

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

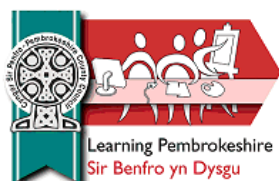
The Learning Journey:

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



Executive Summary

Through the ELWa Common Investment Fund, funding was received in Pembrokeshire to undertake research into Adult and Community based learning provision across the Local Authority (Learning Pembrokeshire), Pembrokeshire College, and the Voluntary and Community Sector. The overall aim of the Fund is to support closer collaborative working in the delivery of Adult and Community based Learning (ACL) to maximise resources, remove nugatory competition, and meet learning needs.

This report explores current provision of ACL opportunities in Pembrokeshire, examining the content of the learning provided, how it is planned and funded, and issues regarding delivery. Methods of identifying learner needs are described, and opportunities to enhance provision through better co-ordination of information and resources are explored, along with 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 reviewed so that elements of their success may be considered for inclusion in a model for Pembrokeshire. The impact of external influences and strategic developments on ACL have also been considered.

Mapping of current provision indicates that a wide range of ACL courses are being successfully delivered, with no evidence of regional inequalities or discrepancies across the County. There was some evidence of unmet need from the Voluntary and Community Sector, which may in part reflect the particular requirements of the sector, with its high degree of specialist needs such as training in arts marketing, and community transport, and also the preference for in-house training geared to the needs and cultural profile of particular organisations and their volunteers.

Further research in the form of 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 learners' participation. For example, many adult learners said that they did not have sufficient time to take up learning opportunities, and that there was a lack of courses available locally and at suitable times to meet the needs of some individuals 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.

No evidence was found of significant duplication among providers, although the fact that around 15-20% of output was planned and not delivered suggests that anticipating demand accurately presents a challenge for ACL providers.

Delivery methods have been considered including new methods being pioneered by all of the three main providers. There are particular priorities emerging from the pilot projects undertaken as part of this research, which include:

- The need to develop creative delivery methods that better address the learning styles of individuals who may have difficulty benefiting from more traditional models of delivery, perhaps because of earlier negative educational experiences.
- The need to develop delivery models that address economic and social obstacles to learning, including economic disadvantage, lack of basic skills or confidence, transport and care issues.
- The scope in partnership-working of sharing expertise and experience and developing learning models
- 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 benefits of on-line learning are considered, and the development of the Pembrokeshire Education Portal is considered as a model of good practice. The Portal can be built upon by developing partnership-based strategies for promoting on-line learning opportunities. It can also serve as a platform for the further development of the required information management systems which will form the organisational and technical infrastructure required to develop the Learning Network in Pembrokeshire.

Learning Networks from other areas in Wales have been reviewed, and through focus group sessions consideration has been given to the criteria for success of a Learning Network. 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

The recommendations detailed in this report will enable the following key outputs from the Pembrokeshire Learning Network:

- A strong, single branded, learner-led network, recognisable to all.
- Quality ACL provision.
- The maximisation of the 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 specialist expertise related to particular subject specialisms, online network groups, and sharing policies such as working with vulnerable adults.

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 are detailed. 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.

The issue of sustainability, however, is central to ensuring the success and longevity of the Learning Network. The appointment of an Independent Management team will require funding to oversee and drive forward the network, and consideration should be given to the way in which the Network is formally constituted as this may have a direct impact on the way in which funds can be secured for the future.

Implementing the recommendations detailed in this report 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 Estyn. They will also support the strategic objectives of key policies and strategies from other organisations, such as the Welsh Assembly Government, and ELWa, which are central to strategic developments in ACL provision.