

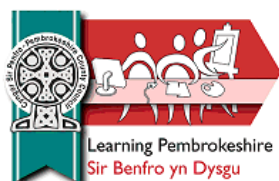
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS The Learning Journey:

A collaborative approach to
Adult and Community based learning in Pembrokeshire

A report on research undertaken by Learning Pembrokeshire,
Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services, and Pembrokeshire College

This report has been prepared on behalf of:

Learning Pembrokeshire



Pembrokeshire Association
of Voluntary Services



Pembrokeshire College



7.0 Summary and Conclusions

This report has explored current provision of Adult and Community Learning opportunities in Pembrokeshire, and innovative developments in delivery and planning that could usefully feed into the development of a Pembrokeshire Learning Network. Learning Network models from two other areas have been explored so that elements of their successes may be considered for inclusion in a model for Pembrokeshire. The impact of external influences and strategic developments on ACL have also been considered.

The principle aims motivating consideration of the development of a Learning Network for Pembrokeshire are:

- To widen participation in learning
- To better meet learner needs
- To maximise the effective use of resources

General conclusions from this research are reported below using the above criteria for success, before going on to specific recommendations.

7.1 Widening Participation in Learning requires better meeting of learner needs

From mapping of current provision it is clear that a wide range of Adult and Community based learning courses are being successfully delivered. There was some evidence of unmet need from the Voluntary and Community Sector, with a demand for additional subjects being identified by some respondents to the research into ACL provision in this sector (see Section 2). In part, this may reflect the particular requirements of the sector, with a high degree of specialist requirements such as training in arts marketing, community transport, mental health service users' rights, and also the preference for in-house training geared to the needs and cultural profile of particular organisations and their volunteers.

Effective partnership working and sharing of information may help to better integrate the identification and fulfilling of unmet needs in this area into the wider context of Adult and Community based learning provision. This will require an understanding and respect for the fact that there are cultural differences between providers, but that a shared commitment to the principle aims of the Learning Network will ensure a firm foundation from which a successful and effective network can evolve.

The Pembrokeshire Adult Learning Survey 2005 suggests that generally there is a reasonable degree of satisfaction with the range of course subjects on offer, but that there were obstacles to participation in the form of lack of time, lack of locally available courses and at suitable times to meet the needs of those who work, and with family and work commitments. This does suggest the need to explore more flexible delivery methods, including building on experience with on-line learning delivery, but also the need to be more systematic in gathering and mapping data on the geographical distribution of learner needs, and in this respect the recommendation that a Management Information System that is integrated with GIS mapping could be very helpful.

Effective partnership working to widen access needs to encompass joint information gathering and sharing, but also strategically directed information distribution, ensuring that equal access is had by all sectors of the community to relevant information on opportunities available from all providers. The Pembrokeshire Education Portal has a significant role to play in delivering such an outcome, already being recognised across Wales as a leading-edge development, but consideration also needs to be given to widening and promoting access to such on-line resources. In this respect the '*Learning for Living*' project exemplified good practice in providing access and support to learners who had previously been unable to fit into more traditionally structured learning opportunities.

There are many good examples, some of which are discussed above, where partnership working is taking place, on a formal and sometimes less formal basis to maximise learner participation. The key in all these cases is the recognition that barriers to learning can lie both in an individual's personal history – e.g. in previous unsatisfactory educational encounters, lack of confidence, lack of belief that things can get better etc, and in objective social conditions, such as lack of financial resources, inadequate public transport, and domestic responsibilities.

Adopting an approach that is learner-led helps to give previously disempowered learners a sense of power and confidence, and increases motivation, whilst partnership working enables providers to draw upon the specialist experience in particular sectors, from co-ordinating social support, to information management, to appropriate interpersonal skills in working with particular disadvantaged groups.

The key here is that what is being offered are learning opportunities that are based upon the multi-dimensional needs and aspirations of learners. Widening participation can only proceed on the basis of providers working together to identify and meet the needs of those who are not currently engaged in the learning process, and not on attempting to fit them into existing systems that they currently find inaccessible for whatever reason.

Learner representation across all levels of the network will make learners partners in the strategic planning process and ensure that their aspirations play a key part in driving the direction of ACL provision, thus resulting in greater participation, increased levels of satisfaction, and the development of a positive learning culture.

7.3 Maximising the effective use of resources

Building an effective Learning Network will require commitment, as providers continue to work on already excellent beginnings in developing mutual respect and understanding, and embrace a strategic vision that puts the needs of the learner at the centre of their shared mission. The rewards in terms of widening access are clear, but also the increased efficiency of the ACL sector as a whole. The new model must be essentially evidence and intelligence driven if it is to be learner centred, and a number of initiatives to improve information gathering, collection, and dissemination have already been discussed.

Matching resources to needs, avoiding duplication, and drawing on the particular strengths and experience of individual providers can only enhance efficient use of resources whilst it drives up quality standards. The need to develop a robust quality framework will be essential to ensuring that providers operating within the network meet the requirements for quality provision as set down by Estyn and ELWa.

Some providers will already be familiar with this approach, such as the Lifelong Learning Manager in Learning Pembrokeshire who has already been trained as an Estyn Additional Inspector, and all Lifelong Learning Co-ordinators are peer assessors. Pembrokeshire College's community provision is also managed by a Community Leader who is an Estyn peer assessor. The Voluntary and Community Sector, however, are less familiar with the inspection framework. Although a small number of staff have undertaken peer assessor training, this needs to be widened out and the sharing of information and skills will be critical to ensuring that every member of the network can achieve the quality criteria, and joint training arrangements on issues such as preparation for self-assessment reviews and inspections should be opened up to all.

8.0 Recommendations

The key recommendations from this research support the reconfiguring of the existing learning infrastructure in Pembrokeshire to develop a flexible, cost effective, and quality-focused Learning Network, responsive to learner needs.

Implementing these recommendations will go a considerable way to resolving many of the issues identified with widening participation and building best practice in Adult and Community based learning identified by Estyn¹. They will also support the strategic objectives of key policies and strategies from other organisations central to strategic developments in ACL provision, such as the Welsh Assembly Government, and ELWa. At the same time, the research has been undertaken in the context of the local environment and operating policies and is representative of the partners and the sectors they represent.

The recommendations detailed on the next page will enable the following key outputs from the Pembrokeshire Learning Network:

- A strong, single branded, learner-led network, recognisable to all.
- Quality ACL provision.
- Maximising use of all resources available, which includes venues, trainers and back-office functions.
- A set of protocols for sharing of information, resources, and policy development to support more effective strategic planning.
- Hubs of expertise.

¹ Widening participation in adult community-based learning: A survey of best practice, Estyn, 21st June 2004

The Pembrokeshire Learning Network – branding and structure:

- To develop a strong, single brand for the Pembrokeshire Learning Network, which includes shared promotional and marketing materials and events.
- To develop a robust quality framework for delivery of Adult and Community based learning provision within the Learning Network. This framework will include:
 - Self-assessment tools based on the Estyn model (for the Voluntary and Community sector it is also recommended that consideration be given to adapting the Good Practice Guide: Voluntary Organisations and the Common Inspection Framework as an initial introduction to the Estyn Framework²)
 - A programme of continuing professional development for all ACL tutors
 - Ensuring effective evaluation of 'soft' learning outcomes, working with tools such as NIACE RARPA/Catching Confidence recently developed.
- To develop a set of protocols and effective systems for sharing of:
 - Information on learner needs, provision, community venues, trainers
 - Back office functions such as health and safety checks, CRB checks delete etc.
 - Resources such equipment, learning materials, venues, tutors, and finances
 - Policy development, for example appropriate protocols for working with vulnerable adults
- To develop '*hubs of specialist expertise*' within the Learning Network. These 'hubs' may be related to particular subject specialisms, online network groups, and sharing policies such as working with vulnerable adults. The development of such hubs recognises the particular contributions partners have to bring to the network, and the work from these can be shared across the network to ensure an effective and consistent approach.
- To appoint an Independent Management Team and Network Co-ordinator with overall responsibility for driving the direction of the network, ensuring adherence to the quality framework, and co-ordinating activities.

² Good practice guide: Voluntary Organisations and the Common Inspection Framework, York & North Yorkshire voluntary sector learning and skills network, March 2003. 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.

The Pembrokeshire Learning Network - Meeting Learner Needs:

- To develop a web-based database of provision, accessible to all (current and future learners) using the Local Authority's GIS, and infrastructure of the evolving Pembrokeshire Education Portal.
- To develop a web-based database of learner needs linked to the Local Authority's Geographical Information System (GIS), to enable ongoing evaluation of, and responses to, adult and community learning needs on a geographical basis.
- To ensure provision continues to be based on learner needs, and delivered in a way which is most appropriate for learners in terms of issues such as location and delivery methods. This includes building on work already undertaken in exploring new models of delivery, for example Learning Clubs, e-learning, and the Pembrokeshire Education Portal.
- To develop a more effective and seamless learner support system at all stages of the "learning journey" from initial engagement through to informal and formal learning activities, to include Basic Skills Assessment and Referral systems.

The Pembrokeshire Learning Network - a learner-led approach:

- To develop mechanisms for involving learners in planning, for example building on the Learner Forums already established by Learning Pembrokeshire, and developing the Learning Champions initiative in the Voluntary Sector.

Sustainability

To achieve these outputs and to secure the longevity of the Learning Network, consideration must be given as to how a Network of this type can be sustained. It will certainly be necessary to consider ways in which future funding mechanisms for all providers will work, and some kind of reconfiguring of this may be required.

A funding mechanism which is learner-led (i.e. it follows the learner along their "learning journey") would almost certainly be appropriate here, and where the Network is taking responsibility as a whole for meeting targets set by funders, then the approach to maximising resources, sharing good practice, and development of protocols for sharing will almost certainly help.

However, critical to the success of the Learning Network will be the appointment of an Independent Management Team as outlined above to drive it forward and ensure the integrity of the 'brand'. It will be necessary to secure funding for this from the outset, with the recommendation that if project funding (e.g. European) is secured for say an initial 2 year period, that a clear, sustainable exit strategy is developed for the team and network as a whole during this time. This should include considering the setting up of a separate legal entity, for example, along the lines of a social enterprise model such as a community interest company.