but these learners often work at levels below their assessed ability and do not challenge themselves. As a result, their progress is slow.

Many specialist groups of learners achieve good standards in their work. For example, learners undergoing drugs rehabilitation programmes use improved basic skills to produce a newsletter for other service users.

Many learners who enrolled on courses, over the last three years, have undertaken further learning with the partnership.

Overall, learners make good use of their individual learning plans to improve their learning and skills. However ABE and ESOL learners do not use their learning plans well enough to set specific targets and review their progress, and not all learners are confident in using information and communication technology to support their studies.

Welsh speaking learners work well bilingually, when they have the opportunity.

Wellbeing: Good

Overall, learner wellbeing is good. Nearly all learners say that they enjoy their learning very much and feel well protected and safe from physical and verbal abuse. Learners' attendance is good. They look forward to their sessions and participate well. Learners on the majority of courses demonstrate independent learning skills. They work well in class. All learners gain confidence and many use their learning to engage with their community in a variety of ways. For example, a small number of art and crafts learners have progressed to marketing and selling their work

Many learners say that it is the first time they have had the confidence to take part and be involved in learning for a long while. Older learners use their learning well to

maintain their health and keep in contact with their peers. Nearly all learners develop their personal and social skills well. Most learners support each other well, provide constructive feedback to each other and help each other to overcome barriers to learning. Most learners are keen to improve their skills and want to progress further. However, a few older learners say that they are not given good advice about what they can do next after they have finished their course and that support available to them is not always effective.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Adequate
---	-----------------

Learning experiences: Adequate

Overall, the partnership offers a wide range of programmes, which meet the needs of most learners and the community well. The partnership has worked well to address local and national priorities. This has improved the targeted provision for a wide range of learners and has helped partners to engage with learners who are hard to reach or who belong to vulnerable groups that do not usually take part in learning, such as Gypsy Travellers.

Two partners in the partnership have recently reviewed their provision and have improved the percentage of courses where learners are able to acquire accreditation for their learning. This has resulted in a minority of learners changing their learning sessions from courses to self-funded clubs and societies.

The very good relationships between the 14-19 partnership and the ACL partnership have meant that the ACL partnership is able to share resources with the 14-19 partnership to improve the learning experiences of adult learners. For example, there has been an improvement in the quality of workshop facilities for adults in Carmarthen town.

Partners, including those from higher education, collect and share useful labour market information, which helps curriculum planning. Partners from higher education and Communities First deliver a good range of taster courses. This is useful to learners as they can find out what courses are available and try what is on offer before formally joining a course.

The partnership develops many learners' skills but there is not a clear enough strategy to ensure that learners' standards of literacy and numeracy improve. Where learners need to do this they do not always receive a consistently high level of support to develop their literacy skills effectively. Tutors do not always encourage learners who need it to seek support to improve basic skills generally. Not enough tutors are skilled or trained in helping learners to develop basic skills.

Although there is a Welsh medium and bilingual sub group in the partnership, there has not been enough effective progress to improve the level of Welsh medium or bilingual education available to adult community learners since the last inspection.

A few courses introduce learners to education for sustainable development and global citizenship (ESDGC) and alternative technology. However, there is not yet enough consistent opportunity for learners to develop their understanding of ESDGC through the context of their learning.

Teaching: Adequate

The majority of teachers use up-to-date subject and technical knowledge well when teaching and many provide learners with appropriate challenges. However, a minority do not sufficiently challenge learners and miss opportunities to contextualise learning. Where tutors carry out initial assessment, in a minority of cases they do not use the outcomes of these assessments effectively and so teach learners at a lower level than learners' ability. Whilst this has the benefit that the confidence of these learners improves, it impedes their progress.

The majority of teaching sessions are well prepared and well differentiated. In most sessions, tutors use a good range of teaching methods and learning materials. However, in a few cases tutors do not give learners enough time to practise their skills. All tutors have good relationships with learners, engage learners and encourage participation. In many sessions where tutors use individual learning plans (ILPs), they use them effectively to record learning targets and to monitor learner progress. These ILPs help most learners to be clear about the progress they are making. However, in a few instances, tutors do not record learner progress or feed back effectively to learners.

When tutors undertake peer observations of sessions they do not measure quality consistently. They often grade either learning or teaching and regard either as a measure of the quality of teaching. Data from self-assessed peer observations are not consistently measured. This data lacks validity and is not reliable enough to use as a measure of teaching quality.

The majority of sessions observed by the inspection team are good or excellent but a significant minority are only adequate. There has been slow progress since the last inspection and too many tutors are only adequate in their teaching

Care, support and guidance: Adequate

Overall, learners feel well looked after and supported by tutors. Nearly all learners feel safe and secure in the venues and classes they attend. Only a few tutors follow up absences systematically. In a few sessions there is good health and safety re-enforcement in lesson plans. There are useful references to healthy eating within family literacy programmes but not all tutors include issues of health and wellbeing in their sessions.

Learner handbooks for the majority of partnership providers are well presented and attractive. However, not all learners are fully aware of the services and support available to them. The partnership works well with specialist organisations to help learners to overcome barriers to learning. In one community-based provision for Gypsy Travellers, staff liaise well with other support services to help learners to participate.

All community workers have a basic guidance qualification. However, not enough staff know enough about progression opportunities for learners. Too few learners make effective use of independent careers guidance to help them plan their progression options. In one case a few learners felt let down about their progression

options because a partner provider did not communicate with them about the viability of a course.

The key partners have appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures. All tutors are CRB checked. Most tutors understand what to do if they identify vulnerable adults. However, a few are not clear enough about what to do and a few are not clear what constitutes a vulnerable adult. Not all tutors have received safeguarding training. The partnership does not have clear enough strategies in place to monitor safeguarding procedures.

A few tutors take good account of learners' mental health needs when planning learning. Where learners have been identified as having additional learning needs, tutors respond well to ensure that they receive individual support. In a few cases, tutors develop additional, personalised learning materials to help learners succeed. However, in a few cases, learners do not have the adaptations they need in class.

Learning environment: Good

Overall, tutors pay good attention to equality and diversity. Many tutors improve learners' awareness and understanding of diversity. For example, tutors help Gypsy Traveller learners to find out about the history of their culture and to explore the Romany language. One tutor produces helpful trilingual learning materials to Russian speakers, which improves the progress made by Russian-speaking learners. Tutors celebrate the achievements of adult learners well, helping them to gain confidence quickly in their ability to learn new skills.

Learning resources in most locations are of a good standard. Most tutors use learning resources, including interactive whiteboards, well to stimulate learner involvement. However, there are not enough displays that encourage bilingualism or awareness of Welsh culture or history.

The partnership makes good use of community venues across Carmarthenshire. This encourages learners, especially those in remote communities, to participate in learning. In such venues, many tutors make good use of laptop computers to provide learners with access to information and communication technology. In a few community venues that are not ideally equipped, tutors are skilled in using limited resources well to create a good learning environment. The probation service's venue, where offenders are helped to improve their basic skills, is very well equipped.

Most venues offer good access to learners with restricted mobility, although physical access in one careers centre is not good enough.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Adequate
--	-----------------

Leadership: Good

The Carmarthenshire Adult and Community Learning Group (CACLG) carries out a strategic role in managing and shaping the ACL provision. It has recently established three sub-groups to monitor and improve the work of the partnership. These sub-groups deal with:

- curriculum and quality;
- bilingual and Welsh medium; and
- ABE and ESOL.

The members of the CACLG bring good representation from partners and a mix of funding, quality, curriculum and research expertise to the partnership. The sub-groups perform a useful monitoring role, but have not yet had enough influence on the improvement of quality and standards overall.

Senior officers within the partnership and elected members from the local authority have a strong commitment to the successful delivery of adult community learning across the county. They work together well to establish adult learning as an important element of the authority's lifelong learning policies. There is a clear and well-understood management structure for the partnership. Senior officers and managers within the partnership have good working relationships. Members of the partnership work together well to meet the needs of adult learners. They have taken difficult decisions to reduce the breadth of provision across the partnership and to make the service delivery more efficient. By making these decisions the partnership has improved the availability of accredited courses. It has also concentrated on improving quality and standards across the provision. Decisions taken by senior officers and managers have led to improved financial management of the provision and better budget control, especially that made by the local authority and the college.

As a result of a review in February 2010, the partnership agreed to work on a ten point plan to improve the service. The ten point plan is based on recommendations from the last inspection. The scrutiny committee of the Carmarthenshire Department for Education and Children receives reports about the work of the ACL partnership. They keep up to date on the progress made by the partnership on the actions and targets in the ten point plan.

Improving quality: Adequate

The partnership's curriculum and quality sub-group has clear terms of reference to monitor the partnership's quality system. The sub-group meets regularly and monitors and shares data across providers.

The sub-group produces the annual self-assessment report (SAR) and quality development plan from individual provider's self-assessment reports. Each provider in the partnership has its own quality improvement arrangements, including systems to observe tutors in the classroom. However, there has not been enough improvement in the number of good and excellent teaching sessions since the last

inspection. The providers' evaluation of learners' performance across the partnership has not improved enough and systems are not yet consistent. The sub group does not do enough to drive forward improvements in quality and standards across the partnership to make sure that all learners have the best opportunities.

The quality development plan does not have enough challenging targets for improving standards.

The local authority gives good support to the partnership which helps to improve quality. It has established three area management committees each with an area community learning officer. These officers enable learners to input their views to the local planning of the provision. There are good examples of individual centres and services gathering the views of learners through questionnaires and from group meetings of centre users. In many cases, these lead to useful suggestions to improve the quality of the service, but are often too concerned with domestic arrangements.

The partnership's self-assessment processes are evaluative and the judgements based on a range of quality sources. The issues identified in the self-assessment report were broadly similar to those identified by the Estyn inspection team. However, the judgements awarded for each key question in the SAR were more generous than those awarded by the Estyn inspection team.

The partnership has made adequate progress in addressing most of the recommendations from the last inspection. However, it has not made enough progress to improve the level of attainment achieved by, in particular, ABE and ESOL learners or in encouraging more learners to use Welsh as a medium of communicating with each other and with tutors across the provision.

Partnership working: Good

The partnership has a good range of appropriate partners to deliver the adult community learning programme, including Coleg Sir Gar, WEA (S), the Regional Language School, Swansea University, Trinity St David, Aberystwyth University, the Open University, Careers Wales West and Llanelli Rural District Council. These are all represented on the CACLG and the representative from Careers Wales chairs the partnership.

The county council and the local further education college deliver the majority of the provision and the partnership between these providers is particularly strong. Strategic managers from the partnership providers meet regularly and have open and honest debates on the future direction of the provision. Together, they have planned an ambitious programme for education and training across the county.

The partnership contributes well to the South West Wales Regional Learning Partnership and is starting to make use of the extensive data and mapping facilities in the regional learning and skills observatory.

All partners share an equal responsibility for the success of the partnership and there is a strong feeling of trust and respect amongst the managers involved with the partners.

Resource management: Adequate

The partnership makes good use of a number of income streams, including Welsh Government and European funding, franchise arrangements and a contribution from the county council to deliver a range of adult community provision at appropriate locations across the county.

All senior managers are very aware of the challenging costs and priorities in delivering adult community learning in a county with both rural and urban areas. Managers know the cost of providing accredited and non-accredited courses and the financial implications of providing these at locations convenient for learners. The partnership has standardised course and location fees and reduced the reliance on the council contribution for adult learning through improved efficiency and the delivery of more accredited courses. Managers use the available resources well to provide appropriate accommodation and resources for learning.

The majority of staff have appropriate qualifications and experience to deliver their courses. Staff, including part-time staff, have access to appropriate staff development, including regular tutor training meetings and opportunities to share good practice in teaching and learning. However, there is not enough impact of these staff development activities on improving learners' standards and increasing the amount of good and excellent teaching.

Senior managers monitor expenditure carefully and review the costs associated with their franchise provision regularly. Overall, standards achieved by learners are adequate and the provider is improving the efficiency of delivery. Overall, the partnership provides adequate value for money.

Appendix 1

Learner satisfaction

Estyn carried out a learner survey just before the inspection of the partnership.

Two hundred and seventy learners returned the questionnaire and eighty-two were not fully completed. The findings helped Estyn to have a view of learners' opinions and experience of the provision currently delivered in the partnership area.

Nearly all learners said that they enjoyed their learning. All learners said that the partnership staff show learners respect and listen to their views and concerns well or very well. A few learners felt that other effective types of support were not available for them.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Enid Hankins HMI	Reporting Inspector
Mark Evans HMI	Team Inspector
Alun Connick HMI	Team Inspector
Huw Collins HMI	Team Inspector
Liam Kealy HMI	Team Inspector
Sally Stringer	Additional Inspector
Anne Evans	Peer Inspector
Maggie Griffiths	Peer Inspector
Matt Morden	Provider Nominee