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# A review of Adult Community Learning in Wales

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# A review of Adult Community Learning in Wales

Arad Research



Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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## Glossary

Acronym/Key word	Definition
ABE	Adult Basic Education
ACL	Adult Community Learning
BAMER	Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee
CLD	Community Learning and Development
CLG	Community Learning Grant
CLIF	Community Learning Innovation Fund
CLT	Community Learning Trust
ESF	European Social Fund
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
ONS	Office for National Statistics
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
NIACE	National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
SLA	Service Level Agreement
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WEA	Workers' Educational Association
WBL	Work based learning

## **Executive summary**

### Introduction

- i. This report presents the findings of a Review of Adult Community Learning (ACL) in Wales, commissioned by the Welsh Government and completed by Arad Research between February and May 2016. The aim of the review was to provide evidence on the nature and value of ACL in Wales as delivered by local authorities and Further Education (FE) institutions to inform future policy development.
- ii. The review was based on a mixed method approach. The evidence presented in this report draws on a literature review (of published literature in Wales and across the UK); an exercise to map ACL provision in Wales; and 23 interviews with ACL Partnership representatives and stakeholders.

### Findings

- iii. ACL makes a positive difference to people's lives in Wales. This is a reflection of the commitment and drive of organisations across the sector. The literature review highlights the value of ACL to individuals, and society more broadly. ACL provides opportunities for individuals to acquire new skills, achieve qualifications, progress onto further learning pathways, or directly into employment or volunteering. ACL also contributes to health and wellbeing, social inclusion, community cohesion and can act as a tool to tackle poverty.
- iv. In Wales regional ACL Partnerships support the skills of both employed and unemployed learners. ACL provision improves employability and delivers short and longer term impacts to learners' economic activity and employment prospects. ACL contributes to a wide range of Welsh Government strategic priorities and outcomes, including re-engaging hard-to-reach groups in learning, connecting communities, developing skills and supporting health and wellbeing.

- v. The ACL sector in Wales has come under severe pressure as a result of reductions in funding in recent years. Provision has contracted across Wales and has been severely eroded in some areas. While the sector has sought to continue to contribute to a wide range of strategic priorities there are issues relating to the way ACL is currently planned, funded and delivered. These are limiting the sector's effectiveness and capacity to address learning and skills needs across Wales.
- vi. Although ACL Partnerships invest considerable time and energy in working to plan and coordinate provision, the sector remains relatively unstructured and lacks a clearly defined, unifying mission statement. This should be addressed, while also emphasising the need for adult community learning to be supported as a mainstream part of education.

**Recommendation 1:**

The Welsh Government should reaffirm its commitment to supporting ACL and clarify its vision for the sector. This would involve producing a clear and focused definition of ACL's role in relation to:

- supporting employability and economic prosperity;
- promoting health and wellbeing;
- engagement and supporting social cohesion.

- vii. The quality and effectiveness of ACL Partnerships is variable. In some areas, there are effective partnership approaches that seek to respond to the needs of learners and employers in different localities. In other areas, ACL continues to be based largely on historical patterns of delivery with little evidence of robust scrutiny of quality or outcomes.

**Recommendation 2:**

The Welsh Government should set out its preferred options for restructuring the way in which ACL provision is planned and delivered throughout Wales. This should take into account the evidence from this review that points to a need for a more clearly defined vision for ACL and a more consistent and equitable provision for learners.

- viii. Funding for ACL in Wales is complex and inequitable and not currently based on need. The significant variations in funding through the Community Learning Grant contribute to the inequality in access to provision for learners in different parts of Wales; and the further reductions to the overall funding of part-time learning in FE Colleges has presented additional challenges to ACL providers. It is essential that there is sufficient support for ACL to ensure high quality delivery across Wales that is consistent and accessible. If the Welsh Government's vision is to sustain ACL and drive up improvements in quality and outcomes, there is a need for infrastructure, resources and practitioners that attract and retain learners.

**Recommendation 3:**

There is a need for a detailed review of funding for ACL. This should consider the feasibility of consolidating or combining the various public funding streams that support ACL with a view to enabling more coherent and purposeful strategic planning.

- ix. There is a lack of consistency in terms of what is offered to adult learners in different parts of Wales. This is attributable to many things, including historical models of provision and delivery, different approaches to addressing Welsh Government priorities, the differing roles of involvement of various partner organisations, and funding pressures. At the root of the problem, however, is the absence of a common adult learning framework or core curriculum. The development of a framework for ACL that is applied consistently could therefore allow for a national approach that provides the flexibility to build on the strengths of local provision.



**Recommendation 4:**

The Welsh Government should work with partners across the ACL sector to produce a common national framework for ACL that will provide a basis for future planning and delivery. This framework should be developed in line with the activities proposed in Recommendation 1.

- x. Taking into account the continued low levels of essential skills and high rates of economic inactivity in many parts of the country, Wales needs effective ACL provision that engages with the hardest to reach groups, helps change attitudes to learning and offers people a second chance to maximise their potential. As the literature review and evidence from Partnerships demonstrate, ACL can make real differences to people's lives by providing a platform for progression into further learning, training, community engagement and employment.

**Future delivery models: conclusions and considerations**

- xi. A clear majority of contributors to the review – including ACL Partnership representatives and stakeholders - recognise that there is a need to reconfigure the sector and move towards a more effective and equitable model of delivery. There is a strong case for change and for the development of new delivery models.

**Recommendation 5:**

In recognition of the positive impact of ACL on individuals, communities and the wider economy, ACL should be promoted as a key part of Wales-wide strategies to tackle poverty and support citizens' wellbeing. This would help raise the profile of ACL, linking the sector to education, health and wellbeing and social inclusion policies.

- xii. Strengthening links between ACL and other policy agendas may raise questions about the need to align funding streams, as noted in Recommendation 3 above. ACL contributes to health, wellbeing and community regeneration priorities and this should open the door to

discussions about whether funding from other departmental or programme budgets should support provision. Any future model should aspire to consolidate and allocate funding in a more equitable way, based on learning and skills needs.

- xiii. Some elements of ACL could be planned and managed at a national level, either by Welsh Government or by a single agency operating on its behalf. Raising standards and supporting the professionalisation of the workforce should be a national priority and should be subject to a single strategy applied on a Wales-wide basis. Similarly, ACL provision should be subject to uniform quality assurance standards that apply to all provision.

**Recommendation 6:**

The Welsh Government should consider commissioning the development of national strategies and frameworks for continuing professional development and quality assurance in ACL. This would help raise the profile of ACL, linking the sector to education, health and wellbeing and social inclusion policies.

- xiv. Under a new delivery model, the Welsh Government may wish to consider ways in which provision can be supported through innovative approaches, including encouraging providers to adopt more ‘commercial’ strategies. For example, where fees are charged for leisure and recreational courses, providers could be urged (or required) to reinvest any surplus generated into delivery for target groups with the literature review outlining the importance of outreach to engage the most marginalised learners. This could encourage a more innovative and responsive approach to developing provision. Surpluses or profits could also be reinvested into creating new progression pathways for learners and high quality learning tools, which the literature review indicates is crucial for attracting and retaining learners.
- xv. Some contributors to the review were strong advocates of a move from the current ACL Partnership structure towards a regional model. It was suggested that regional ACL delivery partnerships could be based on the

footprints of the current Regional Learning Partnerships. Based on the evidence presented during the review, there are clear advantages to streamlining both planning and delivery, channelling resources away from administrative processes and towards learners. This could involve separate agencies being commissioned or remitted to lead on ACL delivery in each region, drawing on the support of various providers as required.

- xvi. Other stakeholders supported an alternative delivery model whereby a single organisation could take the lead for ACL across Wales, potentially through a 'hub and spoke' model. It was suggested that this approach would give the sector much needed national leadership, visibility and expertise and would act as a focus for funding and coordination across the regions.
- xvii. As this review was not designed as a structured options appraisal, it would not be appropriate to make a recommendation with reference to a preferred model. Both models present opportunities to build on the strengths of existing Partnerships and local delivery across Wales. The literature review suggests that responding to local need is vital in ensuring effective engagement and indicates that effective regional strategies aided by an infrastructure that supports local delivery can be beneficial for ACL provision.
- xviii. Further work is required to specify how these alternative models could operate and their relative advantages and disadvantages.
- xix. Future delivery should also be closely aligned with the outcomes of the Donaldson Review and the emergence of new curriculum arrangements in Wales. Donaldson advocated developing 'resilient lifelong learners.' The 'pillars' within the Donaldson Review can be transferred to ACL, notably the aspiration to create 'ambitious capable learners; healthy, confident individuals; ethical, creative contributors and ethical, informed citizens'.
- xx. Despite cuts to funding and the challenges across the sector, ACL in Wales continues to deliver a wide range of benefits for learners by

contributing to the education, health and wellbeing of the nation. With a renewed focus on vision and strategy, structures, partnerships and quality there is undoubtedly the potential for the ACL sector to continue play a lead role in supporting individuals and communities across Wales.

## **1. Introduction to the review**

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of a Review of Adult Community Learning (ACL) in Wales, commissioned by the Welsh Government and completed by Arad Research between February and May 2016.

### **Aim and objectives**

- 1.2 The aim of this review was to provide evidence on the nature and value of ACL in Wales as delivered by local authorities and Further Education (FE) institutions to inform future policy development.
- 1.3 The review's objectives were to collect evidence to help answer the following research questions:
- (a) What, and how, is ACL currently delivered across Wales and how does it differ between areas?
  - (b) What contribution does ACL make to society in Wales, including its impact on social inclusion, health and well-being, jobs, growth and wider employability?
  - (c) What types of ACL are the most effective in supporting this range of outcomes for learners?
  - (d) Is there a particular delivery structure that could be adopted to secure more coherent delivery across Wales?

### **Background and context**

- 1.4 The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) define adult learning as a 'core component of lifelong learning ... whereby those regarded as adults by the society in which they live develop and enrich their capabilities for living and working' (UNESCO, 2014, p. 2). The European Union reinforces the vital role of adult learning emphasising not only the benefits of enabling adults to adapt to changes in the employment market, but the significance of adult learning in upskilling or reskilling those affected by unemployment as

well as fulfilling an important role in people's personal development, citizenship and inclusion (Official Journal of the European Union, 2011, p.1).

- 1.5 The European Commission also proposes an underlying rationale for the development of ACL structured on guaranteeing an adequate supply of skills to meet the demands of economic growth; to correct the failings of previous education and training; and to support cohesion and social inclusion. However, across Europe access to such learning varies greatly with greater progress being achieved in such countries as Denmark, Iceland, Finland and Sweden (European Commission Directorate General Research and Innovation, 2013). The Commission also notes the failure to meet the European target of 12.5 per cent adult participation in lifelong learning as stated in the Lisbon Strategy; adult participation in fact was 9.1 per cent by 2010, with a downward trend in 2012 (ibid: 22).

#### *Adult Community Learning in Wales*

- 1.6 The Welsh Government's *Delivering community learning for Wales* (2010) policy, recognised the range and flexibility of ACL and its potential to meet local learning needs as well as its contribution to the wider skills agenda in Wales. The Welsh Government's vision for ACL focuses on increased participation, improved quality and coherence in delivery.
- 1.7 ACL offers learners opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills through a diverse range of courses including both accredited and non-accredited learning. The courses delivered to adults across Wales aim to fulfil Welsh Government's stated purposes for ACL:
- of taking the first steps into learning
  - providing skills for life and embedding basic skills
  - providing skills for independent living and skills for work
  - contributing to personal development and wellbeing, and
  - developing active citizenship. (Welsh Government, 2016)

- 1.8 The Welsh Government's vision for Wales to develop a thriving Welsh language used in everyday life requires opportunities and support for people to learn the language and ACL provision also has a role to play in contributing to this strategic aim.
- 1.9 The Welsh Government's *Skills Implementation Plan* (2014, p. 8) acknowledges the fundamental role of FE in improving the quality of adult learning provision that is responsive to the needs of employers. A recent UK Commission for Employment and Skills' employer survey (2016, p. 187) found that despite modest economic growth since 2011 many vacancies are left unfilled due to a record shortage of skills across the UK. Wales is in a similar position to many other regions of the UK, with 17 per cent of employers recording a skills gap or skills vacancy. ACL is an important component within the options available to individuals to upskill, whether in employment or seeking work.
- 1.10 Reductions in funding of the Community Learning Grant (CLG) and part-time funding in FE have meant that fewer opportunities are available for adult learners in the community and there has been a shift in focus towards essential skills. Consequently there has been a decline in the number of people accessing ACL. The numbers engaged in community learning have fallen by a greater proportion than FE and Work Based Learning (WBL). Local Authority Community learning fell from 28,050 in 2013/14 to 17,355 in 2015/16, a decrease of 38 per cent (Statistics for Wales, 2015, p. 6). As a result of the shift in focus towards the provision of Essential Skills learners are unable to participate in as wide a range of courses as previously on offer and are increasingly required to pay for courses.
- 1.11 Learner Outcomes data collected annually by the Welsh Government show that the overall learning activity success rate for ACL increased steadily from 82 per cent in 2011/12 to 88 per cent in 2014/15 (the most recently published data).<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that this measure only

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<sup>1</sup> <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/learner-outcome-measures-further-education-work-based-learning-community-learning/?lang=en>

refers to accredited learning and that ACL also delivers a large volume of non-accredited activities.

- 1.12 ACL provision enables individuals to learn new skills, achieve qualifications and develop lifelong learning progression routes. Provision also supports wider policies relating to social inclusion and social mobility, tackling poverty and wellbeing, thereby demonstrating the contribution of ACL to a number of key Welsh Government priorities.
- 1.13 Educational attainment and growth and jobs are two of the four priorities for Wales set by Welsh Government (Welsh Government, 2015a, p.4). Progression through learning performs a vital element of this as individuals endeavour to acquire the skills needed to succeed in the workplace. They are also a key component of Welsh Government policy aiming to succeed in breaking the link between poverty and attainment. The potential impact delivered by ACL provision also links closely to key goals outlined in the *Wellbeing of Future Generations Act* (2015) including the aims of public bodies working together to ensure a more equal and prosperous Wales, a country of cohesive communities and a thriving Welsh language.
- 1.14 Funding arrangements and delivery mechanisms for ACL in Wales have resulted in disparity between local authorities and regions. Looking ahead, if Welsh Government is to ensure that going forward the ACL offer for Wales is as robust and inclusive as possible it is vital to learn both from the experiences across Wales and further afield. This is what this review aims to support.

#### *Adult Community Learning at a UK level*

- 1.15 Looking at ACL in its broader UK context, this review is timely as FE delivery UK-wide comes under scrutiny following reductions in funding. Community learning in other UK regions also offer a range of community based learning opportunities delivered mainly by local authorities and FE colleges.



- 1.16 In England there has been a fall in those participating in adult FE, and this includes a 7.2 per cent decrease in the numbers participating in community learning. (BIS, 2016, p. 136). A recent Public Accounts Committee report raised concerns about the financial sustainability and future of the sector in England (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2015, p. 8). A more locally determined offer of ACL has been rolled out across England since the Community Learning Trust (CLT) pilot in 2012 consisting of several different types of infrastructure.
- 1.17 Even though the Scottish Parliament places a statutory requirement on all local authorities to deliver community learning and development there has also been a reduction in funding for short courses and those not leading to a recognised qualification (Scottish Statutory Instruments, 2013, p. 1). This has resulted in a fall of 48 per cent in part time students in Scotland (Audit Scotland, 2015, p. 11). Similar to Wales, Northern Ireland's number of FE colleges has been reduced as a result of rationalisation and there is commitment to partnership and collaborative working. Northern Ireland's funding model for FE is also currently under review and will provide a useful option to inform proposed structures for this review (Department for Employment and Learning, 2016, p. 65).

## **Methodology**

- 1.18 A mixed method approach was employed to ensure the review was informed by the most relevant literature and drew on the experiences and expertise of representatives from across the ACL sector. The review sought to capture accurate and current information on the different delivery models of ACL provision across Wales.
- 1.19 The review comprised the following phases of activity and research:
- Inception and scoping phase
    - Inception meeting
    - Research templates and tools designed
    - Scope of literature review agreed
  - Literature review

- Mapping of ACL provision, drawing on desk research and information provided by ACL Partnerships
- Interviews with ACL Partnership representatives and stakeholders. In total 23 interviews were completed, comprising 11 learning providers, nine local authority representatives, Welsh Government (two interviews) and the Learning and Work Institute.

1.20 Two research templates were drafted: the first template – a data audit form – was used to record data from the literature review in a structured way that corresponded to the review’s research questions; the second template was used to map ACL provision across each of the ACL Partnership areas. The template used to map ACL delivery across Partnerships collected information on membership, funding, strategic aims and priorities, types of provision and the venues used for ACL delivery.

## Structure of the report

1.21 The report is structured as follows:

Chapter
1. Introduction to the review
2. Literature review
3. Analysis of existing ACL delivery in Wales
4. Qualitative evidence
5. Review conclusions and recommendations
Annexes

## **2. Literature review**

### **Scope and coverage of the literature review**

- 2.1 Drawing on published literature in Wales and across the UK, this literature review aims to provide answers to two of the review's central research questions, namely:
- (a) What contribution does ACL make to society (in Wales), including its impact on social inclusion, health and well-being, jobs, growth and wider employability?
  - (b) What types of ACL are the most effective in supporting this range of outcomes for learners?
- 2.2 A systematic review of the evidence has not been possible in the available timescales and with the resources allocated to this review. The review team drew on a list of references compiled by the Welsh Government's Library and Archive service in 2014 which pointed to the most relevant and robust available evidence at a UK-wide level. Additional more recent publications (including publications by Estyn, Learning and Work Institute/NIACE Dysgu Cymru, Welsh Government statistical releases) were also included in the literature review.
- 2.3 Key fields of investigation were agreed and used to structure the review. This chapter is structured according to these topics: firstly, evidence of the contribution of ACL to society (paragraphs 2.4–2.55) and secondly evidence of the effectiveness of ACL delivery models (paragraphs 2.56–2.116). The chapter closes with a summary of the conclusions and main issues identified in the literature reviewed.

### **Evidence of the contribution of ACL to society**

- 2.4 This section discusses the contribution of ACL to society, reviewing evidence of ACL's impact in relation to a range of wider economic and community-related outcomes.
- Employability

- Value of return on investment
- Social inclusion, community involvement and cohesion
- Health and wellbeing
- Improvement in skills
- Family learning
- Further learning

- 2.5 Within the literature, the impact and value of ACL has mainly been measured through learner self-reporting. This information is often gathered through interviews or group discussions. In some cases it is also collected through learner questionnaires or journals.
- 2.6 In the documentation reviewed, the sample sizes of learners who have provided feedback on the impact of ACL range from small samples of around 100 to larger samples of some 6,000 individuals. Evidence of impact is reported mainly by presenting the percentage of a sample that has self-reported benefits to themselves.

### *Employability*

- 2.7 Employability provides motivation for investment in ACL and participation by many learners in ACL. This section outlines the findings from the literature in terms of the positive impact that ACL has on employability. As discussed in the later sections focusing on social cohesion, health and well-being and family learning, for some learners there is no expectation to improve employability as they often engage in ACL solely for leisure and social reasons.

### **Employability**

#### **Key messages from the literature:**

- ACL enables learners to acquire new skills.
- ACL increases learners' confidence in finding a job.
- ACL increases learners' likelihood of gaining a new job or promotion.
- ACL improves learners' job performance.
- ACL increases learners' job satisfaction.

- 2.8 Evidence suggests that ACL has a positive impact on economic activity and employability (e.g. WEA, 2014a; Estyn 2014; Evans et al, 2013 and NIACE, 2014b). For example, a report on the overall impact of the work of NIACE (2015b) notes that 75 per cent of learners (out of a sample of 2,390) were more positive about employment after participating in learning activities.
- 2.9 The literature outlines a number of ways in which ACL impacts positively on learners' economic activity and employability. The most common areas of impact are summarised within the WEA reports (2014a and 2014b). The first WEA report (2014a) presents the short term impacts of ACL on economic activity and employability. The second WEA report (2014b) presents the long term impacts of ACL (18 months after students had completed their course). Table 1 summarises these findings.

*Table 1. Summary of WEA (2014a and 2014b) research findings.*

<b>WEA (2014a) – short term impacts. Sample = 659</b>	<b>WEA (2014b) – long term impacts. Sample = Wave 1 – 522 and Wave 2 – 276</b>
<b>64 per cent</b> of WEA students said their course gave them new skills they could use in a job.	<b>52 per cent</b> had learned new skills for their employment and taken on a wider range of responsibilities.
<b>38 per cent</b> of students who were in employment felt more confidence in progressing in their career.	<b>35 per cent</b> had started to earn more and 11 per cent had achieved promotion.
<b>35 per cent</b> were able to do their job better.	<b>68 per cent</b> indicated that since the 2013 survey they were able to do their job better.
<b>11 per cent</b> got a new job or changed to a different type of work.	Of those students who were employed (49 per cent), <b>41 per cent</b> had got a new job since the first wave and <b>23 per cent</b> changed to a different type of work.
<b>86 per cent</b> of students who were unemployed and looking for work reported being more confident about finding a job.	<b>53 per cent</b> were happier with their job and more satisfied with their work.

- 2.10 The findings from both WEA studies (WEA, 2014a; WEA, 2014b) illustrate that ACL has both short and long term impacts on learners' economic activity and employability. The main area of impact appears to be gaining new skills, which has a knock on effect in increasing learners' confidence in finding a job and their likelihood of gaining a new job or

promotion; as well as improving their job performance and job satisfaction.

2.11 A number of other research reports support the claim that ACL enables learners to acquire new skills (e.g. Estyn, 2012a; Estyn, 2014; Older People's Commissioner for Wales, no date). For example, the Transformational Fund's findings' report for informal adult and community learning in England outlines a number of skills that learners often gain, such as attitudinal and personal organisational skills (NIACE, 2010a).

2.12 The evidence suggests that ACL develops the skills of both employed and unemployed learners, which improves their employability (BIS, 2013c). For employed learners, increasing their skills enables them to take on a wider range of responsibilities within their current job (WEA, 2014b), improve their job performance (Estyn, 2014), gain a promotion (London Economics and Ipsos MORI, 2013) or gain a new job (London Economics and Ipsos MORI, 2013). The literature provides concrete examples of where ACL has had an impact in these areas:

‘...following the receipt of education and training, 35 per cent of men and 29 per cent of women indicated that they had got a better job, while 18 per cent of men and 12 per cent of women indicated that they had received a promotion.’

London Economics and Ipsos MORI (2013, p.8)

2.13 For unemployed learners, increasing their skills encourages them to become more confident about finding a job in the future. A report presenting case studies from the CLT pilots supports this claim. The report summarises the key findings of the first wave of the Community Learning Learner Survey, conducted with 4,000 people who recently completed a community learning course in England. The report outlines that 70 per cent of unemployed respondents reported feeling more confident about finding a job in the future (BIS, 2013c, p. 11)

2.14 Acquiring new skills increases employment prospects. Therefore in addition to increasing unemployed learners' confidence in finding a job,

evidence suggests that, through developing learners' skills, ACL improves learners' likelihood of gaining a job (e.g. Fujiwara, 2012; Older People's Commissioner for Wales, no date).

### *Return on investment in ACL*

2.15 This section outlines the findings from the literature that indicate the specific cost benefits of investing in adult learning.

#### **Value of return on investment**

##### **Key messages from the literature:**

- A monetary value can be assigned to the positive impacts of ACL.
- Participating in ACL can lead to less expensive health and social care interventions.
- It has been suggested that ACL indirectly reduces expenditure on unemployment benefits, welfare payments and early retirement pensions.
- ACL can improve older people's independence: delaying the need for care 'by even one month could save Wales £1.8 million a year'.

2.16 Fujiwara (2012) measured the impact of adult learning using the latest methods outlined in the HM Treasury Green Book guidance (Fujiwara and Campbell, 2011). Fujiwara (2012) firstly reported that ACL has a positive impact on health, employment, social relationships and volunteering. Fujiwara calculated estimates of the monetary value of these positive impacts using methods recommended by the HM Treasury guidance. Overall, the report outlined the value of a number of impacts for adults participating in a part-time course, such as:

- Improvements in health which has a value of £148 to the individual;
- A greater likelihood of finding a job and/or staying in a job, which has a value of £231 to the individual;
- Better social relationships, which has a value of £658 to the individual; and
- A greater likelihood that people volunteer on a regular basis, which has a value of £130 to the individual (2012, p. 28).

2.17 The findings above indicate that it is possible to place a value on the positive impacts of ACL such as those that have been discussed here. It also shows that there are cost benefits of investing in learning.

2.18 Further evidence indicates a social return on investment for ACL. A report which presents case studies from the Community Learning and Development services in Scotland (Community Learning and Development Managers Scotland, 2013) demonstrated the social return on investment for these services. One example outlined within this report was a social return on investment analysis of Dundee City Council's adult literacy learning programmes. This was conducted for 60 learners over the duration of one year. Overall, it was concluded that for every pound invested there was a £7 return. Table 2 summarises the findings from this analysis.

*Table 2. Social return on investment analysis.*

Outputs and Outcomes	Social Return (Year 1)
100% reported increased confidence	£12,139
100% reported increased literacy levels	£29,000
20 achieved core skills qualification	£18,610
84% reported improved mental wellbeing	£9,531
3 learners moved into employment	£11,750
35 learners reported developing skills to look for work	£39,803
33 learners reported improved social networks	£2,206
20 parent/carer involved in helping their children learn	£13,680

*Source: Community Learning and Development Managers Scotland, 2013, p.12*

2.19 In addition to the social return on investment, the literature indicates the value of improving individuals' health through ACL and as a result individuals become more active, social, healthy and educated and are less of a burden on 'a family's and, by extension, a community's resources and services' (Merriam and Kee, 2014, p. 131). Strengthening older people's independence and their capacity to look after themselves can delay the need for care or support and also save money, for



example 'delaying this need by even one month could save Wales £1.8 million per year' (Older People's Commissioner for Wales, (no date, p. 35).

- 2.20 The literature outlines the cost benefits of the impact of ACL on employability and indicates potential savings to the public purse. For example, the Older People's Commissioner for Wales report (no date) states that by enhancing employability, ACL indirectly reduces expenditure on unemployment benefits, welfare payments and early retirement pensions.

*Social inclusion, community involvement and cohesion*

- 2.21 This section outlines the findings from the literature in terms of the positive impact that ACL has on social inclusion, community involvement and cohesion.

**Social inclusion, community involvement and cohesion**

**Key messages from the literature:**

- ACL promotes health and well-being, social inclusion and helps reduce isolation.
- ACL encourages community involvement, which increases community and social cohesion.
- ACL encourages greater involvement in voluntary work.
- ACL inspires learners to encourage others to take part in learner activities.

- 2.22 Evidence suggests that ACL helps to promote social inclusion and reduce social isolation (e.g. Regional Learning Partnership, 2014; NIACE, 2012a; and HMIE, 2011). This is particularly important to improving the lives of some of the most disadvantaged groups, such as those on low income, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds or Refugee (BAMER), elderly isolated people and those with disabilities (WEA, 2014a). A report by NIACE (2012a) noted that rural community learning increases social interactions and reduces isolation, found to be particularly beneficial for elderly people and disadvantaged adults.

- 2.23 Meeting new people is cited as a positive outcome for many learners (Regional Learning Partnership, 2014; WEA, 2014a). For example

research into the impact of WEA courses found that 88 per cent of students, from a sample of 659, had met people on their course that they would not normally mix with (WEA, 2014a, p. 7). The findings of the Transformational Fund which supported 214 local initiatives testing innovative approaches reiterates this; outlining how projects helped individuals and communities develop strong bonds and friendships through learning activities. This increased learners' familiarity with people from diverse backgrounds, which raised cultural awareness and reduced prejudice (NIACE, 2010a).

- 2.24 A series of Citizens' Curriculum case studies (Robey 2015a, 2015b, 2015c & 2015d) provide further evidence of ACL's important role in promoting social inclusion and cohesion. One of the pilots worked with English for Action developing English skills, with an emphasis on accessing health care (Robey, 2015a). Another pilot engaged with migrant families before their children start school, aiming to develop parents' ability to support their children to understand and use English (Robey, 2015b). Both pilots helped learners develop the sense of belonging to a community. The interactive and social nature of the programmes supported learners to develop friendships and reduce isolation, increasing their confidence to get involved in the community and use local services.
- 2.25 In addition to reducing social isolation, ACL encourages community involvement (WEA, 2014b; Merriam and Kee, 2014; Community Learning and Development Managers Scotland, 2013; BIS, 2012) which leads to an increase in community and social cohesion. A report which provides an overview of the impact of the work of NIACE (2015b) found that 79 per cent of learners became more involved in their community as a result of their learning. Ways in which learners become more involved in their community as a result of participating in learning, include volunteering, setting up their own classes or activities and encouraging others to become involved in learning. Becoming involved in these activities indicates that learners become more prepared to contribute to

the community and wider public life as a result of learning (Estyn, 2014).

Examples of the impact reported following WEA courses includes:

- 44 per cent claimed they were able to play a more positive role in their community.
  - 34 per cent were more aware of how to get involved in decision making.
  - 12 per cent registered to vote.
  - 10 per cent contacted public authorities for consultation or to discuss an issue.
- (WEA, 2014a, p. 7)

2.26 ACL encourages greater involvement in voluntary work (BIS, 2012). A report into the effects of adult learning on different domains of life (Fujiwara, 2012) found that people who were undertaking or had finished a course in the year the research was conducted were more likely to become a frequent volunteer. Others support this: following learning by older adults, 57 per cent out of a sample of 125 learners improved their community involvement and volunteering (Estyn, 2012a, p. 11). A key benefit to the volunteer may include progression onto paid work (BIS, 2014).

2.27 The literature outlines how ACL encourages members of the community to become involved in learning activities. For example, a national consultation (with a sample of 6,306 individuals and 227 groups) focusing on informal adult and community learning found the following:

- 45 per cent would like to organise an informal learning activity;
  - 43 per cent would like to run an informal learning taster session;
  - 41 per cent would like to take part in informal adult learning in a role such as a learning representative or champion; and
  - 40 per cent would like to run an informal learning group.
- (NIACE, 2012b, p. 28)

2.28 Specific examples are provided within the literature of how learners have increased their involvement within their community as a result of participating in ACL. Some of these examples are provided here and illustrate how ACL encourages community involvement in terms of instilling learners' skills and interest in organising and delivering a range of activities within the community.

'The City and County of Swansea has set up an adult learner forum. The learners involved with the forum have taken courses in

advocacy skills, organising, and managing meetings and minute taking. Three of these learners have made good use of this learning to set up their own classes in jewellery, textiles and bead work.'

Estyn (2014, p.10)

'Learners have used their new skills and knowledge well to organise a range of activities, including a women's Summit in Swansea, a play about the suffragettes, a Save the Bees campaign and an awareness raising event about violence against women.'

Estyn (2014, p.10)

2.29 Evidence demonstrates that ACL inspires learners to encourage other members of their community to become involved in learning. For example, within the Estyn report (2014) it is explained how ACL helped to improve one learner's awareness of the barriers to learning that people may face. Since participating in ACL, this learner has encouraged homeless people who she works with to return to education. Learners from black minority ethnic communities have also helped others from their communities to explore new learning opportunities (ibid). These findings are supported by WEA research, which examined the long term impacts of WEA courses; 18 months after students had completed their course, 85 per cent of students (out of a sample of 276) had encouraged others to take part in a learning activity (WEA, 2014b, p. 7). These findings indicate that ACL helps adults take more responsibility for promoting the benefits and advantages of learning to other people.

### *Health and wellbeing*

2.30 This section outlines the findings from the literature in terms of the positive impact that ACL has on individuals' health and wellbeing.

## Health and wellbeing

### Key messages from the literature:

- ACL improves learners' mental and physical health.
- ACL encourages physical activity.
- ACL increases learners' confidence, perceptions of self-worth and reduces depression.
- ACL improves learners' quality of life and life satisfaction.
- ACL reduces the number of GP visits and the use of other health services; thereby reducing the expense of health and social care interventions.

2.31 Evidence suggests that ACL has a positive impact on individuals' health and wellbeing (NIACE, 2014b). For example, when Estyn looked at the impact of ACL on the wellbeing of older learners it found that 94 per cent of learners (out of 125 interviewed) reported improved health benefits from attending learning sessions (Estyn, 2012a, p. 11). This is supported by the WEA longitudinal study which found that, 18 months after completing their course, 87 per cent of respondents reported at least one positive outcome on their health and wellbeing (WEA, 2014b, p. 6). Further findings from this research are summarised in Table 3.

*Table 3. Findings from WEA longitudinal study on health and wellbeing (WEA, 2014b)*

- 56 per cent reported improvements in wellbeing and mental health, with 27 per cent reporting improvements in physical health and fitness.
- 65 per cent do more activities to keep their mind and body healthy.
- 56 per cent reported that their self-confidence has improved.
- 57 per cent claimed they had more activities to fill their spare time and 53 per cent got out of the house more often.
- On the ONS subjective wellbeing scale, respondents rated their life satisfaction as 8.5 out of 10 (a rise from 7.5 in the previous year), their wellbeing at 9 (a rise from 8) and happiness yesterday at 8.7 (a rise from 7.5).

2.32 These findings illustrate a number of ways in which ACL has a positive impact on learners' health and wellbeing. One key area is improving learners' mental and physical health. Evidence shows that engaging in learning activities helps to keep learners mentally and physically active (BIS, 2011a). In terms of physical health, evidence suggests that individuals who participate in learning are less likely to report physical problems such as heart and blood pressure problems (Fujiwara, 2012). A report by NIACE (2014b) which looked at the outcomes of 97 projects

funded through Community Learning Innovation Fund (CLIF), noted that the most commonly cited outcome of ACL on learners' health was related to learners' ability to manage their physical health.

- 2.33 Another way in which ACL improves physical health is by encouraging learners to be physically active. For example a report focusing on the overall impact of NIACE's work notes that all 2,390 learners who enrolled on learning activities increased their physical activity as a result of participating in learning (NIACE, 2015b, p. 11).
- 2.34 In terms of mental health, ACL increases learners' confidence and perceptions of self-worth (Welsh Government, 2010a; BIS, 2011b; Estyn, 2012a). A report that looked at the economic and social benefits of further education and skills reported that 81 per cent of 1,955 learners not in employment said they had gained self-confidence or self-esteem following their training (London Economics and Ipsos MORI, 2013, p. 55).
- 2.35 Developing learners' self-confidence and self-esteem appears to be a key positive impact that ACL brings to learners' mental health. The literature suggests that this is most commonly due to ACL increasing learners' skills and abilities (NIACE, 2010a) and providing them with the resources to control their destinies (WEA, 2014a).
- 2.36 An increase in self-confidence, as a result of ACL, can lead to an improved attitude towards learning. A case study of the Citizens' Curriculum pilot delivered via Tomorrow's Women Wirral (TWW), a women-only community charity, supports this claim (Robey, 2015d). One of the principle aims of the project was to offer support to women in order to prevent offending and help them through recovery. As a result of the project, learners' improved levels of self-confidence increased their motivation to learn and gave them the confidence to sign up to further learning (ibid).
- 2.37 In addition to increasing learners' self-confidence, ACL helps to reduce depression (BIS, 2012), gives learners something useful to do in their spare time (London Economics and Ipsos MORI, 2013) and gives them

a break from daily stresses (WEA, 2014a). This has led to an increase in learners' satisfaction with their social life and use of their leisure time (BIS, 2012). These findings illustrate that ACL enables learners to make a positive change in their lives, which in turn has a positive effect on their mental health.

- 2.38 Linked to mental health, further evidence suggests that ACL improves learners' quality of life and thus their life satisfaction. For example, the findings of the first wave of the Community Learning Learner Survey found that 71 per cent of learners reported their quality of life had improved as a result of their course (BIS, 2013c, p. 10). This is supported by the WEA who state that 84 per cent of all respondents reported improvements in their quality of life and 81 per cent felt generally better about themselves as a result of the course (WEA, 2014a, p. 6).
- 2.39 Studies have analysed older people's participation in learning and its impact on alleviating loneliness. For example a study in Taiwan (2010-2012) of 486 older learners noted the positive impact of learning in relieving loneliness by helping individuals to develop meaningful friendships and a social network (Hung and Lu, 2014). A recent Spanish study also focused on older learners (aged between 57 and 86) and the factors influencing active ageing when participating in an ICT course and considered responses from an experimental group of 112 individuals who participated in learning and a control group of 72 not participating in the course (Díaz López et al., 2016, p. 3). The study concluded there were statistical differences between the control and experimental groups at the end of the three month time period of the study. The benefits appeared mainly in the areas of subjective health and life satisfaction (ibid: 4).
- 2.40 There is also evidence to suggest that the impact of ACL upon the health of different groups of people differs depending on the type of learning. For example, a review of research into the wider benefits of adult learning (BIS, 2012) concluded that impacts for parents and different income groups differ by learning type. More specifically the review found

that parents and lower income groups experience more health benefits from formal learning, whereas non-parents and higher income groups experience more health benefits from informal learning. This suggests that for ACL to have the most impact on health, formal learning should be targeted at parents and lower income groups and informal learning should be targeted at non-parents and higher income groups.

- 2.41 By improving the health and wellbeing of learners, through encouraging healthy lifestyles, ACL helps to reduce the expense of health and social care interventions (Estyn, 2012a). This is particularly evident for older people who participate in learning, as it allows them to remain independent and self-fulfilled (ibid). Furthermore, evidence indicates that ACL helps reduce the use of health services (Hague, 2009); in particular it reduces the number of GP visits (BIS, 2012). ACL does this by reinforcing people's independence and their ability to look after themselves (Welsh Government, 2010a). The value of return on investment is explored later and provides further discussion on the value of improving individuals' health.

#### *Improvement in skills and family learning*

- 2.42 This section outlines the findings from the literature in terms of the positive impact that ACL has on individuals' skills. Other, more general skills are discussed, as opposed to employability skills, which help learners improve other areas of their lives. For example, skills which enable parents to support their children better and improve family relationships.

#### **Improvement in skills and family learning**

##### **Key messages from the literature:**

- ACL helps learners develop skills such as creative, communication and IT skills.
- ACL is important in equipping learners with skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- ACL equips parents with the skills to support their children.
- ACL helps improve family relationships.
- ACL helps to instil a culture of learning within the family.



2.43 Evidence suggests that ACL has a positive impact on individuals' skills (NIACE, 2014b). The literature notes a number of different skills that ACL has helped learners to develop including:

- Creative skills (WEA, 2014b)
- Communication skills (WEA, 2014b; NIACE, 2010a)
- IT and practical skills (WEA, 2014b; Estyn, 2012a)
- Personal and social skills (Estyn, 2014)
- Emotional resilience and assertiveness skills (Regional Learning Partnership, 2014)

2.44 A common theme presented within the literature appears to be the importance of ACL in equipping learners with skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For example, a report by the Older People's Commissioner for Wales (no date) which looks at the importance and impact of community services in Wales acknowledges the importance of keeping up-to-date with modern technologies in order to access information and advice through digital learning.

2.45 Another example of the importance of ACL in equipping learners with skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is presented within a report on the outcomes of the Regional Learning Partnership (2014) event which sought to capture the views of learners on adult learning; illustrating how ACL provides individuals with skills that can help improve family relationships. Particularly parents' relationships with their children or grandchildren:

'Participation in adult learning gives me an opportunity to...gain new skills. These skills are vital to people of my age in order to keep up with children and grandchildren. If we do not life could pass us by in so many respects and we could tend to be reclusive and thereby put more pressure on other state funds.'

Regional Learning Partnership (2014, p11)

2.46 ACL contributing to improving family relationships is also supported by the research into the impact of WEA courses which found that 38 per cent of students reported improvements in their family relationships and 42 per cent of parents reported improved relationships with their children

(WEA, 2014a, pp. 6-9). Often these improved relationships stem from ACL providing parents with an increased confidence and capacity to relate positively to their children (HMIE, 2011). In the case of parents with teenagers, ACL can develop these parents' confidence in dealing with issues relevant to their teenage children (WEA, 2014b).

2.47 The literature indicates that ACL helps provide parent learners with the skills to support their children with their learning (London Economics and Ipsos MORI, 2013). The WEA research found that 66 per cent of parents reported helping children with school subjects more than the previous year (before undergoing the course) (WEA, 2014b, p. 8). More specifically, WEA research found that 56 per cent of parents were becoming more confident in helping their children with reading, 59 per cent with writing, 49 per cent with maths and 55 per cent with other school subject (WEA, 2014a, p. 8).

2.48 By improving parents' skills in supporting their children's learning, ACL helps to instil a culture of learning within the family. For example, the overview of the impact of NIACE's work found that 77 per cent of learners reported an increase in the culture of learning in their family (NIACE, 2015b, p. 11). This suggests that ACL 'plays an important role in the educational development of families' (Welsh Government, 2010a, p.5) and has an important influence on the 'development and life chances' of children whose parents participate in learning (Welsh Government, 2010a, p. 5). Therefore not only does ACL have an impact on those adults who participate in learning, but it also has an impact on their families as well.

### *Further learning*

2.49 This section outlines the findings from the literature in terms of the positive impact that ACL has on encouraging individuals to undertake further learning following their participation in ACL.

## Further learning

### Key messages from the literature:

- For some, ACL is the first step back into learning.
- ACL increases individuals' confidence and enthusiasm to learn.
- Following participation in ACL, individuals often sign up to, and undertake further learning courses.
- ACL encourages independent learning, such as reading, using the internet and visiting museums or libraries.

2.50 For some individuals, ACL is the first step back into learning. Re-entering learning, through ACL, can provide these individuals with the opportunity to progress onto further learning (Welsh Government, 2010a). One way in which ACL encourages further learning is by increasing individuals' enthusiasm to learn (NIACE, 2015b). A report that looked at the economic and social benefits of further education and skills reported that 84 per cent of 1,955 learners had become more enthusiastic about learning (London Economics and Ipsos MORI, 2013, p. 53). This is supported by others with 85 per cent of students more enthusiastic about learning since completing their course (WEA, 2014a, p. 9).

2.51 An increased enthusiasm to learn often leads to individuals continuing to learn following participation in ACL. The literature outlines incidences where individuals who have taken part in ACL have then gone on to sign up to (WEA, 2014a; Robey, 2015a; Robey, 2015c) and undertake further courses (NIACE, 2012a; Robey, 2015c; Community Learning and Development Managers Scotland, 2013). For example, the WEA found that 45 per cent of students interviewed had already enrolled on other courses after completing their WEA course (WEA, 2014a, p. 9). This suggests that ACL provides a platform for further learning. It does this by providing individuals with the confidence and enthusiasm to learn.

2.52 In addition to encouraging individuals to sign up to, and participate in further learning courses, ACL also encourages learners to undertake independent learning. Some research findings support this with 50 per cent of students reported that they did independent learning following their course. The independent learning activities included the following:

- Reading materials (80 per cent)
- Using the internet (78 per cent)
- Visiting museums or libraries (62 per cent) (WEA, 2014a, p. 8)

2.53 This evidence suggests that ACL provides individuals with the motivation to continue learning following participation in ACL. This enables individuals to broaden their knowledge and potentially find new interests.

### **The nature and effectiveness of ACL delivery models**

2.54 This section discusses the nature and effectiveness of ACL delivery. It provides an overview of the key areas involved:

- ACL delivery models
- Partnerships
- Funding
- Learner involvement
- The role of volunteers
- Targeting provision
- Curriculum content and structure
- Venues

#### *ACL delivery models*

2.55 This section outlines the findings from the literature in terms of different ACL delivery models.

#### **ACL delivery models**

##### **Key messages from the literature:**

- When planning ACL delivery, a core group of decision makers with one or more operational groups has been shown to be effective. Decision making can be slower when there are several equal partners as opposed to one lead partner.
- A regional strategic approach can help tackle duplication of provision and streamline delivery processes.
- A single lead team with a single budget can be stronger and more effective.

- 2.56 Fifteen Community Learning Trust (CLT) Pilots were trialled in England between August 2012 and July 2013 with a focus on local approaches to planning and delivery. The pilots demonstrated different models of organisation and delivery including a single local authority as the lead; mutual local authority partners working together, or local authority and voluntary sector partnerships. FE colleges also adopted the lead role in some instances and in one pilot a social enterprise organisation took the lead (BIS, 2014).
- 2.57 The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills' evaluation of the CLT pilot noted that, although there were different infrastructure models, there were similarities in approaches to organisation and decision making. Key elements included a core group of decision makers to focus on strategic direction and decision making, and one or more operational groups concentrating on the delivery of the activities (BIS, 2014). Allocating operational groups with particular tasks resulted in faster progress in delivering actions.
- 2.58 Previous reports by Estyn have identified weaknesses in the leadership and management of ACL along with a lack of clarity regarding the availability of resources to deliver effective ACL (Estyn, 2013a, p. 4). Addressing these weaknesses through the development of clearer strategic direction and effective utilisation of expertise from partnership organisations has led to improvements in the 'effectiveness of strategic leadership, management, and the co-ordination of adult community learning' (Estyn, 2015a, p. 4).
- 2.59 The evaluation of the CLT pilot also reports that slower decision-making and overall progress was more evident in partnerships consisting of several equal partners, rather than those with a single lead partner. At the beginning of the pilot college-led pilots made slower progress; this was believed to be due to community learning being only one of colleges' many functions and priorities. The evaluation points out that the single leadership model, although effective, may not work everywhere, as using a more distributed leadership model can help guarantee all partners are committed (BIS, 2014, p. 37). The evaluation of the CLIF in

England in 2012 – 2013 also notes that occasionally the lack of ‘a unifying thread’ hindered coherence of delivery (NIACE, 2014b, p. 68).

2.60 In Scotland, as in Wales, Community Learning and Development (CLD) sits in different departments across local authority organisational structures. Some local authorities have a single team holding a budget, whereas in other areas the responsibility for CLD is split between several departments. The report concludes that a single team with one budget is stronger and more effective (Blake Stephenson Ltd, 2011, p. 26).

2.61 Guidance available for providers in Ireland acknowledges that although there are a variety of approaches to deliver community education, where provision responds to an identified need, for example to combat social isolation, described as ‘hybrid’, this model provides the most popular approach (Department of Education and Skills, 2012, p. 3).

2.62 However, even though the Welsh Government’s vision for ACL includes collaborative working across partnerships and with other providers to eradicate duplication (Welsh Government, 2010a, p. 11), it has been noted that current planning required by the Welsh Government can be ‘onerous, and over bureaucratic’ (NIACE 2013, p. 5). According to NIACE it can also result in duplication and does not reflect value for money (ibid: 5).

2.63 One proposition for Wales is a delivery model based on regional strategic partners across the nation resulting in one lead provider taking a strategic and coordinating lead role, working with local operational partnerships and other providers as required (NIACE, 2013, p. 12).

### *Partnerships*

2.64 This section outlines the findings from the literature in terms of partnership working.

## Partnerships

### Key messages from the literature:

- A single partnership lead for ACL has proven effective.
- The partnership co-ordinator role is viewed very positively.
- Sharing of roles across partnerships results in cost efficiencies.
- An effective partnership can bid for joint funding and grants, and consolidate funding.
- It is important for partnerships to respond to the needs of the local area.

2.65 Effective partnership working proved important among projects in England delivered via CLIF, with ‘good communication processes, clarity of roles and responsibilities and the ability to demonstrate a real team effort’ ensuring effective outcomes’ (NIACE, 2014b, p. 30). The commitment of individuals from within partner organisations was also emphasised (ibid: 30). In Scotland new partnership arrangements resulted in well-developed local community learning, with local groups working with public bodies to focus on local needs across Scotland and within a region (HMIE, 2011; The Edinburgh Adult Education Group, 2014).

2.66 A more integrated partnership model allows for efficiencies in resources and time, as promoted in Ireland; such integration can mean a common application process and joint commissions to publicise courses (Department of Education and Skills, 2012). A further example illustrates the potential to widen access and save costs: a partnership between the University of the Third Age (U3A) and Lancaster University gave older people access to undergraduate lectures when there were spare places (NIACE, 2010b, p. 7).

2.67 Partnership working has also been promoted in Wales, with the sharing of roles among partners resulting in cost efficiencies, with specific partners identified as important in initially engaging learners. For example, in some areas Communities First provide initial steps into learning, building an individual’s confidence and resulting in progression to ACL (NIACE, 2015a). NIACE also note that partnership working should not be driven from the ‘top’, but for partnerships to respond to the

learning and training needs specific to their locality. In the past ACL partnerships in Wales were criticised for failing to address local need, with Estyn subsequently recognising improvements in developing provision to meet this need (Estyn, 2012b, p. 5).

2.68 There is evidence that underlines the importance of an effective regional strategic lead supported by an infrastructure that supports local delivery (NIACE, 2013, p. 7).

2.69 Outcomes of Estyn inspections of ACL in Wales exemplify the importance of effective partnership working, demonstrated by a 'strong strategic direction' and 'high level of trust and mutual respect' (Estyn, 2013b, p. 10). The importance of collaborative partnership working is also evidenced by some of the Welsh ACL partnerships; with the enthusiasm and realism of those involved in establishing the strategy praised by inspectors (e.g. Estyn, 2015b, p. 9).

2.70 The importance of effective partnership working was also recognised as key to the provision for older learners in Wales; working with other departments and local agencies resulted in 'holistic planning' to cater for the needs of older people wishing to engage in learning (Estyn, 2012a).

2.71 The evaluation of the CLT pilot noted the challenge associated with establishing 'mutual trust and openness among partners'. In some instances this took time with local authorities finding it difficult working in partnership and 'letting go' of decision-making responsibilities (BIS, 2014, p. 12). Developing protocols, which clarified ground rules meant that collaborative working between partners improved during the CLT pilot; recognising that establishing effective partnership working takes time is important. Producing a 'summary document to help 'sell' ideas to prospective partners supported this process (ibid: 11).

2.72 The opportunity to bid for grants and other funds was identified as a major benefit of partnership working by the CLT and CLIF pilots (BIS, 2014, p. 118). Duplication was also avoided when working with other organisations to support ACL, such as health workers, Community Development Officers, trade unions, criminal justice, and voluntary



sector organisations (BIS, 2014, p.11; The Edinburgh Adult Education Group, 2014, p. 3; Association of Colleges, 2013, p. 14).

2.73 The importance of minimising duplication and maintaining ACL via diverse funding streams has been underlined by NIACE (2014). NIACE noted that good collaboration does exist in Wales, including shared posts across partnerships, which involve common employment terms and conditions (NIACE, 2015a). However, this is not consistent, and it has been suggested that there is the potential to draw on or learn from other structures in Wales (such as the Children and Young People's Partnerships and Work-based Learning consortia) in order to help drive improvement and consistency across the sector (NIACE, 2014a, pp. 52-53).

2.74 Positive aspects of partnership working in Wales cited in literature include:

- a commitment to work at an operational level – sharing best practice and collaborating
- collective training and sharing of good practice results in a more professional workforce
- application and analysis of data sharing and benchmarking
- focus on hard to reach groups maintained via engagement with the voluntary sector, housing associations and Communities First (NIACE, 2013, p. 9).

### *Funding*

2.75 Drawing on examples of ACL pilots delivered in England this section outlines the findings from the literature in terms of the general funding of ACL initiatives.

## Funding

### Key messages from the literature:

- Ensuring funding is available for the voluntary sector can incentivise their involvement in ACL.
- There is some evidence that fee paying does not appear to deter learners from ACL.
- Streamlining bidding processes has helped engage organisations.
- Embedding financial sustainability has resulted in successful ACL provision.

2.76 The English CLT pilot involved collaboration with the voluntary community sector; one finding from the pilot was that establishing grant pots for the voluntary sector incentivised smaller organisations to become involved in ACL (BIS, 2014, p. 51). Some pilots expected learners to contribute a small fee towards the cost, noting that this was a donation towards the costs of refreshments. This raised income and also secured 'buy in' from learners, and avoided having differential levels of fees for learners in different circumstances (ibid: 115). In some instances the fee was a refundable deposit. There was no evidence that learners were put off by the fee, and it appears to have improved learners' attendance (ibid: 115). This is supported by the findings of a large survey (over 6,000 learners); 55 per cent agreed that funding should be used to support those on lower incomes which would ultimately help promote equity. Of those willing to pay fees they stated that they 'could afford between £1 and £5 an hour' (NIACE, 2012b, p. 6). Many also believed that learning should be free regardless of income (ibid: 7).

2.77 In Ireland it is recommended that all Department of Education and Skills-funded community education programmes are offered free to adults who achieved below upper second level education and/or are educationally or socially disadvantaged (Department of Education and Skills, 2012, p. 4). NIACE (2015a) also suggest that programmes delivered in the community should be funded by the Welsh Government, ensuring ACL is location specific. Linked to this is a proposal that the funding allocations across local authorities should reflect need more appropriately (ibid).

- 2.78 During the CLT pilot a more streamlined bidding process and partnerships with voluntary sector representative bodies improved the levels of engagement from third sector organisations with limited resources. It was also noted that, although it can be difficult for businesses at the national level to contribute, there was success through one-off sponsorship agreements at the local level. In Wales alternative funding routes such as the European Social Fund have financed programmes such as Bridges into Work (Estyn, 2012a, p. 7).
- 2.79 A case study collated by NIACE notes that Staffordshire County Council Adult and Community Learning Service offered grants to cover 60 hours a year of venue hire costs. A wide variety of group activities was supported, with the only stipulation being that learning should take place. Ultimately there is an aim for groups to be self-supporting (NIACE, 2012a, p. 42).
- 2.80 The most successful approaches incorporated within the CLIF projects were those projects that sought to build in sustainability from the beginning. (NIACE, 2014b, p. 55). Other approaches included the establishment of self-organised groups, acquiring funds from other public sources, fee income, funding from employers or other private sources and/or developing a social enterprise, community interest company or cooperative (ibid: 55).
- 2.81 The Review of ACL partnerships by NIACE in 2013 highlighted that the best partnerships use the CLG 'to lever in additional funds or compliment other provision, whether funded by other parts of the Welsh Government or different funders' (NIACE, 2013, p. 8). Estyn has also recommended that Welsh Government departments pool all budgets targeting older people's lifelong learning and wellbeing (Estyn, 2012a).

### *Learner involvement*

- 2.82 This section outlines the findings from the literature in terms of learner involvement.

## **Learner involvement**

### **Key messages from the literature:**

- Responding to local need is vital in ensuring effective engagement.
- Adopting a learner-centred approach has been identified as a success factor.
- It can take time to develop the trust of learners.
- There is potential for learners to be supported further in organising their own learning.

2.83 Adopting a learner-centred approach throughout the delivery of the CLIF projects was identified as an important success factor, especially when providers are flexible and able to respond to changing needs (NIACE, 2014b, p. 66). Local people were also engaged in the CLT pilots to inform local provision and provide feedback via the following methods:

- using community representatives and peer researchers
- holding public consultation events
- maintaining a community presence
- attending other community meetings and events
- using market research activities
- using social media (BIS, 2014, p. 89).

2.84 In Cumbria CLT partners spoke to parents during parents' evenings to obtain feedback on the demand for courses. It was found that 'large-scale consultation events worked less well' in reaching local communities. If consultation events did take place they were more effective working alongside other engagement programmes (ibid: 14). The report of the CLIF projects restates the importance of using a variety of communication methods such as social media, leaflets, newsletters and local notice boards to reach potential learners, emphasising that 'word of mouth' is effective (NIACE, 2014b, p. 72).

2.85 Aiming to focus on the skills individuals need, as opposed to focusing on rigid qualification requirements, NIACE developed a Citizens' Curriculum; more than 160 learners co-developed programme content in 16 trials (NIACE, 2015b, p. 6). The ownership and motivation resulting from the 'learner-led approach' proved to be a critical success factor for English-language courses delivered via a health theme (Robey, 2015a,

p. 8). Consultation with parents prior to engagement with a pilot focusing on developing migrant parents' ability to support their children guaranteed that the course was accessible and met the learning requirements of the group (Robey, 2015b, p. 8). In-depth consultation with potential learners of another pilot resulted in 'a very flexible learner-centred approach', not only prior to delivery but throughout the learning experience, allowing amendments to the delivery to be made in response to learner involvement (Robey, 2015d, p. 5).

2.86 The Welsh Government recognises the importance of learner involvement within ACL, with all post-16 learning providers required to establish formal learner involvement strategies (Welsh Government, 2010b). There is also a wide range of opportunities for learner participation via forums, focus groups and conferences (Estyn, 2014). These opportunities were valued by learners; for example learners in the Gwent Adult Community Learning Partnership were instrumental in providing feedback, which led to new courses in beauty, family history and A-level English; and following meetings with learners in Bridgend the local authority aims to plan learning that is more relevant to learners' needs (Estyn, 2014, p. 9; p. 12). A range of consultation activities were highlighted in the Wrexham ACL partnership including events at libraries and community venues; surveys and focus groups also provide opportunity for learner involvement and as a result learning provision is contextualised and adapted according to requirements of different groups of learners (ibid: 13).

2.87 Evidence from the Learner Voice Wales survey illustrates that learners recognise that providers ask their views and inform them of the actions taken in response. Findings for the 2015 Survey found that 56 per cent of learners rated their provider as 'very good' at asking learners to provide their views; with 47 per cent noting their provider was 'very good' at providing feedback regarding these views. Both of these figures present an improvement on findings from previous years (Welsh Government, 2015b, p. 47).

2.88 Estyn also reported that ACL providers could support learner involvement further, with assistance in setting up classes and activities. However, most ACL providers lack the infrastructure to help learners organise their own learning; learners lack access to information about venues, how to organise delivery, understand finance issues, health and safety, and insurance procedures required. A few providers were identified as offering leadership development skills for learners (Estyn, 2014, p. 11).

### *The role of volunteers*

2.89 This section outlines the findings from the literature in terms of the role of volunteers.

#### **The role of volunteers**

##### **Key messages from the literature:**

- Volunteers are a vital resource in supporting ACL.
- Volunteers encourage others into learning and support learning.
- The training of volunteers could improve their role further.

2.90 An extensive survey of learners by NIACE in 2012 discovered that almost a third of those surveyed were keen to help organise activities by taking on responsibilities for organising or leading a learning activity or being a 'learning champion' (NIACE, 2012b, p. 6).

2.91 Within the CLT pilot 'learning champions' encouraged learners into learning and supported them 'through their learning journey'; volunteer mentors also helped to bring IT into familiar settings for learners such as libraries and community centres (BIS 2014, p. 13). A partnership project in Yorkshire illustrated the benefits to volunteer learners; informal 'on the job' learning, which may lead onto more formal learning (Association of Colleges, 2013, p. 4). Progression into paid community work with further progression onto 'Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector' courses and later becoming tutors was also noted during the CLT and CLIF projects (NIACE, 2014b, p. 27; BIS 2014, p. 122). The CLIF projects also levered 55,800 volunteer hours to support community

outreach and the development and delivery of programmes (NIACE, 2014b, p. 20).

2.92 Those who choose to volunteer do so because ‘they enjoy helping other people and contributing to wellbeing in their neighbourhoods’ (BIS, 2013b, p. 12). However, the CLT pilot highlighted that volunteers do need training and this is an important component of any strategy (ibid: 12). The NIACE survey of learners also raised this point; even though more than 25 per cent were keen to volunteer, the majority wanted to be supported either with expenses paid, or the provision of training or mentors (NIACE, 2012b, p. 27).

### *Targeting provision*

2.93 This section outlines the findings from the literature in terms of targeting provision.

#### **Targeting provision**

##### **Key messages from the literature:**

- Targeting and outreach work is crucial in engaging marginalised learners.
- There is a risk if all ACL is targeted that those able to pay may miss out on provision.
- Agencies working together can be particularly effective in targeting learners.
- Rural areas and urban areas require different targeting approaches.

2.94 Effective partnership working for the CLT pilot meant that ACL reached out to disadvantaged communities (BIS, 2014). For example CLT pilots effectively targeted men’s needs with courses related to DIY and sport (particularly football) (ibid: 71). However, it has also been highlighted that if funding is targeted solely at the most disadvantaged groups this could result in ‘no publicly-supported offer for learners who are able to pay’ (BIS, 2011a, p. 7).

2.95 In Ireland those facing ‘particular and acute barriers’ are targeted with intensive outreach work. This reflects the need for specific strategies for marginalised groups to be included, particularly those under-represented, for example men in rural areas (Department of Education

and Skills, 2012, p. 4). In Scotland the targeted approach ensures priority needs are met, with connections with schools, social workers and police assisting in effective targeting of provision (HMIE, 2011, p. 19). An example comes from the CLT pilot in England implemented by Rochdale Borough Council (Robey, 2015c). Several agencies were consulted and once a family's situation was defined, a project worker targeted a member of the family who needed support (Robey, 2015c, p. 6).

2.96 When provision is to be targeted in rural areas predominantly there is discussion with learners, referral agencies and voluntary organisations already engaged with specific groups (NIACE, 2012a, p. 33). In Wales the emphasis on targeting skills for employment has been criticised for not being suitable for older learners, with their interests being more focused on enrichment type of activities (Estyn, 2012a, p. 12).

### *Curriculum content and structure*

2.97 This section outlines the findings from the literature in terms of curriculum content and structure.

#### **Curriculum content and structure**

##### **Key messages from the literature:**

- Learning needs to be relevant to learners' everyday life experiences.
- Shorter courses can be more appealing to learners.
- Rebranding courses can prove successful in attracting learners.
- Technology provides cost effective opportunities for learning.
- It is important to be flexible in delivery methods, curriculum and assessment approaches.

2.98 The literature draws on a range of examples of course content and structures, which demonstrate the importance of ensuring content is relevant and accessible to learners. An example of an initiative in Scotland focused on literacy and numeracy but in order for it to be engaging for learners it was vital that the content was relevant to learner's every day experiences as the following extract illustrates:

'They needed to offer people a vision and choices that could change their lives. Making literacies relevant to people's lives was



crucial. Looking at issues that they have to deal with in everyday life, such as filling in forms, got them involved and allowed the project to lead people on gradually to other learning’.

Community Learning and Development Managers Scotland (2013, p. 18)

2.99 Guidance provided for ACL providers in Ireland reiterates this, highlighting that programmes need to begin ‘with the lived experience of the participants and be located in their daily family and social lives’ (Department of Education and Skills, 2012, p. 10). A later review of adult literacy provision in Ireland also emphasises the importance of ‘family literacy provision’ and potential for ‘intensive learning’ as well as more application of learning opportunities via ICT (Department of Education and Skills, 2013, p. 34).

2.100 A range of learning opportunities has resulted from effective partnerships with third sector organisations. This include walks, traditional arts and crafts provided by Wildlife Trusts, Forestry Commission, Field Studies Council, the National Parks and the Trust for Conservation Volunteers. These opportunities have been delivered as single sessions, formal courses, weekend or holiday activities. (NIACE, 2012a). There is evidence that some delivery methods that are particularly effective in rural areas, including approaches such as webinars, as illustrated in the following extract from a project in Berkshire.

‘Webinars have huge benefits which go beyond their cost effectiveness. You can attend the courses from anywhere, simply needing internet access and a headset to join in. [ ] learners get to grips quickly with the technology, which is an added training bonus. Some delegates also appear to participate more actively online than they might in a traditional classroom, overcoming shyness and getting more involved. Webinars are a truly exciting, interactive training experience!’

NIACE, (2012a, p. 17)

- 2.101 Diversity in the delivery of learning in rural areas is evident; for example, Skype, SmartBoard and Moodle are used to enable learners to access materials online in the Isles of Scilly (NIACE, 2012a); a social enterprise working with care homes trained volunteers to go into the homes and deliver informal learning, from playing an instrument to discussing current affairs (NIACE, 2012a); and a mobile teaching centre (NIACE, 2012a) - the Enterprise learning Centre formally Comput@bus currently delivers courses on Email, Internet and all Microsoft office software across the county of Worcestershire.
- 2.102 The NIACE learner survey provides feedback regarding specific subject content learners prefer, with digital technology (ICT and digital photography) most popular (59 per cent of individuals and 70 per cent of groups) languages were also very popular with both individuals and groups (42 per cent) (NIACE, 2012b, p. 20). Over 200 groups responded to the survey and these demonstrated a preference for music, dance and drama and craft courses (ibid: 19). Other information collected by the survey focused on preferences linked to learning with a paid tutor; 92 per cent of individuals and 94 per cent of groups agreed they would like to learn this way (ibid: 22). It should also be noted that a lesson learned during the CLIF projects was that short 'taster' courses are likely to be more appealing to learners initially than committing to a course of several weeks (NIACE, 2014b, p. 73).
- 2.103 A key learning point to emerge from the English CLT pilot highlights the necessity of reviewing the branding of courses with more interest generated when titles of courses were changed to avoid using terms such as 'Maths' and 'English'. Another approach identified during the CLT pilot to overcome people's fear of particular subject areas, IT specifically, was to deliver 'indirect education' by partnering with other community events or learning activities, e.g. coffee mornings, or cookery and craft courses (BIS, 2014, p. 78). Estyn also notes evidence of literacy and numeracy skills development being most successful when provision is delivered alongside other skills related to learners' interests such as family history for example (Estyn, 2012a, p. 7). Some providers

avoid using English and Maths in course titles. However, in some instances when learners were referred by agencies such as social services, these partner organisations preferred English and Maths in course titles as they felt they were complying with government priorities (BIS, 2014, p. 84).

2.104 The importance of focusing on ICT skills for adult learners was evident in the literature (Hague, 2009). However, content offered to older learners has been criticised for being planned in isolation, with different agencies not linking their provision. As a result many older learners do not continue to learn after retirement and into old age (Estyn, 2012a).

2.105 Offering opportunities for learners to manage their learning is important, with self-directed learning, critical reflection and 'learning to learn' skills contributing to learners achieving successes throughout the learning experience. An emphasis on group learning is also encouraged, providing a framework for community action and cohesion (Department of Education and Skills, 2012). Flexibility in methods of delivery, choice of curriculum and assessment have been highlighted in the literature with it being necessary to work with the community to ensure appropriate delivery, with particular flexibility required when aiming learning at those over the age of 70 (Further Education Development Unit, Department of Education and Science 2008; Estyn, 2012a).

2.106 The most recent Learner Voice Wales survey recorded 13 per cent of ACL learners wished to learn in Welsh/bilingually and two per cent identified a preference to learn in Welsh only. The demand for Welsh in the ACL sector was slightly higher when compared to the Further Education and Work Based Learning sectors (Welsh Government, 2015b, p. 50).

2.107 Contextualising the learning and ensuring content is relevant to learners' lives has been a strong theme throughout the literature. For example courses to support the development of English for migrants applied an overarching theme of health, resulting in language becoming embedded in everyday lives (Robey, 2015a). In courses offered for

women only, a focus on self-confidence and personal development, helped with motivation to continue participating in learning (Robey, 2015d). The importance of citizenship as a key thread for ESOL courses and the necessity to embed literacy and numeracy and contextualising within different subject areas has also been recognised (NIACE, 2014a).

2.108 Early findings of an initiative piloted in Scotland from September 2015 until February 2016 with ten centres supporting 130 adult learners, notes the positive benefit of learners completing a reflective journal and the value of direct support from a tutor; the Adult Achievement Awards recognise skills achieved in non-formal learning and the importance of transferable soft skills (Ross, 2016).

### *Venues*

2.109 This section outlines the findings from the literature in terms of the venues used for ACL provision.

#### **Venues**

##### **Key messages from the literature:**

- Flexible delivery at familiar accessible neutral venues helps meet local and individual requirements.
- Locating ACL at a 'shared venue' has proved successful.
- Accessible transport infrastructure can impact learners' decisions particularly in rural areas.

2.110 The role of the venue/setting for ACL provision is important. A large study of almost 2,000 learners, which included examining reasons for engagement in learning, found that for 43 per cent of learners the convenience of location was key (London Economics and Ipsos MORI, 2013, p. 5). The NIACE learners' survey also noted that the majority preferred 'conventional modes of learning'; such as college, adult education centre or community centre classes (NIACE, 2012b, p. 19).

2.111 The CLT pilot identified the importance of using 'familiar facilities', such as libraries, community centres and pubs to lessen anxiety learners may experience in a new environment (BIS, 2014, p. 13; p. 69). Access to

other facilities, such as crèches, were also important for some (Robey, 2015a, p. 5). The location of ACL on the same premises as a library, tourist information and other information services was highlighted within effective partnership working in Northumberland (NIACE, 2012a, p. 45).

2.112 Flexibility of learning venue for learners is also provided when delivering learning online and/or using mobile services (NIACE, 2012a). Many respondents of the NIACE 2012 survey considered issues such as accessibility to public transport and the availability of high quality learning resources to be more important than the type of venue (NIACE, 2012). Many projects supported by CLIF mentioned the importance of a 'safe, familiar and comfortable learning environment' (NIACE, 2014b, p. 68). However, a minority of learners pointed out that they sometimes prefer a neutral location due to perceived stigma associated with particular situations such as homelessness or mental health issues (ibid: 68).

2.113 'Non-traditional settings' in rural areas can ensure that learning is available closer to where people live, with online learning able to help overcome practical barriers such as the lack of public transport (BIS, 2014, p. 75). Estyn support this, stating the importance of 'local learning programmes for older people in preparing them for later life' (Estyn, 2012a, p. 8). The significance of easy access is illustrated below:

'The availability of the course nearby was a deciding issue in my participation. If the course had been further afield I would not have bothered. Therefore the vital issues for me are location and social interaction. In my view not to have these courses available locally would amount to a form of social exclusion!'

Regional Learning Partnership, (2014, p. 11)

2.114 However, it was also observed in Ireland that ACL staff delivering in outreach can be working in isolation, with the work being lonely or difficult; working in teams would ensure that this does not happen (Further Education Development Unit, Department of Education and Science, 2008, p. 11).

## **Conclusions of the literature review**

2.115 The literature review illustrates that there is a wide range of adult learning opportunities delivered mainly by local authorities, FE Institutions and educational and community organisations across the UK and Ireland. While ACL providers in all nations are currently facing challenges through decreased funding, the literature nonetheless emphasises the value of ACL to individuals and society more broadly. ACL provides opportunities for individuals to acquire new skills, achieve qualifications, progress onto further learning pathways, or directly into employment or volunteering. The literature demonstrates examples of the wider impact of ACL on a range of issues including health and wellbeing, social inclusion, community cohesion and as a way of tackling poverty.

### *Partnerships and delivery models*

2.116 The literature review explored different ACL delivery models and partnership approaches adopted across the UK and Ireland. There is evidence to indicate that regional strategic approaches to planning and delivering adult learning can lead to more streamlined provision. Where ACL is delivered through partnership approaches, models of delivery based on a single lead partner and a core group of decision-makers have proven effective. Research has, however, also shown that decision making can be slower when there are several equal partners as opposed to one lead partner and that a single team with a single budget can be stronger and more effective in certain cases.

### *Funding*

2.117 Reductions in levels of funding for ACL inevitably impact on the range of provision available and the capacity to engage with learners. Some areas of good practice have nevertheless been reported in the literature. One of the key findings from the review is that embedding financial sustainability (e.g. through longer term funding cycles) has resulted in

successful ACL provision while streamlining bidding processes has helped engage a range of organisations to support provision and delivery. There are examples in the literature where the sharing of roles across partnerships has resulted in cost efficiencies. Also, joint bids for grants between partner organisations have provided a means of consolidating funding for ACL.

### *Meeting local needs*

2.118 Targeting communities and learners in greatest need through outreach provision is highlighted as being crucial for engaging marginalised learners. Agencies have worked together effectively to target learners in communities. Responding to local need is vital in ensuring effective engagement and the literature indicates that effective regional strategies aided by an infrastructure that supports local delivery can be beneficial. The literature notes that different approaches to planning provision are required in rural and urban areas. There is particular reference to the additional needs in rural areas where accessibility of venues and transport can present additional barriers for learners seeking to engage in learning.

### *Targeting learners*

2.119 In terms of targeting individual learners, adopting a learner-centred approach has been identified as a key success factor. The literature suggests that learning needs to be relevant to learners' everyday life experiences and that a flexible approach including shorter courses, a range of delivery methods and assessment approaches can be important in encouraging engagement with learning. The availability of high quality learning resources is key to attracting and retaining learners. While the literature suggests that fee paying does not seem to deter learners from ACL there is some concern expressed that further cuts to 'leisure' provision will lead to no publicly-supported offer for learners who are able to pay.

### **3. Overview of current ACL provision in Wales**

#### **Overview of the mapping exercise**

3.1 One of the research questions set out in the specification for this review was to establish '*What, and how, is ACL currently delivered across Wales and how does this differ between areas?*' In order to help answer this question, the research team completed a mapping exercise that involved collecting information from ACL Partnerships about the following:

- ACL Partnership delivery structures;
- Members of ACL Partnerships;
- How partners work together through Partnership boards and sub-groups;
- Strategic aims and priorities;
- Types of provision;
- Venues and settings where ACL provision is delivered.

3.2 Before turning to each of these points, we consider the current funding arrangements for ACL in Wales, which provides context for the following sections and the wider issues raised in Chapter 4 of this report.

#### **Funding for ACL provision in Wales**

3.3 ACL provision in Wales is funded through a complex, and frequently interconnected, mix of funding streams. This includes the Community Learning Grant (CLG) and funding for part-time provision in further education (FE). Both funding streams have been subject to significant reductions in recent years, which has impacted significantly on the



amount of ACL delivered.<sup>2</sup> The Community Learning Grant is used to deliver some direct delivery by local authorities. It is also used to support provision through franchises and other government programmes and is used by some local authorities as match funding in European-funded projects. In addition to the direct funding through the CLG, some local authorities also receive franchise funding from colleges; some local authorities also receive additional direct contributions from local authority budgets. Table 4, below, which was compiled by the Welsh Government, provides figures for direct grant (CLG) between 2013/14 and 2016/17. It reveals that there has been a 37 per cent reduction in the Grant over this period, from £6.1m to £3.8m.

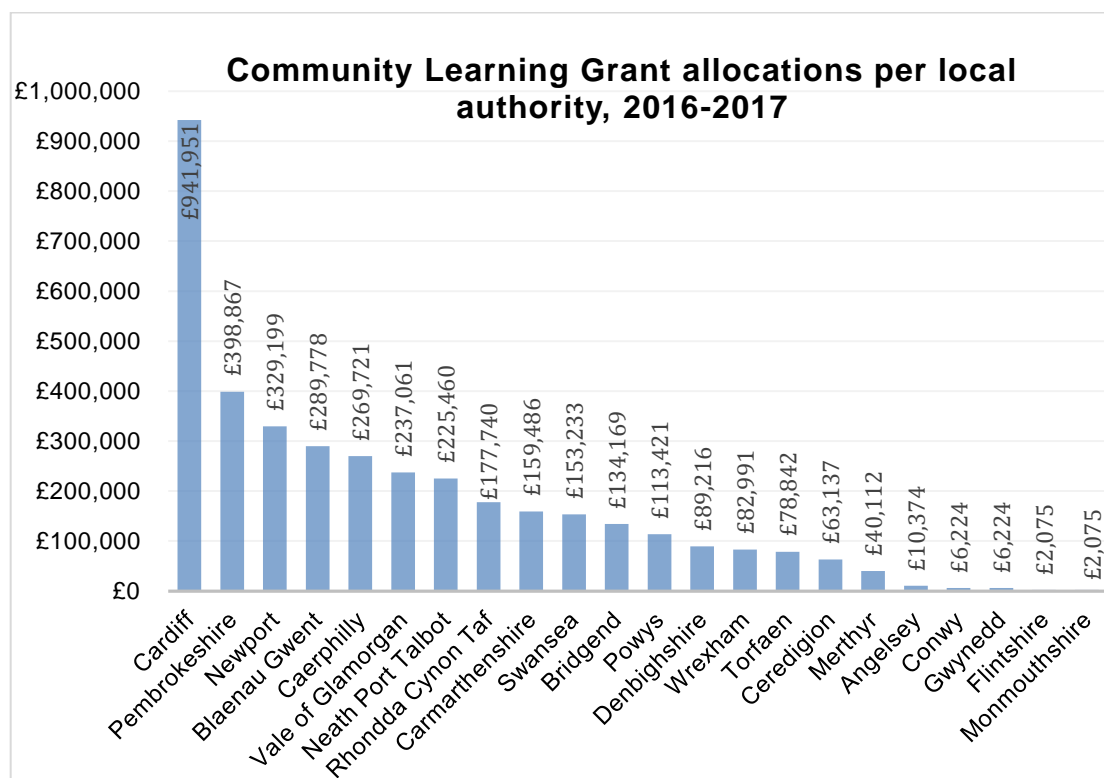
*Table 4: Community Learning Grant Funding, 2013/14 to 2016/17*

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Welsh Government Community Learning Grant – direct ACL grant funding	£6,082,982	£3,801,864	£3,736,624	£3,811,356

3.4 The Community Learning Grant has been in operation since 2000, and is based on a historical exercise that removed a proportion of the Revenue Support Grant from local authorities and redistributed it as a specific Community Learning Grant, distributed annually. The sums awarded to each local authority mirrors what each sacrificed as part of that initial exercise in 2000. It is clear that there were issues with the exercise and as a consequence, the amount of funding each local authority relinquished varied considerably. Consequently, the amounts awarded to each local authority as part of the grant are extremely uneven, ranging from £2,075 (Flintshire) to £941,951 (Cardiff). Allocations for 2016/17 are shown in Figure 1, below.

<sup>2</sup> Both the CLG and part-time funding in FE fell by 37.5 per cent in 2014/15, followed by a further reduction of 50 per cent in the part-time FE budget in 2015/16.

Figure 1. Community Learning Grant allocations per local authority, 2016-2017



Source: Welsh Government

3.5 Some local authorities have franchise arrangements with local colleges and receive funding directly from Welsh Government through the CLG and from FE institutions through the franchise. The amount of funding is determined by colleges, in discussion with local authorities and is not ring-fenced by the Welsh Government. In those local authorities where provision is delivered in franchise with FE colleges, the franchise value across Wales is comparable with the value of the direct CLG allocated to local authorities.<sup>3</sup> Indeed in some cases, the funding from FE institutions is vastly greater than the direct funding received.

3.6 In addition to formal franchise arrangements, colleges fund ACL through Service Level Agreements and Commissioning Frameworks with local authorities to support a range of activity, including ABE and ESOL provision. This underlines the essential role of colleges in supporting and

<sup>3</sup> In 2015/16 the ten local authorities with franchise arrangements with colleges received £1.8m through the Community Learning Grant. These franchise value to local authorities amounted to a further £1.6m.

sustaining ACL provision at a time when budgets are under continued pressure.

- 3.7 Many local authorities also contribute additional funds outside the direct Welsh Government grant and franchise arrangements to support ACL provision. There is no consistent picture across Wales (and indeed not all local authorities do provide such support).
- 3.8 Other sources of funding cited by ACL Partnerships in documentation provided to the review team include:
- Funding through other publicly-funded programmes (notably Communities First; also Flying Start, Families First, Pupil Deprivation Grant funding);
  - In-kind contributions such as staffing costs or the use of local authority-owned venues or facilities;
  - European Social Fund (ESF) and other European Commission funded projects;
  - Funding through local authority-managed regeneration programmes;
  - Lottery Funding;
  - Higher Education Widening Access funding;
  - Specific funding related to community projects;
  - A wide range of third sector organisations working with vulnerable adults.
- 3.9 The current status of ACL funding illustrates many local authorities' success in drawing on multiple funding streams to support and sustain provision and the address funding gaps. It nonetheless also raises questions about how strategic and cohesive the ACL sector is able to be when it is reliant on disparate, short-term and, in some cases, uncertain funding streams.

## **ACL Partnerships in Wales**

- 3.10 All providers are involved in ACL Strategic Partnerships, which were set up at the request of Welsh Government as part of a transformation programme of ACL in 2009. In order to be recognised officially by the Welsh Government, ACL Partnerships must include representatives from FE, HE, local authorities and the third sector.
- 3.11 There are currently 15 ACL Partnerships operating a range of different delivery models. There are four broad delivery mechanisms:
- Delivery directly by local authorities through the Community Learning Grant (CLG);
  - Delivery by local authorities in franchise with colleges;
  - Delivery by colleges through Service Level Agreements (SLAs) and Commissioning Frameworks with local authorities;
  - Delivery directly by FE institutions.
- 3.12 ACL in Wales is planned, coordinated and delivered in different ways across Wales and there is inconsistency in how ACL Partnerships are configured. One Partnership is based on the local authority with the smallest population in Wales (Merthyr, with a population of some 59,000), while there are two Partnerships serving groups of local authorities with populations approaching half a million (Cardiff and Vale, and Gwent ACL Partnership).
- 3.13 ACL Partnerships are monitored by the Welsh Government against the Quality and Effectiveness Framework and by Estyn according to their Common Inspection Framework. It has been suggested by stakeholders and Partnership representatives that this has led to a disjointed situation as the Partnerships are not funded directly by the Welsh Government and yet they are the mechanism by which the provision is evaluated.
- 3.14 The outcomes of inspections since the partnerships came into existence reveal a mixed picture in terms of the quality of delivery in recent years. Inspection reports in the period up to 2013 underlined a number of weaknesses in the way Partnership activity was led and managed.

However, as highlighted in the previous chapter, Estyn inspections have led to improved ratings in recent years.

- 3.15 The inconsistencies in funding and variations in delivery models exist principally for historical reasons, rather than any purposeful or strategic planning. Evidence presented in later sections of this report examines the impact of current arrangements on equality of access and quality of provision.

### **Membership of ACL Partnerships**

- 3.16 The Welsh Government's 2010 Strategy '*Delivering community learning for Wales*' was clear in its expectation that ACL partnerships should continue to bring together a range of providers including FE, HE, local authorities, voluntary sector and other providers and that these partnerships should '*work to their individual strengths*'. Most Partnerships report that they do have a wide and inclusive membership. Partnerships with the largest list of members noted that there are differing levels of activity and engagement. As is to be expected local authorities, FE colleges and the WEA YMCA Cymru lead on the main aspects of coordinating and planning provision. In most Partnerships, HE institutions are also key and active partners.
- 3.17 Partnership representatives reported during interviews that other members are typically less involved in strategic planning and serve largely as 'second tier' delivery or advisory partners. This includes voluntary sector organisations, Welsh for Adults, Jobcentre Plus, Careers Wales, Communities First representatives, training organisations, housing associations and regeneration projects.
- 3.18 Partners report that ACL Partnerships have led to good levels of networking between providers. The review heard evidence of some partners pooling resources and coordinating delivery in order to sustain provision at a time of reduced funding for the sector, address any issues of duplication of provision and provide clear progression routes for learners. This links to the importance of an increasingly regional

approach to aspects of the learning and skills agenda in Wales. Although Regional Learning Partnerships have had a limited role to date in relation to ACL, there may be merit in considering how their functions and activities in relation to supporting the inactive adult population can build on and add value to the work of ACL Partnerships in future.

### **Strategic aims and priorities for ACL partnerships**

- 3.19 Partnerships are required by the Welsh Government to set out 'a clear direction' in their ACL strategic and quality development plans. The majority of Partnerships have current 'Strategic Plans' or 'ACL Strategic Statements' while several are currently developing such documents. There is little consistency in the structure or scope of these documents. In some cases comprehensive Partnership-wide Community Learning Strategies are in place, which set out a vision, aims, and an action plan with performance measures over a three-year period. Some strategic plans also clarify the links between ACL and other national and local programmes. Other partnerships have less detailed plans in place, providing only a broad description of priority areas and without setting the role and functions of the ACL Partnership in the wider context of learning and skills.
- 3.20 As part of the review, the research team has explored the range of aims, objectives and priorities articulated by ACL Partnerships. Echoing the points above, these vary in terms of their detail and scope. Some Partnerships set out their aims in broad terms through mission statements that encompass a range of themes, while others provide fairly long lists of specific strategic objectives. It is important to note that members of the partnerships are also working towards their individual organisation's strategic direction and objectives, which appear to influence how these aims and objectives are presented. As a result strategic aims and priorities for partnerships vary in content and focus.

3.21 The Welsh Government's *Delivering Community Learning for Wales* (2010, p. 6) identifies ACL's target learners, with a minimum of 80 per cent of total funding allocated for ACL provision to be devoted to:

- anyone aged 16 and above accessing an ACL basic skills and/or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programme, including contextualised basic skills and citizenship courses;
- those who are not currently in education, training or employment (NEET) and are in receipt of state benefits or support (excluding state retirement pension); or
- those aged 50 plus who are not in full-time employment.

3.22 Partnerships make reference to these priority areas for ACL with some directly acknowledging them as Welsh Government priorities. The most commonly cited aims and priorities set out in ACL Partnerships' strategic plans are:

- Delivering essential skills; raising literacy and numeracy achievement; supporting employability;
- Offering a range of experiences and increasing participation in learning;
- Delivering learning that is responsive to the needs and priorities (of learners, employers, communities and Welsh Government);
- Improving health and well-being, and social inclusion.

3.23 These points cover a variety of issues, including 'types' of provision, strategic and planning processes and outcomes. Examples of other objectives and priorities included in strategic documentation cut across a number of themes. Some refer to the type of provision (reflecting Welsh Government priorities) while others focus on strategic planning issues, such as the drive to improve quality and ensure coherent progression routes for learners. Others include longer term outcomes in their list of priorities.

- 3.24 Although Partnerships' aims are guided by the Welsh Government's stated priorities, there is nonetheless variation in the aims and priorities that they set out. It is also evident from the breadth of strategic aims and objectives, and the priority groups targeted, that ACL Partnerships across Wales strive to reach out extensively across communities. There is a lack of consistency in terms of how ACL Partnerships across Wales articulate their aims. This could be said to be indicative of a lack of focus or a lack of clarity regarding the overarching aims of ACL delivery.
- 3.25 Partnerships target delivery in response to local need: the most disadvantaged learners are supported in Flying Start and Communities First areas, collaboration with Job Centre Plus allows for courses to be tailored to address job market vacancies. Alongside targeting the above groups some partnerships also emphasise the importance of targeting adults learning Welsh, parents identified by schools as needing family learning support, adults with additional needs, farmers, ex-offenders and disadvantaged and underrepresented groups identified via links with Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Housing Associations and the voluntary sector.
- 3.26 Questions remain about how realistic it is for ACL Partnerships to be able to deliver such an extensive list of objectives fully to such a wide range of target groups. ACL Partnerships and providers have stretched their resources at a time when the sector has sought to contribute to a wide range of policy areas. Although this illustrates the contribution that ACL is able to, and does make, in different ways, this poses questions as to whether such a broad remit is having a negative impact on the sector's capacity to fulfil its primary roles outlined by Welsh Government.

## **Provision**

- 3.27 ACL partnerships were asked whether they provide any ACL provision in addition to the Welsh Government's three priority areas of ESOL, Essential Skills and digital literacy. The majority of ACL partnerships indicated that they do provide additional provision, with a small number



noting that they do not. In most cases, partnerships provided examples of the type of provision they offer. For example, one partnership reported that it delivers courses aimed at adults with additional learning needs, such as independent living skills. Another partnership noted that it provides vocational workshops such as plumbing, carpentry and blacksmithing.

3.28 Some partnerships indicated that they deliver leisure based courses, with one stating in their response that these courses are fee paying course which do not use Welsh Government funding and do not rely on subsidy from the local authorities. Examples of these leisure courses include the following:

- Health and wellbeing courses
- Arts and craft courses
- Languages.

3.29 Many partnerships reported that they provide employability courses in addition to provision that falls under the Welsh Government's four priority areas. Some partnerships noted that they include these employability courses under the 'Preparation for life and work' sector subject area. Examples of the topic areas covered by employability courses include the following:

- Confidence building
- Study skills
- Job searching
- CV and application writing
- Interview techniques.

3.30 Partnerships provided other examples of types of provision that they currently deliver under the 'Preparation for life and work' sector subject area. Among the examples mentioned by one or more of the Partnerships were the following:

- Family learning

- Essential skills e.g. Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy courses
- Basic office skills
- Money wise / planning personal finances
- Work taster courses e.g. Play and Child Development Work Taster; and Health and Social Care Work Taster
- Personal and social development
- Citizenship.

3.31 The broad range of examples of the different types of ACL provided by partnerships illustrates the variations in provision that is offered to learners across Wales.

## **4. Qualitative evidence from case study visits and stakeholder consultation**

4.1 As has been outlined in the previous chapter, the delivery of ACL in Wales varies, and is based on different delivery mechanisms.

Consequently the map of ACL provision across Wales is a complex one with varying amounts of provision, different lead partners coordinating provision across Wales and inconsistency in terms of the offer available to learners. This chapter draws on the qualitative evidence collected during the review and presents this according to the following headings:

- ACL Partnerships' approaches to planning provision;
- Contribution of ACL to society;
- The effects of reductions in funding.

### **ACL Partnerships: strategic planning and operational delivery**

4.2 A common approach across ACL Partnerships is that they are led by an overarching Strategic Board, supported by sub-groups that focus on specific themes (e.g. quality, curriculum, monitoring and MIS, local operational groups). Typically Strategic Boards meet once per term to discuss delivery, planning and strategy. Partnerships report that this approach enables them to identify gaps in provision collectively and to work together *'to try and ensure a coherent offer for the learner'*. A number of Partnerships consult with local communities (including communities in more deprived areas) in order to support the process of planning provision, although this does not appear to be done in all areas. Partnerships in some areas have also developed good links with employers, and there are some examples of ACL provision being planned and delivered in response to the skills needs and job vacancies of local employers.

4.3 Where partnerships are working effectively proposed provision is planned and shared in advance to avoid duplication. This includes identification of progression routes, ensuring transparency of offer and building on the strengths of all partners. Another partnership reported

that they cooperate on lesson observations, CPD for tutors and learner newsletters to drive quality and encourage more open working relations and break down 'silos'.

*'It has become relatively easy to plan courses and provision as over the last few years we have identified areas of expertise among partners - based on (learning) outcomes, sharing of information, peer assessments, and availability of tutors.'* (ACL Partnership coordinator)

- 4.4 A minority of Partnerships, however, reported difficulties in achieving buy-in from senior managers in further education institutions and local authorities. In these cases representatives reported that there is little cohesion in terms of planning and delivery, and little sharing of good practice. Some Partnerships report that the sector is suffering from 'a lack of strategic vision' and that Partnerships do not have sufficient authority or decision-making powers. According to some contributors to the review, Partnerships have become more marginalised, partially due to the loss of lead officer and manager posts following recent reductions in funding.

*'There is no doubt that provision has been eroded and the profile of ACL has suffered. ACL also struggles a bit with a lack of focus. In times of reduced funding, there is a need to be clear about who we are serving, what we are aiming to deliver and how ACL links to other education and training.'* (ACL Partnership coordinator)

*'There is a lack of effective coordination between some partners and programmes. The greatest overlap – and frustration – is with some of the tackling poverty programmes which duplicates some of what we're trying to deliver.'* (ACL Partnership coordinator)

- 4.5 At the operational and delivery levels there are strong levels of commitment to working in partnership across the ACL sector in Wales. Visits to ACL Partnership areas as part of this review found that partners work together to collect and share information about local learner needs and coordinate provision in response to these needs. Through these Partnerships' strategic and operational groups, providers cooperate to ensure provision meets needs, aiming to avoid duplication and identify progression routes.

*‘There is an awareness of what each organisation provides and what potential entry and progression paths exist around this. Communication is good....and this is the key strength of our partnership.’ (ACL Partnership coordinator)*

*‘The ACL partnership is small but there is effective communication – there is openness, trust and no competition, we share quality forms and good practice. As we don’t have a finite number of learners there is no need for targeting other organisations’ learners; the focus instead is on provision.’ (ACL Partnership coordinator)*

- 4.6 Another recurring point is the inconsistency in delivery – certainly across Wales and in some cases within Partnership areas. There is no common core offer or a common curriculum framework that ensures equal access to courses for learners. Numerous examples were provided of variations in terms of what constitutes employability provision, leading to differences in what learners can access for free, e.g. British Sign Language is free in one local authority area but not in an adjacent authority.

*‘There is too much disparity in access to learning and quality.’ (ACL Partnership coordinator)*

## **The contribution of ACL to society**

### **Supporting employability**

- 4.7 Representatives noted that promoting employability skills is firmly embedded as a priority within ACL provision. Partnerships are also continuing to promote digital literacy and digital inclusion. One Partnership noted that their ESOL provision has been reviewed in recent years to focus on ‘English for employment’.
- 4.8 Partnerships argued strongly that ACL supports the skills of both employed and unemployed learners. It improves employability and can deliver short and longer term impacts on learners’ economic activity and employment prospects. For employed learners participating in ACL can contribute to improving job performance and satisfaction and increase their chances of gaining a new job or a promotion. ACL representatives

reported that ACL can help learners who are looking for a job, enabling them to acquire new skills to succeed in the labour market and increasing unemployed learners' confidence in searching for work. This evidence presented by ACL Partnerships across Wales links closely to findings in the literature review where evidence illustrates that ACL has both a short and long term impact on learners' economic activity and employability. The main area of impact is gaining new skills, which has a knock on effect in increasing learners' confidence in finding a job and their likelihood of gaining a new job or promotion; as well as improving their job performance and job satisfaction.

#### Engaging with hard to reach learners

4.9 Partnerships engage with a wide range of organisations and stakeholders. This includes government agencies (Jobcentre Plus, Careers Wales) and many third sector organisations that sit on ACL Partnerships and often refer hard-to-reach learners to relevant provision. Voluntary sector organisations are also important providers of ACL in many areas. Partnerships reported that these links are used to identify and engage with 'hard-to-reach' learners, including individuals for whom low levels of literacy, numeracy, digital literacy and employability skills present barriers to work. Courses are actively used as 'engagement' opportunities with a view to signposting learners onto longer term provision. ACL representatives reported that they also attend jobs fairs, local events etc. where learners are able to talk to tutors, staff. Developing learner trust is a key element of this and presence at these types of events can be successful in encouraging learners to take-up learning opportunities.

*'Learners trust ACL provision – it provides the first rungs of learning all the way up to level 2. It's a first point of contact with the learning system for many individuals. Engagement is a key element – you can then start to embed skills. It can change attitudes to learning. It can offer people a second chance to access learning but there has to be progression.'* (ACL sector stakeholder)

- 4.10 These broad-based partnership approaches link to findings from the literature review which indicate that targeting communities and learners in greatest need through outreach provision is crucial for engaging marginalised learners.
- 4.11 There is nonetheless a recognition among some Partnerships that while their ACL classes were well attended and affordable, they were not always targeting priority groups effectively. There are questions about whether existing provision is meeting the needs of those who most need additional support to improve their basic skills. All Partnerships report that there has been a shift in recent times towards introducing fees for leisure and recreational courses, with the Community Learning Grant supporting the Welsh Government's priority learners.

#### Early engagement and progression

- 4.12 Partnerships report that the majority of their provision spans taster and pre-entry level courses up to Level 2. Partnerships carry out a range of engagement activity in order to provide introductions to learning opportunities. This includes informal drop-in sessions targeting those who are not currently engaged. Learners are initially offered Agored units before being introduced to wider learning opportunities. The WEA YMCA leads on much of the engagement work across Partnerships, working with other providers. Targeted events such as Adult Learners' Week are useful in engaging learners.
- 4.13 These approaches to engagement link to findings outlined in the literature review where adopting a learner-centred approach has been identified as a key success factor. The literature suggests that learning needs to be relevant to learners' everyday life experiences and that a flexible approach including shorter courses, a range of delivery methods and assessment approaches can be important in encouraging engagement with learning.
- 4.14 A number of representatives underlined the importance of planning provision that is likely to appeal to learners who have been disengaged

from learning for a considerable period of time. Some contributors emphasised that not all learners want to progress into employment and that it is 'unrealistic' to think that adult learning will lead to people entering work. Others argued that ACL must be seen as part of a learning continuum and that this should be made explicit as a key part of ACL's mission.

*'Further learning, higher learning and employment must be the key goals for ACL – supporting people to get to levels 1 and 2 and further where possible. It has to be aspirational.'* (ACL sector stakeholder)

4.15 ACL partnerships work closely to engage adults with low skills in learning, developing their soft skills (including their confidence to learn) and supporting progression into more formal learning and/or employment. Some partnerships reported linking with schools that have a high percentage of pupils receiving free school meals to provide family learning sessions, phonics, and other taster sessions to supporting parenting skills. This approach links to the findings from the literature review regarding the impact that ACL can have in family learning and its potential to influence cross-generational learning and build stronger bonds and communities

*'We have tried to ensure that our provision offers opportunities for all types of learners – the disadvantaged, those who lack essential skills, Welsh speakers and older learners. However it is true to say that over the past two years we have focused the majority of our free provision on learners who are most disadvantaged, especially those who live in Communities' First areas who need to improve their skills for work.'* (ACL Partnership Coordinator)

#### Support at a community level

4.16 Partnership representatives reported various ways in which ACL contributes to community cohesion and citizen engagement. Local authority and FE college representatives noted that provision contributes to individuals being more connected with their communities, to the health and well-being agenda and to initiatives such as ageing well for the over 50s.



*‘The focus is on skills for life. Learners are being given the opportunity to get involved in learning, to change their lives, to make themselves more employable and get away from living on benefits.’*

*‘The benefits for learners are social, getting out, integrating and friendships as well as learning outcomes, progression can be measured in many different ways.’*  
(ACL Partnership representatives)

- 4.17 Partnerships highlighted that the fall in provision for older learners is an ongoing concern. One local authority representative noted that due to the ‘lack of choice of evening courses, there are worries regarding isolation of individuals.’

### **Measuring the contribution of ACL to society**

- 4.18 Those who contributed to the review were asked for their views on how the impact of ACL provision is demonstrated. Many reported that the data submitted to Welsh Government (and Estyn during inspections) provides some evidence of impact. Learner Outcomes Reports provide data on learner success rates and qualifications achieved by learners. They enable comparisons across ACL Partnerships. In addition, Learner Voice reports, which are also produced for each Partnership, provide summaries of learners’ satisfaction with the provision they have accessed.
- 4.19 Partnerships continue to invest in data management systems to improve learner data: many partnerships keep records of learners on waiting lists for courses, they are seeking to develop learner tracking tools, and on line enrolment systems and progression pathways. However, different systems are used within the same Partnership in some cases, resulting in duplication of activity and a lack of consistency to allow robust monitoring and analysis.
- 4.20 Partnerships referred to the difficulties they encounter in measuring (and quantifying) impact. One Partnership coordinator noted that the sector has ‘traditionally been weak at tracking learner progression and destinations’. This is attributed in part to the difficulties in tracking the

complex, and sometimes intermittent, journeys that some learners follow. Some elements of ACL provision involve the delivery of non-accredited learning and this can present challenges in terms of quantifying and monitoring learner outcomes and progression. Partnerships also noted that they currently lack the resources to track learner destinations systematically.

- 4.21 Representatives noted that local authorities and other partners have not been required to demonstrate the impact of the Community Learning Grant. As one commented, *'the funding isn't tied to outcomes, you get the money regardless.'* Some representatives acknowledged that the evidence relating to impact and learner progression is often anecdotal. There was a broad consensus among those who contributed to the review that more could be done to track individual learners' progression and to measure the outcomes of ACL and that this should involve a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures in order to recognise the range of provision delivered.

*'We are poor at demonstrating impact. If funding were managed differently it would be easier to measure impact – achievements/outcomes could be attached to delivery plans.'* (ACL Partnership representative)

- 4.22 Some learning activity delivered through tackling poverty programmes and other provision was subject to criticism by both Partnership representatives and stakeholders. While representatives acknowledged the role played by Communities First in engaging disadvantaged people in learning, numerous contributors nonetheless considered that their activities lack quality and rigour in terms of developing basic skills.

*'This provision is not monitored, staff are not qualified and it is disheartening to hear about these projects not achieving.'* (ACL Partnership representative)

## **The effects of reductions in funding**

- 4.23 Gradually over time funding has been reduced and restructuring has taken place within Partnerships. Although there are some sectors where more than one partner delivers, the reduction of funding has resulted in some Partnerships not being able to meet learner demand.
- 4.24 Changes to funding have had an impact on Partnerships' ability to achieve some of their aims, i.e. removal of funding for family learning has significantly reduced what they are able to do in promoting family welfare. Some partners however questioned the quality of some of this provision and its impact on learners.
- 4.25 Partnerships outlined the changes seen as a direct result of the reductions in funding. Provision has been scaled back and is very limited in some parts of Wales, particularly in some rural areas. Courses have been lost and adult learning providers have lost contact with many experienced tutors as a result. Partnerships provided examples of arts-based provision, modern language and BSL courses being discontinued. They also noted that there is less free access to venues.
- 4.26 One college explained that they previously employed a full-time Partnership Manager and approximately 20 ACL tutors. Following the reduction in funding the college lost more than 160 staff, including the Partnership Manager and ACL tutors and there is currently no one to plan and co-ordinate provision.
- 4.27 A minority of contributors noted that funding cuts had resulted in some unintended positive outcomes, namely by leading to more '*focused provision*' and providers '*concentrating minds on the skills agenda*'.
- 4.28 There was a unanimous view amongst research participants that the current funding system is outdated and unfair. Partnership representatives and stakeholders argued for a fairer system of allocating grant funding to the sector. Some stated that the existing funding system '*devalues learning and undermines effective planning*' because of the huge variations in allocations that do not reflect learner need at a local and regional level. There were numerous calls for funds to be

evenly distributed and for greater recognition of the contribution of adult learning to social cohesion, skills development and educational progress.

- 4.29 Some argued that pooling all public funding that supports adult learning (including a proportion of funding from tackling poverty programmes) could provide a basis for more coordinated and effective strategic planning. These views link to some of the key findings from the literature review with evidence suggesting that embedding financial sustainability (e.g. through longer term funding cycles) has resulted in successful ACL provision while streamlining bidding processes has helped engage a range of organisations to support provision and delivery.

## 5. Review conclusions and recommendations

- 5.1 This chapter summarises the overarching conclusions of the review. It also sets out a small number of focused recommendations, which are intended to inform future discussion about the strategic direction for ACL in Wales.

### ACL in Wales: the case for change

- 5.2 The ACL sector in Wales has come under severe pressure as a result of reductions in funding in recent years. Provision has contracted across Wales and has been severely eroded in some areas. At the same time the sector has sought to continue to contribute to a wide range of strategic priorities, including re-engaging hard-to-reach groups in learning, increasing employability and supporting health and wellbeing. The fact that the sector continues to make a positive difference to people's lives in so many ways is a reflection of the commitment and drive of managers and staff in local authorities, colleges and other providers.

#### **Recommendation 1:**

The Welsh Government should reaffirm its commitment to supporting ACL and clarify its vision for the sector. This would involve producing a clear and focused definition of ACL's role in relation to:

- supporting employability and economic prosperity;
- promoting health and wellbeing;
- engagement and supporting social cohesion.

- 5.3 Previous sections of this report have referred to the inconsistencies in the way ACL is funded, planned and delivered. The sector is indeed characterised by inconsistencies and contradictions. Although ACL Partnerships invest considerable time and energy in working to plan and

coordinate provision, the sector remains relatively unstructured and lacks a clearly defined, unifying mission statement. This should be addressed, while also emphasising the need for adult learning to be supported as a mainstream part of education.

**Recommendation 2:**

The Welsh Government should set out its preferred options for restructuring the way in which ACL provision is planned and delivered throughout Wales. This should take into account the evidence from this review that points to a need for a more clearly defined vision for ACL and a more consistent and equitable provision for learners.

- 5.4 Funding for ACL in Wales is complex and inequitable and the funding is not based on need. The significant variations in funding through the Community Learning Grant contribute to the inequality in access to provision for learners in different parts of Wales; and the further reductions to the overall funding of part-time learning in FE Colleges has exacerbated these issues. It is essential that there is sufficient support for ACL to ensure high quality delivery across the nation that is consistent and accessible. If the Welsh Government's vision is to sustain ACL and drive up improvements in quality and outcomes, there is a need for infrastructure, resources and practitioners that attract and retain learners.

**Recommendation 3:**

There is a need for a detailed review of funding for ACL. This should consider the feasibility of consolidating or combining the various public funding streams that support ACL with a view to enabling more coherent and purposeful strategic planning.

- 5.5 ACL in Wales is planned, coordinated and delivered in different ways across Wales. The quality and effectiveness of ACL Partnerships is variable. Learner-centred approaches that respond to local priorities,

draw on the expertise of relevant partners and involve the sharing of information about learners and progression routes have been successful. In some cases, there are genuine partnership approaches that seek to respond to the needs of learners, and indeed employers, in different localities. In other parts of Wales, ACL continues to be based largely on historical patterns of delivery with little evidence of robust scrutiny of quality or outcomes.

- 5.6 An issue raised frequently during the review was the lack of consistency in the offer available to learners. This is attributable to many things, including the historical delivery mentioned above, different interpretations of Welsh Government guidance and priorities, the involvement of different partner organisations, and funding pressures. At the root of the problem, however, is the absence of a common adult learning framework or core curriculum.
- 5.7 The development of such a framework for ACL could encourage a consistent, national approach while also allowing for flexibility to respond to local need. It follows that any ACL framework should be guided by a vision statement that sets out the sector's purpose and function. Curriculum areas and learning themes could be developed in turn to reflect the vision and priorities identified.

**Recommendation 4:**

The Welsh Government should work with partners across the ACL sector to produce a common framework for ACL that will provide a basis for future planning and delivery.

- 5.8 In the view of the review team, the issues raised above, alongside the evidence presented in earlier sections of this report, constitute a strong case for change. Taking into account the continued low levels of essential skills and high rates of economic inactivity in many parts of the country, Wales needs effective ACL provision that engages with the hardest to reach groups, helps change attitudes to learning and offers

people a second chance to maximise their potential. ACL, as has been shown in the wider literature, can make real differences to people's lives by providing a platform for progression into further learning, training and employment. Below we discuss some alternative delivery models and the principles that should be built into any future strategic approaches.

### **Future delivery models: conclusions and considerations**

- 5.9 A clear majority of contributors to the review – including ACL Partnership representatives and stakeholders recognise that there is a need to reconfigure the sector and move towards a more effective and equitable model of delivery. This review has not conducted a detailed analysis of the merits of various possible strategic approaches. However, based on the evidence collected the review team has identified a number of recommendations that could help inform future discussions on the future strategic direction for ACL.

#### **Recommendation 5:**

In recognition of the positive impact of ACL on individuals, communities and the wider economy, ACL should be promoted as a key part of Wales-wide strategies to tackle poverty and support citizens' wellbeing. This would help raise the profile of ACL, linking the sector to education, health and wellbeing and social inclusion policies.

- 5.10 Strengthening links between ACL and other policy agendas may raise questions about the need to align funding streams, as noted in Recommendation 2 above. Evidence from the literature review and qualitative evidence collected during the review suggest that ACL is contributing to health and community regeneration priorities and outcomes. This should open the door to discussions about whether funding from other departmental or programme budgets should support adult learning provision. Any future model should aspire to consolidate funding and allocate funding in a more equitable way, based on need.



5.11 Some elements of ACL could be planned and managed at a national level, either by Welsh Government or by a single agency operating on its behalf. Raising standards and supporting the professionalisation of the workforce should be a national priority and should be subject to a single strategy applied on a Wales-wide basis. Similarly, ACL provision should be subject to uniform quality assurance standards that apply to all provision.

**Recommendation 6:**

The Welsh Government should consider commissioning the development of national strategies and frameworks for continuing professional development and quality assurance in ACL.

5.12 Under a new delivery model, the Welsh Government may wish to consider ways in which provision can be supported through innovative approaches, including encouraging providers to adopt more 'commercial' approaches. For example, where fees are charged for leisure and recreational courses, providers could be urged (or required) to reinvest any surplus generated into delivery for key target groups. Some providers are familiar with operating similar models. This could encourage a more innovative and responsive approach to developing provision. Surpluses or profits could also be reinvested into creating new progression pathways for learners.

5.13 Some contributors to the review were strong advocates of a move from the current ACL Partnership structure towards a regional model. It was suggested that regional ACL delivery partnerships could be based on the footprints of the current Regional Learning Partnerships. Based on the evidence presented during the review, there are clear advantages to streamlining both planning and delivery, channelling resources away from administrative processes and towards learners. The literature review also found evidence in support of strategic regional approaches. This could involve separate agencies being commissioned or remitted to

lead on ACL delivery in each region, drawing on the support of various providers as required.

- 5.14 Other stakeholders supported an alternative delivery model whereby a single organisation could take the lead for ACL across Wales, potentially through a 'hub and spoke' model. It was suggested that this approach would give the sector much needed national leadership, visibility and expertise and would act as a focus for funding and coordination across the regions. Both models present opportunities to build on the strengths of existing Partnerships.
- 5.15 As this review was not designed as a structured options appraisal, it would not be appropriate to make a recommendation with reference to a preferred model. Further work is required to specify how these alternative models could operate and their relative advantages and disadvantages.
- 5.16 Any new model should continue to promote the principles of partnership working and should ideally be governed by strategic plans that span 3-5 years. Future delivery should also be closely aligned with the outcomes of the Donaldson Review and the emergence of new curriculum arrangements in Wales. Donaldson advocated developing 'resilient lifelong learners.' The 'pillars' within the Donaldson Review can be transferred to ACL, notably the aspiration to create 'ambitious capable learners; healthy, confident individuals; ethical, creative contributors and ethical, informed citizens'.
- 5.17 Despite cuts to funding and the challenges across the sector, ACL in Wales is still delivering a wide range of benefits for learners and contributes to the education, health and wellbeing of the nation. There is undoubtedly the potential for the ACL sector to continue play a lead role in supporting individuals and communities across Wales.

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## Annex B: Research tools

### Template used to map existing ACL Partnerships and delivery

**Partnership: [name of ACL Partnership]**

#### 1. Membership

#### 2. Overview of partnership

Delivery mechanism

Funding arrangements (per local authority in each partnership area)

Who is lead partner / How partnership operates

How partners collaborate

#### 3. Strategic aims and priorities

Summary of aims (as articulated in partnership plan or in other source)

If no plan in place – how are aims set out in other published materials.

How have partnerships identified priority areas of ACL provision?

#### 4. Type(s) of provision

Summary of the provision available

<https://statswales.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Post-16-Education-and-Training/Further-Education-and-Work-Based-Learning/Learners/Time-Series/numberoflearningactivities-by-subjectarea-mediumofdelivery>

*[Issue here is how to present this in a way that doesn't become a long list of courses?]*

5. Findings from reviews and inspection reports

Drawn from internal partnership reports / Estyn reports

6. Venues / settings

Venue	Lead provider	Postcode

## **REVIEW OF ACL: topic guide for interviews with partnerships**

### **ACL Partnership: operational and planning processes**

1. How are decisions currently taken about what ACL provision will be delivered and which partner will lead?
  - Are there sub-groups that take the lead on various aspects of planning and delivery? If so, what are the main groups and how do they operate?
2. What are the main strengths of ACL delivery in your local authority / partnership area?
3. Are there any ways in which the delivery of ACL in your partnership area could be improved? If so, how?
  - Is there duplication?

### **Provision**

4. Employability courses is a major area of delivery: is this an area that has been given greater focus recently across the Partnership?
5. How does the Partnership make decisions about the delivery of ACL provision through the medium of Welsh or bilingually?

### **Funding**

6. What effect has the reduction in funding had on the level and type of ACL provision available in your partnership area?
  - Have you accessed funding through new funding sources to support ACL?
  - What effect has this had on planning and on the delivery of ACL?
  - *[If appropriate] Initial question to clarify if unclear from partnership response to initial mapping template: What additional funding sources are used to support ACL provision in your area? What are the opportunities and challenges associated with delivering provision that is supported through multiple funding streams?*

[Additional WEA question: Do you hold information on the different level of funding spent in each local authority?]

### **Impact and effectiveness**

7. What is your view of the broad contribution of ACL to society?

- How does it impact on social inclusion, health and wellbeing, employability?
  - Have you collected or do you hold any data on the social, educational and/or economic impact of ACL in your partnership area?
8. What types of ACL delivery are most effective in supporting a range of positive outcomes for learners? (e.g. what works well in terms of modes of delivery, settings and subject areas?)

### **Future delivery**

9. What can be done in future to ensure more consistency and fairness in the ACL opportunities that are available to learners across Wales?  
How can partnerships ensure equal access to provision in key areas (ESOL, Basic Skills, Digital numeracy)
10. What can or should partnerships do to ensure that provision is sustainable in the medium to longer term?
11. Is there an alternative model of delivering ACL that you think should be taken forward?
12. What one example of good practice from your Partnership would you like to share with other Partnerships in Wales?