

# Adult learning in the community

## Partnerships

Adult learning in the community (ALC) is delivered by 13 non-statutory partnerships and by Adult Learning Wales.

Membership of each partnership differs from area to area, but most include provision offered by the local authority, further education colleges, including Adult Learning Wales, and voluntary or community organisations.

ALC normally takes place at venues such as libraries, community learning centres or schools. While most courses are delivered in person, nearly all partnerships deliver some of their provision in an online or blended way.

Since August 2024, Medr funds partnerships through the annual Community Learning Grant to deliver courses in literacy, numeracy, digital skills, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and other courses that help learners to apply and develop these skills. In 2024-2025, this funding amounted to £6.6m, with a similar amount to Adult Learning Wales.

Since 2024, Medr has funded Bridgend College directly to deliver provision in the Bridgend partnership.

### Learners at adult learning in the community partnerships

The most recent published official data on enrolled learners and their activities for the ALC sector (Medr, 2025) is for 2023-2024 and shows that number of unique adult learners engaged with this provision was 15,120.

### Follow-up Data

No. in follow-up September 2024: **2**

No. removed from follow-up 2024-2025: **2**

No. went into follow-up after core inspection 2024-2025: **1**

Total in follow-up August 2025: **1**

### Core inspections

[Merthyr Tydfil](#)  
[Adult Learning Wales](#)  
[Gwynedd & Môn](#)

## Spotlights

Spotlights highlighting effective or innovative practice were included in all three core inspection reports and in the

## Thematic review

We also visited eight partnerships plus Adult Learning Wales as part of a thematic review of [Literacy, numeracy and](#)

thematic report.

digital skills in adult learning in  
the community

For the purposes of our inspection activity, we recognise the following 13 partnerships, and the designated further education institution for adult learning in the community, Adult Learning Wales:

Partnership / Provider	Local authority area
Adult Learning Wales	n/a
Bridgend	Bridgend (Medr funds Bridgend College directly to deliver for this partnership)
Cardiff & Vale	Cardiff
Cardiff & Vale	Vale of Glamorgan
Carmarthenshire	Carmarthenshire
Ceredigion	Ceredigion
Conwy & Denbighshire	Conwy
Conwy & Denbighshire	Denbighshire
Greater Gwent	Blaenau Gwent
Greater Gwent	Caerphilly
Greater Gwent	Monmouthshire
Greater Gwent	Newport
Greater Gwent	Torfaen
Gwynedd and Môn	Gwynedd
Gwynedd and Môn	Anglesey
Merthyr Tydfil	Merthyr Tydfil
NE Wales ALC Partnership	Flintshire
NE Wales ALC Partnership	Wrexham
Powys-NPT ALC Partnership	Neath Port Talbot
Powys-NPT ALC Partnership	Powys
Pembrokeshire	Pembrokeshire

Partnership / Provider	Local authority area
Rhondda Cynon Taff	Rhondda Cynon Taff
Swansea	Swansea

## Summary

Adults who returned to learning often faced barriers including a lack of confidence and anxiety about ‘crossing the threshold’ of formal learning settings. Most learners who did overcome these initial barriers made sound progress and enjoyed their learning. Teachers generally responded to learners’ needs well, although occasionally did not adapt their approaches to suit individual learners. Participation in learning gave learners a boost in confidence, improved their outlook and supported beneficial social interaction.

Although partnerships had made improvements to their websites, it was not always easy for learners to find the full partnership’s offer. Partnership arrangements were improving, and a minority of partnerships were beginning to evaluate learners’ progression over time using their own data. One partnership was in a position of ‘reset’ after a period without effective partnership working between providers.

## Teaching and learning

Adults who returned to learning reported a range of barriers that they needed to overcome. For many, ‘crossing the threshold’ of a learning setting was a considerable challenge. We discuss these barriers, and how partnerships and tutors had attempted to anticipate and reduce obstacles to participation, in our thematic report, [Literacy, numeracy and digital skills in adult learning in the community](#).

Adult learning tutors had strong professional relationships with their learners. They knew their learners well and took time to understand their motivations for returning to learning and the barriers they may face. In most cases, tutors adapted their teaching to meet the needs of individual learners effectively and provided helpful one-to-one support for learners as they worked. They gave useful verbal and written feedback, and learners knew what they need to improve. In the few cases where teaching was less effective, it was where tutors were over-reliant on worksheet type approaches or were not familiar with the range of ways of teaching particular aspects, for example carrying out multiplication or strategies for reading. We recommended stronger promotion of professional learning – both accredited and non-accredited – to support tutors to develop subject specific teaching skills.

Most learners made sound progress in their sessions. Over a longer period, such as a term, most learners made suitable progress in developing their skills against their starting points and in achieving their qualification aims. However, the majority of partnerships did not evaluate effectively how their learners’ progress over the long term into, within and beyond their provision. There were some encouraging developments in this area and we spotlight examples from two providers in our thematic report [Literacy, numeracy and digital skills in adult learning in the community](#), which illustrate that about one third of learners enrolling on literacy, numeracy or digital skills classes had previously enrolled on courses at the provider. We recommended that partnerships and Medr develop methodologies for evaluating learners’ long-term progression, to gauge the impact of adult learning in the community on learners and plan provision more effectively.

We inspected one partnership in an area where Welsh is widely spoken in the local population. Gwynedd and Môn Community Learning Partnership's effective bilingual provision enabled the majority of fluent Welsh speakers to access their provision either bilingually or through the medium of Welsh. However, even in this partnership, in common with all other partnerships across the sector, very few learners chose to complete assessments through the medium of Welsh. We explore some of the reasons for this in our thematic report *Increasing the use of the Welsh language in post-16 sectors* (Estyn, 2025).

## **Well-being, care, support and guidance**

Learners strongly valued the well-being effects of learning and many reported that, having taken the initial step of re-engaging, they felt a boost to their confidence, outlook and socialisation. Learners described many tangible impacts of the benefits, including helping at work, better job prospects, voluntary work, engaging with online services or simply, 'being a better parent'. Learners taking English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses spoke of how learning the language helps them to assimilate into everyday life in their communities.

Many learners accessed personalised guidance and informal support from tutors, including signposting to further learning, careers advice and links with external agencies. Nevertheless, we found room for improvement in how partnerships ensure that learners know how to take their learning further. Even in stronger partnerships, a few learners were unclear about their progression pathways.

Although partnerships had made improvements to their websites, they were not always clear to navigate and did not always show or link to all partners' provision. A few learners also reported that digital only information and application processes were a barrier to them finding out about or enrolling on provision.

In many cases, structured support mechanisms such as individual learning plans, digital learning plans, and additional support tracking tools were used well to monitor progress and support learners' development. However, we found that, in less effective partnerships, tutors did not ensure that learners know what they need to do to improve in the short term, and learners were often unclear about their medium- and long-term targets.

## **Leading and improving**

Where partnership working was not effective, provision planning, self-evaluation and advice and guidance for learners were under-developed. However, across the sector as whole, formal partnership agreements were being used more effectively to clarify roles and responsibilities between providers. Self-evaluation was generally conducted in a spirit of candour and honesty, although occasionally overstated strengths, or focused on the lead provider without taking sufficient account of other providers in the partnership.

Partnerships are beginning to make good use of the co-constructed 'partnership effectiveness tool' (Learning and Work Institute, 2024) to identify their strengths and areas for improvement. The sector continues to benefit from a worthwhile network for leaders and managers and a collaborative culture between practitioners in different partnerships. There is good exchange of information about effective practice and addressing sector-wide challenges.

The sector has made imaginative use of the UK Government 'Multiply' funding to develop adults'

numeracy skills and try different approaches to engaging new learners. This programme came to an end in April 2025 and partnerships worked hard to maintain some of the benefits of the programme and transition provision into their more usual funding streams.

Partnerships made good use of community venues for provision in attempting to reduce the barriers to learners' participation. However, partnerships reported that servicing the costs of these venues is increasingly challenging.

## Overview of recommendations from inspections

We have carried out two core inspections of ALC partnerships and one core inspection of the further education college for adult learning in Wales. Of these three core inspections, one resulted in a partnership being placed in follow-up. We left a total of ten recommendations. We have also carried out a thematic review relating to the sector, Literacy, numeracy and digital skills in adult learning in the community.

Two providers (67%) had a recommendation in relation to **teaching and learning**:

- Both providers had a recommendation relating to planning provision to meet the needs of learners and offering pathways for progression

All providers had at least one recommendation relating to **well-being, care, support and guidance**. Two of those were for the provider in follow-up:

- Two providers received a recommendation to implement effective systems across the partnership for recording and communicating learners' individual needs and providing the support needed

All providers were given at least one recommendation relating to **leading and improving**. Two of those were for the provider in follow-up:

- Two had a recommendation to improve partnership working
- One provider had a recommendation to improve the accuracy of self-evaluation

## Follow-up

During 2024-2025, the Merthyr Tydfil ALC partnership was inspected and required follow-up. Two partnerships that had previously been in follow up, Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion, had made sufficient progress against the recommendations from their core inspections and were formally removed from follow-up.

## References

Estyn (2025) Literacy, numeracy and digital skills in adult learning in the community. Estyn: Cardiff. [Accessed 18 September 2025]

Learning and Work Institute (2024) *Adult Community Learning Partnerships: Tool for Effective Practice and Delivery*.

<https://www.learningandwork.wales/resources/research-and-reports/adult-community-learning-partnerships-tool-for-effective-practice-and-delivery/> [Accessed 21 July 2025]