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a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on
**Rhondda Cynon Taf Adult Community Learning
Partnership**

Date of inspection: October 2010

by

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



**INVESTORS | BUDDSODDWYR
IN PEOPLE | MEWN POBL**

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 partnership'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.

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Context

This context information was provided by Rhondda Cynon Taf Adult Community Learning Partnership and the Welsh Assembly Government.

Rhondda Cynon Taf is the second largest and sixth most densely populated of the Welsh unitary authorities. The major areas of population are Pontypridd, Aberdare, Tonypany, Treorchy, Talbot Green and Ferndale. Census figures in 2006 show the total population as 233,936. Just under half (48.6%) of the population are male, and 51.4% are female. The area has an ageing population; 19.3% of citizens fall within the retirement age. The population in the south of the borough has increased because of a number of new housing projects and its closeness to the M4 motorway. There has been a decline in population in the north of the borough resulting in an increase in the percentage of older people in that area.

Car ownership in Rhondda Cynon Taf has grown since 1991 from 60.6% to 68.4% (2001 Census), but is still lower than the average (76%) for Wales.

Forty point five per cent of the population of Rhondda Cynon Taf have no qualifications compared to 33% in the whole of Wales. The 2001 census records over half of the population in the three most deprived wards as having no qualifications. This is much higher than the county borough average.

Twenty-four of the wards in Rhondda Cynon Taf are designated as Communities First wards. These wards represent some of the most disadvantaged communities in Wales.

In Rhondda Cynon Taf, 89.9% of the population were born in Wales compared to 75.4% for Wales as a whole. In 2001, the ethnic population was 1.2% showing little change since the 1991 census. However, 2008 census figures show an increase in the number of migrant workers within the area.

Summary

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

Current performance

The standards that learners achieve are good overall. The provision is successful in attracting learners from hard to reach groups and disadvantaged communities. Many learners who begin from very low starting points attain and achieve well and in a few cases very well. Many learners actively seek to contribute to the life of their communities as a result of improving their skills. Many tutors deliver well-structured sessions that help learners to continue in their studies and often progress to higher levels of learning.

Prospects for improvement

Although the contribution of individual partners is good, the new adult learning partnership has only recently received formal corporate recognition. Corporate managers do not yet monitor the work of the partnership well enough. They have only just begun to use the good knowledge and experience of the partnership members to plan and deliver adult community learning in the area. The partnership was slow to implement a few of the recommendations from the last inspection.

Recommendations

Inspectors have agreed with the partnership the following recommendations for improvement:

- R1 improve joint planning between corporate and senior managers to secure the future of adult community learning in the county borough;
- R2 complete actions necessary to address those recommendations not addressed from the last inspection, including the better use of data to plan and monitor the partnership provision;
- R3 develop systems to ensure that all staff understand how to identify adults who may be vulnerable and how to apply safeguarding policies consistently;
- R4 improve learners' access to and use of independent careers guidance; and
- R5 make sure that the examples of excellent project work are disseminated across the partnership.

What happens next?

The partnership will integrate the actions from the recommendations into the quality development plan required by DCELLS. In about a year's time the partnership will receive a routine visit from the area link inspector or the sector lead inspector to monitor progress.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

Overall, learners in the partnership attain well in all courses. The Future Jobs fund programme consistently meets its contract targets in helping people gain work placements within the local authority. Rhondda Cynon Taf is one of seven local authorities working together in a consortium to deliver this programme. Rhondda Cynon Taf has exceeded the performance targets for this programme against nearly all of the other local authorities in the consortium. Completion in Adult Basic Education (ABE) in franchise and non-franchise provision has dipped partly due to a change in the accounting mechanism, but is in line with the national comparators. Attainment rates in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and family history classes are good and have improved. Attainment rates have improved for all accredited courses and are slightly above national comparators.

Learners from disadvantaged backgrounds achieve particularly well and, in Communities First projects, learners achieve high standards. There are many good examples of learners who have gained confidence because of their participation and achievement. This has helped them progress to more demanding courses, to further and higher education, and into employment, and has improved their involvement in the life of their communities.

Many learners take responsibility for tracking their own progress but a few do not fully understand how their individual learning plans can help them plan their own learning. Nonetheless, most learners successfully achieve their targets, and know what they have achieved and what they need to do to progress.

Many learners with low skills develop their language and communication skills very well in a range of different situations. Only a few learners use their Welsh language skills in their classes but a majority use these skills in Welsh in informal conversations in, for example, libraries and community centres.

Learners who take part in taster sessions very often proceed to full courses. Many learners who take basic skills courses progress well and also enrol onto other courses.

Wellbeing: Good

Most learners develop their confidence and self-esteem very well. They are able to transfer their skills from one context to another and make good use of their new skills in social and work settings. Many learners who begin their courses at a low level of basic skills quickly gain in confidence and self-esteem to make good progress.

Nearly all learners are well-motivated and enthusiastic about their learning. Most learners attend well and participate fully in their classes. They enjoy learning alongside others of different age groups, developing high levels of respect for one

another across the generations. Nearly all learners support each other well and all develop their social skills.

Most learners feel safe and secure in the venues and classes they attend. Many develop a good understanding of healthy lifestyles through their learning about healthy eating, food hygiene and health and safety. Many learners develop very important life skills that contribute substantially to their overall wellbeing.

Many learners actively engage with the development of the partnership provision. Learners in Communities First areas contribute well to consultation activities to determine future courses. Many learners are aware of how to contribute to the development of their courses and influence the content of sessions. Many learners also contribute well to partnership learner consultations.

Many learners have become more active in community development through the courses they have taken. Many learners in Communities First areas have become actively involved in improving their communities. They understand the value of working together and are proud to use their new practical skills to support others. Older learners value most the new skills they learn in their classes but they also recognise the personal benefits of social contact with others.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Good
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Learning experiences: Good

The community learning experiences offered by the partnership meet the needs of most learners and their communities well. In a few cases, there is a lack of higher-level courses run in local centres to help community learners to progress.

The provision for many Communities First learners is good. A few Communities First learners have made good progress into further and higher education. Many of these learners begin from very low starting points.

The partnership members, through their Community Learning Task Group, work well together to share information and resources. There are good links with employers to provide supported and unsupported routes into work.

The partnership has effective arrangements for improving literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology (ICT) skills of many learners in discrete classes. The extent to which the partnership embeds literacy, numeracy and ICT within other courses is too variable. Many learners who have not engaged with learning regularly successfully return to learning through the partnership programme. Bridges to Work funding, the Future Jobs fund and the Wales union learning fund (WULF) have helped younger learners and their families, many of whom have left school with low skills to return to learning.

There are good opportunities for both first and second language learners to speak Welsh informally and in social settings, for example in the Caffi Blas at Garth Olwg Lifelong Learning Centre. However, the provision for first language Welsh speakers is limited overall. The partnership has recently undertaken an audit of

Welsh-medium provision. The partnership's Welsh medium and bilingual task group is developing ways to use this audit to spread the good practice demonstrated in the Garth Olwg centre in the south of the county borough to the north where there are limited opportunities for residents to develop their Welsh language skills.

Many learners have good opportunities to learn about global citizenship and sustainable development. In one Communities First area, learners have used their knowledge well to make representations to the council and the Welsh Assembly Government to improve their housing.

Teaching: Good

The quality of teaching is good. Tutors have up-to-date knowledge of their subjects, which they use well in their teaching. Most tutors plan a good range of activities, which provide appropriate challenge for the learners. In many cases, tutors match the work to meet learners' interests and level of learning well. However, in a very few cases, tutors do not listen well enough to learners to take account of learners' needs and interests.

Most tutors provide good oral feedback to learners about their progress and, in many cases, they provide good written feedback. However, the extent to which tutors and learners use the individual learning plans to guide learning effectively is variable across courses.

Care, support and guidance: Adequate

Nearly all learners respect one another and feel safe. Most staff pay good attention to learners' wellbeing and support them well to succeed. Most staff visit learners on work-based courses regularly to ensure they make good progress.

Most learners have good information from staff about their options. The Community Learning Task Group effectively signposts learners to appropriate learning opportunities. In Communities First provision, most tutors encourage learners to access more advanced courses or widen their subject area knowledge. However, a few staff do not know enough about progression opportunities for learners. Overall, staff do not encourage learners enough to make good use of independent careers guidance to help them make effective long term plans and informed decisions.

There are appropriate policies and procedures for safeguarding. However, systems to ensure that staff understand all safeguarding procedures are not robust enough. A minority of staff are not clear what circumstances contribute to making an adult potentially vulnerable.

There are some very good examples of specialist support for learners. For example, a local library, in response to learners' requests, has a useful facility where mothers can breast feed babies in privacy. Libraries generally meet a diverse range of learners' needs well by offering mobile services, transport-to-library services and services for housebound users.

There are useful procedures for tutors to access support facilities for learners with additional learning needs. However, use of specialist support is not monitored well.

Learning environment: Good

The partnership has a good approach to social and educational inclusion. There is a very positive ethos among staff and learners. Nearly all staff across the partnership are very committed to providing opportunities that move learners forward in their learning and life chances. There are effective systems in place to promote the participation of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds including learners from disadvantaged areas.

The overall quality of accommodation is good. The partnership uses a wide range of venues in community locations, which allows learners across the partnership to take up classes near to where they live.

In many cases, the accommodation is of an excellent standard. Many classes are held in buildings that are modern, well-heated and ventilated, and have flexible seating and good access. Although a few venues need refurbishment, learners feel comfortable and confident in coming to class. Most venues have a good range of resources, including good access to computers and whiteboards. This is an improvement since the last inspection.

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

Elected members responsible for lifelong learning in the county borough show a high level of understanding of the issues facing adult learning provision. They understand how adult learning can add value to the life of individuals and communities. The scrutiny committee of the county borough has received a useful report that explores the nature and characteristics of adult community learning locally. The members are committed to the new lifelong learning partnership and to securing ways to finance adult learning in the future. They have not yet set specific targets for the adult learning partnership.

Not all senior corporate managers have yet fully understood the value of a formal partnership. There is no agreed partnership plan that sets out clearly the priorities for adult learning. However, the corporate managers of the county borough have recently recognised the community learning partnership within the corporate structure. There are outline proposals for the partnership which highlight basic skills provision, widening participation and bilingualism as important priorities.

Corporate managers do not have enough data to evaluate the true impact of adult community learning across the area. Operational managers are formulating strategies to safeguard adult community learning in the future but these are in a very early stage of development.

Improving quality: Adequate

Self-assessment within the partnership at individual organisational level varies from adequate to good. The joint self-assessment report (SAR) produced by the partnership for the inspection linked well to evidence in the individual providers' SARs. However, the joint SAR is too descriptive and is not clear enough in its assessment of the partnership provision.

There is effective use of data to identify priorities for improvement between a few partners but this varies across the partnership. The variation occurs because providers use a wide variety of funding sources, which asks for data in different ways and for different purposes. The partnership has begun to collect data to help plan for improvement but this is in an early stage of development. Partners often share expertise and experience but partnership does not have ways to disseminate good practice across the area.

An appropriate variety of groups of providers meet together to evaluate provision. The college and the local authority work together well to secure the effective quality management of the franchised provision. The Workers Education Association (South) (WEA(S)) has arrangements to develop effective provision mainly in the north of the borough.

The voice of the learner is fundamental to the ethos of learning in Communities First areas. The partnership often responds well to requests from groups of learners to provide particular courses. The partnership has also taken steps to invite a learner to become a member of their partnership steering group.

The Curriculum and Quality sub group of the partnership works to improve the quality processes. This group is making plans to work more effectively at a partnership level. Partners have used Quality Improvement (QIF) money well to develop a useful tutor quality manual. The tutor observation process to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning in both accredited and non-accredited learning has improved since the last inspection. Tutors in these classes now have good quality paperwork to support the Recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA) process. Generally, the inspection team agreed with the internal assessments. However, there are a few inconsistencies in the grading of a few internal observations.

The college and the local authority have worked together to improve the access to shared management data for the franchise provision. This gives managers a better understanding of their provision's attainment and achievement rates. However, the partnership has not yet addressed fully all recommendations from the last inspection.

Partnership working: Good

The local authority, with good support from the college, leads the learning partnership steering group. The group has agreed a clear, appropriate vision to support the planning and delivery of adult community learning (ACL). There are good links to other strategic plans to maximise opportunities for ACL learners. However, the pace

of development has been slow and the steering group does not yet function as a body to plan and oversee the corporate development of ACL across the area.

The previous partnership disbanded in 2009 but good communication between operational managers continued. The new partnership's emerging plans take account of Welsh Assembly Government strategic agendas well and indicate innovative ways of developing and sustaining provision.

Connections between the community focused schools and Communities First provision are not clear enough in the partnership plans.

Resource management: Good

The partnership works well to acquire and share resources for ACL learners. Partners are innovative and highly entrepreneurial in their efforts to secure the continuation of funding and resources for provision. Partnership providers use available staff and resources well.

A majority of Communities First managers use resources well to promote adult community learning at a local level. They share with other providers and maximise resources. However, the E3+ youth strategy programme does not yet fully use the expertise of the partnership to support its community focussed provision.

Most partners have put processes in place to meet the development needs of staff. Partners share each other's Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes to maximise opportunities for staff.

The partnership overall secures very effective outcomes for learners, particularly those that are hard to reach. The partnership provides good value for money for its learners and the communities it serves.

Appendix 1

Learner Satisfaction

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

Two hundred and one learners returned the questionnaire and 156 were 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. A very few learners report that they are not offered learning opportunities and support in Welsh and/or English according to their choice.

All learners report that staff help them well or very well in the first few weeks of their learning programme.

Nearly all learners felt that they have good information when they chose their learning opportunities. However a very few learners say that they do not receive good advice about what they could do once they have finished their learning programme.

A very few learners do not feel well-supported by their employers in their work placements.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

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