



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

**Neath Port Talbot Community Learning Partnership
Theodore Road
Port Talbot
SA13 1SP**

Date of inspection: November 2012

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.

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Context

The County Borough of Neath Port Talbot has a population of 137,392. The largest town is Neath with a population of 47,020, followed by Port Talbot (35,633), Briton Ferry (7,186), Pontardawe (5,035), and Glynneath (4,368). The majority of the population live in the coastal plain around Port Talbot and the land around the River Neath in the vicinity of Neath. The upland areas are cut by five valleys: Vale of Neath, Dulais Valley, Afan Valley, Swansea Valley, and the Upper Amman Valley.

At March 2012 the employment rate in Neath Port Talbot was 60.2% compared to the Wales average of 66.7%. The largest employment sectors in the County Borough are Public Administration, Wholesale, Retail, Transport, Hotels and Food, followed by Production. However, at 29.5% Neath Port Talbot has the highest economic inactivity rate in Wales (22.9%).

According to the Office for National Statistics the level of qualifications held by people aged 16-64 in Neath Port Talbot at December 2011 was lower than the Welsh average across all levels. Additionally, 15.5% of this age group have no qualifications, which is higher than the Wales average of 12.3%.

Just over 15% of the 91 areas in Neath Port Talbot are in the 10% most deprived areas in Wales (Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2011). A major challenge is tackling poor health. The Health, Social Care and Wellbeing plan for Neath Port Talbot (March 2011) identifies that residents experience poorer health than is average for both Wales and neighbouring local authority areas. The area has higher than average rates of stroke attacks, coronary disease and respiratory illnesses. Neath Port Talbot has the second highest ratio per population of the 22 local authorities of people registered as disabled.

In Neath Port Talbot, 22% of people over the age of three say they can speak Welsh compared to the Wales average of 26.3%. However, the local authority identifies that there are areas within the County Borough where more than 60% of the population are Welsh speakers. Ethnic minorities account for 2.4% of the population, lower than the Wales average of 3.6%. Neath Port Talbot has a higher number of gypsy travellers than most other local authorities in Wales.

The Neath Port Talbot Adult Learning Network

The network involves a range of public and voluntary-sector organisations in Neath Port Talbot County Borough including:

- Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council;
- Neath Port Talbot College;
- Neath Port Talbot Council for Voluntary Services;
- Workers' Educational Association (WEA) South Wales;
- Swansea University Department of Adult Continuing Education; and
- South West Wales Welsh for Adults Centre.

The strategic direction for adult community learning provision in the County Borough is overseen by the Adult Learning Network executive involving the Director of Neath Port Talbot Council for Voluntary Services, the local authority's Director of Education, Lifelong Learning and Leisure and the Principal of Neath Port Talbot College. The Neath Port Talbot Adult Community Learning Partnership was last inspected in February 2007.

In 2010-2011, providers in the area delivered 4,479 learning activities, funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). Neath Port Talbot College was responsible for 80% of these activities and the Workers Education Association delivered 11% of these activities. Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council delivered 8% of these activities and YMCA Community College Cymru delivered the remaining 1%.

Summary

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

Current performance

The partnership is judged adequate because:

- learners' wellbeing is good;
- in just over half of the sessions seen, teaching is good;
- strategic management helps providers to work together well;
- the partnership works well with specialist services to help learners overcome barriers to learning;
- there is a good ethos of inclusion across the provision, with tutors and staff creating friendly and welcoming learning environments;
- the partnerships arrangements for planning the curriculum are good and take account of local and national priorities; and
- the partnership has good arrangements for using resources and securing provision; in particular, most community centres used to deliver adult community learning have good facilities and a few are excellent.

However:

- successful completion rates vary too much between different aspects of the provision;
- strategic managers do not use performance management information well enough to improve the standards achieved by learners or to inform how well they address their priorities;
- the partnership does not assess the additional learning needs of learners systematically enough, and as a result they do not always get the support they need to make progress;
- the partnership has unsatisfactory arrangements for improving quality;
- the partnership has not carried out a comprehensive analysis of need at a strategic level;
- the partnership does not have an overarching plan to improve the standards of literacy and numeracy of learners; and
- the partnership is judged to provide adequate value for money.

Prospects for improvement

Prospects for improvement are good because:

- the most senior leaders in the partnership have shown strong commitment to securing the future of adult learning, and as a result the partnership has increased its provision since the last inspection during a period of retraction across the sector;

- partners have improved completion, attainment and success rates across the partnership over the last two years;
- there is a high level of trust, commitment and co-operation between partners;
- the two lead partners – Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council and Neath Port Talbot College – have a good track record of leading partnerships that improve the quality of education and training and outcomes for learners;
- there is effective joint planning of the curriculum, involving a wide range of local agencies;
- the partnership has recently implemented a learner voice and learner involvement strategy, which helps learners to play a part in planning; and
- the partnership has recently put in place new arrangements to improve how it monitors the impact and implementation of its quality development plan.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve successful completion rates for all learners and make sure that all learners make good progress;
- R2 improve the quality of teaching across the partnership;
- R3 improve how well tutors and learners use individual learning plans to plan learning, set realistic goals and monitor progress;
- R4 improve the use of performance management information to raise the standards achieved by learners and to evaluate how well the partnership achieves its priorities and gives value for money;
- R5 improve arrangements for the strategic analysis and planning to meet learners' needs, including raising standards of literacy and numeracy;
- R6 improve systems for assessing learners' additional learning needs, making sure that those learners gain appropriate support, and monitor the progress made by learners receiving support; and
- R7 improve arrangements for monitoring equal opportunities and diversity.

What happens next?

A team of up to five inspectors will undertake a visit in about one year, for three days, to monitor the network's progress in implementing the recommendations of the inspection. Inspectors will also carry out observations of teaching and learning and evaluate learner outcome reports.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Adequate

Standards: Adequate

Across the Neath Port Talbot Adult Community Learning Partnership, successful completion rates vary too much from 72% to 93% between the different types of provision. Although course completion rates for all providers are above 90%, attainment rates in around half of the provision are lower than in other partnerships.

Overall, there has been an improving trend in completion, attainment and success rates across the partnership over the last two years.

Learners in Adult Basic Education programmes make steady progress in improving their literacy and numeracy skills. However, a majority of learners take too many qualifications at the same level as their initial assessment. This slows the rate of their progress and delays their progression to higher levels of learning. Most learners in Adult Basic Education attain a good range of credit based qualifications. These allow learners to develop their skills in small steps. However, in 2010-2011 too few learners attained Essential Skills Wales qualifications. Unverified data for this year shows that this trend is improving.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners generally make steady progress in developing their skills. However, a majority of learners take too long to complete learning goals. Most learners at higher levels do not have useful learning plans and learning goals are too general and generic.

Most learners in family programmes develop their skills well and use these effectively to support their children's learning. However, a few learners in family programmes are at a higher level than the target group for these courses.

Learners in adult learning classes make good progress in developing new skills and many move to higher levels of study. However, a few learners remain in provision for too long. They do not develop their skills in independent learning well enough.

Across the partnership and in all programmes, most learners do not use their individual learning plans effectively; they do not have short smart targets and are not able to track and measure their own progress easily. Learners in many adult community learning classes do not effectively develop and improve their literacy and numeracy skills consistently as part of their course.

In family programmes and ESOL classes, learners develop their use of the Welsh language and their understanding of the culture of Wales well. However, in other classes the development of the Welsh language and Welsh culture is underdeveloped.

Wellbeing: Good

Most learners take part in their classes enthusiastically and enjoy their learning. Most learners are well motivated, improve their skills and have gained in confidence

since starting their courses. They listen and participate well in class in groups and pairs and help each other to solve problems and improve. Most learners develop good attitudes to keeping healthy and safe and are positive towards their learning environment.

Many learners in the sessions observed increase their understanding of how nutrition and lifestyle contribute to good health. Learners in cookery classes learn to produce meals using healthy ingredients. Nevertheless, a minority of learners are not aware of the healthy living agenda.

Attendance rates and punctuality are generally good. Most learners make good efforts to catch up with work they miss when they are absent.

Many learners develop new levels of confidence and communication skills, which have a positive impact on their lives outside the classroom. Supported Living learners provide catering for numerous community activities, including catering for public events and winning local cooking competitions. Learners in adult basic education and adult learning classes use the skills they learn in their jobs and to help their children with literacy and number. For example, a learner in a Better Reading class contributes well to school assemblies in her child's school and leads a reading club for children outside class. Learners in cookery classes feel more confident in providing a more sophisticated level of food and entertainment. ESOL learners especially use their English skills in communication in the wider community.

In a few classes, particularly in language classes, learners do not develop their conversational skills effectively enough as a result of low numbers in the group. A few learners attending classes at the college do not have full access to all college facilities and this affects their self-esteem.

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

Partnership provision meets the needs of most learners and of the community well. It takes good account of local and national priorities. Around half of provision focusses on improving essential skills, health and employment prospects. There is a good range of traditional adult learning. The partnership has worked well to help learners attending a very few long running classes to take responsibility for organising their own learning activities.

The partnership is very effective in delivering learning in the most disadvantaged areas of the authority. As a result of good targeting, the local authority recruits more male learners, learners from the 25-49 age group and learners who want to improve their skills for work, compared to other local authorities.

The partnerships arrangements for planning the curriculum are good. A wide range of local agencies plan effectively together to deliver learning. For example, Communities First workers carry out useful surveys to inform the partnership about the needs of learners in their areas. The partnership also makes good use of labour market information to inform course development. However, the partnership has not carried out a broad analysis of need at a strategic level. It does not know well enough if it delivers its provision at the right level and in the most appropriate places.

The partnership recognises the importance of the skills agenda. All three main providers have developed essential skills strategies. Nonetheless, the partnership does not have a comprehensive plan to say how it will improve the standards of literacy and numeracy for all its learners by extending provision over time and in a broad range of contexts. The partnership does not monitor and evaluate well enough information about its skills provision and use this to plan improvements. Inspectors observed a range of learning activities during the inspection. They found that providers did not embed essential skills across all areas of adult learning or contextualised essential skills well enough.

There are a few good examples of provision that extends learners' knowledge of Wales and the Welsh language and culture.

The partnership does not offer enough opportunities for learners to learn about global citizenship and sustainable development. It has not yet developed a strategy for education for sustainable development and global citizenship or shared best practice between partners.

Teaching: Adequate

Inspectors judged teaching to be good in just over half the sessions observed. In these sessions, tutors apply their subject knowledge well to plan effective lessons. They form good working relationships with learners. They focus well on learners' interests and aspirations. Many of these tutors use a wide range of teaching strategies and activities that engage learners and develop a range of learning skills. They provide effective challenge and support, as necessary.

However, teaching is less effective in just under half of the sessions observed. In these sessions, tutors do not plan sessions well enough and the pace is often too slow. Teaching is often too teacher-led and the session does not cater well enough for the learners' range of abilities and interests.

Many tutors provide constructive feedback to learners as part of the on-going work in the lessons. This includes challenging learners to improve and develop their work further. Most tutors mark work well according to accreditation guidelines and provide useful written feedback to learners. There are good processes in place to verify the quality of learners' work on accredited courses.

However, tutors' use of individual learning plans to guide learners' development varies too much. In the most effective cases, tutors help learners to understand how they can use individual learning plans to organise their learning and to set themselves useful targets. They help learners to review the targets regularly and to set new targets to progress. In the least effective cases, tutors view individual learning plans as onerous and they do not encourage learners to use them effectively.

Care, support and guidance: Adequate

The partnership works well to advertise its provision. It has a comprehensive brochure, which clearly outlines the curriculum offered across the County Borough. The partnership uses national campaigns and local radio stations effectively to market its courses and events. The partnership also makes good use of social

media to promote and celebrate activities. It offers a good range of taster and recruitment activities.

The partnership offers many opportunities for learners to progress to other learning. However, in a small number of classes learners do not receive good enough guidance to help them move on to higher levels or other forms of learning.

The partnership works well with specialist services to help learners overcome barriers to learning. The partnership pays good attention to promoting the health and wellbeing of learners. The partnership's arrangements for safeguarding meet requirements and give no cause for concern. Training for staff has been discussed with the partnership.

Many learners have received an induction and are aware of the support available. Tutors give good support to learners and learners feel safe in their environments.

However, the partnership does not assess additional learning needs systematically enough when learners join programmes. This means that learners with additional learning needs, such as hearing impairment, do not always get the support they need to make progress. There is no process in place to monitor the take up of support for learners with additional learning needs. The partnership does not measure how this impacts on learners.

Learning environment: Good

There is a good culture of inclusion across the provision. Partners engage learners from a wide range of disadvantaged groups well. Many community organisations offer learners a wide range of services that help them to engage and stay on their course. For example, learners are offered counselling and advice about health, finance, housing, drugs and alcohol issues. The partnership has carried out an analysis of learner characteristics and uses this information appropriately to target specific groups of learners.

Inspectors observed good inclusion of learners from different backgrounds in classes. The local authority covers issues of diversity appropriately with learners during induction. However, whilst the local authority has an equal opportunities policy statement it does not monitor its impact. The partnership does not have an overall equal opportunities policy.

Generally, learning environments are fit for purpose, welcoming and well equipped. Tutors and staff at learning environments are friendly and welcoming. As a result, learners feel comfortable in community surroundings when taking their first steps back into education or training. Most community centres used to deliver adult community learning have good facilities and a few are excellent. For example, the Glynneath Training Centre offers learners a café with a free drop-in information and communication technology (ICT) facility and access to Wi-Fi. The partnership works well to make sure that learning is available near to where people live. It gives good support to voluntary sector providers to deliver learning in isolated communities. However, in a few cases accommodation is poor and facilities for learners are not suitable for the learning that takes place. Most venues have bilingual signs.

Generally, most learners have good access to up-to-date learning resources including high quality ICT equipment to support learning.

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

Leadership: Adequate

The partnership has a strategic plan that takes account of the context and priorities for adult community learning in the area well. The plan provides a good match with national and regional priorities for change and regeneration. The plan sets out objectives for the partnership work. However, the partnership does not use its objectives well enough to set targets or milestones that help the partnership monitor the progress it is making. For example, the partnership does not evaluate how well learners progress from courses that encourage them to return to learning to courses that help them improve their employment prospects. The partnership does not set targets for the proportion of learners that progress to employment related activities.

The Adult Learning Network Executive is an effective partnership involving the local authority's Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning, the Principal of Neath Port Talbot College and the Director of Neath Port Talbot Council for Voluntary Services. These leaders share a clear view of the partnership's priorities well. They promote the work of the partnership successfully in a range of forums. The college and the local authority have worked well to strengthen the management of the partnership by jointly funding the post of partnership co-ordinator. The co-ordinator works well with the range of partners to plan the curriculum and secure provision.

The Executive has a good range of management groups to which they delegate the operation of the partnership. These groups make sure that there is good communication between the wide range of partners. This helps partners to work well together to raise finance and resources from outside the partnership. The partnership has recently introduced fixed agenda items at its meetings. This means that the voluntary sector can inform the partnership on new developments and share best practice more effectively.

The partnerships analysis of learners' needs is not robust enough. For example, the partnership has no consistent system for assessing the basic skills needs of learners. Neither does the partnership use systems to measure the impact of its provision, such as basic skills classes. The partnership has missed the opportunity to adopt the good practice used by the local authority to track learner progress in schools, identify under-attainment and target improvement activities and intervention effectively.

Improving quality: Unsatisfactory

The partnership involves all partners in its self-assessment process and produces an annual self-assessment report. However, the process is not effective in analysing strengths and areas for improvement. The report focuses too much on the strongest performing areas and does not discuss the weaker learning areas adequately. The partnership does not evaluate statistics about the achievement of learners or other data well enough or include supporting evidence.

The partnership has produced a Quality Development Plan to deliver improvements for learners and has set up a sub-group responsible for improving the quality of the work. However, the quality group does not monitor the implementation of the Quality Development Plan well enough. The partnership has recently put new arrangements in place to address this situation.

The partnership has not successfully implemented recommendations from the previous inspection concerned with the use of individual learning plans, and improving teaching and learning. This has had an adverse effect on learners' progress.

The partnership's system for improving teaching and learning is not rigorous enough. The partnership's observations of teaching and learning do not focus well enough on the learning and progress made by students. The partnership does not moderate observations of teaching and learning effectively to standardise judgements and help tutors improve across the partnership. Inspectors found that the standard of teaching has not improved since the last inspection.

The Executive group has recently agreed a quality charter. The charter provides a framework for all partners to work together to improve quality. However, it is too early to determine the effect of the charter on the quality of the partnership's work.

The partnership has recently agreed a learner involvement strategy. There are also a few good examples of Learner Voice activity that have helped learners plan their learning. However, these activities have not yet contributed to the improvement of provision.

The partnership co-ordinator actively contributes to the development of the adult community learning sector through specific working groups, including the review of the national planning and funding system. Tutors meet formally each term to share best practice. This meeting provides a useful forum for tutors to discuss teaching and learning.

Partnership working: Good

Partners work well together to organise curriculum and provision. Senior strategic officers provide a strong steer to partnership officers. These officers have good links to the local service board, which they use appropriately to influence the priorities of the adult learning network and engage other partners in adult community learning. Partners have a high level of trust in each other and co-operate with each other well to plan provision.

The partnership has agreed a strategic plan and uses the plan appropriately to manage the curriculum and the scope of provision. Partners work effectively with a wide range of local organisations to plan the curriculum, recruit learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and help learners to overcome barriers to learning. However, partners have not agreed key strategic targets to help them measure the success of their work.

The partnership has an inclusive structure for managing its work and for involving a wide range of stakeholders. It has set up an executive management group and sub-group structure. All groups and subgroups have clear terms of reference. All sub-groups include representatives from all stakeholders in carrying out their work.

Partners work well together to secure and pool resources for the adult learning network. The two main partners jointly fund the management and co-ordination of

the partnership. The partnership works effectively with voluntary sector organisations to make sure that good quality accommodation for learning and provision is available in key areas across the County Borough.

Resource management: Good

The partnership works well to draw in funding from a variety of sources to carry out its work. Senior leaders have a strong commitment to secure the future of adult learning. They work well with a range of stakeholders to ensure the continuity of provision. This means that the partnership can deliver adult learning in isolated and disadvantaged communities. The partnership allocates funding to its priorities well in its strategic plan.

Partners work well together to market courses and learning activities. The partnership has a useful on-line enrolment and payment facility. Partners have clear pricing arrangements. The partnerships fees group is working to harmonise fees for classes across all providers on behalf of the partnership. Partners work well together to provide financial help to learners who fit specific criteria. However, the partnership has not considered alternative funding arrangements for courses that learners have attended for many years but do not fall within the priority areas for adult community learning.

Curriculum planning takes good account of the geographical spread of provision. The council operates a good transfer of assets scheme. This assists community groups to use buildings no longer required by the local authority. For example, the STRIDES project operates from a community centre formerly owned by the local authority. However, the partnership has not assessed the suitability of its buildings and facilities for the activities it delivers.

In general, learners have good access to ICT resources. The partnership's technical development officer works well with the curriculum development officer to use new technologies for learning. The partnership provides iPads to support learning and for learners to use in areas where connectivity to the internet is poor.

The majority of staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. The partnership communicates well with part-time tutors to share resources, ideas and information using internet based systems.

The partnership plans staff training for tutors. It has delivered training to over half of its staff in the use of new technologies. The partnership has made effective use of funding available for Essential Skills development. It provides staff with skills awareness sessions and training to deliver essential skills. However, the partnership has not undertaken a robust training needs analysis and does not have criteria to evaluate the impact of training on teaching and learning.

The partnership does not evaluate the impact of resources on learner outcomes well enough. Standards are adequate and the inspection team judges that the partnership provides adequate value for money.

Appendix 1

Learner satisfaction

Estyn carried out a learner survey just before the inspection of the partnership. Four hundred and forty-four learners successfully returned the questionnaire and most of them completed most of the questions. 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 think that taking part in learning has helped them improve their life skills and all learners consider that learning will help them achieve their goals. Most learners feel that taking part in learning has helped them become involved in their community. Nearly all learners would recommend their learning provider to others. Nearly all learners enjoy their learning.

Most learners think they were given good information when they were choosing which course to take. Most learners consider that they received good advice about what they could do when they finish their learning programme. Most learners think that they had good personal support from their tutors, especially during the first weeks of their learning programme. However, in a very few cases learners did not think that they received good personal support from their tutors.

Most learners feel that staff show all learners respect and listen to their views. However, in a very few cases learners think that staff do not show them respect or listen to their views. In these cases, learners think that staff do not help them understand and respect people from different backgrounds or act on their views.

Nearly all learners feel that staff help them to learn and make good progress.

Nearly all staff use good quality learning materials and nearly all learners have enough access to books and equipment to help them do their work.

Most learners think that staff give them enough opportunity to choose to learn in either Welsh or English. However, a few part-time learners did not think that this was the case.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

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Lin Howell	Team Inspector
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