

Learning in the Voluntary and Community sector:

Research and review of Adult and Community based learning
provision in the Voluntary and Community sector in
Pembrokeshire

This report has been prepared on behalf of:

Pembrokeshire Association
of Voluntary Services



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Executive Summary

Through the ELWa Common Investment Fund, funding was received to undertake research into Adult and Community based learning (ACL) provision in the Voluntary and Community sector in Pembrokeshire. This report details results and outcomes of the research, commissioned by Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS), which has taken place across the sector. It provides a significant contribution towards other research that has been undertaken by Learning Pembrokeshire and Pembrokeshire College in considering the development of a delivery model for Adult and Community based learning in Pembrokeshire that is flexible, cost-efficient, quality focused, and responsive to learner needs.

A response rate of 25% was achieved from the base line questionnaires distributed to PAVS members (222), and 30 organisations participated in face to face interviews. In addition, two focus group sessions were held with members of the Voluntary Sector Training Advisory Group (TAG). Information obtained from both the base line questionnaire and interviews indicate that participating organisations represent more than 2000 volunteers, 454 trustees, 239 paid staff (actual bodies not full-time equivalent), and have in excess of 7000 members. However, it is acknowledged that there are other voluntary and community organisations delivering training who have not been included in this report, and whilst the participants in this research do represent 15 main constituencies (detailed in Section 1.2), the information here is being presented as a 'snapshot' rather than a complete picture of provision across the sector.

This report explores current provision of ACL opportunities in the Voluntary and Community sector in Pembrokeshire, examining the content of the learning provided, how it is planned and funded, who it is open to, and issues regarding delivery. Methods of identifying learner needs are described, and opportunities to share such information are explored, along with details on the piloting and evaluation of innovative developments in delivery. Current and future priority areas for training in the sector are identified as well as gaps in current provision. Consideration is given to the potential role of the sector in a Learning Network for Pembrokeshire, and models of networks from two other areas have been reviewed so that elements of their success may be considered for inclusion in a model for Pembrokeshire.

Mapping of current provision indicates that the level of provision of learning opportunities by the sector is healthy, if not uniformly distributed, and there are a number of core training providers who are likely to continue to offer training, and in a significant number of cases expand their current level of activity and widen access to the learning opportunities they provide. Training provision appears to be largely user led, responding to needs as they arise, with pre-scheduled regular training making up a smaller part of provision. There is a level of interest in providing accredited learning opportunities in the future.

There is a good reserve of skills within the sector as some 44% of provision is delivered by staff and/or volunteers, however there is further scope to develop training skills in-house and work with current providers to support and enhance their provision and explore alternative methods of delivery. The issue of sustainability of provision needs priority consideration as over half of courses are run on demand with the majority of organisations receiving no core funding for their activities.

Research on **Identifying and sharing information on learner needs** reflected that the majority of participating organisations undertook some form of identifying learner needs in a planned way, using a wide variety of methods. Just under half record the information, therefore the development of practical and accepted protocols for recording and sharing identified needs, to ensure a more strategic and co-ordinated approach to planning for meeting learner needs, needs to be considered. There is some degree of sharing of information already taking place between the sector and other external organisations and it was acknowledged that this could be improved upon. There were, however, some concerns expressed regarding the need to ensure that

attempts to meet these needs were meaningful for particular client groups, and took into consideration their particular cultural expectations, experiences, and context. This research identified that technical and administrative infrastructures, and even strategically directed funding, to facilitate partnership working to better map and meet learner needs is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of achieving the beginnings of an effective Learning Network in which the Voluntary and Community sector have an equal part to play. What is also required is mutual understanding and dialogue to address and harmonise (not suppress) cultural differences between partners and the community interests they represent, in order to facilitate effective partnership working that respects and values the diverse needs and strengths to be found within and outside of the sector.

This research has explored a number of **delivery models** to gain a better understanding of the ways in which learners may benefit from less formal arrangements, and the potential for these to dovetail into more mainstream offerings, with consideration of sustainable methods of delivery. The three areas piloted in this research have provided an excellent opportunity to explore different approaches to delivery models. The potential of technology, especially on-line learning, to resolve issues of geographical access and reduce costs is considerable, but it is also important to keep in focus the social context of learning, and the contribution that social interaction makes to the overall richness and benefit of the learning experience.

Whatever the specific delivery mechanisms, adopting an approach that is learner-led helps to give previously disempowered learners a sense of power and confidence, and increases motivation. Partnership working enables providers to draw upon the specialist experience in particular sectors to place the learner, with all their learning needs, including the social and interpersonal context within which the learning process is facilitated, at the centre of the picture. If there is a particular strength that the Voluntary and Community sector exhibits, it is surely this experience of seeing the learner in a holistic context on their home ground, and it is this particular perspective that must be retained and built upon if the sector is to make the best of the opportunities that participating in a planned programme of partnership development can bring.

The research undertaken highlights a number of important issues about the possible role of the Voluntary and Community sector in a **Learning Network** for Pembrokeshire. It is clear that more work needs to be done in clarifying in general terms the concept of a 'Learning Network' as many organisations and individuals participating in this research were unable to formulate a clear response to key questions that included the term 'Learning Network'. Only once a clearer understanding has been gained of what a Learning Network is, can the process of engaging in that network begin.

Roles that the sector could perform in an effective Learning Network for Pembrokeshire include that of training provider, offering specialist and complementary provision. The sector's closeness to the 'grassroots' was seen as especially valuable in providing flexible and consumer led learning opportunities which were particularly responsive to community needs, and niche provision of learning opportunities reflecting the specialist knowledge that has arisen within the sector as it has grown by responding to those needs. Acting as advocate and interpreter of community needs to learning providers was also identified, as well as recognising and using more fully the resources the sector has to enhance the quality and relevance of training and educational programmes provided to professionals, and others working in areas impinging upon the interests of particular special interest groups, for example users of mental health services.

For the sector to effectively play its role in the Learning Network, it is essential that it is treated as a true and equal partner by others and that it achieves parity of esteem. Recognition of, and an understanding and respect for, the cultural differences between partners are important factors in ensuring a firm foundation from which a successful and effective Network can evolve. In addition, consideration needs to be given to the capacity of the sector to fully engage in the Network and how it will be represented and consulted.

The **key recommendations** from this research should be viewed in the context of the overall conclusions detailed in Section 7, and reflect the possibilities for the Voluntary and Community sector to play a positive and active role in helping to develop an effective Adult and Community based Learning Network in Pembrokeshire. The recommendations suggest that further research is carried out on mapping of provision across the sector, and that information systems are evaluated to ensure a co-ordinated and coherent approach is taken to identifying and sharing information on learner needs. Support should be given to organisations in their plans for future development, as well as introducing the quality frameworks that will be essential for future funding.

This research clearly demonstrates that the sector has an important, and in many ways unique, role to play in the provision of adult and community based learning opportunities within Pembrokeshire. In preparing for the advent of a Learning Network it will be important to identify areas of particular specialist expertise that will enable the sector to play a positive role in developing this network.

In the context of developing an integrated and sustainable approach to training in the sector, it is necessary to secure funding that encourages co-operation over competition and a strategic approach that is less project led and more focused on long term planning over budget driven short term projects. Funding should be designed to encourage and enable partnership working and reduce duplication of effort. Ultimately the funding needs to follow the learner, and this means it should be planned and distributed in such a way as to view the learner in their community based context, addressing obstacles to access and learner aspirations to ensure equality of opportunity is a reality in adult and community based learning.

Whilst celebrating and valuing the very diversity that is part of the sector's unique strength, it still needs to define and communicate a coherent and distinctive philosophy, and to reflect upon and promote the many examples of good practice that it has developed which can contribute to enriching the adult and community learning experience for the people of Pembrokeshire.

1. Research Rationale and methodology

1.1 Rationale

Through the ELWa Common Investment Fund, funding was received in Pembrokeshire to undertake research in to Adult and Community based learning provision across the Local Authority, Pembrokeshire College, and the Voluntary and Community Sector. This report details the research undertaken within the Voluntary and Community sector, commissioned by Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS).

The overall aim of the Common Investment Fund is to address the need for closer collaborative working in the delivery of Adult and Community based Learning (ACL) to maximise resources, remove nugatory competition, and meet learning needs through the process of:

- Mapping training provision and learner needs
- Piloting and evaluating new models of learning
- Making recommendations on the future development of a Learning Network model for Pembrokeshire

The detailed outputs relating to the research undertaken are provided in Appendix 1. The overall aim is to ensure that the research undertaken across the sector contributes to the development of an ACL delivery model in Pembrokeshire that is flexible, cost-efficient, quality focused, and responsive to learner needs.

A second imperative encouraging collaboration in the field of Adult and Community based learning is Estyn - the office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales, carrying out inspections of individual education and training providers in Wales. Their mandate includes inspecting all learning provision funded by ELWa, including those European projects where the match funding is from ELWa. Adult and Community Learning inspections will include the Voluntary and Community sector, with visits to the County Voluntary Councils to find out how the sector is involved in the strategic planning processes for ACL, even if they are not actually delivering provision themselves.

1.2 Methodology

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to gather data across the Voluntary and Community sector. Quantitative data was recorded and analysed using Excel and statistical analysis techniques. Qualitative data was analysed by examining the range and content of responses to interviews and focus group questions to identify common issues, priorities, concerns and areas of difference.

The first stage of the research was to develop a **base line questionnaire**¹ to be distributed to all members of PAVS. Following discussion with staff at PAVS, a questionnaire was developed, piloted (through the Training Advisory Group), and distributed by post to a total of 222 organisations, all of whom are members of PAVS. The questionnaire was also available to complete online at the PAVS website. 55 questionnaires were completed, resulting in a response rate of 25%. The data from these questionnaires is presented in Appendix 3.

¹ A blank base line questionnaire is available in Appendix 2

The second stage was to develop the structure of questions to be asked in primarily **face to face interviews with organisations**. A pro-forma² for use by researchers was developed, with key questions piloted through the first TAG focus group session in December 2005.

The next task was to select the organisations to be interviewed. A number of questionnaire respondents had already indicated their willingness to participate in further research, and 33 organisations were then identified, made up from a combination of questionnaire respondents and those currently holding Service Level Agreements to deliver services on behalf of the Local Authority, based on information available from the PAVS database. Consideration was also given to ensuring that key constituencies were represented (see below), and that the number of organisations to be interviewed was manageable within the time frame allowed.

Organisations were initially contacted by telephone and, in total, 30 participated in face-to-face interviews, with just one interview taking place over the telephone. Interviews followed up on areas covered in the base line questionnaire and explored a range of issues including the planning of training provision, identifying and sharing information on learner needs, and views about the contribution of the sector to a Pembrokeshire Learning Network. Ten organisations interviewed had not completed and returned a base line questionnaire, so this data was captured at the interview and results included in the base line analysis. The following constituencies were represented by organisations participating in the interviews:

- Advice and Information
- Advocacy
- Arts
- Community Development
- Community Halls
- Disability
- Environmental
- Mental Health
- Older People
- Social Care/Carers
- Social Enterprise
- Sport and Recreation
- Voluntary Transport
- Welsh Language
- Youth

Two **focus group sessions** were also held with members of the Voluntary Sector Training Advisory Group (TAG). Twenty five separate organisations are involved in TAG, representing a wide range of constituencies, including mental health, disability, community development, community halls, older people, social care/carers, youth, and pre-school. There are also other organisations represented, such as Pembrokeshire College and Careers Wales West, who have an interest in Voluntary and Community sector provision.

Eleven members were in attendance at the first session, representing 9 separate organisations, and 7 were present at the second session representing 6 separate organisations. Flipcharts produced from each of these sessions have been written up and available to read in Appendix 5.

² A blank pro-forma is available in Appendix 4

1.3 About Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS) and the Voluntary and Community sector in Pembrokeshire

PAVS is the independent association of voluntary and community groups in Pembrokeshire. As one of the recognised, independent, membership organisations that form a network around Wales, PAVS was established to support and develop voluntary action in Pembrokeshire. PAVS also provides an interface, or working relationship, between voluntary and statutory organisations.

PAVS holds and updates information on 613³ voluntary and community groups operating in the county, and currently has 222 active members. It is estimated that the sector provides employment for 1549 people in Pembrokeshire with 45% of these jobs being full-time. Over 5,600 people are involved as trustees of voluntary organisations and a further 13,743 people volunteer, performing a wide range of duties in varied settings.

³ Pembrokeshire Voluntary Sector Almanac, PAVS 2003

1.4 Statistical data and profile of participating organisations

Information obtained from both the base line questionnaire and interviews indicate that participating organisations represent more than **2000** volunteers, **454** trustees, **239** paid staff (actual bodies not full-time equivalent), and have in excess of **7000** members.

*In relation to the number of **volunteers** involved with the organisation:*

35% indicated they expected this number to stay the same

35% to increase

3% to decrease

25% did not respond to this question

2% indicated 'other' although this was not an option given

*In relation to the number of **paid staff** within the organisation:*

48% indicated they expected this number to stay the same

22% to increase

2% to decrease

28% did not respond to this question

It would be fair to say that this suggests that the Voluntary and Community Sector in Pembrokeshire remains vibrant, with positive signs of future growth, and little indication of any anxieties about a future diminishment in the number of volunteers or staff engaged in this sector.

2. The Voluntary and Community Sector as a Training Provider

This section focuses on the role of the sector as a provider of Adult and Community Learning opportunities in Pembrokeshire. The type of provision is explored, including the range of subject areas, and issues such as accreditation of learning, and delivery methods. There is also an examination of methods of funding, and timing and location of delivery. Discussion took place regarding external issues that may impact on both the nature of provision and the issues affecting organisations in their role as training provider.

From the base-line questionnaire, it was established that just over half (51%; 28) of respondents are currently delivering training and learning activities. Of the organisations not currently delivering training and learning activities, 2 out of 3 indicated they would definitely not be interested in doing so in the future, and one in four indicated they would.

2.1 Mapping of provision

Details of the type of training provided by these respondents are produced in Appendix 6. Where possible, data was gathered on the cost of the training, who delivered this (e.g. staff or external trainers), the location of the activities, how it was funded, and who the training is open to. Analysis of this data has enabled the following graphics to be produced here. It is acknowledged that there are other voluntary and community organisations delivering training who have not been included in this report, and whilst the participants in this research do represent the main constituencies outlined in the previous section, the information here is being presented as a 'snapshot' rather than a complete picture of provision across the sector.

The provision has been categorised into 23 separate areas of activity, from advocacy and arts and crafts, through to personal skills, and technology. This reflects both the diversity of the sector and the range of provision required to meet learner needs. To enable a graphical representation of this information, the categories were then divided up into two, namely where eight or more courses are offered per subject area, and where less than eight courses are offered per subject area.

Figure 1 A snapshot of the type of courses provided by the Voluntary and Community Sector in Pembrokeshire with more than eight courses offered per category

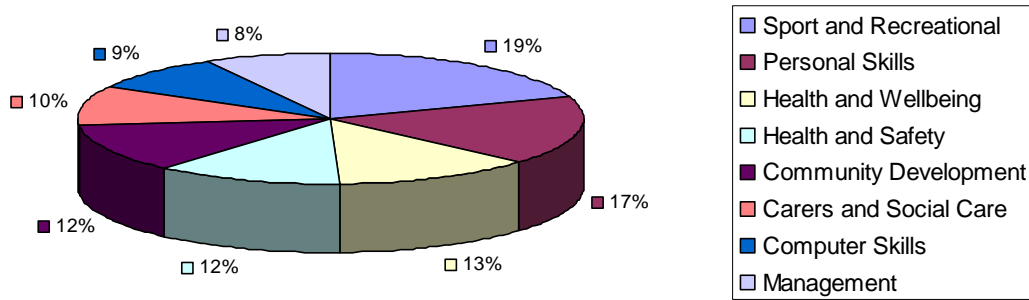
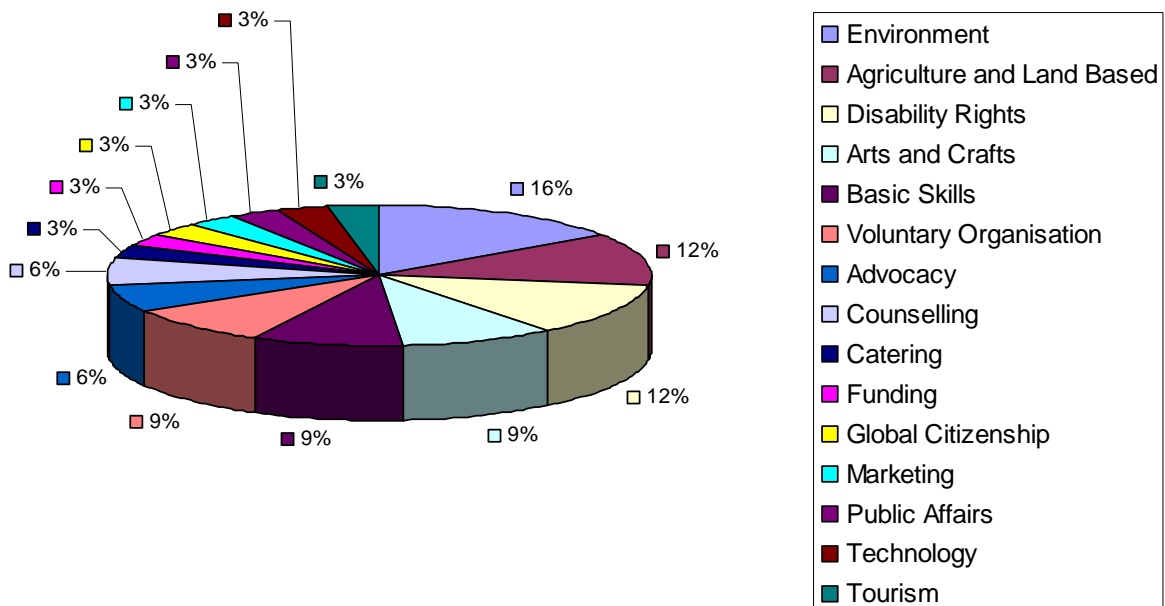


Figure 2 A snapshot of the type of courses provided by the Voluntary and Community Sector in Pembrokeshire with fewer than eight courses offered per category



2.1.1 Subject areas

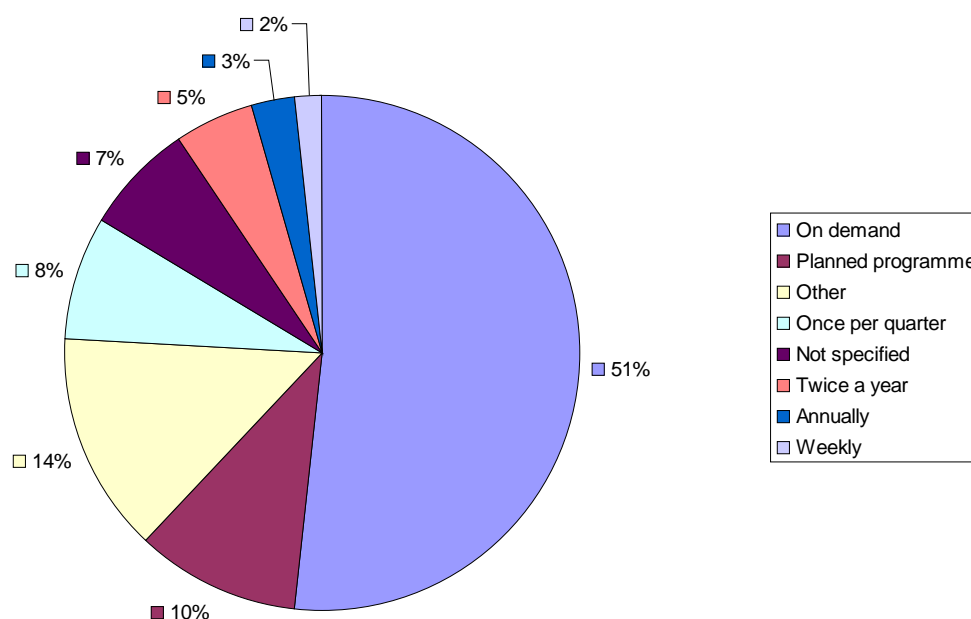
As has already been noted above, the breadth of subject areas offered reflects the diversity of the sector as a whole in Pembrokeshire. The largest element of the training provided by organisations is devoted to developing the skills needed by volunteers and staff to pursue the aims and activities of the organisation. The majority of the 19% of training offering more than 8 courses relating to personal recreation and leisure is provided by just two organisations. Overall, all the training offered by the sector can be seen to be providing an important range of skills and knowledge development, contributing to the positive impact of the sector upon community and cultural life in Pembrokeshire.

2.1.2 Timing

Organisations were asked how often they delivered their training. Options given were:

- once a month
- quarterly
- annually
- on demand
- other

Figure 3 Frequency of course provision



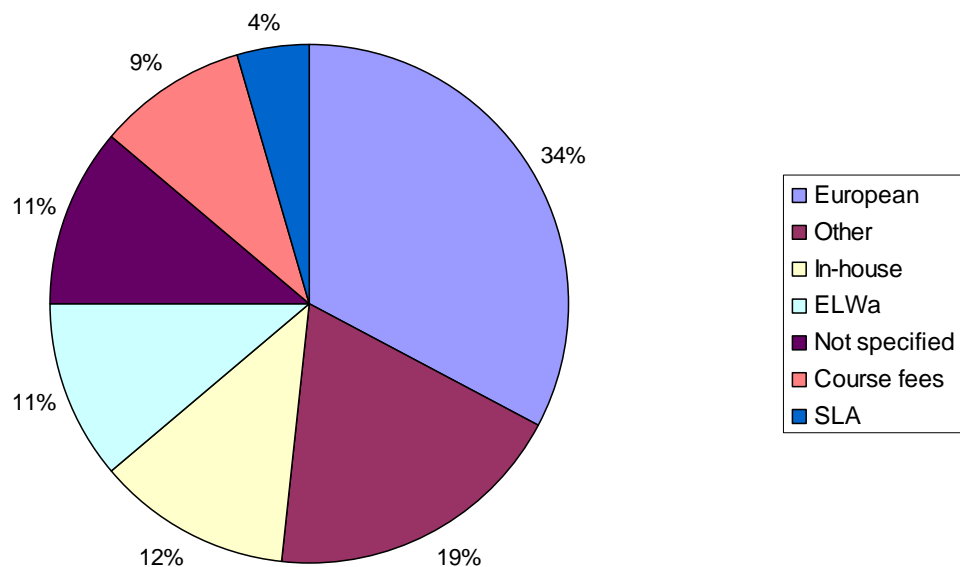
Just over half (51%) of the courses delivered are provided on demand. The remaining courses are delivered at various times throughout the year, with 10% as part of a planned programme or scheduled activities. It is likely that so many courses being delivered 'on demand' is due to the fact that the majority of organisations do not receive any core funding for their training provision. The 14% of courses delivered at 'other' times are made up of Project based (3), Regular classes (3), Fortnightly (1), and Continuous (1).

2.1.3 Charges and Funding

Organisations were asked to provide information on how they funded their provision, and whether they made a charge to attend. With regard to funding provision, options given were:

- ELWa
- European
- Course fees charged
- Funded in-house
- Service Level Agreement
- Other

Figure 4 Ways in which Voluntary and Community sector training provision is funded



Just over a third (34%) of courses run due to European Funding (ESF). However, to obtain European funding it is necessary to ensure that 'match funding' is in place and as a consequence of this, it should be noted that much of the provision funded through ESF is also supported through other funds such as ELWa or the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG).

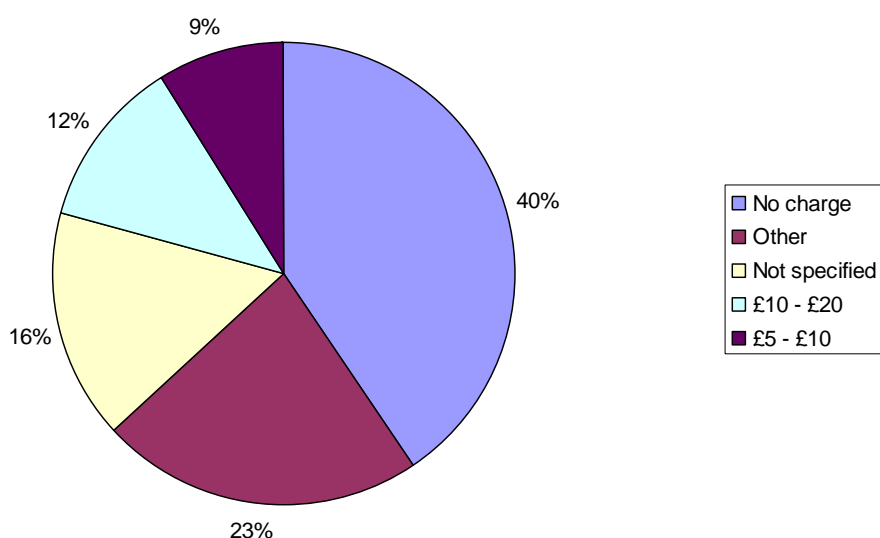
The 19% of courses run by other means include members fees, lottery funds, donations, and linking up with other providers such as Pembrokeshire College to provide training which is free at the point of delivery.

A small number of organisations involved in this research have Service Level Agreements which provide funding for their activities, and 9% of courses have course fees attached to cover the costs. A similar number (12%) are funded in-house.

Charging of course fees - Options given for course fees were:

- No charge
- £5-£10
- £10-£20
- Other

Figure 5 Range of charges for Voluntary and Community sector training courses



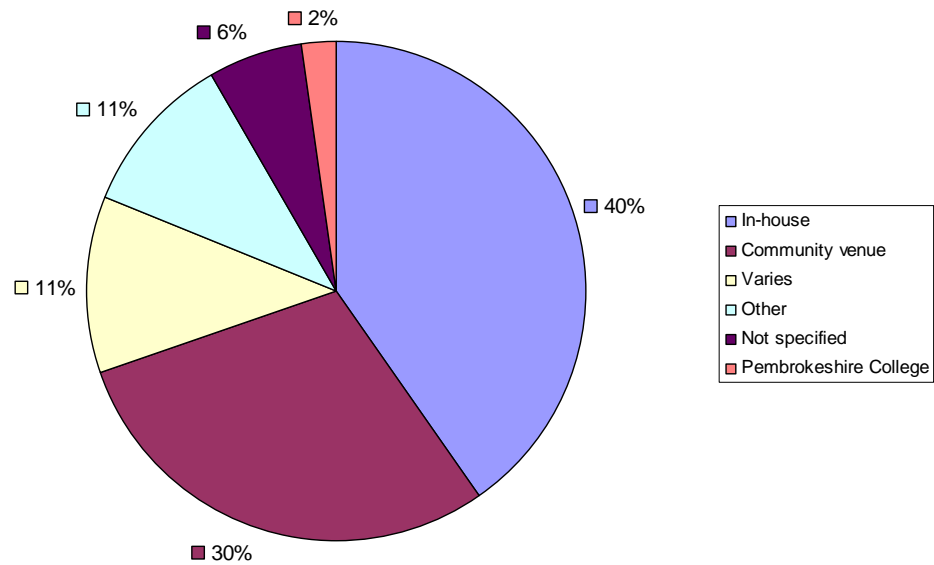
There are no course fees charged for 40% of courses run. This would in general reflect the level of courses provided as a result of European funds. The 23% of 'other' is made up of 21 courses where the fee varies, in some cases just '*sufficient to cover costs*' and others in the range £0-£75. 3 courses are offered free to volunteers but a charge (of between £10-£20) is made for others. There is one example where a 'consultancy fee' of £350+VAT is charged, and another where a fee of £250+ is charged 'depending on context'.

2.1.4 Venues

Organisations were asked where they deliver their training. Options given were:

- In-house
- Community venue
- College
- Other

Figure 6 Use of venues to deliver Voluntary and Community sector training provision



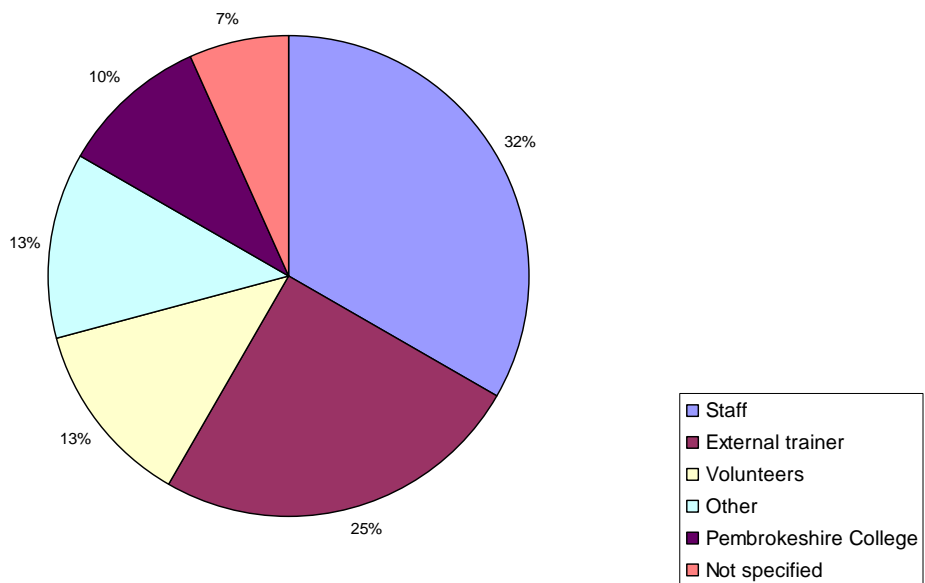
Forty per cent of courses are delivered 'in house' at the organisation's premises, and 32% at a community venue. 9 courses were identified as being delivered at either in-house or community venues, and 6 as either in-house or outreach (outreach has been included under 'other'). Just 2% (3 courses) are delivered at Pembrokeshire College and one course is delivered at a school.

2.1.5 Trainers

Organisations were asked to indicate who actually delivered the training they provided. The options given were:

- Member of staff
- Volunteers
- External Trainer
- College Tutor
- Other

Figure 7 Trainers used to deliver Voluntary and Community sector training provision



Nearly a third of all training provision is delivered by staff within the organisation, and 13% by volunteers within the organisation. Twenty five percent of provision is delivered by external trainers. The number of staff involved in delivery of provision is encouraging in terms of the existing skills set available, although from the interviews with organisations it is clear that in the majority of cases the training delivered by individual members of staff reflects just a small part of their work within the organisation.

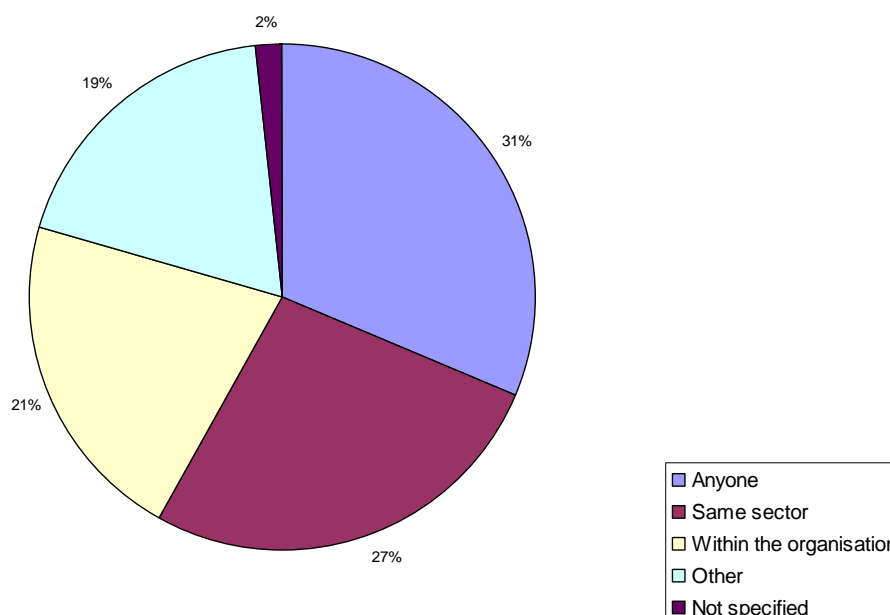
Other trainers used, identified in 13% of courses, include three named individuals where it was not possible to establish whether they were staff or external trainers, three where the response was *'various'*, two *'experts'*, and seven identified simply as *'qualified and experienced tutors'*. In a number of cases (8) it was noted that a combination of staff and/or volunteers may be used to deliver the training or a combination of staff or external trainers (2).

2.1.6 Access

Organisations were asked to indicate who was able to access their training. Options given were:

- Only people within the organisation
- Open to others working or volunteering in the same sector area
- Open to anyone interested

Figure 8 Access to Voluntary and Community sector training provision



Just under a third (31%) of training provision is open to anyone to attend. 27% of courses are available to anyone working or volunteering in the same sector area, and 21% is only accessible to people (that may be staff, volunteers, or trustees) within the organisation itself. Of the 19% of courses specified as ‘other’ these include ‘members only’ (12), students on specific courses to which the organisation contributes (3), and very specific criteria for attendees, e.g. up to aged 19 years of age and living in a specific geographical area (6).

It is interesting to consider this data in the context of a further question asked on the questionnaire regarding whether organisations are planning to open up their provision to a wider audience. If organisations participating in the interviews had indicated they were, this was explored in more detail, including what factors may have influenced this decision.

The question asked on the base-line questionnaire was *‘If you only provide training in-house, are you or would you consider opening this up to a wider sector/community in the future?’*

Just over half of the respondents to this question indicated that they are planning to open up their provision, although this represents just 4 organisations. Three organisations (43%) said they were not planning to open up their provision to a wider audience. The remaining 18 organisations it can be inferred already open up their provision beyond the realms of the organisation itself.

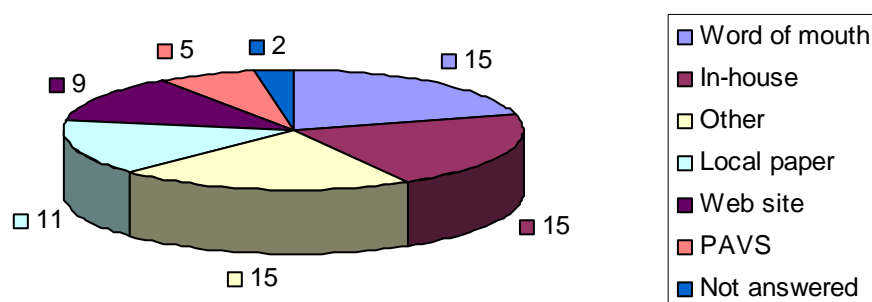
The interviews explored the reasons behind the organisation’s decisions to open up (or not) their provision. The main reason cited for not opening up provision was the lack of time and funds. Reasons given for widening participation included the need to recruit more volunteers to expand the organisation, and wishing to recruit younger people. Certain policy documents relating to issues such as global citizenship and legislative changes were cited as influencing these decisions. Discussion of possible widening of access also raised questions relating to increased accountability, and the need to achieve quality standards in relation to legislative requirements.

“The training provided at all points in the project must be of high quality. It’s got to be good stuff”

2.2 Promoting the learning opportunities

It is unclear from this research how effectively marketing activities to promote the courses offered are reaching those who could be eligible to attend. The question was asked of organisations 'how do you promote your training opportunities?' with the following responses given. Respondents were able to choose more than one option. The figures indicate the number of times the particular activity was identified by respondents.

Figure 9 Types of activities used to promote Voluntary and Community sector courses



From these responses it is clear that a wide variety of methods are used for promoting training opportunities. The most popular are in-house and word of mouth. Other activities identified included local radio, posters, events, and newsletters. Networks were also identified on many occasions. As in the majority of cases there are no dedicated staff promoting and/or delivering training in the sector, it is not surprising that in-house and word of mouth are used most frequently as the most cost-effective methods of promoting opportunities.

Where widening access beyond the organisation's staff and volunteers is an issue, it may also be useful to explore other marketing methods, and the PAVS network itself provides a valuable way to reach a potential wider audience for specific learning opportunities.

2.3 Accredited Training

Organisations were asked whether any of the training they delivered is accredited, and if not, whether this was something they may be interested in offering in the future.

Two questions relating to accredited training were asked in the base-line questionnaire as follows:

'Is any of your training accredited? If not, is this something you would like to offer in the future?'

Of the 28 organisations responding who are training providers, just under half (43%) are delivering some form of accredited learning. Of the organisations who are not currently delivering accredited learning, one in three are interested in offering this in the future.

2.4 Delivery methods

Organisations were asked on the questionnaire what type of methods they are using to deliver training. Some examples were given in the question such as classroom based, online, one-to-one, and action learning. Respondents could provide multiple responses.

The responses to this question suggest that the majority of organisations are delivering training in multiple ways. The most commonly used method is classroom based (50% of respondent organisations) followed by one-to-one instruction (29%), workshops (25%), action learning (25%), and practical hands on training (21%). Fourteen percent of organisations offering training report using on-line learning.

2.5 Planned provision that did not go ahead

Organisations were asked whether there had been any training they had planned to deliver, but which didn't go ahead, and the reasons why. 43% (12) organisations indicated that there had been occasions where they were unable to go ahead with planned provision. In the majority of cases this was due either to a lack of participants (50%) or lack of funding (42%).

2.6 Planning training provision

Interviews held with thirty organisations explored the issues regarding planning of their training provision and the type of external factors that may influence current and future plans.

What are the things that help you plan your provision, and what gets in the way?

The main responses in relation to things that help with planning were predominantly about knowing the audience (the client group) and understanding current and changing needs. Being user-led was vitally important, and many organisations had a clear strategic direction and mission which directed their activities, for example working with older people, or carers.

“Giving them a choice is empowering – we’re user led”

Funding was reported as key to planning provision in that it provided opportunities to put on training otherwise not possible, and tapping into existing networks (both within and external to the Voluntary and Community sector) also helped with planning.

“Training is what we’re about... it is a core provision. The organisation is... stimulated in providing that support”

In terms of things that get in the way of planning provision, unsurprisingly resources came top of most organisations' list. The lack of resources, in terms of dedicated staff to develop and deliver training, was an issue, as well as continued pressure to find resources just to enable the organisation to function. Although networks were cited as a positive thing in helping to plan provision, several organisations also felt that at times these can hinder progress due to a lack of information and shared understanding – the possibilities for networking and improving provision being potentially limited by other people's agendas.

There was a strong feeling that more often funding was directing provision rather than the other way around, directly conflicting with the very thing that helps to plan provision – that of being user-led.

“The service should direct the funding, not the other way around”

In several cases organisations raised a concern about promoting their courses too widely in case too much interest was raised and there was insufficient capacity to respond. The accessibility and affordability of external venues was also identified as a factor that hindered the planning of provision.

Several individual issues were raised in relation to the planning of provision, which included:

- the need to carry out risk assessments where outdoor activities were taking place (some of these would be weather dependant and could not always go ahead)
- that there were low expectations for people with disabilities and the feeling they were disempowered and sometimes difficult to engage because of negative self perceptions or prior bad experiences
- difficulties in retaining volunteers

The Training Advisory Group focus session (see Appendix 5) identified many similar issues to those in the interviews, including budgets and resources as both a help and hindrance, the importance of knowing the client group, and also a lack of affordable and accessible venues. In addition, they identified the importance of knowing what other training was being provided elsewhere, the need to consolidate and recognise skills and needs within the sector, and to ensure that information disseminated reaches the right people.

What are the external influences that may affect current and future training you provide?
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Twenty three separate items of legislation and/or statutory changes were identified as directly or potentially impacting on future provision. Examples given included the Disability Discrimination Act, the Environmental Protection Act, and MIDAS (relating to Community Transport). Legislative changes could have a positive or negative effect on provision, for example for some there are new opportunities to offer training to ensure learners are up to date with relevant legal requirements, but for others, legislation in relation to public entertainment licences, for example, has meant that organisations can no longer stage events to raise funding used to deliver their training. Changes in costs relating to insurance, and health and safety legal issues were frequently mentioned.

“The Health and Safety Act... it means that you have to do so much training... it just affects everything... you have to be so much more assiduous”

Funding was identified by the majority of organisations as a key external influence not only on future provision, but also on the organisation’s ability to ‘make things happen’ and move forward.

“Funding- that affects the whole thing... we are always pinballing around. Insecurity of funds prevents long term planning”

Several organisations with Service Level Agreements felt that although these were seen as positive insofar as the need for provision had been both acknowledged and funded, there was often a lack of more general support. Attitudes from external organisations towards the sector (in some cases the feeling that they were being viewed as the ‘poor relation’) could have both a positive and negative effect on encouraging participation in provision.

A number of individual issues were raised such as the lack of bi-lingual trainers or speakers; the fact that for one organisation the building they are located in has a long lease and this is getting in the way of them accessing funds; and external consultation currently taking place on education for sustainable development may impact on how this is integrated and delivered for one provider.

Two organisations identified the county strategic planning partnerships as playing a key part in influencing future direction of provision.

The TAG Focus group session again identified similar issues such as funding, and perceptions of others, but also identified among other things, that the current focus of funding, on learning to reduce economic inactivity leading to accredited outcomes, was to the detriment of funding for informal learning.

2.7 Planned significant changes to provision

The base line questionnaire asked the question *'Are you planning any significant changes to the training you currently provide?* Examples given in the question of what is meant by significant changes were reducing or increasing provision, entering into third party arrangements, or offering accreditation.

57% of organisations responding to this question indicated they are not planning any significant changes to their current provision.

This question was followed up (where appropriate and possible) in the interviews, with the question:

If you are planning significant changes to your provision, what are these and what are the issues associated with these changes?

For the majority of organisations interviewed, there were no plans to make significant changes to provision. This is also reflected in the question on the following page which explores what kind of provision they want to be offering in the future.

Those who did indicate changes, identified areas such as extending to wider communities such as Communities First (3 organisations), and plans to increase and retain the numbers of volunteers (2 organisations).

Individual plans included working in partnership with local organisations such as Pembrokeshire College and the Probation service, a change in focus on community care training, and development of a Horticulture project.

The main issues associated with all of these changes were related to the need for training to become self-sustaining and to explore options for income generation. There were some uncertainties regarding the merger of quangos such as the Welsh Language Board and ELWa into the Welsh Assembly Government in April 2006

What kind of provision do you want to be offering in the future?

The majority of organisations responded that they wished to be offering more of the same, and to improve on this. Others indicated they would like to offer accredited learning and to raise the quality standards of their provision, although one organisation was particularly negative about this, saying

“There are wasted resources because of the obsessions with accreditation – the content, not qualification, is important”

Several organisations said they would like to undertake more provision on an ‘outreach’ basis, to work more locally, including specified areas such as Communities First and other areas of deprivation, or specifically in the South of the county.

For some, there was a plan to broaden out the provision in response to opportunities arising from changes in legislation and/or social agendas, for example to broaden out into areas such as healthy living or nutrition. For some, this was something they were aspiring to, whereas for others funding for a further 2 or 3 years had already been secured which would allow them the opportunity to expand.

Plans specific to individual organisations included more confidence building and self-esteem training, more social and recreational activities, activities to attract younger members, and licensing training in relation to community transport.

One organisation felt that their future plans would depend in part on how they were able to input into strategic planning partnerships within the county, and link into strategies such as the Community Plan; however there was currently very little if any capacity for the organisation to be involved with this. Just one organisation gave a very negative response to this question indicating they felt that their training provision was *‘going backwards not forwards’*.

High quality and accredited provision were also identified by TAG as being issues for the future. Also identified were more outreach and locally based opportunities, and low cost training delivered in a comfortable, relaxed and non-classroom environment, with support and timing to take into account travel and respite care.

What has or will influence this?

All organisations responding to this question indicated that funding is a major influence in taking their plans forward. They also identified the need for more joined up thinking and working both across the sector and externally, in order to have a more co-ordinated approach to provision, and that successful delivery would be dependant on demand. Many felt that they would need to make sure the skills of staff to deliver the training were appropriate, with one organisation indicating they were looking at accrediting the performance of their own staff.

The TAG Focus group session were asked to consider ways in which the role of the sector as a training provider could be improved. They identified the following areas:

- Maximising existing resources
- Understanding what other resources are available to the sector and accessing these
- Collection and analysis of information on providers, venues and trainers
- Defining a complementary not competitive approach to provision – identifying and valuing sector specific differences in style and approach
- Achieving high Quality Assurance standards

2.8 Conclusions on the Voluntary and Community sector as training provider

This section has considered a wide range of issues regarding training provided by the Voluntary and Community sector.

It is clear that the majority of the training included in this research relates directly to the mission and activities of the organisation offering the training. As well as helping to strengthen the organisation's direct contribution to the development and enhancement of the communities (e.g. geographical, or of interest) in which they operate, this training has additional benefits in raising the confidence and competence levels of individual learners, and stimulating demand for learning opportunities.

Much of the provision also makes a significant contribution towards achievement of two key priorities identified within the Community Plan for Pembrokeshire⁴. Priority D1 '*Encouraging People to reach their Potential*' states longer term aims of 'encouraging people to maximise their potential by learning and acquiring new skills; equip people with the skills needed to make effective use of ICT through community based learning; and to widen participation in lifelong learning within socially disadvantaged groups'. Progress towards fulfilling this key priority will also help contribute to priority D2 '*Promoting Health Wellbeing*', the provision of learning opportunities directly relating to health and wellbeing, for example in the fields of health, exercise and nutrition will obviously have a direct impact, but also any initiatives that help to develop individual and the community's sense of self worth and access to improved educational and employment opportunities will have a positive impact upon their wellbeing.

The level of provision of learning opportunities by the sector is healthy, if not uniformly distributed, and there are certainly a number of core training providers who are likely to continue to offer training, and in a significant number of cases expand their current level of activity and widen access to the learning opportunities they provide. With a quarter of respondents indicating their intention to begin training activities in the future, and 28% and 35% indicating growth in staff or volunteer levels respectively (with less than 4% anticipating any reduction in staffing or volunteer levels), it is certainly reasonable to assume that the sector will continue to be an important, and growing, provider of adult and community based learning opportunities within the county.

Training provision appears to be largely user led, responding to needs as they arise, with pre-scheduled regular training making up a smaller part of provision, however there is a level of interest in providing accredited learning opportunities in the future.

Forty percent of training was provided in house, 30% in local community venues. The lack of affordable and accessible external venues was raised by a number of respondents as an obstacle to planning provision, and the possibility of providing sector wide, locally accessible, specialist training venues could be explored as a way of facilitating the kind of strategically planned sector wide provision considered elsewhere in this report. A contribution towards achieving sustainability for such initiatives could be made by opening up organisation's training facilities to other organisations and providers and income generated from this.

Any consideration of approaches to facilitating training provision needs to recognise the importance in current practice of providing training opportunities and environments that are non-threatening. Familiar in-house environments and trainers can help to build confidence, and overcome earlier negative experiences and expectations, which can form a barrier to learning for many.

⁴ A Community Plan for Pembrokeshire 2003/08, Pembrokeshire Community Planning and Leadership Partnership, October 2003

Currently some 44% of provision is identified in the survey as being delivered by staff and/or volunteers. This provides a good reserve of skills to tap into, but still leaves at least a further 25% identifiably reliant upon external trainers. External trainers are explicitly identified as expensive, and this suggests that there may be further scope for developing training skills in-house, whilst recognising the benefit that outside experts can bring. In order to maximise the benefit of current in-house training there is also a need to find ways to better support the people who are delivering training (usually training is an additional part of their normal every-day work), and ways of ensuring that quality assurance methods are supportive and enhancing of the internal trainer's confidence and ability.

There is much in current training provision in the sector that could be of benefit to a wider audience, and the opening up of provision, which a number of organisations are anticipating and planning, will require cost-effective marketing techniques to make maximum use of the opportunities and benefits this presents to organisations and potential learners. In this respect there is a need to make more use of the communication and facilitation facilities offered by PAVS with their county-wide remit, to reach a wider audience, and the issue of partnership working, discussed further in section 6, is relevant to opening up communication channels between partners making sharing of information on learning opportunities more effective. The Pembrokeshire Education Portal (featured in section 5.3) is another mechanism for reaching a wider group of current and potential learners.

As noted above, over half of the courses within the sector are run on demand and the majority do not receive any core funding for activities. This raises the issue of the sustainability of on-going training where this is identified as a need – course fees are one way of funding training, but not everyone can afford these fees, especially if they are volunteering. Wider research⁵ shows this to be an issue not just in Pembrokeshire but across the whole of Wales where organisations identified lack of core funding, and funding being increasingly tied to projects, as key challenges to address.

Legislation, and the frameworks for funding of adult and community learning opportunities, is likely to have the greatest impact on future provision. In this context, it is essential that providers consider ways in which legislation will impact (positively and negatively) on future provision, and how learners, where appropriate, are kept up-to-date with such changes. It also underlines the importance of organisations working together pro-actively to make a case for strategic funding to meet learner needs. Plans⁶ to introduce progressively over a number of years a level playing field for all providers, and to simplify the resourcing of post-16 learning, will support parity of esteem between providers.

⁵ Voluntary Sector Skills Wales, WCVA 2005

⁶ The National Planning Framework and Funding System, ELWa, www.elwa.org.uk

3. The Voluntary and Community Sector as participant in ACL provision

This section explores the role of the Voluntary and Community sector as a participant in Adult and Community based provision, identifying areas where there may be gaps in current provision, current and future priority areas for training, and external factors that may influence training requirements in the future. The question of training accessed outside the county is also explored in order to understand the factors that may be involved in Pembrokeshire based organisations accessing training in this way.

3.1 Gaps in provision

29% of organisations indicated on the base line questionnaire that their current training and learning needs appear to be being met. 44% did not respond to this question, which could be interpreted as at least an indication that they do not have any particular conviction that their needs are not being met.

However, twenty seven percent of organisations indicated that they had training needs not being met. Respondents identified 18 areas of training and learning which they felt were needed and not available. From the information on mapping of provision, both within the sector but also across Learning Pembrokeshire and Pembrokeshire College⁷, a number of these areas such as health and safety, IT, fundraising, and PowerPoint are already being delivered by other voluntary sector organisations or other providers within the County. This would indicate that a common information system available to all current and potential learners detailing opportunities county-wide would be extremely beneficial.

Other areas of need identified included those specific to the area in which the organisation was operating, such as child protection, or passenger assistance, as well as subjects specific to voluntary organisations such as recruitment of volunteers, trusteeship, social enterprise development, and fundraising.

In what areas do you feel there are gaps in training provision for your organisation and/or sector and/or the voluntary sector as a whole?

This question was asked in the interviews to find out a little more about where organisations felt there were gaps in provision and how those gaps were identified.

Just over a third of participating organisations indicated they were well catered for in terms of general provision - *"We're well covered"* was the popular response. A number of specialist areas were identified as being unavailable locally, such as those relating to arts marketing or community transport, although it was recognised that because of their specialist nature it was highly unlikely that future training opportunities would be available in the county for just a small number and it was generally accepted that there was a need to travel to attend such courses (see the remarks below relating to accessing training outside of the county).

"Training provision has improved radically in recent years"

⁷ The Learning Journey: a collaborative approach to adult and community based learning in Pembrokeshire, Allman, March 2006

Other areas identified mirrored those already recorded in the questionnaire responses, such as trustee training, first aid, and child protection, as well as other voluntary sector specific areas such as third sector management. Advanced IT was specifically mentioned as it was felt that much of the IT courses currently on offer cater for basic needs but there was very little for the advanced learner. Basic skills needs were also mentioned and in the context of this, one organisation responded that *“If people acknowledge their basic skills needs then there would be a massive gap in provision”*.

Through the Voluntary Sector Training Advisory Group focus meeting, further learning needs were identified in the areas of:

- Personal Development e.g. confidence building, interpersonal skills, communication etc.
- Legislation e.g. employment law, risk assessments
- Supervision skills (also included in this were mentoring and informal guidance)
- Free/low cost first aid and manual handling
- Specialist training that may only be available further afield

3.2 Current and future priority areas for training

A wide range of current priority areas were identified. There was not one particular area that stood out, although First Aid, Health and Safety, and Trustee training were recorded more than most. The majority of the training needs identified are related to the specific area in which the organisation is working, e.g. arts, transport, youth, carers, or related to the running of the organisation such as staff supervision, fundraising, financial planning.

As with the responses to current priorities, there was no one particular area dominating the future priority areas. Health and Safety and First Aid were both identified by several organisations as a priority in the future, and the remaining responses were again related to the specific area the organisation was operating in.

What are the external issues that may affect the type of training your staff/volunteers/members will need in the future?

The responses to this question in the interviews were very similar to those in section 2.6. The majority of responses related to changes in legislation, and the need for people to be kept up to date. Two organisations identified government policy as impacting on future needs, and a further two responded that they didn't know what issues may affect future training. One organisation said they didn't think there were any particular external issues that may affect future needs.

Of the seven issues identified by individual organisations, there were four which may also have a bearing on the wider Voluntary and Community sector. These are:

- Employment Law
- Venues – needing to be truly accessible, which may affect the scope of what is delivered and accessed
- Increasing need to have a 'professional face' to the organisation
- Changing fashions in funding priorities for bodies such as ELWa or the Welsh Assembly Government

The remaining three issues identified were the availability of educational grants; national campaigns; and recent government consultation on facilitating education for sustainable development and global citizenship.

3.3 Accessing training opportunities outside of Pembrokeshire

The question on the base line questionnaire was presented as follows:

“Please tell us about the training activities your organisation has accessed over the last year”

Appendix 7 shows the answers given by respondents to this question. Twenty two organisations (45%) did not respond to this question. Sixty two separate training events were recorded of which twenty six (42%) took place outside the county of Pembrokeshire, and eleven (19%) outside of Wales.

This was followed up in the interviews with the questions:

To what extent has your organisation accessed training opportunities outside of the County? What were the main reasons for doing so?

A third of participating organisations indicated that attending training opportunities outside the county was the only way to access specialist training, tailored to their particular needs. This corresponds to areas identified in previous questions regarding gaps in provision and current and future training needs. Four organisations identified the opportunity for networking with others in the same sector as a main reason for attending such events.

Of the individual reasons given for attending opportunities external to Pembrokeshire, six indicated it was to attend conferences, and one organisation which has a county-wide remit, saw it as its responsibility to attend regional events, then cascade the information locally. Another organisation responded that for them that it was about balancing the link up with other experienced professionals against attending local but generic training.

“Travelling time eats into the time that’s available – the courses are there but access is an issue in the full sense”

“We just accept the fact that we live in Wales and it could be an issue getting there”

One organisation estimated around thirty percent of the courses they attend are outside Pembrokeshire and are those predominantly run by the WCVA. Three other organisations also mentioned their attendance at WCVA courses, which in general are run at locations such as Llandrindod Wells, Cardiff, and Brecon.

Just one organisation said that they accessed opportunities outside of the County *“hardly at all”*.

3.4 Conclusions on the Voluntary and Community sector as participant in ACL provision

“The sector is so diverse... you can’t get a model which fits all organisations”

On the whole, the majority of sector needs appear to be being met through current provision. The areas where gaps were identified predominantly related to subjects specific to the area in which the organisation was operating, as well as those relating to voluntary organisations in general such as trusteeship, social enterprise, fundraising.

Some of the highest levels of responses to the invitation to highlight areas of unmet need were related to training that is already available across the county, either from within the sector or from other providers, and these included courses in Health and Safety and IT. This would indicate that either the promotional materials for these learning opportunities are not reaching these potential learners, or they are not being delivered at a time or place suitable for them. A common information system available to all current and potential learners, detailing opportunities across the county could be extremely beneficial in this respect, and form an essential element in developing a county wide Learning Network in partnership with providers outside the sector as well as within.

Current and future priority areas for training were very similar, with First Aid, Health and Safety, and Trustee training being recorded more than most, as well as training needs relating to specific areas in which the organisation is working, e.g. arts, transport, youth, carers, or related to the running of the organisation such as staff supervision, fundraising, or financial planning.

Participation in training opportunities outside the county is still seen as a necessity for many of the organisations responding to this question. 42% of events attended were outside the county, the main reasons given for attending these events were in order to access specialist training tailored to particular specialist needs, or to attend conferences.

It is clear that the sector is an active participant in adult and community based learning opportunities. The extent to which there is ‘unmet’ need for the sector can be categorised in one of two ways:

Given the results of research into the Adult Learning community⁸ as a whole and some of the barriers to learning, it is reasonable to assume that the sector is not immune to experiencing some of these general barriers to accessing learning to meet specific needs, in the form of lack of knowledge of available courses, lack of access to easily accessible local venues, or lack of access to funding. Indeed research previously undertaken⁹ indicates learners having difficulty in finding out what information is available in their area, fear of returning to a classroom situation, limited public transport, and being out or driving at night as key factors that stop them engaging in learning activities. In this respect, the discussion in section 6 regarding the role of the sector in contributing to the development of a Pembrokeshire Learning Network is relevant. There is a need to address the questions of how to make information on training opportunities more widely available, how to plan provision to match local needs with local access, and how to secure strategic funding that will maximise equality of access to learning opportunities for all social groups and income levels.

⁸ Adult Learning Survey 2005, Narrative report to accompany quantitative results, Allman, March 2006

⁹ Lifelong Learning in Pembrokeshire for the over 50s, Age Concern Pembrokeshire, March 2005

There are also certain specialist areas of training required that are genuinely not available within the county at present. As a precursor to developing the Learning Network, building more effective partnership working and co-ordination within the sector itself will be important in helping to determine the strategic merits, or otherwise, and the cost benefits, of providing access to such training in-county. Where there remain obvious benefits for organisations attending events such as conferences and other learning opportunities outside of the county, there is potential for better networking between interested organisations and individuals to develop a rotational delegate system which will enable individuals to share access information from these events and share the costs associated with sending representative individuals.

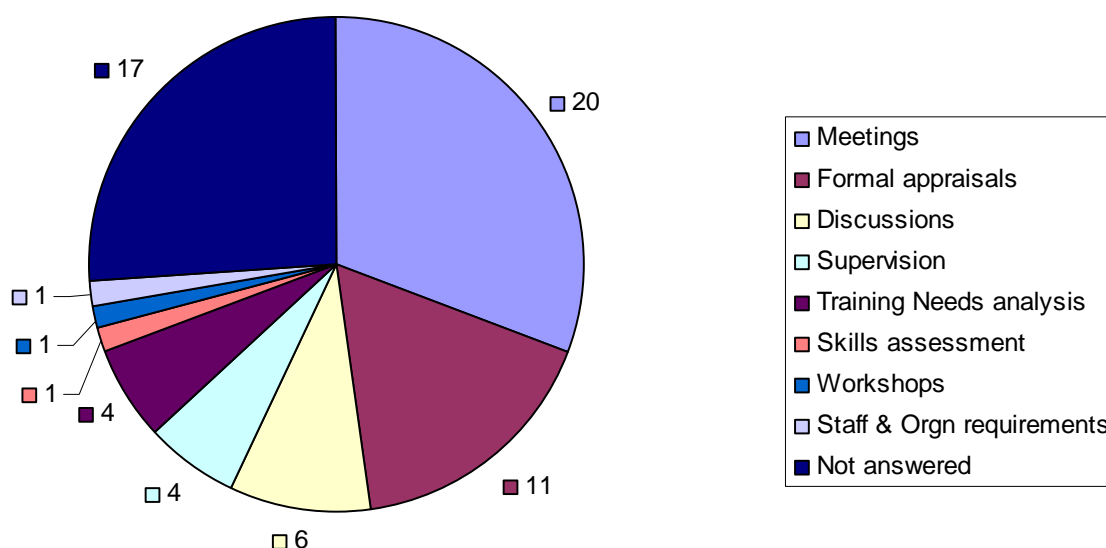
4. Identifying and sharing information on learner needs

This section explores the range of methods used in Voluntary and Community organisations to identify training and learning needs for their staff, volunteers, members, and trustees. Consideration is given to the factors that can influence a positive learning experience, and the issue of sharing information on learner needs is also discussed.

4.1 Identifying training needs

Questionnaire participants were asked “How do you identify training needs for your staff and volunteers?” It was possible to provide multiple responses to this question.

Figure 10 Methods of identifying training needs



The most frequently used method for identifying training needs is through meetings, followed by formal appraisal, and then discussion. A range of other methods are used, including supervision, and personal development plans. In general it would appear that there is usually some form of identifying needs in a planned way, rather than ad hoc (2%).

With regard to recording information obtained through these methods, just under half (46%) of the organisations who responded indicate that they do record the information gathered.

How have you identified gaps in training?

A sixth of organisations participating in the interviews indicated that they undertook a base line survey of training needs and/or a skills audit within the organisation. A further sixth indicated their use of a range of internal and external monitoring to identify needs such as self-assessments, or external consultants. Less formal methods such as observation and conversations were identified by several organisations.

Highlighting organisational requirements, such as the need to spread the load of responsibility relating to Health and Safety, or to develop skills within the organisation in the area of social enterprise to better support others, for example, were instrumental in helping to delineate new training requirements.

The TAG focus group session identified some similar mechanisms to those detailed above, but also highlighted the following issues:

- certain subjects courses are repeatedly asked for and over-subscribed
- training relating to employment law and personnel management are growth areas because of the increasing numbers of employed staff in the sector
- training needs are generated by requirements or initiatives through national organisations such as MIND, or NIACE

4.2 Consideration of how learners learn best

How do your learners learn best?

The location of training was identified by over a third of organisations as the key to successful learning. Respondents indicated that learners needed to be familiar with the venue, that it should be a safe, welcoming environment, and also close to public transport links.

“The location of any training is a factor, especially in evenings and winter”

Other requirements for a positive learning experience included informality, atmosphere, a good relationship with the trainer, humour, providing refreshments, being able to learn at a pace and time suitable to the learner, and a focus on softer skills such as self-esteem, and being led by the learner.

“Atmosphere... it can make a big influence on how people respond”

Factors identified by individual organisations included opportunities being non-computer based, with no pressure to achieve, focused, with tangible outcomes, real learning opportunities, and the opportunity to socialise.

The TAG focus group identified similar requirements to the above, as well as the need for bite-sized and practical hand-on learning opportunities, the need for the trainer to be able to cater for a wide range of levels and abilities in any one group, and for the learner to be clear about “what’s in it for them”.

“It’s the other person involved – the tutor that can ensure a positive outcome”

4.3 Sharing information on learner needs

How can information on learner needs be shared and who with?

In general the response to this question was positive, and it was recognised that the way in which information is currently shared could be improved. A small number of organisations indicated that they are already sharing information with others to some degree, and in some cases specific organisations were identified with whom the sector members would be prepared to share their information. These included PAVS, Pembrokeshire College, Learning Pembrokeshire, and PLANED.

“This informal sharing doesn’t extend to the local authority, or the local college but I wish it would”

Two organisations said they were happy to share with similar organisations operating in the same sector area, and one organisation felt that their needs were very specialist, not fitting in with most locally based training, so were unsure about linking in to local networks.

A number of concerns were expressed regarding sharing of information and ensuring that meaningful responses to learner needs were made.

“We want meaningful and proper responses to needs identified... we need to share our information with like minded people – those who are respectful and understanding of our service users”

The TAG focus group considered in more detail mechanisms for sharing information and identified:

- Use of a central planning tool which is easy to use, accessible, and low cost. An example given was the Geographical Information System (GIS) mapping tool currently in use through the Local Authority.
- CCET (Community Consortia for Education and Training) which operates at a macro level but could use the TAG group more effectively.
- Sharing of an internal database

They also felt that funders should have more information about learner needs, and that existing Training Needs Analysis methods could be built upon and shared more widely across the sector. Creating “packages” of training with other providers would be beneficial, and sharing information with other ‘like-minded’ groups through PAVS and/or TAG.

4.4 Conclusions on Identifying and sharing information on learner needs

It is encouraging that the majority of organisations participating in this research undertake some form of identifying learner needs in a planned way through a wide variety of methods. With only just under half recording the information, however, this is an area that requires some attention to enable the development of practical and accepted protocols for recording and sharing identified needs if there is to be a more strategic and co-ordinated approach to planning for meeting learner needs.

Alongside formal methods of identifying needs such as skills audits or self-assessments, a range of other less formal methods are used such as observation and conversations, reflecting the way in which methods are adopted to most appropriately meet the needs of particular groups of learners, such as staff, volunteers, or members.

Exploring the issue of what helps learners learn best raised some interesting responses, in particular relating to the location of training, identified by over a third of participating organisations as one of the key components for successful learning. This correlates directly with the data relating to the location of training delivered by the sector, i.e. predominantly in-house or in a community venue, which learners are familiar with, and where there is a non-threatening, and welcoming environment.

With regard to the sharing of information on learner needs, there was in general a positive response, with some organisations indicating this is happening to some degree already. Improving and developing the mechanisms for sharing information was welcomed with a range of ideas being put forward. There were, however, some concerns expressed regarding the need to ensure that attempts to meet these needs were meaningful for particular client groups, and took into consideration their particular cultural expectations, experiences, and context. It is interesting to note here responses to the Voluntary and Community sector Infrastructure Consultation document¹⁰ which indicated overall that respondents understood the case for greater collaboration but that there is an anxiety about this leading to organisations having less flexibility and autonomy at a local level. However, the recognition of the need for the sector to continue to play a key role in activities and to share information with others is reflected in this quote from Fiona Mactaggart, Parliamentary Under Secretary:

“If the voluntary and community sector is to thrive and play its role in achieving a shared vision of reform and renewal, it needs high quality and sustainable support services. Organisations also need to be able to make known the views and needs of the people they serve and whose interests they represent”.

¹⁰ Voluntary and Community sector Infrastructure Consultation document, ACU Home Office, September 2003

5. Identifying and piloting new methods of delivery

In the context of the minimal funding available for non-accredited courses, and exploring in more detail appropriate delivery methods suitable to a community learning setting, a number of pilots were identified as outlined below, where it was hoped to gain a better understanding of the ways in which learners may benefit from less formal arrangements, and the potential for these to dovetail into more mainstream offerings.

Due to the time constraints in completing this aspect of the research, it was decided that areas for piloting and evaluation would be identified from expressions of interest already received through previous Voluntary Sector Training Advisory Group meetings.

The three pilot areas identified offered very different approaches to learning, as follows:

- *Learning for Living* – focusing on the delivery of on-line learning to unpaid carers.
- *St John's Community Hall Learning Club* – an opportunity for individuals to come together, and identify and organise activities to meet their learning needs.
- *Pembrokeshire Education Portal* – exploring the potential of a web based portal to support interactive learning and opportunities for collaborative working.

A brief overview of each pilot is provided below, along with a summary of the key issues for consideration at the end of this section. A more detailed analysis of each pilot is included in Appendices 8, 9, and 10 along with information on key personnel to contact for further discussion.

5.1 Learning for Living

The aim of this model is to provide flexible access to learning and ongoing support for unpaid carers, thus removing many of the key barriers to learning identified by them, such as being unable to attend structured courses due to caring commitments, the cost of training, and the lack of available transport to attend a training centre. It was hoped that other, less tangible issues such as low self-esteem, lack of confidence, and feeling isolated could also be addressed.

At the heart of the learning model is an on-line course, accredited by City and Guilds which they describe as "...an online learning programme for carers. It builds on the skills that carers and former carers have developed in their caring roles. It also helps to build confidence and develop computer skills, and could pave the way for further study or a return to a paid job."

The programme actually consists of two core elements, namely a Level 2 qualification - Certificate in Personal Development and Learning for Unpaid Carers, and an on-line learning resource.

A partnership approach

The initial requirement was to identify a delivery partner, but it also became clear that there was considerable potential for a number of other organisations and/or projects to be involved and add value to the overall experience for the learners. The key to the success of this model has been to identify contributors and their particular strengths. In total, 5 partners and/or projects were identified and became involved.

Support for learners

Although learners are registered with City and Guilds for a period of two years, the initial pilot ran over a four month period and learners were encouraged to work to this timeframe, where possible. Additional support was available and whilst the predominant form of learning was on-line, optional tutor-led study sessions were made available, as well as IT support to improve basic IT skills, and mentoring in the form of peers (carers who had successfully completed the course themselves and who were prepared to act on a voluntary basis as mentors for future learners).

Funding and resources

The main source of funding for delivery of this pilot was from ELWa, drawn down by the delivery partner, Pembrokeshire College. The additional support from other partners was paid for through project funds such as Objective 1 ERDF, ESF, Welsh Assembly Government Building Strong Bridges Programme, and Big Lottery Fund. The peer mentoring process is undertaken voluntarily, and there is no charge for learners.

Evaluation and Summary

Feedback from learners and partners alike has been extremely positive. Three learners successfully completed the course, and two learners have one further module to complete. Others are able to continue with their learning due to the very flexible nature of the on-line courses.

Although the pilot was successful, it is proving difficult to attract new learners, and this is something the partners need to address. Five new learners have started the course, which is also now being delivered to carers in Ceredigion although the local County Voluntary Council are not currently involved in the partnership.

The model has proved to be an excellent example of partnership working across sectors, drawing on the strengths of each to build a sustainable training and support infrastructure meeting the needs of a specific group of learners. Whilst this course has been targeted at one particular group of people, that of unpaid carers (of which there are around 14,000 in Pembrokeshire alone), there is clearly the potential to develop this approach for other groups of learners who experience similar barriers to learning, such as those with disabilities, single working parents etc. Two key

recommendations to come out of this work are to pilot the learning model centred on alternative on-line courses for different groups of learners, and to develop an e-Learning Study Skills module particularly geared to those with little or no IT experience.

For more detailed information on the Learning for Living model, and who to contact to find out more, please see Appendix 8.

5.2 St John's Community Hall Learning Club

The aim of this pilot was to set up a 'learning club' within St John's Community Hall whereby individuals come together through an initial consultation session to identify and plan activities to meet their desired learning needs.

Thirty seven people were invited to attend and much interest was shown, although on the day there were just nine participants. The session worked on establishing areas of common interest, and through a process of group discussion using a set of guidelines developed specifically for this pilot, reached a consensus on four areas of learning they wanted to explore. In the end, due to time constraints, just two of the four areas were covered, but these were both very successful. It was also necessary to open up the sessions to members of the public to ensure sufficient numbers of participants.

The two learning activities carried out were 'Introduction to Dance' and 'Basic Cookery Skills'. Further details about these are included in Appendix 9.

Support for learners

The key person involved in this pilot was the full-time Development Officer based at the Community Hall. This officer played a key role in supporting the learners in terms of co-ordinating the activities e.g. finding a tutor, booking facilities, organising refreshments etc. and it is felt that in the early and evolving stages of a Learning Club model, it is essential for someone to act as a leader or co-ordinator.

Funding and resources

A small budget of up to £300 was identified from the Common Investment Fund to support this pilot of both the Learning Club session and the learning activities themselves. These funds covered the costs of tutors, refreshments, publicity materials, and food for cooking. The cost of time spent on the pilot by the Development Officer (currently partly funded through ERDF) had not been costed or paid for separately, as the pilot was considered to be part of their current role in developing learning activities at the Hall. In the end the actual total costs incurred throughout this whole exercise, was only £133.00. This was partly due to the fact that the Cookery Tutor insisted on doing this piece of work on a voluntary basis.

Evaluation and Summary

Both the learning club session and following activities were evaluated and overall were a real success. With regard to the learning club session participants had enjoyed the experience and discussions. They all felt that the aims of the session had been met, but acknowledged that the whole process would have been easier and worked better if there had been more participants. They indicated they would like to see a Learning Club formed, and would be prepared to pay a small subscription, however they felt that such a Club could only work with a minimum number of say 30 members, and felt unsure that it could be sustainable without external funding of some kind.

It is also recognised that whilst the participants involved in the session positively embraced the activities relating to establishing areas of common interest, further work needs to take place to support members in building their confidence and identifying their strengths. As this happens, and the number of members grow, it is felt that the model will evolve into providing an infrastructure from which a broad range of activities can be identified and planned. Various options need to be explored as to how the model can be sustained, and it would be beneficial to talk with representatives from the University of the Third Age (U3A) about how their model works.

The ongoing dance lessons are now self-sustaining as participants make a contribution to cover the cost of the tutor, and they bring in their own refreshments (there is no charge for using the community hall). These lessons will be able to continue for as long as there are sufficient

numbers of learners turning up to cover the costs of the tutors. It is hoped that the skills learnt by the participant in the cookery lessons will be passed on in the future to other friends in a similar situation, using their own kitchens and produce.

It is clear that there is a need for a key person to co-ordinate activities, ensuring effective communication between members' and that there is compliance with legislation (e.g. health and safety) where relevant. This is part of the infrastructure needed to ensure things move forward, but over time it is hoped that reliance on such a person would be reduced. A Learning Club ethos where there is no pressure to achieve, and where it is fine to simply 'come along and have a go' can provide a positive learning experience (as evidenced in both learning activities piloted here) and potentially lead to other opportunities to take that learning further with other providers in the future, as the learner's confidence grows. With support, such as a person at the end of a telephone line, who could absorb some of the responsibility for helping remove obstacles and provide encouragement, learners are more likely to feel safe in their journey forward.

For more detailed information on the St John's Community Hall Learning Club pilot, please see Appendix 9.

5.3 The Pembrokeshire Education Portal (PEP)

The Pembrokeshire Education Portal is described as “*an on-line collection of websites, brought together in one place to create a network of information and people to support teaching and learning activities*”. It provides a forum for teachers and learners alike to share resources, collaborate, and communicate. Pembrokeshire County Council is the lead partner in the project, providing the developing technological infrastructure, technical support, and training. Following a pilot project which ran in county schools, the portal is being rolled out to a wider partnership, which includes the Voluntary and Community Sector.

Members from the Voluntary Sector Training Advisory Group (TAG) expressed an interest in exploring the potential of the portal to both support the work of voluntary organisations in their role as training providers, and also the opportunities it may provide for collaborative working and sharing of resources across the different sectors. Two sessions were arranged with Mike Isted from the County Council to explore these issues, which the author of this report also attended.

It is clear from just these two sessions that there is considerable potential for the portal to be an invaluable tool for the sector in a number of ways:

- Firstly, there is a public area with open access which will provide a central point of information about learning opportunities, training providers, careers advice and information. This could potentially also include volunteering opportunities and will provide a ‘shop front’ to all that the voluntary sector has to offer to potential and current learners in the county.
- Secondly, for current learners, there is the potential to access more innovative forms of learning opportunities and resources such as development of internet based portfolios and records of achievements, on-line tutor support, peer learning on-line, video footage and much more. This does, of course, rely on the sector having the skills and time to be able to develop such resources but the supporting infrastructure is there.
- Thirdly, there is considerable potential for sharing ideas and learning materials, to undertake collaborative work both across the sector itself, and also with other training providers such as community tutors, the local college, private training providers etc. The sharing of good practice and expertise would be of tremendous benefit to the sector but also to other providers in terms of understanding the good practice and levels of skills and knowledge within the sector itself that they may have access to.

Funding and Resources

To date, the development of the portal has been funded through a variety of sources including mainstream education budgets, ELWa (Common Investment Fund), and European Objective 1 funds. In the longer term it is expected that charges will be made to enable the continued functioning and development of the portal. Although these charges are still to be determined, it is expected, for example, that schools will be charged in the region of £3.50 per learner per annum.

Evaluation and Summary

Evaluation following the two sessions was overall very positive and the potential for both learners and providers is clear. The Voluntary and Community sector is able to benefit from the considerable investment made by the statutory sector and the training and support provided thus far should be commended. There are, however, a number of issues that need to be considered before full advantage can be taken of the portal.

Firstly, there needs to be consideration as to how the 'shop front' is developed. The diversity of the sector is such that there is a danger it is presented in such a way that is confusing for the visitor, but equally there would be little point in simply reproducing web sites that are already fully functioning.

Secondly, in relation to learner support, it may be necessary to undertake a skills audit within the organisations who are delivering (or who could potentially deliver) on-line learning opportunities across the sector to determine the range of skills and knowledge in both developing these type of opportunities and also provision of on-line tutor support. Where gaps in skills have been identified, it may be possible to link up with, and learn from, other providers who do have the relevant experience and thus improve the capacity of the sector to deliver in this way. As previously noted, there will be a time cost to developing resources and learning new skills. The ability to commit to the time required for this needs to be decided in the context of the extent to which it will meet learner needs, bearing in mind that on-line learning is not simply a substitute for other forms of learning.

Thirdly in relation to collaborative opportunities, it is recognised there may be an issue to overcome here regarding trust and confidence in working with other providers who may previously have been viewed as 'competitors'. As work continues to remove what is termed 'nugatory' competition, and with a continuing emphasis on collaborative working to achieve broader aims relating to adult and community learning provision, it is hoped that these barriers will, in due course, break down. Confidence levels within the Voluntary and Community sector need to be built up, perhaps through collaborative working initially within the sector itself, although the experiences of pilots such as the Learning for Living model could and should be built upon.

To find out more about the Pembrokeshire Education Portal and who to contact, please see Appendix 10.

5.4 Conclusions on identifying and piloting new methods of delivery

The three areas piloted have provided an excellent opportunity to explore different approaches to delivery models. There are several areas identified across the pilots where one approach could complement another. For example, one of the key recommendations to come from the Learning for Living pilot was to develop alternative on-line courses for different groups of learners. The Pembrokeshire Education Portal seems to lend itself naturally to this kind of approach and would also support the collaborative work needed between partners to make this happen. The Education Portal could also support the Learning Club model where learners are responsible for identifying their own learning needs and organising activities to meet these. The 'shop front' public area could be accessed by club members to find out what opportunities might be available to them and also to learn more about suitable training providers to contact if they are unable to find what they are looking for.

The electronic methods of communication the portal offers such as on-line surveys, discussion forums etc. may provide members with an effective mechanism for communicating on a regular basis, and it would be beneficial to further explore the contribution that new technologies, especially the internet, can make to increasing learners' choice, the richness and convenience of the learning experience, and the facilitation of integrated delivery systems involving all providers.

The partnership approach taken to developing and delivering learning and learner support in the Learning for Living model ensures that each partner adds value to the experience for the learners and that resources are maximised for effective, creative, and successful delivery and outcomes. The opportunities the Education portal presents for collaborative opportunities should not be ignored, although the issues previously mentioned regarding the sector's capacity and skills levels to engage with this also need careful consideration.

It is clear from the two pilots which involved learners that they gained enormous benefits from the less formal approach to learning, and both pilots underlined the benefits of providing needs-led learning opportunities, where learners are able to engage in the learning process by identifying desired learning outcomes and pursuing them at their own pace. They provide a timely reminder that, *'one size does not fit all'*, and in both cases it is easy to see ways in which the learning can dovetail into mainstream provision. For example, the learning club activities provide a 'have a go' opportunity for learning something new. Anyone with a desire to then take this learning forward, for example to gain some form of accreditation, could do this through mainstream offerings, their confidence having increased from the initial sessions. Similarly, the Learning for Living pilot has enabled carers to gain confidence and learn new skills which can be taken forward to other opportunities they may not otherwise have considered.

Inevitably, where funding for such learning opportunities comes from sources such as European Funds or short-term project funds, the issue of how these opportunities are sustained in the longer-term will arise. Estyn¹¹ have identified concerns over the need for sustained programmes and projects in the medium to longer term to meet the learner expectations and aspirations, and self-supporting models such as the Learning Club pilot at St John's Community hall are worth exploring more fully as potential viable models of learning delivery.

¹¹ Widening participation in adult community-based learning: A survey of best practice, Estyn, 21st June 2004

6. The role of the Voluntary and Community sector in a Learning Network for Pembrokeshire

As identified at the start of this report, one of the core outputs of the Common Investment Fund work taking place across the county is to propose a 'fit for purpose' Learning Network model for Pembrokeshire, which has the support of its members, is sustainable, quality focused, removes duplicate provision, offers innovation in the delivery of learning and provides appropriate support to each stage of the "learning journey".

In this context, participating organisations were asked questions about how they saw the role of the sector in such a Learning Network, what needed to happen to facilitate the development of such an effective integrated Learning Network, and in what ways the sector could influence training provision to meet learner needs.

Many of the organisations interviewed found this section of the interview difficult to respond to as they were unfamiliar with the concept of a Learning Network. One organisation did not participate as they felt unable to answer the question even in any small part. In view of this, it is difficult to generalise responses in this section, although there are some particular themes emerging which will be drawn together at the end.

Can you identify ways in which the role of the Voluntary Sector in a Pembrokeshire Learning Network could operate?

Just under a quarter of organisations felt that there was still very much a role for the sector as a training provider, offering complementary but not competitive provision. Two thirds of organisations felt that recognising individual organisations best placed to deliver specialist training was important, defining niche areas of provision that recognised the particular skills, knowledge and experience the sector has. Four organisations stated that the closeness of areas of the sector to the 'grassroots' of particular communities of interest (e.g. the disabled, the elderly) could be capitalised on by helping other providers to better understand the diversity of learner needs.

"It's all about partnership – multi agency working, in partnership, not competition. We've got to keep talking, (to) share, (and) find our niche"

Two organisations identified that setting up support groups for the sector in areas such as quality assurance systems would be beneficial. Other individual roles identified for the sector included:

- To train statutory bodies
- To provide a centralised base of information on training
- To be part of the strategic planning process
- To set up a range of working groups to increase the effectiveness of TAG and constituent elements

What needs to happen to achieve this?

Half of the organisations interviewed identified the need for more **effective sharing of information and knowledge**. Improved partnership working and communication, including within the sector itself, was a common response, with respondents identifying positive opportunities to be gained from improvements in both these areas, with genuine partnership working taking place. A small number of organisations indicated they are already working in partnership with organisations such as the Local Authority and/or Pembrokeshire College through formal (e.g. third party arrangements) or informal means.

The need for the sector to have **parity of esteem** with other partners was raised by over a third of organisations, with the desire for true representation rather than a 'tokenistic' presence. However, a number of respondents felt that the sector does not have the power itself to become an equal in a Learning Network.

Recognising and valuing community learning and informal learning was raised by several organisations as a key factor in promoting the value of the sector's contribution. Focusing on the strengths of the sector, building on its experience in providing a flexible and innovative approach to learning and creating accessible learning environments which are different from mainstream offerings, and which are needed by some client groups, may play a key part in demonstrating the unique contribution that the sector makes to the overall pattern of provision of adult and community based learning in the county.

"Sometimes what we do is undervalued"

"It would be hard for volunteers to slot into other training groups – between ¼ and ½ have mental health issues and wouldn't be able to access generic training"

The diversity and breadth of the sector was identified as both a positive feature, but also a potential obstacle to effective partnership working. The need to have an understanding of the different cultures that operate across the different partners, and in some cases the need to undergo cultural changes to enable joint working to be taking place were identified. Sharing training opportunities such as compulsory training of the care sector, or joint training for youth workers, between partners was identified by several organisations as an example of positive working practices that could be built upon.

"We're not a single voice. We're all coming from a separate direction and perhaps it's difficult not to... we're so diverse, different, we haven't all got these huge gaps in time"

Resources such as funding, staff, and premises were identified by a third of organisations as essential, with such resources needing to be focused on the actual delivery of provision and services rather than administration.

"The fact that the organisation doesn't have a trainer is ludicrous"

Increased capacity would provide more opportunity for people to attend meetings associated with being part of a Learning Network, one organisation in particular indicated that they participate in a number of networks across the county but that their input is not as great as it could be due to capacity issues - *"I wish we'd be a bigger part of the planning process. It needs more strategic planning... needs to be inclusive"*

Many of the organisations participating in the interviews reported difficulties with a lack of sustainable funding, which tends to be short-term, project driven and does not encourage collaborative working.

Other salient issues identified were:

- Consideration of how training programmes are designed – the need to look at integrated approaches to learning with opportunities led by strategy and not funding.
- Transparency.
- Getting more people involved - but there is a need for more personal contact, to visit organisations to remove the remoteness, and possibly offer some form of reward or incentive to be involved.
- That a Learning Network should keep focused on a few main priorities such as quality of training and ensure that the network addresses the ‘problem’ it was set up to address. To identify two or three areas of concern and concentrate on those instead of *‘picking up 12 priorities and faffing around, getting nowhere’*.
- The need to clarify what the aims of a Learning Network will be.
- A database of available resources to encourage joint working
- A PAVS led democratic structure with Memorandum of Understanding
- A network that will pull in community as well as voluntary groups
- A model based on a networking partnership of people with common values and aims
- Flexibility and resources for meeting needs as they arise
- Resources to ensure a network recognising Welsh Language issues
- Learner-led forums

In what ways can the voluntary sector influence the way training takes place in the future to meet needs?

Organisations identified the need to provide clear evidence (not just anecdotal) of learner needs. These needs should be client not provider led, and emerging training needs should be made more widely known. Suggestions of continuing research into the sector’s needs, and ongoing meaningful evaluation of provision to ensure future needs are met, were also mentioned.

“Feedback forms are very depressing. Follow things up, then it becomes worthwhile”

In the context of continuing research, it is noted here that two organisations were clearly sceptical about both this research (in terms of how far it may impact on or influence decisions) and also achieving an efficient and truly representative network.

Improving consultation, so that the sector’s contribution to building a Learning Network includes more individuals and organisations to ensure it is truly represented, was identified as being important. Making a positive, practical, contribution to the network in areas such as provision of information, training, trainers etc. were considered essential for influencing future plans.

One of the special contributions the sector could make was seen to be by providing a safe environment in which to experiment –

“the voluntary sector could change things by practicing models fairly safely in the sector, experiment, do things for the first time, being brave, see if it works but not mind if it doesn’t”

Freed from some of the core funding and statutory constraints governing mainstream training provision, it was felt that the sector can, and needs to be, more proactive and assertive, capitalising on its strengths and special insights:

“What the voluntary sector is really good at is dealing with the out of the ordinary, by definition, what the state can’t cope with – grows out of a need – can only survive as long as the need stays – if the state sector can cope, we’re not needed”

“Bringing in a perspective from people not paid to do the job. There is a unique quality to this – voluntary organisations have a lot to offer”

“The voluntary sector are the grassroots – in touch with what people want” “We are a known quantity and are trusted”

Partnership working was seen as crucial but the need to improve communications and share knowledge was seen as a key factor in achieving this:

“We’re not very good at sharing good stuff”

“Partners don’t know what they don’t know – let us show them how to open doors”

The County Voluntary Council (PAVS) was seen by several participants as a potential key facilitator in building the necessary culture and practice of partnership working and helping to achieve a degree of coordination.

6.1 Outcomes from TAG focus group session

The second TAG focus group session considered the role of the sector in a Learning Network for Pembrokeshire. In the light of the difficulties experienced in many of the interviews that had taken place, it was decided to start the session with finding out what the term ‘Learning Network’ meant to members.

A shared vision and sense of purpose and belonging were mentioned, along with opportunities to work together to prevent duplication, share ideas and resources, and build on good practice. ‘Trust’ was highlighted as a key word, and a network would be learner-led, providing an enabling framework in which participation in learning can be widened and achievements celebrated.

Members were asked to identify who they thought should be a part of the Learning Network, and what they considered to be the criteria for success. The responses to the latter are detailed below:

Criteria for success of a Learning Network

Transparency
Increase in learning participation
The right people and commitment
Clearer information
Directory of who does what
Web site/Notice board – sharing of up-to-date information
Continuous membership – funding
Still here in 5 years time
Key driver to keep momentum and keep on track
Tangible examples of where policy has been influenced
Learner ownership – pride
Access to specialists
Joined up, coordinated approach

Finally, consideration was given as to the benefits for the sector in participating in a Learning Network. Many benefits were highlighted, including a potential increase in volunteering and community action, greater awareness across the county of opportunities within the sector, being equal players and influencing decisions, and more access to greater resources and knowledge.

6.2 The role of the Voluntary and Community Sector in other Learning Networks

As part of this and the wider collaborative research, two very different Learning Networks operating in Wales have been investigated. For the purposes of this report, there is a focus on the role of the Voluntary and Community sector in each, and determining models of good practice that could be adopted for the sector in Pembrokeshire.

The two Learning Networks considered were:

- RISE – a cross-sectoral Learning Network extending across the five counties of Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Torfaen, Monmouthshire, and Newport
- CARMARTHENSHIRE Learning Network – a project funded network covering the county of Carmarthenshire

A brief overview of each model and the role of the sector is provided here, but further information is included in Appendices 11 and 12.

6.3 RISE

RISE is a learning network that developed as a result of the CORUS closure, and in the light of a survey which indicated 65% of the population in the five counties of working age had no intention of taking part in any form of learning for the foreseeable future. Securing over £20 million of European funds has enabled RISE to work towards its objectives of attracting new learners, establishing an extensive network of branded learning centres, and building a stable partnership base. Learners are actively involved at all levels and at all stages through a range of mechanisms from Learning Advocates to Learner Forums.

The Voluntary sector

The Voluntary sector has played a key role in their Learning Advocates initiative. These advocates promote learning in their local communities and receive training support from voluntary sector bodies as well as Learning Development Officers. They play a key role in the promotion of learning and in support of the widening participation agenda. In support of this agenda, achievements have also been made in areas where the voluntary and community sector have had an important role to play, including:

- Grassroots working with community groups and individuals
- Using the right language by using learning and local community groups to evaluate promotional material
- Tapping into networks, new community learning groups and fora
- Developing a range of 'hook' courses that are innovative, fun and build on what the learner wants
- Bite size learning chunks that are manageable without long term commitments that allow flexible delivery

Partnership working

RISE has established a 3-tier organisational structure (specific details regarding the structure are contained in Appendix 11), and have worked hard to achieve their objectives in relation to partnership working. Agreement on a core Vision and Key Principles was paramount, and through extensive consultation they have achieved the major developments related to areas such as Curriculum initiatives, Funding strategies and a Training programme.

Quality Assurance

Partners can benefit from the development of a 'Good Practice and Quality Framework' where local learning development issues can be considered and addressed strategically, and ensuring accessible, appealing, and responsive learning opportunities are available.

Guidelines were developed for Learning Centres, Learning Action Centres, and Workplace Centres (similar to the approach used by Learn Direct), whereby providers are required to meet specified standards before being included in to the RISE 'brand'. These standards form a core part of the quality assurance process for key areas such as learner and tutor support, connectivity etc. Voluntary organisations in the areas are represented on the RISE partnership, actively participate in Learning Development Committees, and those who are training providers have met the RISE standards for learning delivery.

The role of the County Voluntary Councils (CVC's) has been important to the development of the Learning Advocates volunteer initiative, and the use of RARPA (Recognising and Recording Performance and Achievement) standards set by NIACE to measure the benefits and/or outcomes of informal and non-accredited learning (much of which is offered through voluntary organisations) has been key to the development of a framework for learner progression.

6.4 Carmarthenshire Learning Network

The Carmarthenshire Learning Network arose from the need to widen participation in Lifelong Learning identified by the local Community Consortia for Education and Training (CCET). There was a need to ensure that 'first steps to learning' were provided for, and that learners were supported and encouraged to progress to formal, accredited education and training.

A very clear need was also identified to engage with learners who had not recently accessed post-compulsory education or training and those who may have had negative learning experiences, and one of the goals of the network in the first phase was also to develop the capacity of training providers to respond more effectively to the community's learning needs.

Funding was initially obtained through European funds for two years up to 2005, and further ESF funds have now been secured for a second period up to 2007.

Six Learning Forums are based around the six geographical areas already identified for Community Regeneration purposes and these bring together learners, providers, and agencies in the area. A strategic plan for provision is developed through the termly meetings, based on learner needs, and this is then fed in to the local CCET. There is a Community Learning Officer to take the project forward in each area as well as in the first phase of the network, a Learning Officer who worked specifically with voluntary sector organisations across all areas.

The Voluntary Sector

The Voluntary sector has a key role to play in the network. The local County Voluntary Council, CAVS, is one of the strategic partners, and there are sector representatives on the Learning Forums. There was already an established Learning Forum for the voluntary sector, and the dedicated Learning Officer was appointed to work directly with the sector to ensure full involvement. To meet the widening participation agenda, it was important to work with voluntary organisations on the ground in touch with the 'harder to reach' groups.

Work undertaken with these organisations was primarily focused on identifying the types of learning activities and responding to the needs. Initially, some voluntary sector stakeholders had maintained that such activities should be delivered by the sector itself (or tutors working with them) but in practice this didn't happen and the same range of training providers as delivered other network courses delivered those.

Partnership working

The network is based on a partnership model involving ten diverse organisations, which played very different roles in the life of the community. It was important that partner organisations adopted a shared vision for the network, which also provided an opportunity to foster collaboration between providers involved in a wide range of initiatives designed to broaden access to learning. Over time, structures developed to inform future collaboration opportunities and the feeling was that partnership working through the network would continue for as long as there was funding to sustain it.¹²

The strategic management of the network was undertaken by the Technical and Operational Group, and the operational management by the Project Manager.

¹² Evaluation of the Carmarthenshire Learning Network, NFER final report, September 2005

6.5 Conclusions on the role of the Voluntary and Community sector in a Learning Network for Pembrokeshire

The research undertaken highlights a number of important issues about the possible role of the Voluntary and Community sector in a Learning Network for Pembrokeshire.

Firstly, it is clear that more work needs to be done in clarifying in general terms the concept of a 'Learning Network' as many organisations and individuals participating in this research were unable to formulate a clear response to key questions including the term 'Learning Network'. Only once a clear understanding has been reached on this can the process of then engaging in that network begin.

From those in the sector who felt more able to contribute to the questions asked about the development of a Learning Network, there was evidence of general support and enthusiasm for this and a generally positive evaluation of the possible contribution that the sector could make.

Participants identified three interrelated roles in particular that the sector could perform in establishing an effective Learning Network for Pembrokeshire.

- The sector could operate as a training provider, offering specialist and complementary provision to enhance the offering by other providers. In this respect the sector's closeness to the 'grassroots' was seen as especially valuable in providing flexible and consumer led learning opportunities that are responsive to community needs. Niche provision of learning opportunities reflects the specialist knowledge that has arisen within the sector as it has grown by responding to those needs.
- The sector's closeness to grassroots' concerns and needs, and the voluntary status of key personnel within the sector, was seen as making the sector particularly effective as an advocate and interpreter of community needs to learning providers. It was also seen as providing a potential signposting service to specialist sources of training from within the sector, and a more general information service to enable community members to discern and access learning opportunities across the board, and to act as advocates for learning within the community.
- The resources of the sector could be more fully recognised and utilised, it was felt by some, in providing supportive services to enhance the quality in the provision of learning opportunities across the sector. Indeed the sectors' access to both grassroots concerns, and specialist knowledge and experience, could also be used to enhance the quality and relevance of training and educational programmes provided to professionals and others working in areas impinging upon the interests of particular special interest groups (e.g. users of mental health services).

For any of the above roles to contribute to the building of an effective role for the sector in developing a Learning Network for Pembrokeshire, it was seen as vital that the sector be fully involved in the ongoing strategic planning process that would be such an integral part of developing and sustaining the Network. An important part of the process of achieving the desired level of strategic input is an increased focus upon partnership working and improved communication within the sector.

For the sector to effectively play its role in this respect, however, it was felt essential that it is treated as a true and equal partner by others and that it achieves parity of esteem. Recognition of, and an understanding and respect for, the cultural differences between partners will be key to ensuring a firm foundation from which a successful and effective Network can evolve. In addition, consideration needs to be given to the capacity of the sector to fully engage in the Network and how it will be represented and consulted.

In the context of developing an integrated and sustainable approach to training in the sector, it is necessary to secure funding that encourages co-operation over competition and a strategic approach that is less project led, and more focused on long term planning over budget driven short term projects, one that is designed to encourage and enable partnership working and reduce duplication of effort.

7. Conclusions

This report has explored the current provision of adult and community learning opportunities provided by the Voluntary and Community sector in Pembrokeshire, innovative developments in delivery and planning, and methods for identifying and sharing learner needs. Two models of Learning Networks from other areas of Wales have been explored with a particular focus on the role the Voluntary sector had to play in each of these, and consideration of the role of the sector in a Learning Network for Pembrokeshire has been discussed.

7.1 Mapping of current provision

It is clear that a wide range of adult and community based learning courses are being successfully delivered by the Voluntary and Community sector, and there are indications of prospects for future growth, as discussed at the conclusion of section 2.

As discussed, much of the training provided is 'on demand', with no core funding. It is suggested that developing a strategic plan involving effective partnership working within, and outside, the sector, must make the case for suitable sustained strategic funding as well as developing models for sustainability. Research from Estyn¹³ identified that learners generally make good progress as a result of their involvement in ACL courses and that the skills gained such as confidence and self-esteem helps take them further on the road of learning, but that progress of these learners tends not to be well-tracked and evidence of progression is anecdotal. In this respect recent research by NIACE¹⁴ on measuring 'soft outcomes' of informal or non-accredited learning, such factors as growth in self confidence, improved communication skills and educational aspirations, may be worth investigating in arguing for new funding models to help deliver strategic benefits and making the case that formally accredited learning is not the only type of learning worth providing or pursuing.

7.2 Identifying and sharing information on learner needs

In respect of identifying and responding to learner needs, appropriate methodologies for recording and sharing information should be explored. The development of the Pembrokeshire Education Portal to provide a 'shop front' for the sector, will be beneficial in promoting training opportunities to current and potential learners, but needs to be linked to co-ordinated activities and partnership working.

This research has also identified, however, that technical and administrative infrastructures, and even strategically directed funding to facilitate partnership working to better map and meet learner needs is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of achieving the beginnings of an effective Learning Network in which the Voluntary and Community sector have an equal part to play. What is also required is mutual understanding and dialogue to address and harmonise (not suppress) cultural differences between partners and the community interests they represent, in order to facilitate effective partnership working that respects and values the diverse needs and strengths to be found within and outside of the sector.

Demand for additional subjects reflects primarily the particular requirements of the sector, with a high degree of specialist requirements such as training in arts marketing, and community transport.

¹³ Widening Participation in adult community-based learning: A survey of best practice, Estyn, 21st June 2004

¹⁴ Catching Confidence: the nature and role of confidence – ways of developing and recording changes in the learning context, NIACE, 2005

7.3 Delivery models

This research has explored a number of delivery models to gain a better understanding of the ways in which learners may benefit from less formal arrangements, and the potential for these to dovetail into more mainstream offerings, with consideration of sustainable methods of delivery. The potential of technology, especially on-line learning, to resolve issues of geographical access and reduce costs is considerable, but it is necessary to be aware that this is just one form of learning, and there is a need to balance the costs of up-skilling trainers and potential learners, and developing technical infrastructures, against the potential benefits and savings. It is also important to keep in focus the social context of learning, and the contribution that social interaction makes to the overall richness and benefit of the learning experience.

Whatever the specific delivery mechanisms, adopting an approach that is learner-led helps to give previously disempowered learners a sense of power and confidence, and increases motivation. Partnership working enables providers to draw upon the specialist experience in particular sectors to place the learner, with all their learning needs, including the social and interpersonal context within which the learning process is facilitated, at the centre of the picture. If there is a particular strength that the Voluntary and Community sector exhibits, it is surely this experience of seeing the learner in a holistic context on their home ground, and it is this particular perspective that must be retained and built upon if the sector is to make the best of the opportunities that participating in a planned programme of partnership development can bring.

7.4 Contribution to a Learning Network

As previously indicated, building an effective Learning Network will require commitment in continuing to develop mutual respect and understanding, and embracing a shared strategic vision that puts the needs of the learner at the centre. There needs to be a clear understanding of the concept of what a Learning Network is for the sector to 'buy in' to this vision, and to be clear about the benefits and agendas that can be genuinely subscribed to that transcend particular sectional interests. In this context an understanding, and appreciation, of the diversity of the sector is fundamental, as it is often the very differences between organisations and the communities they represent and are embedded in, that makes partnership working in pursuit of a common strategy both challenging and potentially so effective.

There has therefore to be a clear delineation of the generic values and culture of the sector as a whole, the grasping of an appropriate *unity-in-diversity*, and an attempt to map out a clear role for the sector in providing a unique but complementary and specialist provision within adult and community based learning in Pembrokeshire.

Research indicates that *"funding must encourage partnership rather than competition among institutions, and be founded on regular and structured mapping of all stakeholder needs and strategic planning"*.¹⁵ As suggested above, if the development of a Learning Network is to result in the provision of sustainable opportunities in Pembrokeshire, the case must be made for appropriate models of funding that will provide the necessary basis for planning and delivery of integrated needs-led services.

¹⁵ Best practice approaches to achieving parity of esteem in education and training, Newidiem, February 2003

Recognising and drawing on the particular strengths and experience of individual providers can only enhance efficient use of resources whilst driving up quality standards. The success of the RISE network, for example, has been in part due to the ability to recognise and build upon the strengths that each partner had to bring to the network. The recognition that the voluntary sector, for example, has much to offer in the way of specialist knowledge and expertise in engaging 'harder to reach' groups and is in touch with the 'grassroots' learners was capitalised on in RISE through their involvement in the Learning Advocacy scheme and is an example of the benefits that the sector can bring to the development of a network model.

Government-set targets for lifelong learning presented in the context of 'The Learning Country'¹⁶ strategy, recognises that widening participation of adult learners, particularly those in adult community-based learning, will help towards the achievement of those targets identified within the strategy as the need for policy and programme development 'to be undertaken on the basis of partnership with all those who can contribute to success using effective consultation; the least possible bureaucracy; and encouraging genuine commitment to work across organisational boundaries with partners playing to one another's strengths'.

Quality of provision has been mentioned in a number of different areas of this report and the requirements of organisations such as Estyn with regard to adult and community based provision means that all sector providers operating in this area will need to meet these standards. In addition, between 2005-2008 ELWa is expected to invest £1.75 billion in learning and skills in Wales¹⁷. Improving the quality of learning delivery is key, and a Provider Performance Review (PPR) system has been developed by ELWa to build a comprehensive overview of each provider's quality and performance. PPR is being implemented to put into effect powers (Learning and Skills Act 2000) to assess the quality of the provision funded by ELWa, and take judgements about quality into account in deciding which providers to continue to fund.

There is much experience of working within quality frameworks such as Estyn across other providers, e.g. Learning Pembrokeshire and Pembrokeshire College. The Voluntary and Community Sector, however, are less familiar with the inspection framework, although that is not saying that they are not already meeting the quality standards. Although a small number of staff within the sector have undertaken relevant quality training, this does need to be widened out and the sharing of information and skills will be critical to ensuring that every provider within the Voluntary and Community sector is able to work within the Estyn framework.

¹⁶ The Learning Country: A comprehensive education and lifelong learning programme to 2010 in Wales, August 2001

¹⁷ ELWa web site, www.elwa.org.uk

8. Recommendations

The key recommendations from this research should be viewed in the context of the overall conclusions detailed above, and reflect the possibilities for the Voluntary and Community sector to play a positive and active role in helping to develop an effective adult and community based Learning Network in Pembrokeshire.

- Further research should be carried out in order to fully map current provision across the sector. The present research to establish base line data on provision primarily relied upon responses to a questionnaire, which is always going to produce a partial response. It is likely that more labour intensive methods, such as personal visits, will be necessary to fully engage organisations currently delivering training, before a fuller and more definitive picture of current levels of provision can be arrived at
- Consideration should be given to the way in which information gathered on provision and learner needs could be mapped using a Geographical Information System (GIS) such as that used in the Local Authority. This would enable better identification of issues relating to geographical access, demographic factors, local resources, and local needs. Information gathered from within the Voluntary and Community sector could be usefully entered into a central database which could in turn feed in to wider information systems reaching current and potential learners, such as the Pembrokeshire Education Portal.
- True to the principle that an Information System is only as reliable as the information put into it, it is recommended that further work is carried out with organisations to encourage them to improve their recording of information relating to learner needs, met or unmet. Training may be required to encourage organisations to value such information and develop confidence in accessing and interpreting it.
- Support should be given to those organisations considering developing accredited learning in the future, as well as to those who wish to look at improving quality of provision overall.
- There are a high number of staff involved in the delivery of training, and efforts should be made to build on their expertise, and find out what may be needed in terms of support.
- In the context of working to the Estyn quality framework for adult and community learning provision, it is recommended that the Good practice guide for Voluntary Organisations and the Common Inspection Framework¹⁸ is adapted for use in Pembrokeshire. Whilst this guide is based on the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) in England, the general principles of the framework are similar to Estyn and could be easily adapted to provide an excellent introduction for Voluntary and Community organisations new to this approach, as a first step towards working within the Estyn framework.
- Much training is currently delivered at the premises of the organisation providing the training. The potential for capitalising on this and promoting the potential use of the training facilities to other providers or organisations should be explored as a way of providing an additional income stream to support activities.

¹⁸ Good practice guide for Voluntary Organisations and the Common Inspection Framework, York and North Yorkshire Voluntary Sector Learning and Skills Network, March 2003

- To ensure effective evaluation of 'soft' learning outcomes, it is recommended that work is undertaken with tools such as RARPA/Catching Confidence¹⁹ recently developed by NIACE.
- To continue to explore learner-led self-sustaining models such as the Learning Club model, and collaborative opportunities to maximise resources and skills/expertise.
- To undertake an audit of skills and interest across providers in developing on-line activities using facilities such as the Pembrokeshire Education Portal.

Recognising and valuing the contribution of the Voluntary and Community sector

This research clearly demonstrates that the sector has an important, and in many ways unique, role to play in the provision of adult and community based learning opportunities within Pembrokeshire. In preparing for the advent of a Learning Network it will be important to identify areas of particular specialist expertise that will enable the sector to play a positive role in developing this network. The idea put forward by partners in ACL research in Pembrokeshire²⁰ suggested the development of 'hubs of specialist expertise' related to particular subject specialisms, online network groups, and sharing policies such as working with vulnerable adults. This recognises the particular contributions partners have to bring to the network, and the work of these specialist hubs can be shared across the network to ensure an effective and consistent approach.

As well as recognising particular specialisms within the sector, there has to be a clear delineation and communication of the *generic values and culture* of the sector as a whole, defining a distinctive contribution within adult and community based learning in Pembrokeshire.

This research suggests that recognising the sector has an important role to play in developing the Pembrokeshire Learning Network, and defining this role, will require work in relation to raising awareness of the concept of a Learning Network, and it is recommended that a programme of awareness raising events and engaging in further dialogue is required to ensure adequate 'buy-in' to the concept.

Funding and Sustainability

In the context of developing an integrated and sustainable approach to training in the sector, it is necessary to secure funding that encourages co-operation over competition, and a strategic approach that is less project led and more focused on long term planning over budget driven short term projects. Funding should be designed to encourage and enable partnership working and reduce duplication of effort. Ultimately the funding needs to follow the learner, and this means it should be planned and distributed in such a way as to view the learner in their community based context, addressing obstacles to access and meeting learner aspirations to ensure equality of opportunity is a reality in adult and community based learning.

Issues have already been addressed regarding re-thinking funding patterns to encourage partnership working, and a holistic learner needs led approach to strategic planning and funding. If the sector is to benefit from this and remain a key player it needs to define and market actively its own distinctive contribution to providing learning opportunities. Whilst celebrating and valuing the very diversity that is part of its unique strength, it still needs to define and communicate a coherent and distinctive philosophy, and to reflect upon and promote the many examples of good practice that it has developed which can contribute to enriching the adult and community learning experience for the people of Pembrokeshire.

¹⁹ Catching Confidence: the nature and role of confidence – ways of developing and recording changes in the learning context, NIACE, 2005

²⁰ The Learning Journey: a collaborative approach to Adult and Community based learning in Pembrokeshire, Allman, March 2006

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List of Appendices

Appendix No	Description
1	Expected outputs from the research
2	Base line questionnaire (blank)
3	Data from completed base line questionnaires
4	Pro-forma structure for interviews
5	Flipchart records of the TAG focus group sessions
6	Data relating to course provision provided from participating organisations
7	Responses to base line questionnaire on the range of courses accessed outside of Pembrokeshire
8	Learning for Living
9	St John's Community Hall Learning Club
10	The Pembrokeshire Education Portal
11	RISE Learning Network
12	Carmarthenshire Learning Network