

Third Sector Scheme

Meeting between the Minister for Education and third sector networks

13 February 2019

Adult Community Learning in Wales

1. There is considerable research in place which demonstrates the value of adult learning in Wales and the positive difference this makes to people's lives. (ARAD, 2016; Estyn, 2015/16). Community provision is essential for those individuals who are hardest to reach, and furthest away from education and employment. More needs to be done to ensure that equal opportunity is given to those who wish to access learning through the medium of Welsh and greater awareness is required to ensure that adults with disabilities have improved opportunities to access education, training and employment. Funding cuts continue to hamper progress, and have been detrimental in enabling providers to respond to Welsh Government policy which sees lifelong learning and upskilling as a catalyst for improving individual opportunities, maintaining community cohesion and enhancing the economy of Wales. Donaldson advocates developing 'resilient lifelong learners' (Donaldson Review, 2015).
2. Welsh Government's Adult Learning in Wales Policy (2017), sets out a key aim '*to support adults to play an active role in the economy and society through enhancing their learning opportunities*'. The vulnerability of funding and a lack of coherent strategy for the future delivery of adult learning in Wales, has been clearly raised as a concern by ARAD and Estyn. The consultation Document 'Adult Learning in Wales' sets out a case for change, and summary feedback supports the need to review models of delivery.
3. As set out in the policy statement:
 - Lifelong learning supports the development of skills, improves health and wellbeing and is a catalyst for social engagement and integration.
 - Participating in adult learning has a significant impact on individual health and wellbeing; as well as improving skills
 - Helping people to gain skills they need to enter the workplace is a clear priority for Welsh Government.

However, there is a disconnect between policy and reality. The latest proposed funding cuts will lead to a significant further demise of adult learning opportunities within communities and through vocational and academic part-time provision. Further Education Institutions and ACL providers are seeing a restriction to their budgets to such an extent that opportunities for upskilling for the 340,000 economically inactive citizens in Wales and the lowest paid workers are becoming more and more restrictive. The latest Welsh Assembly statistics highlight that 55% of the Welsh population live in working households.

4. The Welsh Government has identified the crucial importance of upskilling our nation to gain higher level qualifications and we, as providers of adult education, are keen to play our part in meeting this aspiration. The demand for Adult Basic Education (Essential skills in

literacy, numeracy and ESOL at Pre-Entry to Level 2) continues to be our main focus, as we endeavour to give learners the confidence to progress into higher routes. There needs to be a much more coherent and structured approach to ensure we have an infrastructure in place which is appropriately funded so that we have a realistic chance of meeting the 2017 policy aims.

5. ACL providers are keen and ready to deliver. We all recognise that learning and qualifications continue throughout life. Today's 80 or 90 year olds will have finished compulsory education in around 1963 or 1953. They will have lived through and responded to dramatic social, technological, political and economic changes and there is every reason to believe that such changes will continue. Given the right environment, we can deliver a meaningful lifelong learning ticket – the golden ticket for the citizens of Wales to support priorities for employment, upskilling, active citizenship, enhancing health and wellbeing as well as tackling poverty.

Kathryn Robson
Prif Weithredwr | Chief Executive

QUESTIONS TO THE MINISTER:

In light of the above, and given the priorities set out in the Adult Learning policy statement:

1. How can providers be further enabled to ensure that all learners have equal access to provision delivered in an environment where they feel safe and secure, which is offered locally and makes the best use of available venues?
2. What steps are being taken to deliver the outcomes of the adult learning consultation, in order to address the inconsistencies in funding allocations, ensuring that learners in greatest need receive the support and opportunities they deserve?
3. What opportunities are there to enhance collaboration with the Third Sector to ensure learners have access to all provision available to them, with clear progression routes into mainstream provision?