

REVIEW OF ADULT CONTINUING EDUCATION DELIVERED THROUGH LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN WALES

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1. INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Review

In its Remit Letter to the National Council – ELWa (NC - ELWa) for 2001-02, the Welsh Assembly Government requested the Council to

“spearhead the drive to increase participation in areas of disadvantage, and to ensure that adults who need to improve basic skills of literacy and numeracy get appropriate help” (Remit letter, 2001)

and, looking to the longer term

“begin to integrate its programmes for young people and adults into seamless provision that best supports the concept of lifetime learning.” (Remit letter, 2001)

In its Remit letter for 2002-03, the Assembly requested that the Council:

“complete its evaluation and review of adult and continuing education and to bring forward proposals for advancing this area of activity, having regard to the significance of outreach and informal learning.” (Remit letter, 2002)

and

“begin to align the pattern of learning and skills provision across Wales with the Council’s own needs assessment. As part of the re-alignment, the Council will work closely with local authorities, the business community, the voluntary sector and others to plan for significant improvements in the integrated provision of adult and community learning in local areas.” (Remit letter, 2002)

Features of Good Practice

Features of good practice in adult and community learning have been identified by the Community Education Development Centre. They identified five key areas that should be addressed to ensure functional and effective provision:

- **Access** (eg. physical access, signposting, times and forms of activities, etc.)
- **Lifelong Education** (eg. access to retraining, alternative skills, etc.)
- **Interagency collaboration** (eg. pooling resources and expertise, etc)
- **Relevant curriculum** (eg. programmes that meet the needs of the learner)
- **Governance** (eg. participation by learners in the management of provision) (CEDC AMA, 1991)

This report seeks to review each of these issues in terms of current service delivery arrangements within local authorities (LAs), draw conclusions, and recommend improvements.

BASIS FOR THE REPORT

The evidence used to inform the preparation of this report is as follows:

Desk based review

- Syniad Benchmarking Exercise, mapping of adult and continuing education (ACE) provision by LAs and that funded by other further education providers
- NFER review of existing documentation and best practice within ACE
- NIACE Trends in Adult Participation, with a boosted sample for the survey in Wales in 2001-02
- Information from the Structured Outlooks research into how ACE funding is allocated within the 22 LAs
- Annual Reports from Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales. Extracts refer to inspected provision only, which, to date, has only included ACE delivered as part of college provision.

This review also refers to several additional documents, produced by the Learning Skills Council in England, NIACE, Estyn and independent researchers and academics. These are listed in the Sources.

Field work

Fieldwork has involved interviews, meetings, and attendance at relevant forums and events, including:

- Interviews with senior officers in Local Education Authority ACE services
- Individual and group discussions with LA Senior Officers and practitioners
- Visits to all of the LAs and several colleges of further education
- Participation in Principal Adult Education Officers bi-monthly meetings
- Participation in Syniad Benchmarking Club meetings
- Visits to LEA adult learning centres

Adult Learners Forum

Observations at the Adult Learners Forum meetings and attendance at the dissemination event on 18th February 2003, have enabled us to include the views of learners. Selected quotes from the Adult Learner's Forum have been included to illustrate points.

College Outreach – Fforwm

- Observation and invited participation at Further Education outreach sector meetings through Fforwm
- Visits to college outreach centres

Estyn

- Discussions with representatives of Estyn have been undertaken.

- Participation in the Common Inspection and Handbook consultation event for the sector, about supporting documentation for the Common Inspection Framework

This review has concentrated on the adult continuing education provision made by local authorities.

The NC – ELWa needs to establish a clearly defined working relationship with the local authorities in relation to the provision of adult education.

BACKGROUND

Education acts and local government legislation have coincided with concerns for regeneration and economic development to create a complex picture of provision for adults.

“In the 1990’s, the responsibility for further education was removed from local authorities. Independent corporations were formed and nearly a century of local authority-run vocational education came to an end. With a new funding regime for accredited provision and a decline in the funding for LAs, adult education diminished in many areas of the country. The sector has been resilient, however, thanks to a variety of alliances with differing funding bodies, and the efforts of learners, tutors and providers.” (Adult Learning Inspectorate, March 2002)

When it was formed in 2001 the National Council – ELWa inherited a budget of £4.721m for the provision of adult continuing education from local authorities in Wales. The budget was based on what LAs indicated as their expenditure on ACE.

There is no specific definition of what ACE should encompass.

Towards a Definition

NFER identified that the definition of this work should be clear and relevant to the Welsh context, but broad enough to encompass a range of types of learning, learners, and delivery methods:

- It involves an organised process which enables a person to acquire new skills, competencies or attributes.
- It is undertaken by any person deemed to be an adult by the criteria of their society such as those who have completed compulsory basic education and acquired at least some of the legal rights of adulthood.
- It includes all types of learning, such as learning with and without accreditation in formal, informal and non-formal modes.
- It includes a variety of delivery modes, including tutor-directed and class-based, distance learning and self-directed learning.
- It can be undertaken in a wide range of setting, from traditional classrooms and workshops to museums and libraries, churches, public halls, public houses and the home.” (NFER, 2003)

It also includes a variety of learning opportunities such as:

- Higher Education widening participation projects
- Work-based learning programmes
- Employer training programmes
- Activities community clubs and organisations
- Private training opportunities

Between learners and government directives, including targets for basic skills, and widening participation, there is demand for a wide curriculum. Participation is voluntary with courses of varying length, including drop-in/ tasters, 1 hour or 1 day, and part-time over an extended period of time, in a wide variety of settings. The tutors and outreach workers are predominately part-time. Delivery of learning happens through a range of partnerships, sub-contracting or grant aid. Innovative projects, with different performance criteria, are funded from a variety of sources. (NIACE, LSDA. 2003)

Effective provision within adult and community learning is about getting provision right in terms of place, time, price, content, style of delivery and support.

NFER also identified that the objectives include:

- Improving economic performance
- Overcoming social exclusion
- Promoting individuals within communities

There are a variety of terms used to describe post 19 adult education and training made by LAs. ACE is variously referred to in the context of:

- Recreational vs vocational learning
- Formal and informal learning
- Accredited and non-accredited provision
- Certificated and non-certificated provision
- Teachers and tutors

The term 'accredited' is now being applied to qualifications included within Schedules 96 and 97 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000. The phrase 'certificated' is used in this report, to prevent confusion.

For the purposes of this review, the definition of ACE will include provision to adults over the age of 19, attending programmes in community locations. The type of provision includes Local Education Authority (LEA) organised courses and programmes in the community, both certificated and non-certificated.

Due to the confusion caused by the variety in the language used, for the purposes of funding and planning provision in the future, discussion with colleagues suggest that the phrase 'local authority adult and community learning' (LA- ACL) is the most acceptable compromise in use at the moment.

It should be noted that LA- ACL is only one strand in a wider strategy for achieving the National Council's goal of creating learning communities. It needs to be seen in the context of a comprehensive approach to both widening participation and raising achievement.

Nature of the sector

There are 22 local authorities in Wales.

Several of the LAs contract with the local colleges to deliver in the community on behalf of the college, and a few use their ACE allocation to contract out some of their provision.

Most of the Further Education institutions in Wales offer ACE through outreach provision, to a greater or lesser extent. In South Wales many of the colleges contract with the LAs to deliver in the community. In North Wales the colleges are the primary providers of ACE.

In 2001-02 there were 23 colleges of Further Education that the NC – ELWa contracted with; with mergers there are currently 22. The funding for these colleges comes from the NC – ELWa through a formula, referred to as the Recurrent Funding Methodology (RFM).

Additionally, the NC - ELWa contracts directly with three designated providers of ACE using the RFM:

- WEA South Wales
- Coleg Harlech/ WEA North
- YMCA

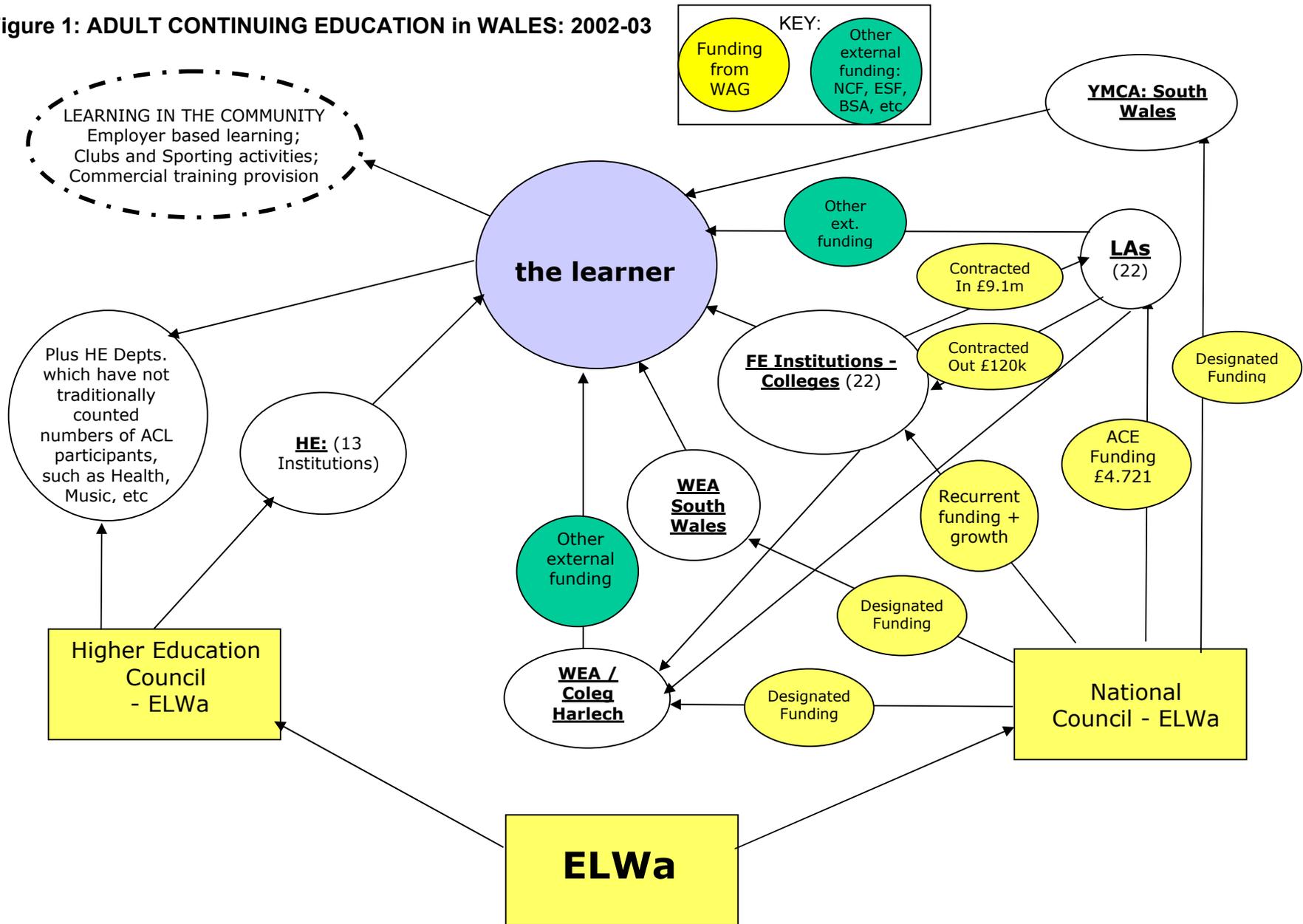
There are also 13 Higher Education Institutions in Wales with a remit to widen participation in the community, with a view to encouraging new learners into higher education. Recent funding from the Welsh Assembly Government has been allocated to four Higher Education led partnerships to widen access. In many cases this provision offers choice to the adult learner, but in some cases there seems to be direct overlap with the work of the LEAs and / or the colleges.

When unitary authorities were disaggregated in 1996, Flintshire, Denbighshire, Wrexham, and Conwy emerged from the former Clwyd. ACE in these counties, along with Gwynedd, is delivered through the local colleges and WEA. Monmouthshire, which evolved from the former Gwent, discontinued ACE but continued to provide adult education on behalf of the local college.

The colleges plan provision, and apply to the National Council for Education and Training for Wales for funding. This is allocated through the RFM.

The following diagram illustrates the complexity of the funding for adult and continuing education in Wales.

Figure 1: ADULT CONTINUING EDUCATION in WALES: 2002-03



MANDATE / CONTEXT

Learning and Skills Act 2000

Under the terms of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 (section 32) the NC for Education and Training for Wales must secure the provision of *reasonable* facilities for:

- (1) (a) education (other than higher education) and training suitable to the requirements of persons who have attained the age of 19,
 - (b) training suitable to the requirements of such persons,
 - (c) organised, leisure-time occupation connected with such education, and
 - (d) organised leisure-time occupation connected with such training.
-
- (5) (a) education includes both full-time and part-time education;
 - (b) training includes both full-time and part-time training;
 - (c) training includes vocational, social, physical and recreational training. (Learning and Skills Act, 2000)

The National Council – ELWa

Corporate Strategy

Two of the five key goals of the NC relate substantially to activities involving ACE:

Creating Lifelong Learners - *“that every person in Wales is motivated to learn throughout life and has the opportunity to learn in a way which suits their needs.”*

Learning Communities - *“that all communities in Wales value learning as a means of enabling everyone to play an active role in society.”*

- learning that is designed to regenerate a community through developing the education and skills of its people; and
- learning that strengthens the community.

This can involve:

- *learning in the community* – learning which is accessible to the local community for example in a school, library, pub, community or village hall;
- *learning for the community* – learning which supports community capacity building through activities designed to help social capital as well as individual competencies;
- *learning through the community* – informal learning opportunities which come through the learner’s voluntary participation in community activity;
- *learning with the community* – learning which comes from participation in arts, cultural, sporting and other leisure activities.

The majority of adult continuing learning through the local authorities is ‘learning in the community’ as programmes are offered in community settings rather than learning with, for or through the community,

Additionally, the four cross cutting themes reflect the activities of adult continuing education.

Corporate Plan, Priorities:

The NC – Elwa’s Corporate Plan priorities include:

1. improving the economy of Wales
 - including a focus on *those who do not have, but are close to acquiring, the essential skills needed for work.*
 - support for adult *community learning* that has the potential to contribute to the economic needs of Wales.
2. improving the supply of, and demand for, learning.

Cross cutting themes

The NC – ELWa is concerned with ensuring that four cross-cutting themes underpin these Goals. These are

- bilingualism
- social inclusion
- sustainability
- equal opportunities

As identified in research on the use of schools for adult and family learning,

“one of the many challenges that face ELWa is to increase uptake, and widen community participation in all forms of learning activities, eg. non accredited, vocational and academic. Through the development and enhancement of existing provision, and where possible, by adopting new and innovative approaches to delivery protocols, in order to reduce barriers and make the prospect of participating in the learning experience more attractive to both communities and individuals.” (RSG, 2003)

2. PLANNING

In terms of planning the provision of the ACE, the following specific issues need to be borne in mind:

Purpose

ACE requires shared understanding and trusting partnerships. The role of LAs in contributing to widening participation and reducing social exclusion needs to be built around the integration of community resources and strategic planning.

“Adult and community learning could be at the heart of neighbourhood renewal but will need to be very clear about what it has to offer residents and activists

who want to get involved in turning around their lives and their communities in ways that just might make a difference.”(Thompson, 2001)

Ownership

In their paper on scoping of achievement in non-certificated learning, Turner and Tuckett have pointed out that

“The weight of practice and research suggests that learning developed and agreed with learners, that builds upon their experiences and knowledge, and that is tailored to their individual and collective interest is fundamental to widening participation.” (Turner and Tuckett, 2002)

Choice

Above all, we must not forget the focus of our work: the learner. Although it appears to state the obvious, it must be reiterated that

“It can only be possible to widen participation if the focus is on the learners themselves. They need to be given the opportunity to decide what they want to learn, where they want to learn it and at an affordable cost.” (Walters, 2001)

CCETS

LAs are represented on local CCETs. Some are more active and involved than others. Links are being made between Lifelong Learning Subgroups and CCETs where these are lacking.

The recent review of CCETs recommended that

- CCETs should be balanced and representative across the sectors involved
- the role of CCETs needs to be clarified in terms of a planning role for local provision in response to demand as expressed in NC’s requirements.

Estyn found that

“There are not always enough of the right courses available locally for people. Managers of adult education services do not always gather enough information about what people want to study or make best use of the information they have to plan course. Since the (CCETs) have been set up, this situation has begun to improve.” (Estyn, 2001)

Because each local authority has been responsible for its planning provision, an overall strategy for Wales has not been developed, leading to fragmented and variable provision, approach to delivery, charging policies and quality assurance.

Structure

ACE provision is organised in a wide variety of ways. It has been incorporated within a lifelong learning departmental structure in at least three of the LAs, along

with library services, and recreation and leisure. In other LAs, the responsibilities for adult learning programmes lie within leisure and library services. Many of the LAs incorporate adult continuing education with youth services. In fact, many Principal Adult Education Officers have a dual role with responsibility for adult education and youth services.

It is also important to note that, unlike in colleges, ACE provision is one of a range of LA services, and does not have its own 'governing body' as such.

Collaborative working

One of the strengths of LAs is their partnership working. LAs have established good relationships with other departments within their authorities, in particular the Youth Service.

Through Extending Entitlement, LAs have the responsibility to implement and develop young people's partnerships for those between the ages of 11 and 25 to ensure that services meet their needs. This overlaps with the provision of community development for those age 19 and over.

Many LAs have built good relationships with their local colleges. Collaborative working has improved the range of learning opportunities available to the local communities. *"Local education authorities work well in partnership with colleges to provide adult learning in their areas."* (Estyn, 2002)

LAs have extensive contact with the voluntary and community organisations. Voluntary organisations act as intermediaries to ensure the involvement of learners in programmes that benefit them and the community in which they live.

LAs participate in a plethora of working relationships with other external organisations such as Communities First partnerships, Welsh for Adults Consortiums, and others brought together under project arrangements.

"Collaboration can solve learning problems – funding, delivery and support for learning. It also provides a broader basis from which to share lessons, comments, issues and outcomes. In terms of securing a better deal for learners and for getting messages across, it appears to be a model of some strength." (Swanton and Jones, 2002)

Community Learning Networks

There is evidence of learning networks already being established:

"Many areas in Wales are already committed to developing Community Learning Networks, using school and college premises in and out of normal hours and terms, adult education centres, libraries, community houses, etc. as part of their commitment to lifelong learning for all members of their communities."

These arrangements would support the wider provision for 14-19 year olds, but importantly also help to embed the idea of lifelong learning after the age of 19.”
(Learning Country: Learning Pathways 14-19)

Good practice example:

Neath Port Talbot has established a 'New Learning Network' of statutory, public, voluntary and community sector partners. It includes 16 funding partnerships, a further 13 associate partners and 12 schools. The aim of the 10 year project is to build on current provision with a focus on post-16 community education, by equipping people with greater self-confidence, higher numeracy, literacy, information and communication skills, as well as improving their relevant employment skills. By July 2002 they had reached 4000 new beneficiaries, largely between 25-50, from previously under-represented wards.

New Planning and Funding System

In the run up to the introduction of a new planning and funding system in August of 2004, the NC – ELWa has been working with the LAs to prepare for the transition. Activities have included:

- development workshops with representatives of all local authorities
- staff development and capacity building through the Investing in Quality Programme
- introduction of Service Delivery Plans for ACE provision
- a modelling exercise to test the new funding system formula, with volunteers from several LAs
- data collection workshops relating to the new Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR)

The assumption has been made that all active providers will be funded through the Learning Provision Purchasing Block of the new funding system.

Service Delivery Plans

All LAs have been asked to prepare Service Delivery Plans for ACE provision for the period April 2003 to July 2004.

These Service Delivery Plans require authorities to provide detail on:

- Needs analysis
- Co-ordination with CCETs and other strategic planning processes
- Planning and funding arrangements
- Management and Leadership
- Quality Improvement
- Links to other strategies
- Support for learners
- Curriculum areas of delivery

These plans will be used to inform the allocation of resources on an ongoing basis and the development of provision in the same way that Institutional Plans are used for FE colleges.

3. FUNDING

For the year 2001/02, the NC – ELWa inherited the budget for ACE from LAs. £4,721,000 was allocated in 2000/01 to the 22 LAs based on their submission to the Welsh Local Government Association of the amount spent on ACE in their county. It is the responsibility of each local authority to ensure that appropriate systems are in place to manage and account for public funding, including budgets relating to ACE in this case.

The overall budget, and county allocations, for 2002/03 remained the same as in 2001/02. The indicative budget for ACE for 2003/04 has not changed. The result is a net decrease in funding over three years.

Table 1: ELWa Funding Allocations to LAs for adult continuing education (2002-03)

Local Authority by Region	Total Allocation 2002-03 £
North Wales	
Conwy	9,000
Denbighshire	129,000
Flintshire	3,000
Gwynedd	9,000
Isle of Anglesey	15,000
Wrexham	120,000
Mid Wales	
Ceredigion	22,000
Powys	164,000
South East Wales	
Blaenau Gwent	419,000
Bridgend	194,000
Caerphilly	390,000
Cardiff	1,362,000
Merthyr Tydfil	58,000
Monmouthshire	3,000
Newport	476,000
Rhondda Cynon Taff	257,000
Torfaen	114,000
Vale of Glamorgan	200,000
South West Wales	
Carmarthenshire	139,000
Neath Port Talbot	326,000
Pembrokeshire	190,000
Swansea	122,000
Total	£4,721,000

Funding review

Several LAs are participating in a New Funding System Modelling exercise. This will enable the NC – ELWa to test the formula funding model on their actual provision of adult learning.

Because only six of the LAs maintained their own provision, and all of these, plus nine more, deliver programmes in the community on behalf of Further Education colleges, the modelling will look at both facets.

Other sources of funding

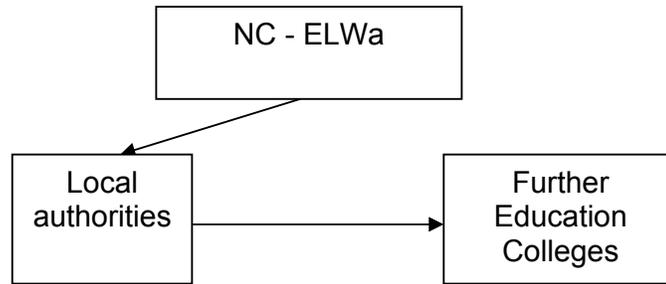
In the HMCI Annual Report for 2001, Estyn identified that some local education authority managers spend too much time trying to find funding for their programmes, which results in them spending too little time managing the services. While it is valuable that providers actively identify alternative sources of funding for their provision, there is clearly a cost involved.

Our investigation suggests that over the past decade, LAs have tapped into a wide variety of resources, including:

- Training and Enterprise Council regional project funding
- Innovation and Development Programme funding from the NC
- Learning Challenge Fund through the NC
- Further Education Funding Council for Wales (FEFCW)
- Basic Skills Agency
- European Social Fund
- Gruntvig (Socrates) European funding
- Welsh Assembly Grants for Education Support and Training
- Careers Wales through contracts to deliver advice and guidance.
- New Opportunities Funding (NOF)
- Sure Start
- Communities First
- Employment Service

Some LAs contract out some of their provision while others pass their ACE funding directly to other providers with no contractual expectations. In this case, local colleges run courses on behalf of LAs. The following diagram illustrates the relationship:

Figure 2:

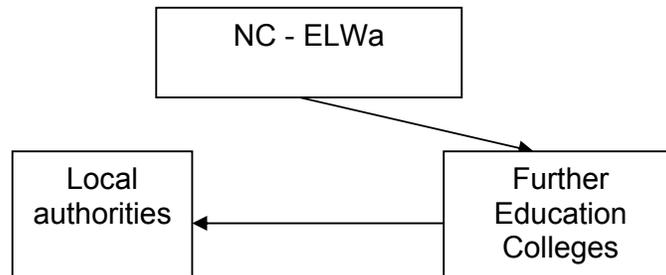


College / LEA contracting arrangements

Fifteen LAs offer accredited courses in the community on behalf of the college. In 2002-03, LAs contracted with 17 local colleges for approximately £9m worth of Third Party Contracts.

This contractual relationship is illustrated below:

Figure 3:



While these arrangements have been convenient and pragmatic in the past, it has led to a lack of transparency and accountability. Costs involved in management fees or 'top-slicing' of these contracts are variable and may not represent value for money.

Further Education Service charges

Franchise contracts with the LAs are top-sliced by the colleges, by anywhere between 7.5% and 24%, to cover management information, data collection, quality assurance, arrangements for inspection, Welsh for Adults Consortium contribution and staff development. The amount is determined by the local college and agreed with each local authority.

Table 2: Contracting In by LAs

Local Authority	Third party 01-02 £ 000's	Third party 02-03 £ 000's	Top slice %
Blaenau Gwent	422	510	12
Bridgend	272	368	20
Caerphilly	330	386	12 CG/11.5 YM
Cardiff	1,959	2,032	7.5
Carmarthenshire	407	472	15
Ceredigion	169	179	15
Conwy	N/A	N/A	N/A
Denbighshire	N/A	N/A	N/A
Flintshire	N/A	N/A	N/A
Gwynedd	N/A	N/A	N/A
Isle of Anglesey	N/A	N/A	N/A
Merthyr Tydfil	0	43	0
Monmouthshire	750	836	12
Neath Port Talbot	630	690	25
Newport	1,306	1504	12
Pembrokeshire	310	320	15
Powys	30	30	27
Rhondda Cynon Taff	500	683	10
Swansea	N/A	N/A	N/A
Torfaen	602	735	12
Vale of Glamorgan	262	262	7.5
Wrexham	N/A	N/A	N/A
	£7,949	£9,050	

Despite very positive relationships with their local colleges, many LAs are dissatisfied with the level of 'top-slice' that the colleges impose.

As can be seen from the above contacting information the amount of 'to-slice' varies considerably and does not appear to be justified by the actual activity.

Charging policy

Charging policies differ from provider to provider, including programmes delivered by LAs and colleges. This means that participants on some courses may each have paid different fees.

Good practice example:

Pembrokeshire local authority has collaborated with their local further education institutions to establish parity of fees for both college and LEA provision.

European funded projects often make free provision. This distorts attendance at other programmes as learners travel to attend free courses rather than attending courses in their own locality which they may have to pay for.

Fees charged for courses contribute to the support for ACE programmes. Some LAs are required to pass course fees for college courses back to the college.

Expenditure

Our investigation has revealed little detailed information available about the level and nature of expenditure on ACE within LAs.

The allocation of the ACE budget reflects the variation in costs associated for ACE, which differ widely across the 22 LAs. This expenditure includes:

- support for premises
- operational costs for rented facilities including local schools
- tutor costs
- travel
- co-ordination and management costs for LEA staff
- staff development

Many of the LAs use their ACE funding for premises and maintenance in support of provision for college accredited courses. The level of variation in the use of resources is illustrated as follows:

Table 3: Regional overview of ACE expenditure

South West Wales:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All LAs reported that the ELWa ACE budget is subsidised by franchising activity, though most could not accurately identify by how much. Most areas spend substantially more than their ELWa allocation of funds for ACE provision. • The majority of LAs use ELWa ACE funds mainly to support infrastructure costs. Most LAs do not receive additional funds for achievements.
South East Wales:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All LAs reported that the ELWa ACE budget subsidises franchising activity, though most could not accurately identify by how much.
North Wales and Mid Wales:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centres are used by providers and community/ voluntary groups. In many cases infrastructure costs are shared between youth, community and adult education providers. • Additional costs incurred by LAs include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • involvement in Adult Learners' Week • Allowing providers to use school buildings without a facilities fee • some 'in kind' contributions to running of CCETs • a proportion of the LEA lead officer's salary • Initial discussions with providers indicated that their

	<p>Schedule 2 funding is subsidised by ACE costs. Integrated costs of marketing, staff development, planning etc make it difficult to identify ACE-specific costs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some LAs are working with partners within the CCET to access alternative funding for specific projects.
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Source: ELWa, Structured Outlooks

Facilities

In 2001 LAs delivered provision in a total of 185 different centres. In 2002 the figure had risen to 289.

Estyn found that there is generally good accommodation in most adult learning centres where LAs deliver on behalf of colleges, with some enjoying attractive and well equipped surroundings. However, most of the buildings are only satisfactory. Some are poor, with the worst suffering from insufficient heating, lighting equipment and furnishings, and lack of complete access for the disabled in wheelchairs. (Estyn, 2002)

There has been a lack of capital investment in LA facilities used for adult learning over the last ten years. We need to consider carefully the role of the NC in resourcing and maintaining multiple use facilities.

Local authorities also have concerns about their ability to meet requirements under the Disability Discrimination Act for facilities used for adult learning.

4. PROVISION AND PARTICIPATION

Current analysis of provision

ACE data is itemised in four categories:

- **Maintained** provision is directly delivered by the LAs
- **Contracted Out** is provision delivered by another organisation on behalf of the LEA
- **Assisted** refers to learning opportunities supported by the LEA through free or subsidised provision of facilities or premises.
- **Contracted In** provision is where the learner is enrolled at an FE institution but is taught at a local authority site under a third party arrangement.

Table 4: Local Education Authority activity - categories of provision

Local Authority by ELWa region	Direct provision	Contracted out to another provider	Assisted	Contracted in from local colleges
North Wales				
Conwy			✓	
Denbighshire			✓	
Flintshire			✓	
Gwynedd				

Isle of Anglesey	✓			
Wrexham			✓	
Mid Wales				
Ceredigion	✓			✓
Powys	✓	✓	✓	✓
South East Wales				
Blaenau Gwent	✓			✓
Bridgend	✓	✓	✓	✓
Caerphilly	✓		✓	✓
Cardiff	✓			✓
Merthyr Tydfil	✓	✓	✓	✓
Monmouthshire				✓
Newport	✓			✓
Rhondda Cynon Taff	✓	✓		✓
Torfaen	✓		✓	✓
Vale of Glamorgan	✓		✓	✓
South West Wales				
Carmarthenshire	✓			✓
Neath Port Talbot		✓		✓
Pembrokeshire	✓			✓
Swansea	✓			
Total for 22 LAs	15	6	10	15
Total enrolments 2001-02	18,580	6,860	4,721	32,246

Source: ELWa

In 2001/02, fifteen LAs registered more than 32,000 learners on behalf of local colleges.

In 2001-02 the top four subjects for LEA delivery contracted in from the colleges and paid for through the RFM were in:

- Adult Basic Education
- English as a Second Language (more prevalent in counties in the South East than in the rest of Wales)
- Welsh for Adults
- ICT

Data collection

The Local authorities complete ACE data returns for ELWa Data and Analytical Services in December. The information is currently based on attendance by learners on the 1st December.

Data collection based on 1st December enrolments only capture a part of the ACE picture, due to the nature of ACE provision. Many programmes such as short courses, taster sessions, workshops, etc, are run throughout the year, often on a roll-on, roll-off basis.

The ACE Returns supersede the National Assembly AE1 forms. The information provided on the previous AE1 forms is unreliable due to variations in interpretation and guidance for filling in information.

Enrolments for Contracted In provision are included on the ACE returns. Registrations are also counted by the college on the Individual Student Record (ISR) submitted annually to the NC.

The introduction of the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) for data collection will improve the consistency of information. The LLWR is due to be implemented in the summer of 2004. However, it will take until 2006, at least, to have sufficient data through the new system to begin to identify trends.

Types of provision

After the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992, many adult learning opportunities were turned into certificated courses to attract funding. This has led to an over-emphasis on the provision of certificated provision, and reduced emphasis on making certificated provision available as and when learners demand it.

The remit of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 offers the opportunity to redress this overemphasis on certificated provision that were created as a result of the 1992 Act, and improve the appropriateness of the mix of provision on offer to learners.

Estyn identified that there are gaps in provision:

“Community Consortia for Education and Training (CCETs) have found gaps in the range of courses on offer in their area to meet the needs of local people in terms of their age range, previous experience of learning and social grouping.”
(Estyn 2002)

In order to widen participation, it is imperative that non-certificated provision is extended to appeal to those engaging in learning for the first time (or returning to learning after a period of time) in places and times appropriate to the adult learner. The opportunity for LAs to engage people in learning for the first time, or enable them to increase their confidence often comes through taster sessions and entry level courses.

It is important that the LAs offer a balance of certificated and non-certificated provision in their local communities. Where LAs are particularly well equipped to handle this role, the balance of provision should be for them to concentrate on this, with the FE sector focussing on higher level skills.

Learner comment:

Bits of paper are nice to have, but not the most important thing.

LAs deliver both certificated and non-certificated provision.

Many courses delivered in the community were certificated, primarily through the Open College Network (OCN) to attract funding.

Non-certificated learning provides opportunities to widen participation for those who, for whatever reason, do not wish to gain a qualification or may be intimidated by the certification process.

Minimum enrolments numbers are set by colleges for certificated programmes. However, LEA delivery in the community has the ability to support small size classes in some subject areas from those classes that are well attended.

Teaching through the medium of Welsh

There is limited information collated about delivery through the medium of Welsh in the community. Two LAs deliver courses through the medium of Welsh; two others report that courses were offered but there was no take-up. A further authority reports that although no ACE provision is delivered solely through the medium of Welsh, publicity materials indicate which tutors are bilingual, so students are able to choose which language they wish to use.

The WEA/Coleg Harlech offers several non-certificated courses through the medium of Welsh within the community in North Wales, including local history, 20th Century Welsh Poetry, and current affairs.

Welsh for Adults

Welsh for Adults is provided through eight consortiums in Wales, based on the former unitary authority regions (pre 1996), and made up of partners including the further and higher education sectors. Funded through the RFM from the NC, this ensures consistency of provision and fee structures, decrease in unhelpful competition, and staff development. Each has a different set-up based on local needs. The extra weighting allocated through the RFM is dedicated in varying degrees to running costs and development.

A number of LAs contract out the Welsh for Adults provision through local colleges and others which contract Welsh for Adults in from local colleges.

In 2000, Welsh for Adults represented 10.38% of certificated enrolments, but only 4.38% of the non-certificated enrolments.

Good practice example:

A Learning Challenge Fund project aims to address the deficiencies in the existing provision of Welsh for Adults programme. Cymad, Cyfrwng Iath Gwaith will establish a nationwide project to promote bilingualism, focusing on community based learning.

Basic Skills

LAs work in partnership with the Basic Skills Agency to provide literacy and numeracy courses, primarily through family learning programmes. To access funding from the BSA, however, testing must be conducted to achieve a minimum level of proficiency. This has created a barrier for some potential learners. Individuals who participate often have similar characteristics, such as low achievement rates in school, lack of confidence, lower socio-economic status.

Basic Skills through the medium of Welsh

Basic Skills Agency programmes for Literacy and Numeracy are offered through the medium of Welsh within family learning opportunities. There is insufficient information currently about other basic skills programmes delivered in Welsh.

Family learning

Family learning encompasses more than literacy and numeracy, as parents, grandparents and carers work together with their children to develop other essential skills through a variety of activities. A number of programmes and projects are underway throughout Wales. NIACE Dysgu Cymru is working with a network of Family Learning providers, and developing a Family Learning Manifesto.

There is currently insufficient information on a baseline of family learning in Wales. Initial research has identified that of the 329 schools in Wales which have adult learning in their schools, 109 offer family learning opportunities. Swansea has the highest number involved in family learning, with 40 schools participating. (RSG, 2003)

Family learning is a vital mechanism for widening participation and increasing essential skill levels. A pilot project is underway to identify innovative and practical ways to include parents, grandparents and carers in learning, involving children.

Learner comment:

Educate the mother and you educate the family.

Gender balance

Three times as many women as men participate in LA- ACL. This varies significantly from the findings of the participation survey of all adults, which identified that *“slightly more men (41%) than women (38%) are current or recent learners.”* (NIACE Dysgu Cymru, 2002) The variation may account for the fact that men tend to see learning opportunities in relation to work, whereas women will participate for a wide range of reasons.

Provision for adults with learning difficulties

There is limited provision for adults with learning difficulties. Independent living skills represented only .47% of all non-certificated provision in 2000-01. Most of the local authority learning opportunities are supplied through their Social Services departments. This is seen as separate from ACE provision.

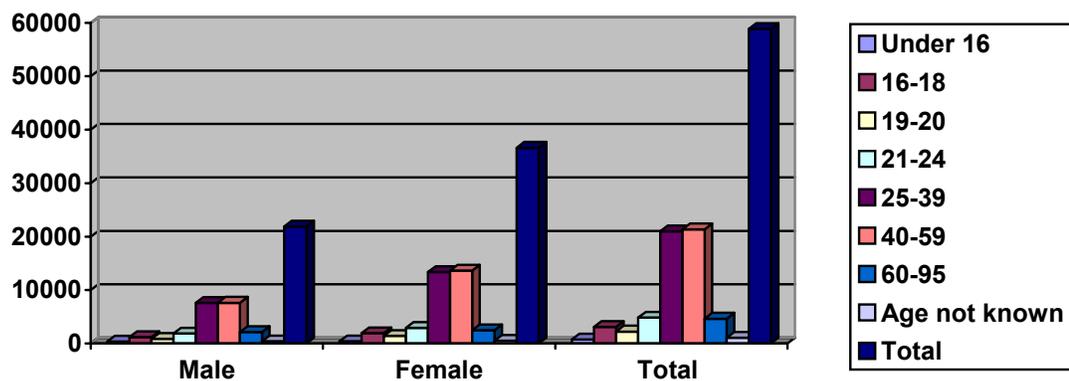
3.94% of certificated provision delivered in the community by LAs is in Independent Living Skills.

This provision includes: art, catering skills, communication skills, cooking, creative studies, drama, music, environment, health and fitness, horticulture, interior decoration, photography, pottery, national skills profile.

Participation

Initial analysis of 2001 returns show that 76% of those registered to attend part-time college provision are aged 19 and over. The majority (64% of the total) were between the ages of 25 and 60.

Figure 4: NC Further Education Part-time Enrolments all sites, 2001-02



This is down considerably from the 99-00 statistics of 91%, which was a 12% increase over the previous year.

From 98/99 to 99/00, there was a decrease in LEA provision enrolments of 5,000, at the same time that further education enrolments for the over 19s showed a significant increase.

Standard Participation Rates

Standard Participation Rates have been collated in the Regional Analysis of Participation in Wales for post-16 learners in Further Education and Work Based Learning. The following numbers are in comparison with a National Participation Rate of 100, which has been calculated by gender and age.

Table 5: Standard participation rates for Post-16 learners aged over 18 (excluding Higher Education) in 1999/2000

Unitary Authority	Standard Participation Rate	Unitary Authority	Standard Participation Rate
Isle of Anglesey	120	Neath Port Talbot	114
Gwynedd	92	Bridgend	105
Conwy	143	Vale of Glamorgan	77
Denbighshire	133	Rhondda Cynon Taff	84
Flintshire	105	Merthyr Tydfil	93
Wrexham	97	Caerphilly	91
Powys	99	Blaenau Gwent	91
Ceredigion	72	Torfaen	106
Pembrokeshire	99	Monmouthshire	108
Carmarthenshire	126	Newport	107
Swansea	115	Cardiff	68

Source: ELWa

The data in this Table includes learners participating in college courses delivered by LAs in the community, through Contracted In provision. It excludes those undertaking direct delivery through LA provision.

Interestingly, Cardiff City and County had the lowest Standard Participation Rate for participants aged over 18, based on 1999 population figures. This contrasts with their high participation rate for adult learners through LA provision.

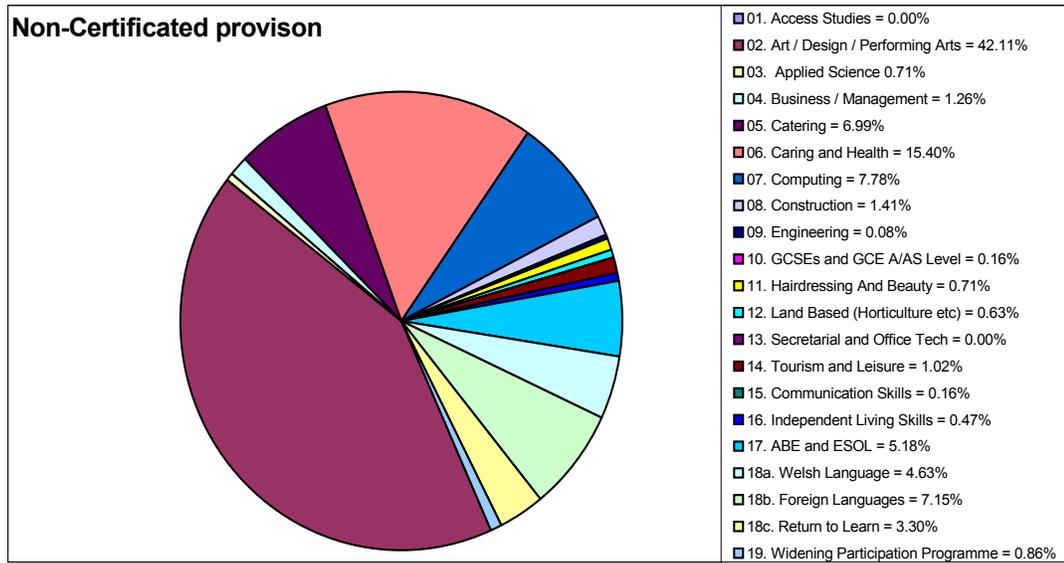
Conwy County had the highest Standard Participation Rate in 1999/00. This supports the very low level of local authority provided adult learning opportunities for the same period.

Balance of provision by subject area

Non- certificated provision

In 2001/02, there were 18,580 learner enrolments on non-certificated courses maintained by LAs at adult education centres, evening institutes, and other venues. The tables below show the balance of provision across the sector.

Figure 5: Breakdown of Non-certificated learning 2000

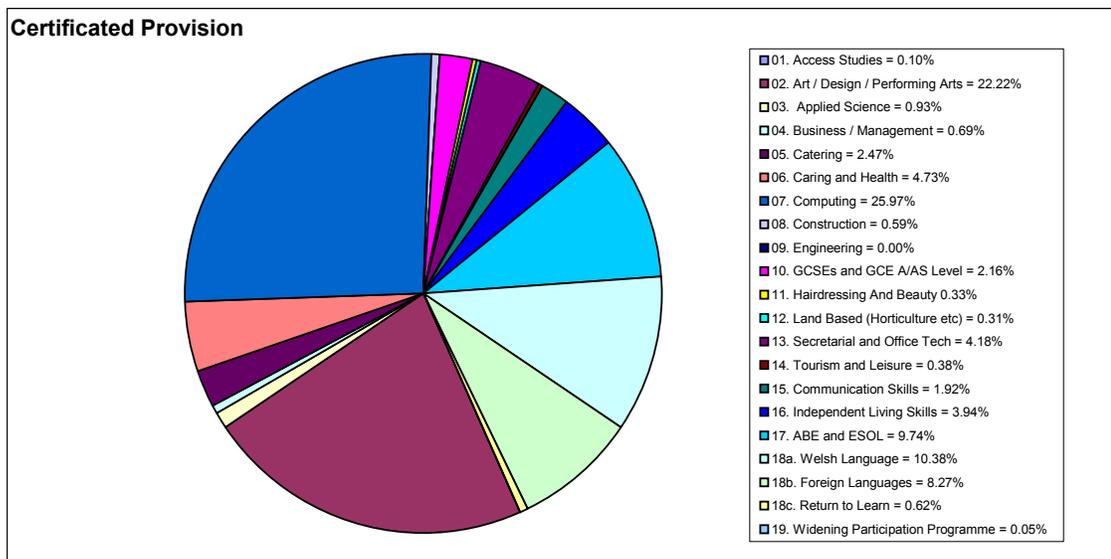


Source: Syniad Benchmarking 2003

Certificated provision

Additionally the LAs worked with another 32,000 learners through provision of certificated college courses. These learners are registered with the colleges, but attend in community locations, and are taught by tutors paid for by the LAs. Analysis of enrolments for 2000 through Contracted In provision show a wide variance in participation. Computing courses represent over a quarter of the take-up.

Figure 6: LEA provision, Certificated learning

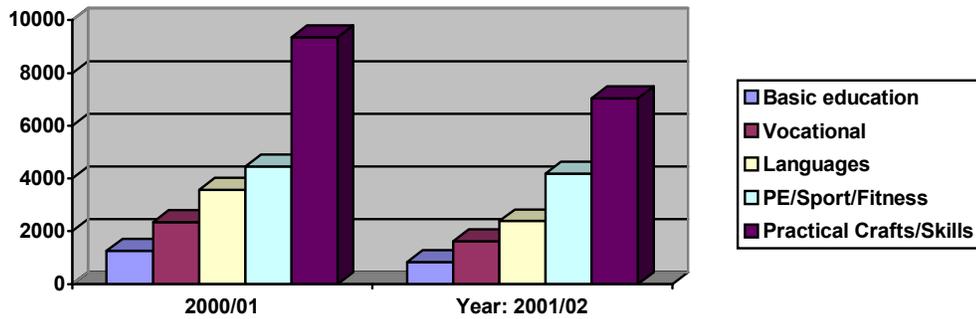


Source: Syniad Benchmarking 2003

Balance between Vocational and Recreational provision

The majority of the 18,580 non-certificated enrolments were in practical crafts/skills, with 7000 in 2001/02. Recreational, Sports and Fitness enrolments amounted to 4,200.

Figure 7: Variations in LEA non-certificated provision



Source: ELWa

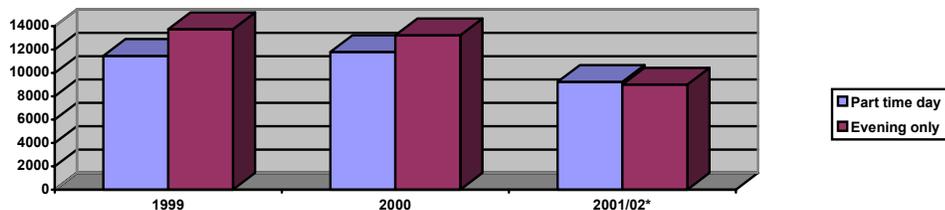
Carmarthenshire was the only County with higher numbers of enrolments in PE/Sport/Fitness activities. Ceredigion had more enrolments through vocational routes.

In some LAs a significant amount of adult learning is provided through Leisure and Recreation budgets. Enrolments through this support are not included in the ACE figures.

Balance of attendance

Enrolments for non-certificated courses were almost equally split between part-time day and evening provision.

Figure 8: Part-time provision: Day vs. Evening attendance



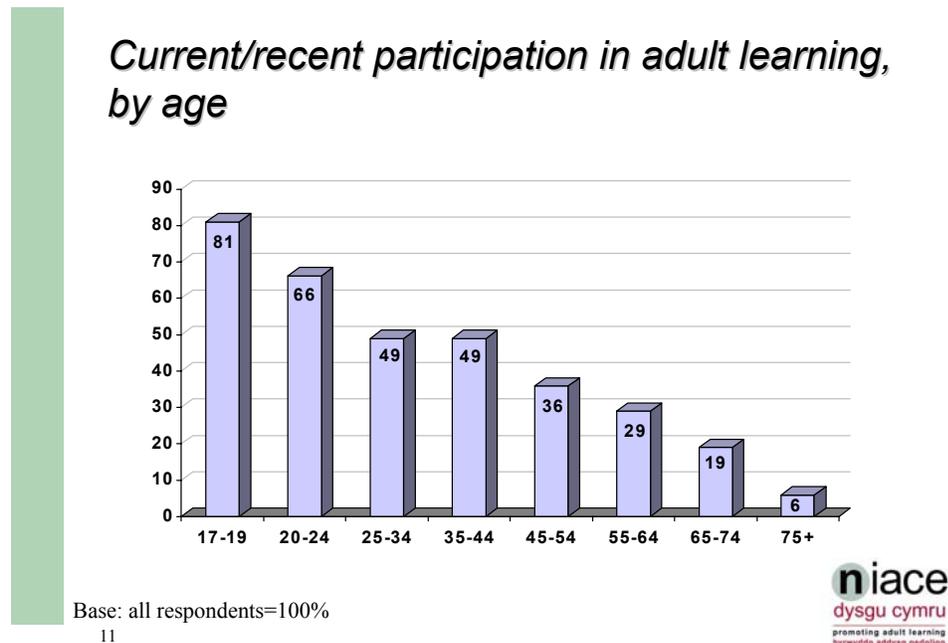
Source: National Statistics

Female enrolment in non-certificated courses outstripped male enrolment by approximately 3 to 1.

Older Learners

With the number of middle aged and retired people expected to rise considerably over the next few years, there is a pressing need to encourage older adults of working age to invest in their own learning opportunities.

Figure 9: Participation in adult learning, by age 2002



Source: NIACE Dysgu Cymru

In its participation survey 2002 sampling across all adults, NIACE Dysgu Cymru identified a serious decline in participation in learning for progressing age groups.

“In general, the older people are the less likely they are to participate in learning. Over 80% of those aged 17-19 are current/recent participants, compared with only 6% of those aged 75 and over.” (NIACE Dysgu Cymru, 2002)

“We need to increase the number of Adults involved in learning as they get older and to stop this decline!” (John Gates, Chair of the Wales Adult Learner’s Forum, 2003)

The importance of this becomes more evident as research has shown that

“learning for older people cuts health and welfare costs by encouraging independence and self-confidence. Evidence has shown that older learners are well motivated and have an increased willingness to take responsibility.”
(Bladnoch, 2000)

Learner comment:

Lifelong learning is a farce. Generally for the under 60's who have a viable employment life ahead of them.

Older learners need the chance to participate in courses of their choice. I was studying through the WEA, now it's been taken over by the University. But I don't want to get a certificate. And the course costs more!

Marketing

Marketing materials and strategies differ from county to county. It is unclear who marketing materials are aimed at. Marketing to older learners who have already participated in learning opportunities requires a different approach than reaching those who have not been engaged.

Research has shown that word of mouth is one of the most effective means of reaching into the community, and engaging people to participate. The success of LEA programmes is evident in the enrolments, and the demand, which is often greater than the availability.

Marketing of courses and learning opportunities for learners, and potential learners, varies significantly from local authority to local authority, and indeed, region to region within ELWa. There is a wide variance in the funding available, and therefore strategies, for marketing local provision.

- some authority's marketing is included within ACE funding
- some authorities incorporate marketing and printing within their local authority departments
- some authorities spend little on marketing.

For those who deliver primarily college courses, the information is available through the college prospectus, often separated into a part-time and evening leaflet.

Good practice example:

LAs in South East Wales have recently formed a Community Education Marketing group, with support from ELWa and NIACE, to co-ordinate activity. Early indications show that, through economies of scale, the co-ordination efforts will be more successful. Sponsorship funding has been made available for a workshop on marketing local authority provision, which will be open to all LAs.

The Sign Up Now campaign, which ELWa has supported NIACE to deliver, has shown successes in getting people into taster sessions. Success has been monitored through evaluation and questionnaires with providers and participants. Now in its second year, measurement needs to be made of progress from taster sessions to less ad hoc learning.

Adult Learners Week in May is also used to raise the profile of adult learning. There are a wide variety of activities involving learners and providers, and successes in adult learning are celebrated at the Adult Learner Awards. Adult learners who recognise the value of their learning are acting as ambassadors to promote lifelong learning. Evaluation of Adult Learners Week undertaken by

NIACE indicates that it is raising the profile of adult learning. However, many people see May as an inappropriate time to celebrate these learning successes, as potential learners then have very limited opportunities to explore provision (due to traditional September start dates).

Learner satisfaction

Learner satisfaction measurement is inconsistent. Course and programme evaluations are carried out, but the practice is not consistent across all provision. Many short courses are not evaluated, and there is often no method to identify reasons for people dropping out.

Information

It is imperative that learners, and potential learners, can make informed choices to influence their learning. Many new adult learners obtain information from friends and family, and trusted members of the community. Currently, information available for potential learners across LAs is inconsistent. It is important, therefore, to ensure that appropriate information is available to the right people.

Leaflets, brochures and other publicity material are produced, of variable quality, by the LAs and their associated colleges.

Learner comment:

One of the Adult Learners of the Year made a plea at the Adult Learners Forum that publicity materials need to be made available at places where people who are not currently engaged can see them. Displaying them in local colleges and learning centres only is not effective.

Some LAs have websites, but the level of information is variable as well, and information is limited to those who have access to the internet and relevant ICT skills.

The Learndirect freephone number is available to everyone, but the level of information is dependent upon providers supplying it for the databases. For short courses and informal learning opportunities this is often not kept up to date. Users of the service have found the support and relevance of information variable.

Advice and Guidance

Twelve of the fifteen authorities delivering learning in the community provide some form of advice and guidance. This ranges, however, from a full support unit, to tutors offering information about their own subject area.

There is no consistency in the provision of advice and guidance across the LAs. Requirements for advice and guidance for short courses is different from longer, more costly commitments.

Sometimes the course work is not suitable to those who are returning to learning after a significant break. (Estyn, 2001) Such cases may be a result of insufficient or inadequate advice and guidance.

It is worth noting that learners embarking on local authority provision often have a number of issues to deal with, not the least of which relate to social deprivation. This affects their capacity to progress vertically. Progression should include lateral movement in activity level, as well as participating in different types of programme delivery (eg. attending more structured courses to workshops or other types of provision).

There is a perception by some adult learners that tutors are driven by numbers, and therefore don't offer impartial advice.

Tutors delivering in the community are often in the best position to provide appropriate guidance for progression, but are often not well enough informed, or do not have the time to devote. Staff training will ensure that they have knowledge of other local authority provision, but this may not extend across other providers to offer learners the most appropriate choices. Tutors hired through direct college provision within the local communities are not provided with sufficient information to provide appropriate advice and guidance.

Learner Comment:

Negative tutors, driven by 'bums on seats', therefore want only the people who they think will finish the course – dissuade others applying.

The most successful areas of progression are where tutors teach across a range of levels. The number of learners who progress because they follow the tutor is anecdotally well acknowledged. This is particularly true where tutors work for both the local authority and the local college.

Good practice example:

A sixty year old learner started art classes at Bedwas Community College approximately 15 years ago. Since then she attended a variety of art classes with the same tutor, progressed to accredited courses, and then attended a local college and achieved 'A' level Art. Last year she participated in a University Foundation Art Course with the same tutor, exhibited her work at a University Community Art exhibition and was awarded the top prize. Five other members of the class received commendations for their work.

5. QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Current quality improvement activity in ACE provision includes

- staff development for LAs under the Investing in Quality Programme
- development of Good Practice Guides for Local authorities matching the Common Inspection Framework

Inspection evidence

Currently, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales, Estyn, inspects that part of college provision contracted to LAs for delivery.

Estyn found that most teachers are well qualified and experienced, but there are pockets where not enough have teaching qualifications. This is borne out in the Syniad Benchmarking analysis: 12 of the 16 LAs which deliver adult learning have minimum teaching qualifications for their tutors. Principal Adult Education Officers and their colleagues are considering whether there should be a recommended standard minimum level of qualification.

It is important to ensure that qualifications for those tutors working with adults are relevant. Teachers may be qualified to teach, but they need to be able to tutor adults. One of the special skills of adult tutors is their ability to work with mixed ability groups.

Learner comment:

Teaching qualifications are not as important as the ability to teach

LAs prefer to refer to their community teaching staff as tutors. Estyn found that these individuals are well motivated, work beyond their paid hours, and understand their responsibilities as most have clear job descriptions. (Estyn, 2002) Many part-time tutors spend unpaid time preparing for their classes. Their dedication is acknowledged and appreciated by local authority adult education managers.

Teaching and learning

Estyn has found good support for most adult learners in their learning. This includes agreements on what is expected of them, and their tutors, although this practice is not always offered. Those learners on college registered programmes have access to institutional student support services. However, this level of support is not usually available on courses provided in the community.

Estyn has also found that most of the teaching in adult education is good, and outstanding in a few cases. Tutors plan, and adapt course provision to their learners. There is an expectation that plans should be detailed enough to be effective, which is not always the case.

“Generally, teaching is varied and interesting and tutors have good relationships with the learners. They support the learners well and encourage them to work on their own and in groups.” (Estyn, 2002)

Learner comment:

Informal contact with tutors, breaks down barriers when you realise ‘they’re not up there with you down there’

Inspection arrangements

The Estyn Common Inspection Framework is due to be introduced for all inspection work by 2004. To prepare, LAs have been working with Syniad Benchmarking to develop good practice guides for the seven key questions. The guides are designed for tutors and managers alike to measure their practices, and are being developed in conjunction with the Estyn Common Inspection Framework Handbook.

Inspections will not only be conducted on a cycle to include all local authority provision, but will be conducted through area assessments. Details are being developed by Estyn.

Internal Quality Assurance within LEA ACE

A number of the LAs use the same quality assurance procedures in place for the provision they contract in on behalf of the colleges, for their own directly delivered programmes.

Self-assessment is undertaken by 13 of the 16 LAs which currently deliver on behalf of a local college. Seven of them conduct self-assessment on non-certificated programmes as well. The NC – ELWa will expect all providers to undertake self-assessment to accommodate this. Training in self-assessment will be rolled out to all providers through the ELWa Investing in Quality programme. To provide a consistent approach, it would be sensible to expect all providers to undertake self-assessment.

Resources

Estyn identified that

“In some of the poorest areas of Wales, there are not enough classes in places that are convenient for people. In a few centres, there is not enough childcare to help learners to join the courses they want to take.” (Estyn, 2002)

Evidence suggests that proximity to learning opportunities influences learner take up. Use of schools, libraries and other community centred venues provide the opportunities for provision to be located at a place accessible to the learner. Access for disabled learners is an issue in some community learning centres. This is being address by the LAs as part of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Support for childcare and other requirements for adult learners is crucial to ensure that learners participate, and are able to complete the programme.

Barriers to learning

To ensure that learners have the maximum opportunities to participate, it is recommended that sufficient resource is available to support:

- learning centres in deprived or disadvantaged areas
- learning centres in Communities First areas
- sufficient quality childcare
- transportation to enable people who need to travel to learn
- access to facilities/ buildings

Funding for staff and management of ACE within some LAs is reliant upon the ACE funding. In other LAs it is subsumed within core / central costs. In either case there is the issue of sufficient capacity to develop methods and measure appropriate data. The sector has historically been under-funded, and therefore the capacity to both deliver a relevant ACE programme, and account for it, has been undermined.

Data management

The Data and Analytical Services Department is leading on the new LLWR and is working with providers to ensure data collection meets ELWa's requirements. Some support funding will be available for the implementation of Management Information Systems, with support from the Investing in Quality programme to develop staff in the appropriate use of the systems.

Data and Analytical Services of ELWa provided workshops for providers, attended by most of the LAs. Further workshops on IT requirements were scheduled to address hardware and software issues.

Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire use the same software that the local colleges use to collate data for ELWa. Eight LAs are using or introducing another data collection tool. As long as the information collated is compatible with that required to support funding requirements, it doesn't matter what the software is.

Staff development

Only nine of the authorities have a formalised staff development / needs assessment process for teaching staff. All of these also provided a programme to develop their staff.

It is often difficult for part-time staff to participate in staff development activities.

Economies of scale, cascading of information and networking are all activities which LAs are working to implement.

Good practice example:

One group of LAs, working with their local college, uses a model whereby each local authority has the lead on a specific curriculum area, which has improved efficiency and effectiveness.

Although there has been some internal funding for staff development, the Local authorities identified the fact that development activities which will improve quality have not been accessible particularly to part time staff, nor, in many cases, LEA

staff. This has placed them at a disadvantage against the local colleges, which have had the opportunity to develop staff through funding from the NC and its predecessor, the Further Education Funding Council for Wales.

£250K has been allocated for the development of ACE support in the Local authorities. This is for staff development and capacity building as part of provider development.

This funding has been used to support two development days for relevant LEA staff. These have been well attended. For the first time, contacts have been made for networking between colleagues in different LAs to share good practice and learn from each other's experience.

Additionally, applications for staff development funding were received from 18 LAs, based on a costed Action Plan. Of the 46 areas identified for development, the most popular included:

- training needs analysis
- development of Induction/tutor packs
- support for FAETC or equivalent
- facilitation and support for curriculum quality groups
- health and safety
- ICT training
- recognising and advising on basic skills needs

Additionally, several LAs identified the need to recognise and assess informal learning outcomes. A strong case was put by Newport LEA so they have been given the lead to work with other interested LAs. The results will inform both the Credit Framework and the Quality Improvement programme within ELWa.

As part of the Investing in Quality Programme, support on generic themes for all providers, including LAs, will be offered, including

- self assessment
- quality improvement
- benchmarking and the use of data
- leadership and management
- peer assessment
- health and safety
- capacity building

Issues around the capacity to meet requirements for funding are focused on Management Information Systems and data collection, and the capability of LEA staff and equipment to meet the requirements of the NC. Further support will be available in 2003-04 to address these needs.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

The aim of this review has been to evaluate the provision of adult continuing education (ACE) within local authorities in Wales, and to make recommendations for advancing this area of activity.

The review shows that ACE is a significant area of activity. In 2001, approximately 60,000 learners were pursuing programmes maintained, arranged or assisted by local authorities (LAs). This includes approximately 30,000 learners who were formally enrolled at Further Education institutions.

Local authority ACE provision is special, because it often:

- adds value to other provision
- contributes to widening participation
- plays a role in community regeneration
- is accessible and relevant to local people

The main strengths and weaknesses of the sector highlighted by this review have been set out below:

Strengths

The evidence collected for this review shows that ACE provision clearly contributes to the delivery of ELWa's goals of promoting essential skills, creating lifelong learners, building learning communities and developing skills for business. ACE is also a significant contributor to the delivery of ELWa's cross cutting themes particularly in relation to equal opportunities, bilingualism, social inclusion and, to a lesser extent, building sustainability.

It is clear from this review that local authorities play a significant role in creating the opportunity for learners to influence and design provision which meet their needs.

The nature of learning opportunities delivered through the LAs involves

- certificated and non-certificated provision
- entry level and taster programmes which allow people to get on the first rung of the ladder
- basic skills & provision for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities
- community capacity building

They have a special role to play in meeting the needs of their constituents where other provision is either inappropriate or unavailable. They are often more flexible and adaptable in meeting the needs of learners than conventional provision.

They can often contact 'hard to reach' people through their network of internal departments such as housing and social services, and provide learning opportunities where none may have existed before.

Many local authorities have strong relationships with local voluntary and community organisations that play a valuable role as 'intermediaries' in helping people to participate.

Local authority involvement in local partnerships helps promote good collaboration and 'joined up' service delivery. Staff and adult tutors at community centres are usually from the community and understand it. They are adept at working with people with mixed abilities and skills.

Estyn inspections of local authority delivery on behalf of further education colleges suggest that many authorities make effective provision and have a positive impact on learners.

Local authorities often use their National Council allocation to lever in European and other funding to support a broad programme of delivery. Their use of the current allocation of £4.7m to support approximately 60,000 adult learners is a good example of Value for Money. Their use of funding to support provision is an example of how the 'whole is greater than the sum of its parts.'

Weaknesses

Since the implementation of the Further and Higher Education Act in 1992, there has been no overall strategic planning for ACE. This has led to fragmented and highly variable provision.

The sector is suffering from low levels of historical investment. There are clear weaknesses in relation to capital funding, staff development and management information infrastructure. This has led to weak capacity.

The poor quality of financial information provided by authorities has prevented us conducting a detailed analysis of the use of resources for ACE. Many authorities are also involved in contracting for delivery of provision with colleges, which complicates arrangements and inhibits our ability to assess value for money.

More specifically Estyn have pointed out that the energy and effort that is required to secure funding for this provision is taking managers attention away from 'managing the service'.

There is also evidence that the combination of different funding and charging policies distorts participation.

In terms of the curriculum offer, the lack of non-certificated entry level programmes and sufficient breadth of provision for older learners present two areas that require significant investment.

The Way Forward

LAs clearly have a special role to play in the emerging 'learning and skills' sector. To ensure that Local Authority provision is put on a firm footing for the future and to address the issues highlighted in this report the following action is required.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

In light of the conclusions set out above, we recommend the following specific actions:

- Use the phrase '*Adult and Community Learning*' (ACL) for the purposes of report writing, guidance production and policy making. The use of this term brings us into line with the approach taken in the rest of the UK. **(National Council has recommended the use of the term '*Community Learning*')**
- Ensure the new Planning and Funding System is able to accommodate and support non-certificated programmes relating to the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales.
- Increase, over the medium term, the overall level of resource available to ensure appropriate support for ACL.
- Review the current arrangements for charging learners and develop a common charging policy for post 19 provision.
- Simplify contracting arrangements to improve cost effectiveness and financial transparency.
- Review the relationship between ACL provision delivered by Higher Education Institutions and provision supported by the National Council and delivered through LEA's, FE institutions or the voluntary sector.
- Develop a range of options for more cost-effective provision of ACL over the longer term.

That ELWa work with Local Authorities throughout 2003-04 to:

- Use National Council resources to target the development of entry level, level one and level two provision.
- Develop a common strategy to help promote participation and raise demand for learning.
- Improve the capacity of local authority ACE providers to implement the LLWR and improve data capture and analysis.
- Support the professional development of ACE staff, tutors and managers.

And that local authorities undertake the following:

- Produce and publish an annual service delivery plan, and annual self-assessment report, as a condition of funding.

- Work through the CCETs to ensure effective provision for Adult and Community Learning
- Further develop Community Learning Networks that maximise the appropriate use of venues such as schools, libraries, adult education centres and other community facilities.
- Further develop relationships with voluntary and community organisations for the purpose of widening participation.
- Work to establish a more appropriate balance between the provision of certificated and non-certificated programmes that will better meet the needs of adult learners.
- Develop, in partnership with their schools, a co-ordinated approach to the provision of family learning activities.
- Further develop bilingual provision, particularly through bilingual family learning activities.
- Work together with other local authorities and other relevant providers to create economies of scale in areas such as data collection, curriculum development, joint provision, developing staff and sharing tutors.
- Develop 'cost recovery' provision for those who can afford to pay for learning.
- Work towards the Basic Skills Quality Mark for Post 16, and take the Basic Skills Agency Employer's Pledge to ensure relevant skills in house.

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