



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**

Bridgend Adult Learning in the Community Partnership

**Bridgend County Borough Council
Civic Offices
Angel Street
Bridgend
CF31 4WB**

Date of inspection: February 2023

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Bridgend Adult Learning in the Community Partnership

The provision for adult learning in the community in Bridgend is co-ordinated by the Bridgend Adult Community Learning Partnership. In 2020, the partnership re-configured and it set up a new strategic board and subgroups. Partners include Bridgend County Borough Council's Adult Community Learning, Employability Bridgend, Adult Learning Wales, Bridgend College and Learn Welsh Glamorgan. In addition, the partnership works strategically with a wider base of other providers, including voluntary sector organisations, the Department for Work and Pensions, Menter Bro Ogwr, Awen, schools and a range of community projects, as well as health and well-being and employability focused partners.

The key partners deliver provision in the priority areas identified by the Welsh Government. Provision for accredited courses of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) is provided primarily by Bridgend College, funded through their further education grant.

Provision is offered in a wide range of venues which include college campuses and training rooms; libraries and cultural venues; and community venues such as community centres, community hubs, schools and a rugby club.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) data for 2021 shows that Bridgend is the seventh most densely populated area of the 22 local authorities, with the third greatest population increase across Wales. It shows a population of around 145,500, an increase of 4.5% from the previous census. Around 21% of Bridgend's population is aged 65 and over.

Just over 52% of residents over the age of 16 are economically active. This is marginally higher than the Wales average of 51.9%. StatsWales data for 2021 shows the average (median) gross weekly earnings of £607.60, which compares well to the Welsh figure of £563.70. However, in 2022, the data shows the median weekly salary fell to £574.90, lower than the Welsh median of £598.10. This has resulted in Bridgend falling from paying the highest median weekly salary to 14th place in the local authority rankings. Those classified as economically inactive is 25.8%, slightly higher than the all-Wales figure of 24.1%.

The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WMID) ranks Bridgend as one of the lesser deprived local authority areas in Wales. However, there are pockets of relatively high deprivation, with one area being categorised as having deep-rooted deprivation and ranking as the fifth most deprived area in Wales.

ONS data shows that, for residents between the ages of 16 and 64, those who have qualifications at level 4 or higher stands at 38.9%, which is consistent with the Wales average of 38.6%. Those with qualifications at level 3 or higher are just under the Wales average. Seventy-three point seven per cent of the population have qualifications at level 2 or higher, slightly lower than the Wales average of 75.3%. Those with qualifications at level 1 or above stand at 83.4%, slightly lower than the average for Wales for 85.8%. The percentage of people with no qualifications in Bridgend is 9.6%, slightly higher than the Wales average of 8.3%.

Nearly all Bridgend residents are of a white ethnic background (95.6%) while 4.4% are of a black, Asian or minority ethnic background. In 2021, census data indicates that the percentage of Welsh speakers aged three or over stood at 17.8%. However, in 2022 the data indicates that the percentage of Welsh speakers aged three or over stands at 18.3%, a slight increase on the previous year.

Learner numbers in 2021-2022 for the partnership were 964. The number of staff who are involved in adult learning in the community across the partnership is 33.

Summary

Across Bridgend Adult Community Learning Partnership, many learners make suitable progress in their learning. They learn and apply new skills as well as developing confidence and motivation. Many learners improve their employment opportunities and benefit from the social interaction in their classes. Learners with additional learning needs make solid progress in developing life skills and their learning enhances their enjoyment of life. The majority of learners have a clear understanding of their goals and targets. Nearly all learners show very good attitudes to learning and they are respectful of others and their well-being. Providers ask learners about their experiences regularly and they respond in a timely way to their suggestions.

Bridgend Adult Community Learning Partnership offers a useful range of courses based on the Welsh Government priorities of literacy, numeracy and digital skills and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). The partnership does not offer courses to improve Welsh speakers' literacy or courses through the medium of Welsh. The partnership is keen to offer personal interest courses, but challenges in recruiting teachers make this difficult at this time.

Tutors are well qualified and knowledgeable about their subjects. Most tutors plan their sessions well. They take their learners' interests into account and they use a variety of strategies to help individual learners develop their knowledge and skills effectively. They use a wide range of assessment, feedback, tracking and monitoring systems to ensure that they understand learners' progress and needs.

The partnership provides a range of impartial advice, guidance and support to help learners stay on track and progress in their learning.

Partners in the Bridgend Adult Community Learning Partnership work effectively together. Their evaluation of the provision is open and honest and there is a clear focus on equity of opportunity and experiences. The partnership offers regular professional development to its tutors to help them keep up to date in their practice through a range of means, including online training. The partnership uses its funding streams well to reduce duplication and to support learner aspirations.

Recommendations

- R1 Strengthen management information systems to ensure that the partnership can track, monitor and quality assure learners' progress effectively across the partnership
- R2 Ensure that marketing strategies help potential learners access an overview of the partnership's course offer and progression pathways
- R3 Ensure that Welsh culture and the Welsh language are appropriately embedded within the curriculum offer and courses

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 a case study on its work in relation to family learning for parents of secondary pupils, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main findings

Learning

Many learners make sound progress. They acquire, develop and apply new skills and produce work of at least an appropriate standard. Many learners across the partnership engage well with their courses. They improve their self-esteem, confidence and motivations, and in many cases their employment and social opportunities.

In classes for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), learners make strong progress in developing their English language skills and they successfully complete their courses at sound rates. These learners benefit from clear progression routes to the next higher course level. Most learners make a clear link between prior and new learning. They make sound progress in developing their listening, reading, writing and speaking skills from their starting points. Many learners develop a wide range of vocabulary appropriate to their level, which they use confidently. At higher levels, learners demonstrate their deeper understanding of English by reading texts confidently with clear inflection and intonation. Many of these learners use the language of speculation confidently and demonstrate their understanding of British culture, nuance and norms of politeness by using expressions correctly. Most learners develop critical thinking skills and apply them well to new situations. Nearly all learners contribute positively and interact well with their tutors and peers, and they appreciate the opportunity to gain new knowledge and understanding.

Most learners attending courses to improve their literacy and numeracy make sound progress. Many learners have a clear focus on improving their ability to use literacy and numeracy in their personal lives to support and help their children with schoolwork or improving their employment aims.

Most learners attending classes to improve their digital literacy skills make suitable progress from their starting points. Many learners increase their knowledge and understanding of digital devices and software packages. These learners apply newly acquired knowledge well when undertaking a range of activities, such as when using the internet to undertake job search sessions and being aware of security and safety when accessing the internet.

Learners undertaking courses related to literacy, numeracy and digital skills develop a wide range of new skills and knowledge. For example, in digital literacy, learners develop a greater understanding of using digital devices, software applications and keeping safe online. In a course designed to help parents support their children taking Year 11 examinations in school, parents learn about the content and tasks their children need to develop to be successful in their English Language GCSE examination. Parents use this knowledge and understanding to be better informed about the school curriculum and examinations. As a result of attending these courses, parents often improve their ability to give meaningful support to their children at home and strengthen family relationships.

Pathways courses help learners with additional learning needs (ALN) to develop new skills and enhance their enjoyment of life. The majority of learners with additional

learning needs have agreed long-term goals, which are often around securing paid employment. Many learners with additional needs talk with confidence about their learning experiences and they provide clear examples of the new skills they have developed and the progress they have made. Where appropriate, learners take up work placement opportunities. These learners gain valuable work-related experience working in a range of settings including charity shops where they develop new skills pricing items, dealing with customers and answering telephone calls. Pathways performing arts learners develop greater levels of confidence and new skills well through working and supporting each other as a team, remembering their lines and stage movements for plays.

In Pathways to assisted living courses, learners with additional learning needs make sound progress in developing their life skills. They develop and improve their literacy and numeracy skills by calculating the cost of groceries, reading and understanding labels and interpreting cooking instructions. These learners further develop their skills by undertaking craft work and learning about the history and culture of Wales. They also benefit from opportunities to develop their social skills when working with their peers and tutors.

The majority of learners have individual learning plans, which identify their agreed overall goals and targets. These documents are completed in a range of ways including electronic and paper based. In many cases they are used appropriately to identify and help learners understand what they need to do to improve and track their progress. In other cases, often when undertaking formal qualifications, learners know what they need to improve through beneficial written or verbal feedback from their tutors.

In a few sessions, learners use or develop their Welsh language skills. This is usually incidental and through greetings and conversations with their tutors and peers. In a few ESOL classes, learners develop an awareness of everyday Welsh terms, such as greetings and days of the week.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Learners report a high level of satisfaction with their classes. Nearly all learners display very good attitudes to learning. They enjoy their classes, listen and participate and interact well with tutors, other staff and their peers. They help one another with tasks and they are respectful and mindful of the well-being of others. Many learners work well independently and they often extend their learning at home. Nearly all learners feel safe and secure in their learning environments. Where classes are online, the providers have policies in place for safe digital learning. Providers remind learners of basic rules for being online, which extend from the classroom to their everyday lives, for example when using social media.

Attendance is generally good. Providers all have strategies in place to deal with non-attendance and lateness. Where learners have a strong reason for not being in class, providers send work for them to complete or they arrange extra online sessions. Providers are mindful of the issues that many adult learning in the community learners have since the pandemic, but they are still keen to ensure that learners complete their courses, achieve a qualification and progress to another level or activity, or to work where appropriate.

Following the pandemic, many learners, particularly those living in disadvantaged areas, remain anxious and have mental health issues and financial difficulties. They are nervous about returning to face-to-face learning and their more usual routines. The partnership continues to support learners well both in their learning activities and with wider issues that affect their personal development. As a result, learners are becoming more resilient and nearly all persevere with their learning activities.

Most learners who attend family learning groups develop a better understanding of their children's learning needs and how to support them. Many learners who attend family learning sessions develop further their own skills in literacy, numeracy, digital and creative skills and they often develop a desire to take their own learning further. Many learners attending family learning groups report that they learn to interact with their children in positive ways, making learning fun and strengthening family relationships.

Employability Bridgend enhances the well-being of learners needing skills for employment, by signposting them to provision that best suits their individual needs. The partner's interaction with local food pantries has led to the development of recipes for how to make tasty meals out of the available produce. This promotes healthy eating, as well as the learners' ability to budget and make the most of available resources to the benefit of their families. Employability Bridgend's partnerships in local communities have led to local walking groups for learners, which improve both their physical and mental health and foster a sense of community.

There are many learners who do not have laptops or internet connectivity. The partnership has continued to support these learners through loaning hardware and supporting their connection to the internet. Learners attending online classes and digital literacy groups develop life skills and greater confidence to cope with carrying out many necessary activities, such as booking doctor's appointments and internet banking.

The partnership providers seek views of learners regularly, and it has listened and responded promptly to their suggestions. As a result, the partnership providers continue to offer blended learning and online classes as well as classroom delivery. Many learners who are still shielding or caring for others take good advantage of the blended learning and online learning offer to help them remain in learning and to socialise. This offer also helps learners who are working or have other commitments to keep a work-life balance and to continue to learn. A few tutors report that they have gained a better insight into learners' personal circumstances through online sessions than they did in a classroom situation and they are able to support their well-being more effectively.

Teaching and learning experiences

The partnership works together well to plan an appropriate curriculum, which providers map against subject sector areas. Most of the programmes within the offer focus on the priority areas of literacy, numeracy, digital skills, ESOL and employability and are identified accordingly.

The employability offer includes two distinct strands, one of which entails short employability specific courses such as first aid, introduction to becoming a teaching

assistant and food hygiene. The second strand is the Pathways programme, which is a part-time programme for adult learners with additional learning needs who are aiming to move onto further study or into employment. The partnership offers a few very useful literacy and numeracy courses to parents wanting to support their children with their schoolwork, and, in the case of secondary phase, exam preparation. The ESOL provision includes a range of full-time and part-time courses from entry level through to level 2. However, there is not enough ESOL provision to meet the increasing demand.

The partnership offers very few personal interest courses, but it is keen to develop this area as leaders recognise that this approach supports reaching target groups, such as older and more socially isolated learners. However, there are significant challenges in relation to teacher recruitment, which have an impact on developing this and other areas of provision further.

Tutors deliver a few courses online or via a blended approach and where this happens it is because learners express a preference to learn in this way. Of those that are fully online, the majority are language programmes.

In addition to the main providers, the partnership works with an employability provider that specifically aims to engage those facing barriers to learning such as individuals with mental health issues, those dealing with substance misuse, and single parents. These learner-led employment focused programmes are many and varied and they include opportunities such as heavy goods vehicle training, understanding the behaviour of dogs, and book keeping.

Although the partnership does not deliver provision bilingually or through the medium of Welsh, a Welsh language organisation links with the partnership to enhance the partnership offer by providing short taster programmes in Welsh as well as year-round initial language courses at all levels.

To reduce duplication, where appropriate, partners refer learners to other provision across the partnership. However, there is currently no formal tracking of cross provider referrals or progression pathway mapping in place.

Most tutors plan their lessons well with appropriate consideration given to learner-centred outcomes. For example, in a managing anxiety lesson, the teacher discusses strategies that learners can apply to their specific personal situations, which include workplace and societal challenges.

In most sessions, tutors set up tasks effectively by sharing objectives, providing clear instructions and checking learner understanding. Tutors and support staff work together well to support and direct learners. This is particularly evident in the case of the Pathway courses. In these groups, learners' skills and abilities vary considerably, and tutors use a range of suitable strategies to meet individual learning needs. In a Pathway to Countryside, Leisure and Recreation session the tutor plans effectively to provide learners with a choice of activities that require different skill levels and varying degrees of challenge.

In many sessions, tutors use a variety of topical resources and interesting activities that engage and challenge the learners. In most cases, delivery is personalised and

meaningful, and tutors provide learners with plentiful opportunities to bring their experiences into sessions. Likewise, most tutors encourage learners to share how they might apply their learning to their home and working lives. For example, on a pathway programme, the tutor asks learners to suggest how they might apply college behaviours to their working situations. In an IT employability session, the tutor works with learners to equip them with the skills needed to create a curriculum vitae and undertake meaningful job search activities.

Tutors use a range of target-setting and feedback mechanisms well, which include formal individual learning plans (ILPs) tracking on a virtual platform, printed lists, feedback on marked work, and learner recorded targets. In most cases these targets are individualised and created to address specific needs.

Most tutors are encouraging and supportive, and they readily praise and value learners' contributions. It is evident that tutors know their learners well and they are sensitive to their needs and the challenges they may be facing in their lives outside of the classroom.

Care, support and guidance

The partnership has detailed policies and strategies in place to support learners throughout their learning journeys. Most partners have effective systems to identify, check and monitor learner support, well-being and patterns of attendance. However, information is not used well enough by the partnership to monitor individual attendance patterns and wellbeing.

Across the partnership, there are efficient referral processes, from external organisations to individual partners. These help learners access provision appropriate to their interests and learning needs. For example, partners receive referrals from social services, Job Centre Plus and a range of specialist support services and third sector organisations.

Nearly all tutors are aware of learners' needs, and they provide appropriate support. Adult Learning Wales and Bridgend Council offer a new suite of classes to support well-being such as anxiety and stress management and skills for life and work. Bridgend Council and Bridgend College provide useful comprehensive support for learners in ESOL, independent living skills (ILS) and essential skills groups. The Pathways programme offers a range of activities through which learners can gain skills and improve their quality of life and personal interests. Although most of the courses provided by the partnership are in traditional learning areas, the course content often gives opportunity for learners to develop their creative skills. Course such as managing stress, appeal to people from a range of backgrounds and educational achievement. They give learners the tools to deal with a variety of issues and the opportunity to meet together, form new friendships and contribute to each other's well-being.

Nearly all tutors take account of learners' commitments outside the classroom, which may act as barriers to their learning or prevent them from attending regularly, such as medical appointments and work-shift patterns. In the best examples, tutors upload work for learners to complete on an online platform. Digital drop-in centres are well placed across the county, in community venues, a library and a rugby club, where

existing and potential learners can access one-to-one digital support and advice in digital skills. Nearly all learning programmes operate in a flexible manner, and learners appreciate the ways that providers accommodate their needs.

Nearly all tutors provide impartial advice and guidance, at the beginning and throughout courses. This allows learners to progress in their learning, employment and personal lives. However, on part time courses, not all learners are able to access information easily about wider support services that are available to them. Nearly all tutors promote healthy lifestyle choices, and the importance of physical exercise, to support learners' health and well-being. In a Pathways health and well-being class, where learners are working towards a qualification in the promotion of healthy living, learners demonstrate a solid awareness of activities that will lead to better health, the components of a healthy diet, and ways to cope with stressful situations.

Nearly all partners have useful and appropriate information for learners. As a result of learner voice, providers now also keep learners better informed about the enrolment process, such as providing them with updates about courses, following their initial application. This information is available in bilingual formats, hard copies of brochures, individual partner websites and on social media platforms. The partnership recognises the need to create a marketing strategy to increase learner recruitment. Nearly all partners produce learner induction handbooks and website pages, providing useful and comprehensive information once learners are enrolled. This includes guidance on health and safety, safeguarding, access to financial support, what learners might expect from their course, and links to external support organisations.

Many learners have opportunities to share information about their own cultures. They develop an understanding of the local communities in which they live, as well as the wider world. In ESOL courses, learners are encouraged to use English to share information about special celebratory events in their own countries, and they are provided with opportunities to mix with mainstream learners at special events, such as Chinese New Year. ESOL learners also go on educational visits to places that exemplify Welsh heritage, for example St Fagan's Museum. This helps to develop their knowledge and understanding of Wales and its culture. On the Pathways to health and well-being course, learners attend work and voluntary placements, where they are able to put employability skills into practice. The partnership nominates learners for the annual national Inspire awards, although the partnership does not currently celebrate learner success and achievement at county level.

Nearly all providers track and monitor the progress of learners effectively. However, the tracking of learner progress across the partnership in an overarching manner is at an early stage. The partnership does not have a system to record and measure learner movement across or between levels and it is not able to capture data on learners who move onto further learning, training or employment. The partnership has created new and useful curriculum progression pathway documents in certain subject areas. These map the range and level of courses delivered across the partnership.

The partnership arrangements for the safeguarding of learners meet requirements and give no cause for concern. Individual partners have safe recruitment practices

and staff receive training on safeguarding and radicalisation. Nearly all learners are educated about the dangers of radicalism and extremism.

Leadership and management

The partners in the Bridgend Adult Community Learning Partnership have a positive working relationship. Leaders have recently reviewed the partnership's leadership and management structure. As a result, the partnership has developed new terms of reference and meeting schedules for its main and sub-groups which allow for identified issues to be addressed and monitored in a timely way.

The partnership has a good understanding of local, regional and national priorities, such as the drive to help learners overcome barriers to learning. To this end, the partnership is in discussion with adult learning partnerships which border Bridgend to assess the viability of pooling resources to provide learners with more choice and to reduce unnecessary duplication. The partnership has useful alliances with other providers, for example Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations (BAVO), with which it works to meet specific needs of learners. The pandemic has highlighted many well-being needs of learners that may have previously gone unnoticed, but which have always been there. Bridgend Council has developed an innovative adult learning well-being policy, which takes account of national policy documents, such as the Future Generations Act, and has, in partnership with MIND, NHS and New Economic Foundation, based its approach to adult learning on 'five ways to well-being'. This policy underpins an approach to adult learning that supports adults to stay active, stay learning and take care of themselves and others. This plan is currently going through council approval processes, but it is already being piloted as the basis for how adult learning will be developed in the area.

The partnership has a good understanding of its work, successes and areas for improvement and it is honest and open in its own assessment. The partnership recognises the need to address the impact of the pandemic and changes in economic circumstances, such as developing strategies to increase learner numbers. It has reviewed a wide range of evidence. The partnership records its strengths clearly and it has put in place incremental steps through which to address areas for improvement. The quality improvement plan focuses well on the issues the partnership has identified. The plan includes milestones at which it will assess progress. For example, the partnership is developing new ways of engaging learners and improving success rates in identified areas.

The individual providers in the Bridgend Adult Community Learning Partnership have quality assurance processes in place to assure the quality of the teaching, learning, provision and support to learners that they provide. They have a clear understanding of the quality of teaching and learning in their provision. However, the partnership recognises the need to establish quality assurance mechanisms across the partnership to ensure learners' equity of opportunity and experience.

Tutors working for the Bridgend Adult Community Learning Partnership are well qualified and knowledgeable about their subjects. The partnership offers regular hour-long online professional development sessions to all tutors across the partnership. This has the benefit of both letting tutors share practice with one another and cutting down the need to travel to a session. The training that tutors have

received has helped many of them to grow in confidence in teaching with technology and to be able to apply these skills to teaching wholly online or through 'hybrid' classes, that is with some learners attending in the classroom and others participating online. The partnership has provided training for all tutors to support learners' well-being and there are designated staff who act as well-being champions.

Partners in the Bridgend Adult Community Partnership plan and use their individual funding streams well to meet learners' needs and aspirations. For example, the partnership has recently agreed a joint bid for funding to support learners' development of numeracy and mathematics with each partner catering for specific needs, skills and levels

Bridgend Adult Community Learning Partnership has a wide range of venues. Many are located close to the city centre or situated towards the north and east of the county in local communities. This allows many learners easy access to classes. Overall, venues are well appointed for adult use, are well lit, are accessible and are welcoming.

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:

Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

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

This document has been translated by Trosol (English to Welsh).